SOCIAL STUDY OF ILLEGITIMATE MATERNITIES

BY

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Illegitimacy is often said to be a self-perpetuating problem, the loveless infant or the child deprived of a normal home life growing up to become the irresponsible parent of the future. Stillbirth and infant mortality rates are higher in illegitimate than in legitimate births. Problems associated with illegitimacy which must be dealt with by social services are costly in personnel and accommodation. Nevertheless, there appear to have been no studies of a defined population, and “many facts that might help to devise social policies and guide public opinion are buried in the records and case-notes of social welfare organizations and public authorities” (Ferguson and Fitzgerald, 1954).

This report, which is based on records of all women having illegitimate children during the four years 1949–52 in Aberdeen, is concerned with their social background, living conditions, and immediate problems. The most striking finding is a marked social class gradient; illegitimacy and also pre-nuptial conception occur predominantly in the lower social classes.

MATERIAL*

Information was derived from three sources:
(1) Birth registrations in the four years 1949–52.
(2) Records in the Almoner’s Department of the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital.
(3) Medical register of all maternities occurring in the city, cross-indexed and maintained as a continuous record in the Department of Midwifery, Aberdeen University.

The identification of women having an illegitimate pregnancy was often complicated; some gave different names for their confinement records, at birth registration, or at different pregnancies; it was sometimes necessary to check four possible surnames—maiden, husband’s, father’s, or a “married” surname assumed by cohabiting couples to conceal their real identities. Discrepancies in the number of pregnancies were found in 3 per cent. of records; for example, one woman appeared as a primipara in two consecutive years; a married woman started cohabiting and no longer included her four legitimate children; several women “forgot” children who were boarded out or adopted.

During the years 1949–52, 582 women normally resident in Aberdeen had a total of 701 illegitimate births. Rates per 100 live births in 1952 were: Aberdeen 5.7; Scotland 4.8; England and Wales 4.8. Of the 701 illegitimate births, 48 were ”transferred in”, as they belonged to Aberdeen residents confined elsewhere, usually under arrangements made by the almoners. Owing to multiple pregnancies, the 701 births occurred as a result of 687 maternities.

Table I compares the Aberdeen illegitimate maternities with legitimate maternities, in terms of arrangements made for confinement and of number of pregnancy. Illegitimacy was rare in private nursing home patients. Women who kept their pregnancy

* Some terms in this paper may be defined as follows:
  Illegitimate—parents were not married to each other when pregnancy ended.
  Unmarried—not a divorced or widowed woman.
  Father—unless otherwise specified, the man responsible for the illegitimate pregnancy.
  Husband—legal husband of a married woman, late husband of a widow, or previous husband of a divorced woman.
  Social Class of Matron—in accordance with the classification of General Register Office (1951).
  Broken Home—upbringing before minimum school-leaving age abnormal, i.e. did not take place in the parental home, or one parent was not present.
  Pre-Nuptial Conception (PNC)—first day of last menstrual period antedated marriage by more than four weeks.

| Maternities, 1949–52, by Arrangements Made and Number of Preganacies (Per Cent) |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                   | Illegitimate | Legitimate     |
| Arrangements for Confinement      |               |                |
| Hospital Booked                   | 74            | 76             |
| Hospital Emergency                | 7             | 1              |
| Domiciliary                       | 18            | 16             |
| Private Nursing Home              | 1             | 7              |
| Total                             | 100           | 100            |
| Number of Pregnancy               |               |                |
| 1                                 | 48            | 33             |
| 2                                 | 20            | 30             |
| 3                                 | 14            | 19             |
| 4+                                | 18            | 18             |
| Total                             | 100           | 100            |
secret until they started in labour accounted for the higher proportion of emergency admissions to hospital in the illegitimate group. The proportions of booked hospital and domiciliary confinements were very similar. Although illegitimacy is commonly thought of in terms of first births to unmarried mothers, the second part of Table I shows that 52 per cent. of the illegitimate cases were second or later pregnancies, compared with 67 per cent. of legitimate cases. Table II shows that nearly one-third of women having an illegitimate child were married, widowed, or divorced, and that most of them had legitimate children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Almoner</th>
<th>Other†</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primiparae Unmarried</td>
<td>261 (21)*</td>
<td>37 (4)*</td>
<td>298 (25)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed or Divorced</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>22 (3)*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23 (3)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Primiparae</td>
<td>290 (24)*</td>
<td>38 (4)*</td>
<td>328 (28)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiparae Unmarried</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed or Divorced</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Multiparae</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Parities</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The 28 primiparae shown in brackets reappeared as multiparae within the period studied. They must be deducted in order to derive the number of women in the last line.
† Registration or identification data only.

No information other than that contained on birth certificates and clinical records was available for 116 women. Most of the analyses which follow, therefore are based on almoners' records for the remaining 466 women. This “Almoner Series” shown in Table II includes 88 per cent. of all primiparae and 71 per cent. of all multiparae. However, the social records vary in detail since they were compiled by several almoners and not primarily for research purposes. This explains why, in some of the detailed analyses which follow, the numbers are less than the total shown under “Almoner Series” in Table II. Although the overall effects of omissions cannot be assessed accurately, it seems unlikely that they invalidate conclusions which are based on marked trends.

In addition to Aberdeen women having illegitimate maternities, 142 unmarried primiparae were delivered in the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital who normally lived outside Aberdeen and had been admitted during the late weeks of pregnancy to the Aberdeen Mother and Baby Home. These present some features of interest and will be reviewed briefly in Part II.

I. Primiparae

Of the 328 Aberdeen women whose first child was illegitimate, thirty were married, widowed, or divorced. Most of these had made unsatisfactory marriages during the war, and a few others had lost their husbands through enemy action. All presented themselves for medical care as married women and the fact of illegitimacy was not always known to the almoners antenatally. Many of these women cohabited with the father, all had their affairs well under control, and none requested help from the almoner in making arrangements for themselves or the child. This small group will not be discussed further and the remainder of this section will consider the 298 unmarried primiparae.

In the analyses which follow, the backgrounds of women having illegitimate and legitimate first babies are compared in terms of age, occupation, social class, and normality of upbringing. The information in legitimate cases refers to all 1,750 first maternities which occurred in the years 1952–53; of these, 458 were conceived pre-nuptially. In the case of unmarried women, the living conditions, relationship with relatives and with the baby's father, attitudes to pregnancy, and arrangements made on discharge from hospital are discussed.

Comparisons between Illegitimate and Legitimate First Maternities

Age.—The unmarried group contained a high proportion of very young women, 36 per cent. being aged under 20 compared with 5 per cent. of women conceiving after marriage. In married women who conceived pre-nuptially 29 per cent. were under 20 at delivery.

Occupation.—Fig. 1 (opposite) shows the distribution of illegitimate maternities and of pre-nuptially and post-nuptially conceived maternities in a number of occupational groups. The usual or last occupation of each woman was used for the purposes of classification.

The professional and technical, skilled manual, and unskilled manual occupations correspond broadly to the Registrar-General's Social Classes I and II, III, and IV and V respectively. Clerks, shop assistants, and workers in the fish industry are differentiated because they form distinctive groups (Illsley, 1955). Employees in the catering and cleaning trades (such as domestic servants, cooks, hospital ward
orderlies, and waitresses), whose jobs may be resident or daily, show some interesting features in relation to illegitimacy, and are also shown separately.

The incidence of illegitimacy rises from 2 per cent. in the professional and technical group to 19 per cent. among the catering and cleaning workers; that of pre-nuptial conception from 9 per cent. in the professional group to 40 per cent. among fish workers. Combining maternities which started outside marriage, there is a steady gradient from 11 per cent. in the professional and technical group to 58 per cent. among fish workers. The combined rate in catering and cleaning workers is 40 per cent.; this group occupies a position between skilled and unskilled manual workers, but the ratio of illegitimacy to pre-nuptial conception is higher than in any other group.

Taking the data another way, 59 per cent. of unmarried women were in unskilled jobs or in the catering and cleaning or fish trades, compared with 38 per cent. of women who married after conception and 22 per cent. of those who married before conception.

It is evident that illegitimacy tends to be associated with unskilled, unattractive, or menial occupations. This may arise from personal or environmental limitations, especially during childhood. It is therefore of interest to study the upbringing of the women.

**Upbringing.**—Fig. 2 (overleaf) shows the social (occupational) class of the chief wage-earner (usually the father) in the families of Aberdeen primiparae. 2 per cent. of married women and 17 per cent. of unmarried had been brought up in institutions, or in constantly changing conditions, or by unemployed parents subsisting on pensions and statutory benefits, so that the social class of upbringing could not be defined in occupational terms. The information available suggests that the style of living in childhood of most of the unclassified cases approximated to
unmarried as married women had attended special schools, but the total number attending was small (1.5 and 0.3 per cent. respectively).

More unmarried women had had an abnormal family life. Fig. 3 shows that the incidence of broken homes for the three groups falls from 40 per cent. in the unmarried group to 23 per cent. in the pre-nuptial conception group, and 18 per cent. in those who conceived after marriage.

In all groups the most common cause of a “broken home” was the death of one or both parents. The records give no reason for the broken home in 14 per cent. of unmarried women, but in at least 10 per cent. of cases the mother herself was illegitimate compared with only 3 per cent. of married primiparae. Broken homes arising from separation of parents were uncommon in those conceiving after marriage, but the incidence was higher in the other two groups. It may be of psychological importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class of primiparae</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I and II</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV and V</td>
<td>458</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 2.—Social class of upbringing of primiparae.

that of the lower social classes. 46 per cent. of unmarried women came from Social Classes I, II, and III, compared with 54 per cent. of married women who conceived pre-nuptially, and 63 per cent. of those who conceived after marriage.

It was commoner for the unmarried women and the married women who conceived pre-nuptially to have been brought up in families with six or more children; the percentages in each group were: unmarried 40; PNC 35; Non-PNC 30. In all groups, about 7 per cent. were only children.

Full-time education beyond the minimum school-leaving age had been received by 18 per cent. of married women who had conceived post-nuptially, compared with 7 per cent. of those who remained unmarried. Five times as many

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for broken home</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents separated or divorced</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegitimacy</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 3.—Incidence of and reasons for broken homes of primiparae.
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that broken homes without a "father-figure" were twice as numerous in unmarried as in married women.

The conditions of upbringing of the nineteen unmarried compared with the 54 married women who were themselves illegitimate were strikingly different; 41 of the 54 married women had been brought up in a stable family setting, usually by the mother and stepfather, grandparents, or adopted parents, compared with only seven of the nineteen unmarried women. Ten in each group had been reared in a constantly changing background of foster homes and institutions. Few in either group had been cared for throughout by a mother who remained single.

Although 60 per cent. of unmarried primiparae had been brought up by both parents and were themselves legitimate, about one-sixth reported an unhappy childhood and unsatisfactory home conditions for such reasons as parental drunkenness, chronic illness or mental instability, and wife-beating. Therefore at least half the unmarried primiparae had grown up in either broken or unhappy homes. The incidence may have been higher, as evidence is scanty or non-existent in some case records. The unhappiness or unsuitability of the home may, of course, sometimes have been exaggerated in order to strengthen an initial request for help, in arranging adoption, for example. Comparable data on the upbringing of married primiparae were inadequate, but whereas cases of parental illness seemed to be as common, there was little evidence of drunkenness or vicious behaviour.

Table III shows the number of broken homes, by occupations arranged in order of the incidence of illegitimacy. In all groups, the rate of broken homes was higher in unmarried than in married women, and in married women it was higher in the pre-nuptial conception group. In both groups of married women, the incidence increases from the top to the bottom of the table; in the unmarried women, the sequence is broken by a relatively low proportion of unmarried primiparae with a broken home in the unskilled manual category. This aberration may be a chance phenomenon, but it may arise because the group contains many girls whose homes had been unsatisfactory though unbroken. In most of these unhappy homes, the father's work, usually that of a trawlerman, involved his frequent absence; in such cases family life often fluctuated between comparative peace and happiness and violent crises, since many of these men drank to excess when at home, and provided irregular incomes for their wives.

The combination of adverse social factors weighed heavily against the unmarried women. The percentage of records in each category in which an upbringing in Social Class IV or V or unclassifiable, a broken home, and an unskilled or menial occupation were found together were: illegitimate 23, pre-nuptial conception 6, and post-nuptial conception 3; the percentages in which none of these factors occurred were 12, 32, and 41 respectively.

**Fathers**

Where the father was a casual acquaintance at a dance-hall or a street "pick-up", or where several men had been involved, the women were often unable to give any reliable details. The percentage of men whose social class was "indefinite" (either unknown or too vaguely reported for classification) may indicate the extent of casual association. As Fig. 4 (overleaf) shows, the percentage is relatively low for the professional and clerical group of primiparae and high for the fish workers. Of the seventeen fathers in Social Class I and II, ten were the employers of the women concerned (who were mainly shop assistants and resident domestic servants). Half of the fathers in Social Class III were in the Armed Forces, the Merchant Navy, or road transport service, compared with 32 per cent. of husbands of married primiparae in Social Class III. Among fathers in Social Class IV and V, 32 per cent. were trawlermen, compared with 12 per cent. of fathers of legitimate first babies.

Some of the fathers were known to the almoners, and the available information indicates that they came from much the same type of environment as the women. Many came from broken homes, and a frequent comment by young unmarried fathers was that they felt "smothered" by their own mothers, who were usually widowed or deserted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Groups</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Technical, and Clerical</td>
<td>13 (460)</td>
<td>20 (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Assistants and Skilled Manual</td>
<td>16 (481)</td>
<td>21 (195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Manual and Fish Trade</td>
<td>18 (228)</td>
<td>24 (138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering and Cleaning</td>
<td>33 (97)</td>
<td>33 (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is impossible to say how many men were involved, as some were unidentified and sometimes the same man was named by several women. The reported ages ranged from 17 to 47 years, but few were said to be under 20.

One of the 156 men for whom information was recorded was a widower, and 65 were married; three were reported to have represented themselves as single in order to seduce the woman, and many to have offered marriage when they could obtain a divorce.

A few men acknowledged paternity and planned to marry on their return from overseas or from prison. A few youths, under pressure from their parents, rejected the woman and denied paternity. Some women had taken the prospect of marriage for granted while others had never been under any illusions about the father's intentions. About one-quarter of professional and clerical workers, but a negligible number of other workers, reported a broken engagement. Many women in unskilled occupations said they pursued the men and pressed for marriage after conception.

 Seventy fathers of illegitimate babies born in the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, out of a possible 226, registered the births (eleven under Decree of Court); some of the remainder were untraced by the mothers, and some were not informed of their paternity. Nearly half of the men who thus acknowledged paternity were already married. In general the proportion of fathers accepting responsibility was higher in the unskilled groups, in which eventual marriage to the father seemed to be commoner. Most illegitimate babies therefore remained “fatherless” unless the mothers subsequently married or cohabited. In England, only about 10 per cent. of illegitimate children are covered by Affiliation Orders (Pinchbeck, 1954); the number of private agreements (apparently uncommon in Aberdeen) is not known. In Sweden, where the state encourages mothers to identify the fathers, financial responsibility for
paternity is established in over 90 per cent. of all illegitimate births.

Circumstances of Illegitimate Pregnancy

Living Conditions.—Of the 261 unmarried primiparae, 212 were living with their own relatives, 21 were cohabiting, and 28 were living in lodgings or residential jobs.

Only eighteen of the 212 women who were living at home at the time of booking or of emergency admission to hospital had conceived while living away from home; five had taken temporary resident domestic jobs in order to be nearer their seaman boy friend when in port, one had been on holiday, and twelve normally worked away.

The 21 women cohabiting came from all social groups, and all the men concerned were already married; eleven of these couples shared a house with the woman's relatives to whom the man had originally gone as a lodger; one young woman was allowed to cohabit with a distant relative who had made his home with her family for some years.

Six of the 28 women living in lodgings seemed to have been brought up normally, but had severed all connexion with their families; two had been living at home at the time of conception but left because of parental opposition to the proposed marriage, which eventually took place after the birth. Nineteen were domestic servants, usually in resident posts; many of these had been brought up in highly unstable conditions, had no attachments, and lived a drifting, lonely, and irresponsible life.

Relationship with Relatives.—Usually the relatives knew of the pregnancy before the woman was seen by an almoner, but occasionally a woman in the upper social classes wanted to arrange to go to a Mother and Baby Home before telling her parents or said "I don't know how to tell them". About one-third of the women who had discussed the matter with relatives reported difficulties with their family; these seemed to be fairly evenly distributed socially, but the nature of the difficulty varied. In the upper social classes emotional problems were common and were often aggravated by the distress of disillusioned parents and the antagonism of brothers and sisters; the records give evidence of emotional distress, ranging from weeping during interview to attempted suicide, in 25 per cent. of professional, technical, and clerical workers. Similar emotional upsets occurred in less than 5 per cent. of women from the unskilled occupational groups, but material difficulties were commoner: for example, one woman's father raised financial objections to her keeping her baby, and one mother who already had a large family refused to help to look after another child.

A few women gave evidence of difficulties overcome before they attended the clinic: for example, one woman said that her mother had made her take pills to get rid of the baby but "She's all right now and helping me". Another said, "She (my mother) was mad at me at first but she's come round now and is buying me some maternity clothes and knitting for the baby". Relatives sometimes rallied round and gave tremendous help: for example, an aunt resigned her job and came to live with her niece who was housekeeping for a widowed father. Occasionally a mother took a temporary job when her unmarried daughter had to stop work in late pregnancy, and afterwards stayed at home to look after the baby when her daughter resumed work.

In several families in the unskilled occupational groups illegitimacy was no new phenomenon: a stepmother who had had an illegitimate child herself before marriage was "wonderfully understanding"; in another case the parents were particularly "kind and considerate" as an older daughter in a similar situation had committed suicide; another girl was living with her mother who had had several illegitimate children through cohabitation.

Attitude towards the Pregnancy.—The mother's attitude to her expected illegitimate baby, at the time of booking, depended partly on her living conditions and partly on her relationship with the father. Half the 241 women, seen antenatally by an almoner, expressed a desire to keep the baby; 33 per cent. wanted it to be adopted, and the remaining 17 per cent. were undecided or seemed unable to express an opinion. The catering and cleaning workers, who so often lacked "roots", were the least decided on their future plans: 29 per cent. expressed no opinion, but 40 per cent. wanted the baby adopted. In other occupational groups the demand for adoption fell steadily from 50 per cent. among professional and clerical workers to 19 per cent. among fish workers, while the proportion of those who wanted to keep the baby rose from 44 per cent. to 70 per cent. respectively.

Before confinement 49 Aberdeen women went to a Mother and Baby Home; fourteen of these were rootless "nomads", and the other 35 left home owing to a desire for secrecy, or because of parental hostility, illness, and other domestic difficulties; 21 women, including three "nomads", went to Dundee or Glasgow. Most were in circumstances such that it would have been difficult for them to keep their babies, and so said they wanted the baby adopted, yet they realized that one of the usual aims of a
Mother and Baby Home is to keep mother and baby together.

Outright rejection of the child during pregnancy was uncommon. Sometimes it was associated with a traumatic sexual experience (e.g. rape) or with a dominant conflicting interest (e.g. a career). Rather than acknowledge violation of the conventions of their social milieu, a few couples in the professions who were engaged and planned to marry later demanded adoption so that they could have “a proper wedding at the right time”. Definite determination to keep the baby was uncommon during pregnancy, but was most likely to come when there had been a happy relationship between the woman and the father; for example, in three cases in which a fiancé had been killed in an accident.

By far the commonest attitude in pregnancy was ambivalence, desires swinging towards one extreme or the other at different times. The woman's initial statement was often coloured by the recent reaction of relatives and friends to the knowledge of her pregnancy, and it was only with time that she adjusted to her new situation and became able to consider her problem realistically. Although it was sometimes difficult to disentangle a woman's own feelings and ideas from those of dominant relatives, indications of the final attitude usually became apparent during the course of pregnancy, and there is no evidence that abrupt changes occurred after delivery. Delivery however, brought with it the need to make a definite decision about the future of the baby, and often seemed to resolve many of the conflicts which existed during pregnancy, not only for the mother but also for her family.

Post-Natal Arrangements.—The babies of 23 Aberdeen primiparae were lost through stillbirth or neonatal death. Of the remainder, those who went to Mother and Baby Homes were much less likely to keep their baby than those who remained in private accommodation (40 and 91 per cent. respectively). A possible reason for this large difference has been given above. Separation of mother and baby was sometimes necessary because of circumstances, such as a mentally defective mother with no relatives to help her, or outright rejection of the baby. In most cases there were extenuating social or medical reasons. The separation was sometimes temporary, as in the case of a homeless woman who married the seaman father when he returned home from abroad and made a home for their child.

Aberdeen records show that up to the end of 1954, at least 109 unmarried primiparae delivered in 1949–52 had had a second baby, and 77 of these second babies were legitimate. In eleven cases, the couple, both of whom had been free to marry during the first pregnancy, had legitimized the first child by marriage, and had proceeded to have a second; twenty couples had married before the second pregnancy but had not been able to legitimize their first child; the remaining 46 women with a legitimate second child had married a different man. Of the 32 illegitimate second babies, ten were born to the same cohabiting couples who had had the first baby, and in 22 cases the father was different.

Immigrant Primiparae in the Aberdeen Mother and Baby Home

Aberdeen is a “reception area” for unmarried primiparae, and in the four years 1949–52, 142 came to the Aberdeen Mother and Baby Home from elsewhere; the majority came from Scotland, especially the North East, and 9 per cent. came from outside Scotland, including several from abroad.

Though confinement was arranged in the Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, the data recorded by hospital almoners in such cases were scanty, as the resident Matron at the Home usually gave the required help and guidance to the mother during pregnancy and made the ultimate arrangements for her.

The immigrants were a little older than Aberdeen unmarried primiparae, and many more had professional, technical, and clerical, or catering and cleaning occupations. There were very few shop assistants and no fish workers. Whereas most Aberdeen women had been living at home at the time of conception, more than one-third of the immigrants had been in residential employment at the time, frequently as nurses or domestic servants. Nearly three times as many immigrants as Aberdeen women had been brought up in Social Classes I and II. Data in relation to broken homes and fathers correspond, broadly, to the findings in respect of Aberdeen residents.

In general, the immigrants can be divided into the following categories:

1. Those from the upper social classes who had flouted the conventions of their social group and wanted the anonymity of a strange town. These women usually requested adoption.

2. Those who were in conflict with their parents or whose home conditions were unsatisfactory. These sometimes went to the nearest or a more distant Home according to circumstances. Some favoured adoption while others planned to keep the baby.

3. Those, usually domestic servants, who had no settled home and who needed accommodation in late pregnancy. These went to the nearest Home, and had no security to offer the child.
II. MULTIPARAE

The different types of multiparae and the characteristics of women who have a series of illegitimate children by different men are described below. The circumstances of post-marital illegitimate pregnancy and the care of previous surviving children, illegitimate and legitimate, is discussed.

Of the 282 Aberdeen multiparae having illegitimate maternities, 158 were married, widowed, or divorced women (Table II). These 282 women accounted for 359 (over half) of the total illegitimate maternities of all parities in the four years. For purposes of analysis only the last illegitimate maternity to each woman is considered.

Of 82 multiparae who had domiciliary confinements, little more is known that the registration particulars (home address and father's signature) indicated cohabitation in over three-quarters, compared with under half in hospital patients. These will not be considered further. The remaining two hundred multiparae—91 unmarried and 109 married, widowed, or divorced—were confined in hospital, and social information was obtained by the almoners; only these have been used in the following analyses.

The ages of the multiparae ranged from 18 to 43 years, and analyses of job histories and conditions of upbringing indicated an even more pronounced association with poor social backgrounds, broken homes, and unskilled occupations than was found for primiparae. Only fourteen of the 200 multiparae were or had been professional, technical, or clerical workers; most of these cohabited and three were known psychopaths. No professional men and only four business proprietors were named as fathers. Unidentified fathers and pregnancies resulting from casual associations were over twice as common among unmarried multiparae as among married, widowed, or divorced women (26 and 12 per cent. respectively).

Among married, widowed, or divorced women, the husbands and the fathers generally came from the same social class and often had the same occupations. The marriages had taken place from 2 to 12 years before the last illegitimate pregnancy. Table IV shows that of these 109 women, 52 were facing the problem of illegitimacy for the first time; but sixteen had had one to three illegitimate children before marriage.

For descriptive purposes, the multiparae may be classified as follows:

(A) 52 women who cohabited steadily, i.e. who had had two or more illegitimate children by the same father (eighteen unmarried; 34 married, widowed, or divorced).

(B) 52 women who were having their first illegitimate maternity (all married, widowed, or divorced).

(C) 96 women who had at least two illegitimate children by different fathers (73 unmarried; 23 married, widowed, or divorced).

Table IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Illegitimate Maternities</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 and over</th>
<th>No. of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>No. of Maternities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, Widowed, or Divorced</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>200</td>
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(A).—The multiparae in this category had all their illegitimate children (two or more each) by the same father, and were living with him in settled conditions. All used the description “Mrs. . . . . . . . .”, and outwardly the families appeared normal and complete. The explanation for illegitimacy in these cases seemed to be the difficulty of divorce. The men cohabiting with these unmarried, widowed, or divorced women were all married. The records show that most of these couples had made repeated and prolonged attempts to obtain divorce in order to marry. Difficulties had arisen through, for example, the need for divorce by both partners, the cost, or the complications of international law. It seemed that few, even after years of abortive effort, had become resigned to their position.

The attitude of these couples to a further pregnancy was similar to that of legally married parents. Illegitimate pregnancy, which was sometimes planned, created no special problem. It was the legitimate and not the illegitimate children of these women who experienced a “broken home”; three-quarters of them were being brought up by their mother and “step-father”, whilst the remainder were living with other relatives, in foster homes, or in institutions.

(B).—In each of the 52 multiparae with previous legitimate children only, the illegitimate pregnancy seemed to be symptomatic of a chronically strained or already broken marriage, with a few possible exceptions where the women were “unfaithful” during the prolonged absence of husbands overseas, in hospital, or in prison. There was no evidence that
any of the women had “broken out” of a stable and apparently satisfactory marital relationship.

During the illegitimate pregnancy the affairs of most of these women were highly unsettled, because the relationship with the husband had usually broken down, while that with the child’s father had not become stabilized. Only a few, however, appeared to be emotionally overwrought, and although advice was often sought about problems of human relations the initial approach to the almoner was usually on the basis of a financial problem.

Most of the 52 women eventually kept their illegitimate babies; in addition they continued to look after 80 per cent. of their legitimate children.

(C).—96 women, 73 of whom were unmarried, had had at least two illegitimate children by different fathers. As a matter of convenience they will be referred to as “promiscuous”. The 23 married, widowed, or divorced women include those who had had illegitimate children born before marriage.

Most were in unskilled occupations, the proportion rising with the number of illegitimate children. Of those with three or more illegitimate children, 77 per cent. were in the catering, cleaning, and fish trades. In such trades, the promiscuous women usually performed the least skilled and attractive jobs for example, they were dish-washers not waitresses, and fish-washers not filleters. There was little evidence that the women had drifted into such menial occupations, since the jobs held during successive pregnancies were nearly always similar.

It is of great interest that nearly 75 per cent. of the unmarried promiscuous women with two children and 40 per cent. of those with three or more children were living in their parental homes; most of the rest were in lodgings, and a few cohabited, but none had homes of their own.

Some of the married, widowed, or divorced multiparae, however, had their own homes and commonly took in casual lodgers, such as lorry drivers or seamen who fathered their children; others stayed with the father, but had not achieved a steady cohabitation. Among promiscuous women, even cohabitation was usually an unstable affair, and some were “put out” or deserted during pregnancy. Ten promiscuous women, eight of whom had become homeless as a result of pregnancy, went to Mother and Baby Homes in Dundee and Glasgow.

These 96 promiscuous women had previously had 32 legitimate and 142 illegitimate surviving children. The proportion of these children cared for by the community increased with the degree of promiscuity.

For example, in the group of 73 unmarried women, provision had been made for 22 per cent. of previous children in cases of one surviving child, and for 65 per cent. in cases of two or more surviving children. Of the children of the 23 married, widowed, or divorced promiscuous women, over half the illegitimate ones and one-sixth of the legitimate ones were in institutions or foster-homes; the mothers kept about half each of their illegitimate and legitimate children, but many legitimate children were in the care of other relatives.

The records of nineteen of 23 of these unmarried women, who had had three or more illegitimate children by different men, are reasonably full, and are of special interest. Eleven of these nineteen had been born and bred outside Aberdeen, usually in the country; all had come from broken homes, and most had led very chequered lives in various foster homes and institutions. In various ways they usually indicated their feelings of “not belonging to anyone”. Since leaving school they had all drifted between various lodgings and residential jobs, sometimes cohabiting intermittently. Only three of them had kept any of their previous surviving children, and all were quite unperturbed by a further pregnancy and responsible in their attitude; they had usually had ample experience with various social agencies and were often confident in their repudiation of personal responsibility for their expected child. These women usually “emerge” only when pregnant, when they need the community’s help in finding accommodation, and in making arrangements for the confinement and for the baby; this phase completed, they take up their aimless and irresponsible existence once more.

The remaining eight of the nineteen women had been born and bred in Aberdeen and lived in their parental homes: five from normal and relatively large families were recorded as borderline or certified mental defectives and were treated as “black sheep” by their relatives; two from small and apparently happy homes seemed to have “gone off the rails” suddenly, one after the death of her fiancé, and the other after the death of her father; the last came from a family with an involved history of promiscuity, suicides, and petty crimes. All eight had kept some of their children.

A few self-acknowledged prostitutes became hospital patients, but they were usually married women and their children were registered as legitimate. Only one, a widow, was known to have an illegitimate baby during the period under review. It is generally accepted that prostitutes are reasonably successful in avoiding pregnancy (Rolph, 1955).
SOCIAL STUDY OF ILLEGITIMATE MATERNITIES

III. Discussion

Pinchbeck (1954) has pointed out that the status of illegitimacy in any society depends upon the laws and customs governing marriage and the family. Thus, social attitudes to the problem are a reflection of marital institutions and sexual mores. Only a small part of the extra-marital sexual activity which might result in illegitimacy actually does so. Many pregnancies in unmarried women are legitimized by the marriage of the couple; according to figures published by the Registrar-General, in about one-fifth of all legitimate first births, conception occurred before marriage. Many abortions go unrecognized, and little is known about extra-marital sexual intercourse which does not result in pregnancy. The illegitimacy rate is therefore a poor indicator of the standard of sexual morality. Though the rate increased at the time of the recent world war, the pre-nuptial conception rate fell, and the proportion of extra-marital conceptions as a whole decreased (Registrar-General, 1954; Ferguson and Fitzgerald, 1954).

National statistics of illegitimacy give no idea of the complexity of the problem. As the present inquiry has shown, many illegitimate births were to married, widowed, or divorced women, and over half the illegitimate babies were from second or later births. The parents of some illegitimate children lived in steady cohabitation and their relationship was outwardly indistinguishable from that of married couples.

It is a general convention in our society that pregnancy and childbirth should occur in wedlock, but the rigidity of the convention doubtless varies from area to area and in different social groups. Where the social sanctions against extra-marital pregnancy are weak, the illegitimacy and pre-nuptial conception rates are likely to be high. Apart from this question of group attitudes, it seems that illegitimacy is favoured by psychological instability in the individual, arising for example out of unsettled or unhappy conditions of upbringing, or from disease or mental deficiency.

This inquiry has been mainly a matter of establishing facts, and does not directly elucidate the problems of aetiology, prevention, and treatment. It is, nevertheless, of interest to consider some of the facts in relation to the background.

Fig. 1 shows that the proportion of extra-maritally conceived first maternities rose from 11 per cent. in professional and technical workers to 58 per cent. in fish workers, and that the ratio of illegitimacy to pre-nuptial conception has a similar trend. In the social groups with relatively good education and “middle-class” standards, illegitimacy and pre-nuptial conception are not only uncommon but represent deviations from acceptable conduct which incur strong social disapproval. In the unskilled manual and fish workers, these phenomena are so common that an equivalent degree of social disapproval is unlikely, and our experience suggests that it is, in fact, not very strong. In the upper social classes, fear of the stigma of illegitimacy frequently causes an unmarried primigravida to leave home for the anonymity of a Mother and Baby Home, usually in another town, and to ask for the baby to be adopted. In the lower social groups, the unmarried primigravida usually remains at home and her parents accept the baby into their family.

These facts do not necessarily imply different standards of sexual morality at the various social levels, although it seems probable that differences exist in the frequency and type of sexual practices (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard, 1953). Logan and Goldberg (1953), after observing young men in a “working class” urban area, suggest that they show considerable tolerance of extra-marital sexual activity; no comparable study in “upper class” groups could be traced. Sexual intercourse probably begins and marriage takes place at an earlier age in the lower social classes, but the low incidence of pre-nuptial conception and of illegitimacy in the higher social groups might be explained by their more extensive knowledge of reproductive physiology and of contraception (Scott, Illsley, and Biles, 1956).

Nevertheless, the many differences in physical and mental environment of the social classes must, by influencing their sexual habits, affect the illegitimacy and pre-nuptial conception rates. In the lower social classes overcrowding is so common that children and adolescents are more likely to witness the sexual practices of their elders; lack of facilities for educational or recreational pursuits in the home and its environs tends to drive young people into the street or the dance-hall. Jephcott (1954) found that in such circumstances adolescents were only interested in courting; she also found that in the lowest social groups an illegitimate pregnancy was considered “a bit of bad luck” and did not involve a moral issue (Jephcott and Carter, 1955).

Scott, Illsley, and Biles (1956) and Scott, Illsley, and Thomson (1956) have shown that the average intelligence test scores of Aberdeen married primiparae from the lower social classes are lower than in other social groups. Their evidence, together with that of Baird (1946), suggests strongly that pregnancy in the lower classes, even when preceded or followed by marriage, is often unplanned. The youth, low occupational skill, and poor education of many
mothers of illegitimate children, may be indicative of relatively low intelligence and poor planning capacity.

The association between illegitimacy and broken and unhappy homes shown by the present inquiry is not unexpected. It is generally recognized that the child brought up in a normal, happy family gets the best chance of developing the capacity to make satisfactory social adjustments; by example and experience he discovers the advantages of conforming to accepted standards of conduct. The conflicts of adolescence are usually resolved against this reliable family background; deviations from conventional behaviour in order to fulfil strong sexual impulses are likely to be temporary and restrained; and courtship eventually ends in marriage. The child with an unbalanced, erratic, or institutional upbringing may lack the stability, continuity, or affection of life in a normal family. Some such children have to adjust repeatedly to changing styles of living and standards of values, and some may become conscious of being "unwanted" or may even experience outright rejection. At adolescence the urge for new personal contacts leads them to indulge in sexual activity; without developed standards of conventional behaviour and loyalties, and with limited social skills, restraint may be difficult and unrewarding. The present data indicate that the age and social gradients of illegitimacy may arise, in part, from background influences of this kind. Table IV shows that broken homes are more common as the degree of occupational skill declines, and there is also reason to believe that the grosser forms of family unhappiness are commoner at the lower social levels.

Young (1954), who studied the problems of unmarried mothers seeking help from social agencies, sees illegitimacy as the result of neurotic compulsion. The girl "wants a baby—but specifically, an out-of-wedlock baby—without a husband", usually in consequence of an upbringing dominated by one parent, which deprived her of normal relationships with either, and led to rebellion expressed in illegitimate pregnancy. Many of the case-histories described by Young could be paralleled from the Aberdeen records, but her explanation cannot be readily invoked to explain the "epidemiology" of illegitimacy in Aberdeen. Young specifically denies a social gradient in the incidence of illegitimacy—"It might fairly be said that the unmarried mothers are by and large representative in their social, economic, and educational backgrounds of the population as a whole"—but she produces no statistical evidence. American conditions may differ markedly from those in Aberdeen, but the most striking finding in the Aberdeen statistics is inequality of social distribution.

Illegitimacy, like delinquency, thrives when social values, cultural as well as material, are low. Insecure family life, poor and overcrowded homes, lack of constructive recreational aims and outlets, lack of general planning ability, and permissive attitudes to extra-marital relations may all contribute to its occurrence. Such factors rarely occur in isolation, and it would be difficult to assess their relative importance in causing or favouring a high illegitimacy rate. Context and causation are so varied and so many influences act together that there is no shortcut to prevention. The ultimate aim must be the improvement of the environment, together with the re-education of those whose way of life reflects and is reflected in a bad environment. Progress will largely depend on the efforts of the authorities concerned with housing, education, health, and welfare, and it will inevitably be slow.

Since this is so, the role of social workers, who deal with problems of illegitimacy as they arise, remains extremely important. Because they act on behalf of many social agencies with widely differing attitudes to the social, moral, and personal problems involved, and because the standard of training they have undergone varies greatly, diametrically opposed views are held on many of the problems. Some persuade expectant mothers that they should plan to keep the baby at all costs; others are prepared, antenatally, to make provisional arrangements for adoption if this is desired; yet others think that the mother should not be encouraged to make up her mind until after the child is born. Some institutions insist that the child should be breast fed even when the mother does not intend to keep it; others take the view that in these circumstances it is better to allow bottle feeding from the start.

The emotional and moralistic motivation of so much social work in this field not only impedes co-ordination of the aims and activities of the various agencies, but also hinders the scientific study of illegitimacy. Better informed public opinion and better understanding of the social and psychological factors involved are needed to bring about a more objective approach and a more co-ordinated effort.

**Summary**

This paper reports the analysis of records of all Aberdeen illegitimate maternities during 1949–52. Some comparisons with legitimate maternities are made and pre-nuptial conception is discussed.

Illegitimacy is shown to be a complex problem; women of all civil states and parities are involved.
It occurs predominantly in the lower social classes, however, and it is suggested that different styles of living and standards of value partly account for this phenomenon. The association of illegitimacy with broken homes and poor occupational skills is considered. For unmarried primiparae, the social background and circumstances surrounding illegitimate maternity are discussed in detail. The characteristics of women who enter Mother and Baby Homes, of those who cohabit steadily, and of the "promiscuous" are described.

A more objective approach is required in order to help our understanding of the problem and thus to facilitate the co-ordination of social work.

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