SOCIAL WORK

Trajectory Revisited:
How Social Work Planted Itself in Mental Health during the Profession's Nascent Stage in America

BACKGROUND

Psychiatric social work during the <u>early period (1910s-20s)</u> of social work development <u>in America</u>:

- **Changes in Psychiatry – an "epistemological transformation"**
  - Margin (the insane) → Center (the general population)
  - Moralistic → Medical → Medical + Social
- **Emergence of the Social Work Profession**
  - Seeking "scientific basis" for the establishment of its professional credibility
- **Mary C. Jarrett**
  - Founder of psychiatric social work
  - Established the training courses → Smith College School of Social Work

METHODOLOGY

A Historical Study

- **Reviewed academic articles from (81+12+10):**
  - *Mental Hygiene* (1917-1922)
  - *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (1917-1922)
  - Mary C. Jarrett's academic articles (1910s-20s)
- **Method of extracting contents:**
  - Round 1: extracted all contents relevant to the topic
  - Round 2: organized contents according to six broad categories
  - Round 3: under each category, hand-coded contents and grouped them into thematic clusters

(Round One)

Jarrett in her office, facing forward. 1916.
Creator: Taylor, H.W. (Cambridge, Mass.)

What are the roles and concerns of social workers when they are simultaneously:

- **Negotiating a space for practice** in the interprofessional field of mental health

- **Establishing a professional identity** for public recognition

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HIGHLIGHTS IN PRELIMINARY RESULTS

➤ **Social Workers had a <u>wide range of functions</u> in mental hygiene practice**
- Social examination
- Assisting treatment
- Family involvement, prevention, education
- After-care
- Comprehensive community supportive services
- Public prevention & education
- Research and advocacy
- ......

➤ **<u>Collaborations</u> between social workers and other professionals, and between hospital and community were crucial:**
- "Natural go-between" or "great intermediate" professional
- Practices outside the hospital wall – borderline cases, prevention, public education
- Controversy: "trained aides to experts" OR unique expertise addressing the limits of psychiatry?

➤ **<u>Psychiatric Point of View</u>:**
- Individuality, personality, mental quality as fundamental to all social work practices
- Individuality in terms of (mal)adjustment – person-in-environment
- Psychiatry as the scientific study of behavior – objective, observable
- PSW as a fundamentally different way of viewing social work, as a profession

➤ **<u>Trainings and Research</u> as Strategies of Professionalization:**
- From trainings in PSW → Smith College of Social Work
- Research as the standardization of practical experience
- Research – a habit of thinking and acting – measurability & consistency

IMPLICATIONS

❖ **"Psychiatric Point of View" as a Double-Edged Sword:**
 ❑ "Scientific basis" for social work → professional status
 ❑ Over-emphasis on the individual personality and readjustment → the professional move towards psychotherapy and private practice (away from structural-level interventions
❖ **Social Work Research, Who and How?**
 ❑ Experienced social workers
 ❑ Accumulation, organization, and standardization of practical experiences
❖ **Localization, or Situated Knowledge?**