

CURRENT RESEARCH IN THE JEWISH SOCIAL SERVICE FIELD

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THE paper which you have just heard is really a report on a research project. Mr. Black and the members of the Planning Committee for the Research Session of the Conference have gathered facts which they have identified, classified and interpreted. Of the five types of research listed in the paper, this would seem to fit into the category of descriptive studies, and I think you will agree with me that it corroborates Mr. Black's statement that descriptive studies are extremely important.

The need for evaluation which Mr. Black sees in current research can be very appropriately related to this paper. It was, of course, impossible for the committee, in the time at their disposal, to do more than describe and classify the studies which are being carried on all over the country. Had it been possible to evaluate them, I wonder what would have been revealed. In how many instances were studies made when the desired results could have been achieved by other methods—thoughtful determination of policy, consultation with experts? In how many studies were the goals carefully planned and clearly defined? In how many were the findings conclusive and constructive? How many competent studies were made, studies which contributed a sound basis for planning and action but nevertheless were fought over and discarded? We do not know the answers but we are probably safe in assuming that many inade-

quacies do exist. I hope I am not anticipating this afternoon's paper when I point out the large element of trial and error in present-day social work research as well as in social work practice. Furthermore, despite the increasing interest in research on the part of professional social workers, social work research still remains a step-child of the profession, occupying a spot somewhere on the outer rim of the field, brought in when a crisis occurs and generally carried on in a rather haphazard fashion.

It seems to me that we should emphasize the need, not so much for more research, but rather for better research. We also need to concentrate on the role of research in social work. If it has a potential contribution as a vital force in the planning of program, in the evaluation of services, in the testing of results (and I, as a prejudiced witness, think that it has) then it should be in the center rather than on the periphery—it should function on a systematic, continuing basis.

I would like to re-emphasize the principles enunciated by Mr. Black, particularly the importance of the participation of practitioners in research. I think it is true that some administrators in case work, group work and community organization are recognizing the need to test results of their work. I am not sure whether the same point of view is held by the practicing workers. From my experience, a discouraging number of them

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are absorbed in their individual cases and groups and are so convinced of the validity of their theories and working principles that they do not admit the need for testing them. It seems to me that this pre-occupation of practitioners with their person to person relationships has been one of the deterring factors in the development of evaluative research.

The goals of the research worker in this field are not too unlike those of the social work practitioner. While his philosophical approach may be different in searching for scientific facts which will lead to generalized knowledge, his eventual aim is to help in the refining and improving of methods of serving people.

I would like to suggest another way in which we can utilize research to carry forward the work we are doing. We should establish some media of communication for social work researchers. Information about case work, group work, community organization, theory and practice is widely disseminated by means of national and regional conferences, professional journals and schools of social work. This is not true in the field of research; an extreme example is a worthwhile project which may be carried out in one community and which no one outside the agency, perhaps no one but the executive and the research worker, may know about. This is due, in some instances, to the fact that research findings may reveal weaknesses in program which the agency is reluctant to broadcast. Furthermore, research workers may be diffident and insecure about their efforts. Certainly, group workers and case workers don't have this excessive modesty—they have no hesitance in publishing broad claims about their services on the basis of one or two cases. If social work research is to become really effective it should be possible for a project carried

on in one community to be tested in another community. Perhaps the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds can divert some of the energy that it is now spending on community surveys to take more leadership in stimulating experimental and evaluative research and making possible the interchange of the findings.

The fact that research workers in social work are struggling with method and the problem of getting money for research from Community Chests and Federations, which are seldom liberal in providing funds for the regular agency programs, will undoubtedly be discussed in the afternoon session.

I would like to end with an encouraging note from my own experience. While I have the rather imposing title of Research Secretary of the Jewish Federation, and while I do carry at least one research project at all times, a large part of my time is taken with other jobs in community organization and in student training. Recently, the interest in research in some of the agencies of the Federation has taken the form of requests for funds for research staff. We are currently gathering information from a group of our agencies about the studies now in process and those which are contemplated, and we plan to discuss together a program for regularized, continuing research in the agencies, operated by their own research staff or by an augmented research staff of the Federation. Most of the studies contemplated are of the evaluative and experimental type. No matter who undertakes the studies, the agencies or the Federation, we are all agreed on the need for coordination not only in our own family, but also with the broader community program of research through the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago.