

A Factor In Delinquency?

Effect Of Working Mothers On Family Life Is Considered By Leading Social Workers

By OLIVE DICKASON

"Selfish" working mothers as a cause of juvenile delinquency came in for consideration by some of Montreal's leading welfare workers this weekend. The cause of the consideration was a news story from Washington in which working mothers who "neglect their children to earn extra money" were criticized as contributors to juvenile delinquency.

"The majority of mothers who work also give good care to their children," Elinor Barnstead, supervisor of case work with the Family Welfare Bureau, said. "If the mother plans well for her children, she can work without her children turning into delinquents. Delinquency is more often the result of poor relationships in the home."

GROWING TENDENCY

Rev. Patrick Ambrose, director of the Federation of Catholic Charities, noted that while a working mother doesn't necessarily mean a delinquent child, still "there is a growing tendency for more and more young mothers to go to work unnecessarily." This tendency is accompanied by increasing juvenile delinquency, he added.

David Weiss, director of the Baron de Hirsch Institute and the Jewish Child Welfare Bureau, emphasized the quality of the maternal relationship. . . "if a mother has to go to work to provide for the necessities for her children, then she is contributing to their welfare." He referred to Sweden and Israel, where a great many mothers work, and good community services provide for the day care of children. "It has worked out well under those circumstances," he said.

All three of the welfare officials agreed that at the present time mothers usually do not go to work unless they have to. "Very seldom does a woman leave her children for a job because she wants a mink coat," Miss Barnstead observed. The most common occasion for mothers working is when they are left alone to provide for their chil-

dren. However, high living costs, particularly high rentals, often make it difficult if not impossible for a young family to get along on the father's earnings.

Confused Statements

"A family should have enough to live in frugal comfort," Father Ambrose said, "and sometimes it is necessary for a mother to work for a family to have even that much. But there is a growing confusion between luxuries and necessities. I would say that today a telephone can be considered a necessity, but television isn't. Yet in a few years TV could be considered essential in a home, whether it actually is or not."

The desire for the frills of life sometimes prompts mothers to seek outside work, Father Ambrose con-

tinued, a trend which is becoming more pronounced. "We get requests at our agency for domestic help because both parents are working," he said. "Sometimes these couples are willing to pay quite well. One would question in such a case whether or not it is necessary for the mother to leave her children."

He referred to the difficulty of finding competent help. "When a mother works, it often means that her children are not properly supervised," he remarked. This fact alone contributes to delinquency.

Mr. Weiss conceded that if a mother goes to work simply because she wants some of the so-called luxuries, then she is trading her role in life for a mess of pottage. However, he added, it is one of the laws of nature that the mother as well as the father provides for her young ones. With proper planning, this can be done without sacrificing family life.

The "material culture" of the world today tends to influence mothers to think it is necessary to work, he said. Sometimes this necessity is not so much financial as psychological. . . "a profession or a career is highly glamorized, but that of the housewife is often considered just drudgery. The satisfactions of motherhood are not emphasized enough these days."