

The Hurlin-McMillen Comparisons as they Relate to the Cincinnati Figures

By KURT PEISER

ALL of the contributors to the symposium on *Statistical Comparisons of Jewish and Non-Jewish Social Work* in the December, 1930, issue of THE QUARTERLY warned the readers against hasty and unwarranted deductions because of the tentative nature of the material presented. I want to sound my own note of warning concerning this matter, and concretely illustrate it by the relief figures for Cincinnati. I am impelled to do so—and correct a grave error—not only for abstract reasons of seeking after the truth, but also because in these days of economy and retrenchment, to be singled out as the agency giving the highest per capita relief in the country is not a very pleasant distinction, particularly when these figures come to the notice of laymen who have not background information on the methods of keeping social work statistics and on the justifiable conclusions that may be drawn therefrom.

I am referring now to Table I in Mr. McMillen's article which appears on page 13. In that table are given the average monthly amounts of relief per major care relief case during 1929, and Cincinnati tops the list with an expenditure of \$66.33. This being the highest figure, attention is further specifically drawn to this fact in the body of the article. Now, this figure is correct enough, but it is altogether untrue and misleading, if it is taken to mean that the United Jewish Social Agencies has in 1929 actually spent \$66.33 per relief case per month. The correct figure is \$49.20 which places Cincinnati fifth instead of first on the list, and is only \$6.00 higher than the average for all Jewish agencies. The reason for this discrepancy I shall explain below.

The figure of \$66.33 is based on gross relief expenditures. This item is called for in the reporting blanks of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research, the Russel Sage Foundation, and the Local Research Committee of the University of Chicago and the Association of Community Chests and Councils. The reason why gross and not net relief expenditures (that is, expenditures from which refunds have been deducted) are taken is, I understand, because refunds of one month usually constitute repayments of moneys expended in a previous month, and therefore net figures do not represent correctly the actual relief expenditures of a given month. This may be true enough for most family agencies, but it does not hold true for us because of our peculiar set-up here in Cincinnati. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that even for the usually constituted agencies, the net figure seems to be a fairer picture when averages are computed

for the year, because the major portion of the refunds during the year is likely to consist of repayments for amount spent during that year.) To give you a concrete illustration, I am analyzing below the refunds for the month of January, 1931.

1. Mothers' Pensions	\$520.00
2. Family Support	512.47
3. Children In Boarding Homes	100.00
4. Work Shop	50.40
5. Special Nourishment and Appliances	27.85
6. On Moneys Advanced	74.35
	\$1285.07

The United Jewish Social Agencies has an arrangement with the Juvenile Court whereby Jewish families receiving mothers' pensions are supervised by our agency. The pensions are sent to us by the Court each month and we administer them. The \$520.00 in item 1 are therefore *not a refund at all, but an advance payment of moneys disbursed by us in the same month in which we get them.*

The same is true also of the second item, family support, for \$512.47. We have on our relief list a number of families in which for casework reasons, it is deemed wise for the wage earners to turn in their earnings to us each week and for us to budget the families according to our standards. Of course, all funds thus received are disbursed in the same month.

The third item for \$100.00 represents payments made by parents and relatives toward the support of children maintained by us in private boarding homes. With few exceptions, these, too, are advance payments.

The Work Shop, referred to in item 4, is a small shop operated by us, in which a number of otherwise unemployed men are kept at work making baseballs. The men are paid a wage half of which comes from our relief funds and half from the firm for whom these balls are made. The \$50.40 is the amount received from the firm during the month of January.

Of the \$27.85 received for special nourishment and medical appliances, \$10.50 has been received from a local group of women for a specific case. This is a periodic payment made at the beginning of each month. The last item (No. 6) may be regarded as strictly refunds since most of it consists of payments for sums advanced to clients as loans in previous months.

Thus, of the entire sum of \$1285.07 which are technically classed as refunds, only about \$90.00 (or 7%) properly belongs in that category. A similar picture, I am sure, would be produced for every other month we stopped to analyze. It is for this reason that we have recently eliminated the refund items from our reports to statistics-gathering agencies, and are giving only the figures of the net relief expenditures.

If we take the gross figure, our average expenditure per under-care relief case in January is \$55.44; the average on the basis of the net expenditures is, however, \$38.53.

This is just what happened with the figures Mr. McMillen used in his Table I. It is the gross relief expenditures that appear there. I do not know the extent of the discrepancy that must exist between the net and gross figures of the other agencies listed in that table. For Cincinnati that difference is \$49.20 as against \$66.33—a difference of 35%! I am giving in the table below our net relief figures for 1929.

Month	No. of Under-Care Cases	Net Relief Expenditures	Cost per Case
January	69	\$4,977.58	\$72.14
February	67	3,032.29	45.26
March	61	2,016.53	33.06
April	56	3,018.87	53.91
May	62	2,807.17	45.28
June	61	2,069.53	33.93
July	67	3,127.00	46.67
August	66	2,155.80	32.66
September	65	4,056.44	62.41
October	65	3,719.11	57.22
November	73	3,027.46	41.47
December	84	5,151.52	61.33
	796	\$39,159.30	\$585.34
AVERAGE PER MONTH....	66½	\$ 3,263.28	\$ 49.20

Our actual figures for family relief would be still lower if we separated in our account straight family relief from expenditures for drugs and medical appliances. Here, again, our functional form of organization renders inaccurate statistical comparisons with purely family agencies. As an integral part of the Agencies we have a dispensary, both for diagnosis and treatment. This dispensary is located in the same building which houses the administration and family welfare officers. There is a very close connection between the doctors, nurses, and case workers, on account of the organizational set-up and the physical proximity. This arrangement, in my opinion, is conducive to fine health work, both for examination and follow-up, and for that very reason it raises somewhat the relief expenditures in the form of costs of medicines, special nourishment, glasses, orthopedic shoes, recommendations for housekeepers' aids. But quite aside from this fact, our relief funds are charged with drugs prescribed to relief clients, whereas it is usually the clinics that bear the cost of these in cities where the

family case work and health work are carried on by separate agencies.

In a previous number of the *Quarterly* (March-June 1930) Mr. Maurice Taylor published an article showing that Boston District Service was not the *lowest* in relief standards of the Jewish agencies reporting to the Russel Sage Foundation, as the figures of the average monthly relief allowances released by the Foundation seemed to indicate. My remarks at this time are made in order to demonstrate that the relief allowances of the United Jewish Social Agencies of Cincinnati are not as *high* as the published statistics disclose. But I agree whole-heartedly with Mr. Taylor's statement in the above mentioned article (p. 104): "The great danger, however, lies in attempting to compare and draw conclusions from these monthly statistics without knowing the differences that lie behind them. Mere numbers and more particularly averages are apt to be misleading unless we know the stuff from which they were drawn."

The Bureau of Jewish Social Research which has been gathering statistics in the Jewish field, has submitted the following comment on Mr. Peiser's statement:

Mr. Peiser has indicated one of the troublesome problems of statistical analysis of relief with which the Bureau of Jewish Social Research and other agencies developing comparative service statistics are concerned. Present definitions of relief used in reporting systems are unsatisfactory and give rise to variations of reporting. An attempt will be made to develop more precise definitions which may serve to eliminate a part of this difficulty. Although the present definition is not specific, few agencies include in their relief expenditures public relief grants or the wages of clients as has been the custom in Cincinnati. On the other hand many family agencies do include all relief items which go through the accounts of the agencies whether such relief funds are obtained from the resources of the agency itself or through voluntary contributions for families under care. Where funds are deposited with the agency for individual clients such as estates, insurance or gifts, it is the practice in some agencies to set these up as trust funds rather than as relief funds and not to report them within relief expenditures although in some instances such contributions have been obtained primarily through the efforts of the social case workers.

So far as comparative statistics are concerned, it is important that the relief disbursements by one agency should be exclusive of all relief funds obtained from other social organizations. On this basis, public funds should be excluded. Wages obtained from individuals within the family group should not be considered as relief even though the agency receives the wages and disburses it on behalf of the family.

While revisions of the definitions as above outlined may help to establish greater uniformity between the reporting agencies, it should be borne in mind that present relief figures are at best an indication of supplementation rather than of family budget, and that local communities vary considerably in the amounts of relief or service available to clients from agencies other than the one reporting. The amounts of relief per family, therefore, reflect a combination of influences in which the standards of the agency and the sources for additional relief available elsewhere are important variable factors. An agency high in average relief per family may actually have lower budgetary standards than one whose relief is low on this account.—H. L. LURIE.