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Factors which contribute to the surrender of a child for adoption

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FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE
SURRENDER OF A CHILD FOR ADOPTION

A thesis

Submitted by

Peggy McNamara

(A.B., Skidmore College, 1941)

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The New England Home for Little Wanderers is a multi-function child welfare agency. Among its functions are casework service to unmarried mothers and adoption services.

This study is concerned with the unmarried mother's decision regarding her child i.e. whether she decides to keep her child, or to place her infant for adoption. It is the purpose of the study to examine several factors which may influence her decision.

It has become apparent to the author during her experiences in giving direct casework service to unmarried mothers, that specific factors within a given case situation seem to have a bearing on the mother's ultimate decision. Again it has appeared that some of these specific factors are common to several case situations. In the light of these impressions it seems important to gain an overall picture of factors which may be associated with an unmarried mother's surrender of her child for adoption.

All mothers who come to the agency are requesting adoption for the illegitimate child. Each mother is provided with casework service in order to assist her in determining whether or not the placement for adoption of the child is the best plan for her and her baby. Many of these women following an examination with the caseworker of their feelings and their current reality situation proceed according to their original

plan, while others do not. What are some of these factors which enable a woman to surrender her child for adoption? What are some of the influences which make her different from the mother who originally planned to surrender her child, but who later decided to keep her baby?

The author's hypothesis is that early referral of an unmarried mother to casework service is associated with her decision to surrender the child, and that referral to an adoption agency in the last weeks of pregnancy or after delivery is more likely to be associated with her keeping the child. The fact that some women come to the adoption agency early in the pregnancy may be associated with their feeling that the only solution to the problem is adoptive placement of the child. It has been noted that these women come to the agency at any time prior to or following delivery with the expressed intention of surrendering the child. Although all these women come to the agency asking for adoptive placement some ultimately decide to keep the child. Factors other than early referral must therefore influence the decision. Among the other factors to be examined are age, race, sex of the child, religion, relationship with the alleged father, degree and duration of contact with the infant, and the mother's education.

The Method of Selection of the Sample

The author is employed as a caseworker by a multifunction child welfare agency. The case load consists of adoptive home finding, work with adoptive parents during the service year,

foster home finding, and supervision of latency children in foster home placement, as well as casework with unmarried mothers. The sample includes all cases of illegitimately pregnant women who were assigned to the author on or after January 1, 1956, with the final decision made for the care of the child by December 31, 1958. There were forty cases which met this criterion. In twenty-five cases the mother decided to surrender the child for adoption and in fifteen cases she decided on a plan other than adoption.

Method of Data Collection

The study was projected and the schedule developed in advance. The time limits for the beginning and end of the study were also established in advance. It was ascertained at the time of the study and treatment that certain items for future research would be incorporated in each case record. These items fall into five categories (see schedule in Appendix):

1. Referral
 - Source
 - Time in relationship to delivery
2. Mother
 - Age
 - Race
 - Religion
 - Nationality
 - Relationship with alleged father
3. Surrender
 - Timing of surrender in relationship to delivery
 - Sex of child
4. Alleged father
 - Continuing relationship with mother
 - Mother's attitude toward alleged father

5. Mother's contact with the child
 In the hospital
 Care prior to placement
 Visiting in the foster home

The data for the study were drawn from the recording of forty cases of the author's caseload which involved unmarried mothers and met the criteria of time. The forty cases were divided into two groups: the mothers who surrendered the child for adoption, to be designated as Group 1, and the mothers who kept the child, Group 2.

The Setting

In 1865, following the Civil War, The New England Home for Little Wanderers was incorporated by the churches of the six states

for the purpose of rescuing destitute children from want and shame, providing them with food and clothing, giving them instruction for the mind and the body, and placing them, with the consent of their parents or legal guardians, in Christian homes.¹

Following along with the general trend of child welfare, in the early day children in large numbers were "shipped" into the rural areas of the middle west and placed through charities.

We read in the annals of the organization a typical entry that

Mr. Hughes started one winter morning in 1867 with twenty-nine children by boat for New York, with Ohio as his ultimate destination

and later the report that

¹The Constitution of the Baldwin Place Home (later named The New England Home for Little Wanderers).

in eight days every child had a good permanent home, and Mr. Hughes could have placed twice as many if he had them.²

Today The New England Home for Little Wanderers is a private child placing agency, sponsored by the Greater Boston United Fund and private endowment. The central office of The New England Home for Little Wanderers is an institution located at 161 South Huntington Avenue, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. There is one branch office in Waterville, Maine. The original charter, under which the Home still operates, was phrased in broad terms. It has allowed the agency to develop during the past ninety-eight years, expanding its functions and changing them to meet existing needs. Although the agency was established under Protestant auspices, its functions today as a non-sectarian community agency.

The Boston area has a well developed community organization plan. It is administered by the United Community Services whose responsibility is to provide social service to various groups and geographical areas and to avoid the duplication of services. Under this plan The New England Home for Little Wanderers has agreed to provide children's service to the geographic area outside of the metropolitan district. However, the agency is permitted under this agreement to accept clients who for one reason or another make a direct request for services to the agency. While growing and adapting itself

²Rev. William Winslow, "How It Came to Be What It Is," p. 1.

to community needs, it has maintained the spirit and purpose of the New England men who were concerned with helping children.

The total program of the agency includes a diagnostic study home, a foster home department, three group homes, Orchard Home, Everett House, Longview Farm, and an adoption department.

Since this thesis is not concerned with the facilities of The New England Home as a study home for problem children, or a group home, it will confine itself to the functions of the agency as they might relate to the unmarried mother and her seeking assistance there.

There are many varied services available to the unmarried mother. Upon being accepted by the agency for help in planning for her child, she is assigned to a caseworker who will see her at regular intervals prior to the birth of her child. It is this caseworker who, with the help of the Home-finding Department, will select a foster home where the child will remain while the mother decides whether she wishes to release him for adoption or make other plans for his care.

Review of Literature

The unmarried mother and her many and varied problems have been the subject of a vast amount of research. Innumerable studies have focused on the problem of unwed motherhood with emphasis on the sociological and psychological aspects. The United States Government Children's Bureau and many other

public and private agencies have prompted much of this research. They have also sponsored descriptive and statistical studies. As Clark Vincent says, "a comprehensive bibliography on unwed mothers would constitute a short book."³

Despite the amount of work that has been done on this subject, the question still arises as to how much we really know about the unmarried mother. One author states that "there is a neglected area of social research, the area of illegitimacy."⁴ Another author states that with all the knowledge of the problem which we have acquired so far through research, the only certain factor unmarried mothers have in common is bearing a child out of wedlock. The very nature of the problem has made it almost impossible for researchers to study anything but highly selective samples. Even government statistical studies can provide us with only estimates of the extent of the problem. These estimates in themselves do not include the unmarried mothers whose illegitimate pregnancy terminates in miscarriage or spontaneous and induced abortions, nor do they include "the relatively mature, and economically self-sufficient unmarried mother" described by Clark Vincent in his book Unmarried Mothers.⁵ These are the women who are over twenty, supplied with cash and able to leave home to bear

³Clark Vincent, Unmarried Mothers, pp. 291.

⁴Social Welfare Research Inc., A Study of Unmarried Mothers Who Keep Their Babies, foreword.

⁵Vincent, op. cit., p. 12.

their out-of-wedlock children, whom they then place, all secretly and without benefit of agency.⁶

The limitations of the data available for study seem therefore to be even more vast than the literature available. The problem from the researcher's point of view becomes almost overwhelming when examined in the light of one of the conclusions Vincent drew from his encompassing study of the problem. He states, "Our study has also shown that research in illegitimacy must acquire comparative data from females whose sexual behavior reflects progressive degrees of deviation from traditional sex mores."⁷

These thoughts while appearing to be discouraging are not intended to be such. The fact remains, however, that there are serious limitations on all the research that has been done on this subject to date. Within these limitations important work has been produced. Specific aspects of the problem have been explored effectively and thereby there has been an increased understanding of the unmarried mother and the problems she faces, which has enabled social workers and members of the other helping professions to assist her in a compassionate, flexible and realistic manner.

The main focus of much of the research has been the identification of the unmarried mother and the characteristics

⁶Elizabeth Herzog, "Unmarried Mothers: Some Questions To Be Answered and Answers to be Questioned," Child Welfare, vol. 10 (October, 1962), p. 345.

⁷Vincent, op. cit., p. 245.

within herself and her environment which have contributed to her becoming pregnant out of wedlock. There is a dearth of material on the factors which contribute to the decision which she must make regarding her own and her child's future. To date only preliminary studies which have produced guarded findings have been done on this aspect of the problem. This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that we have rather extensive data on the needs of infants for stable environment and relationships. Freud and Burlingham⁸ wrote classical reports of their findings in the early forties. Such studies are of course pertinent to the child welfare worker who is placing children in adoptive homes. They are also pertinent to the social worker who is working with the unmarried mother and whose interest must include the planning of the future of her illegitimate child. The current thinking of adoption workers is that the earliest possible adoptive placement is best for the child as well as the adoptive parents. Therefore today the unmarried mother is not only permitted to sign a surrender soon after delivery, but is often encouraged to do so if it seems that adoption is the best plan for both her and the baby. This has not always been true. A study published in 1940 which deals with the decision of an unmarried mother to keep or to surrender her child reports that it was acceptable practice at that time for an agency to permit the mother

⁸Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, "Infants Without Families," p. 127.

to postpone making a decision regarding the child for a three year period. This occurred at a time when the principle of self-determination on the part of the client was very much in vogue, to the point of forcing an unmarried mother to make all decisions herself with very little assistance from the caseworker. Such an approach would of course permit much vacillation on the part of the mother, and it follows that the length of time before a decision could be reached was prolonged. In an earlier era the social worker made all the decisions and the mother's part in the decision was minimal. It seems that between the early nineteenth hundreds and the late nineteenth thirties the pendulum swung to both extremes.⁹ Today the casework approach is a modification of both these extremes. "The Child Welfare Standards for Unmarried Mothers" states

The unmarried mother generally has the right to self-determination in this plan, but may need help in understanding her inner motivation and the external realities of her situation. The caseworker has the responsibility to present the various solutions available and to face realistically with the mother the meaning of her decision to herself and her child. In addition, by conscious use of the casework relationship, the caseworker may help the mother to work through many of her conflicts and to consider the reality aspects of her situation in an appropriate manner . . . There is no one plan which offers an ideal solution for every child born out of wedlock. This is perhaps the biggest issue the mother faces, and frequently causes her much conflict in reaching a decision. Usually there are inherent advantages as well as possible hazards in any plan. In the majority of cases, adoption is the best plan for mother and child. The

⁹Ruth Rome, "A Method of Predicting the Probable Disposition of Their Children by Unmarried Mothers," Smith College Studies in Social Work, vol. 10 (March, 1940), pp. 167-201.

mother should have the opportunity to consider alternative plans, such as keeping the child with her, or placement in temporary foster family care.¹⁰

While it is acknowledged that several authors have considered specifically the problems an unwed mother faces in making the decision to relinquish or keep her child, comparatively few of them have considered the factors which influence the decision. The earliest paper found is a predictive study published in the *Smith College Studies* in 1940.¹¹ More recent studies on this particular aspect of the problem recognize the paucity of material on this subject and plead for more work in this area. Meyer et. al. who did some early work on the subject state,

Although research in the social work area has been growing in volume, the amount of rigorous description and hypothesis testing thus far reported is limited.

They go on to say,

A long-range objective in any area of social practice is to evaluate the effectiveness of specified treatment procedures for known types of persons and problems. . . . Before strictly evaluative research can be incorporated into an agency program, considerable exploration in a descriptive and analytical sense is necessary. Indeed it is imperative.¹²

¹⁰Child Welfare League of America Standards for Services to Unmarried Parents, p. 18.

¹¹Rome, op. cit.

¹²Henry J. Meyer, Wyatt Jones, and Edgar F. Borgatta, "The Decision by Unmarried Mothers to Keep or Surrender Their Babies," Social Work, vol. 1 (April, 1956), pp. 103-109.

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The focus of the study is factors which contribute to the surrender of a child for adoption. To understand the nature and scope of these factors, it is important to consider some of the characteristics of the individual members of the group under study. The information was provided by the forty unmarried mothers who comprised the group.

TABLE 1

AGE OF UNMARRIED MOTHERS

Age	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
16 - 20	9	36	2	13	11	28
21 - 25	10	40	6	40	16	40
26 - 30	4	16	5	34	9	23
31 - 35	1	4	2	13	3	7
36 - 40	1	4	0	0	1	2
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Age of Unmarried Mothers

As seen in Table 1 most unmarried mothers in the sample are within the sixteen through twenty-five age group. These findings are consistent with findings of other studies in which the frequency is greatest in the sixteen through twenty-

five age group.¹ However the sample differs in that the twenty-one through twenty-five group is larger than the sixteen to twenty. This may be due to the fact that there was selectivity in the assignment of cases to the author. The fact that the author is an experienced and senior member of the agency's casework staff was an influential element in the assignment of cases to her. Therefore it is probably not a true reflection of the age of the total population of unmarried mothers in this agency.

In comparing Group 1 with Group 2 we find, as had been anticipated, that a high frequency occurs in the sixteen through twenty-five age group in Group 1. Again it was anticipated and is borne out by the data that frequency of surrender would drop in the upper age groups. In both groups the greatest frequency occurs in the twenty-one to twenty-five age range. The proportion of mothers who surrendered the child is greater in the younger age brackets, while the proportion of mothers who kept the child is greater in the older age brackets. This may be partially explained by the tendency of an unmarried mother to keep her child as she approaches the termination of the child bearing years and she feels that her likelihood of having a legitimate child is lessened.

Racial Background

In the sample of forty unmarried mothers thirty-six were white and four were Negro. The racial distribution of the

¹Leontine Young, Out of Wedlock, p. 18.

sample does not reflect the incidence of illegitimacy in the general population of the community.² However, it does reflect the fact that relatively few Negroes are referred to private child placing agencies for assistance in planning during an illegitimate pregnancy. It is possible that this may be explained on the basis of cultural factors. One study on the subject indicates that Negro families in the United States seem to be more accepting of the out of wedlock child, and therefore may be better able to absorb the child within the family.³ Two of the four Negro women in the sample surrendered the child.

Of the thirty-six white unmarried mothers in the sample twenty-three, or sixty-four per cent, surrendered the child for adoption, while thirteen or thirty-six per cent kept the child.

Religious Background

In the sample there were twenty-six Protestant, twelve Catholic and two Jewish unmarried mothers. This distribution may be explained by the fact that there are sectarian child placing agencies in the community. Although the New England Home is a non-sectarian agency and services all groups, in the past it was closely associated with Protestant churches. This may be a factor in determining the high proportion of Protestants in the sample.

²National Office of Vital Statistics, Public Health Service, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Illegitimate Births: Fact Sheet, April 15, 1960.

³Meyer, et. al., op. cit., p. 105.

Of the twenty-six Protestants in the sample, eighteen or sixty-nine per cent surrendered the child for adoption, while eight or thirty-one per cent kept the child. Among the Catholic and Jewish mothers the proportions of those who surrendered and kept were equal.

National and Racial Background

In regard to the factor of national background, the sample may be said to be fairly representative of the community. For purposes of analysis the sample has been categorized according to geographic areas. British Isles includes England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales; Northern Europe includes Germany and the Scandinavian countries; Southern Europe includes Greece and Italy. Eastern Europe denotes Russia. The Negroes in the sample were considered to have their national origins in Southern United States. The determination of the national background of each unmarried mother was made by the woman herself when in the process of giving factual material she identified the national group with which she felt most closely associated. In one case the mother was born outside the United States. Thirty-five women were either second or third generation. The four American Negroes had resided in urban areas of the northern section of the United States.

TABLE 2
NATIONAL AND RACIAL BACKGROUND

Geographic Area of Origin	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
British Isles	15	60	8	54	23	58
Northern Europe	6	24	0	0	6	15
Southern Europe	1	4	2	13	3	7
Eastern Europe	1	4	3	20	4	10
American Negro	2	8	2	13	4	10
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Fifty-eight per cent of the total sample were from the British Isles, and the proportions in Group 1 and Group 2 were approximately the same. The other groups are represented in the sample by such small numbers that it is difficult to draw any inferences in regard to the influence which their national and racial background may have on their decisions.

Education

The level of education in the sample under study is comparatively high as noted in Table 3. This may be due to the fact that a high proportion of the cases was referred by maternity homes. (Source of referral and its impact on the social and cultural level of the sample will be discussed in another section.) The fact that the study is being done in a private agency setting may also have contributed to the relatively high educational achievement of the group.

In the sample included in the grammar school group was one unmarried mother who attended special class until she was sixteen. The high school group included four unmarried mothers who had not completed high school, two among those mothers who surrendered the child and two among those mothers who kept the child. Not all of the college group had completed the requirements for a degree; in the total sample four had degrees, among these four two surrendered the child and two kept the child. The six who had not received a degree all surrendered the child for adoption. Of those classified as having special training three were nurses and one a graduate student. In this group two surrendered the child and two kept the child.

TABLE 3
EDUCATION

Type of Schooling	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Grammar School	3	12	2	13	5	12
High School	12	48	9	60	21	53
College	8	32	2	13	10	25
Special Training	2	8	2	14	4	10
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Occupation

The occupation of the unmarried mother was considered to be her major employment at the time of conception and until

she was forced to give up work because of the pregnancy. In Table 4 the unskilled category included file clerks, housekeepers, mother's helpers, domestics, waitresses and factory workers. The skilled category included airline stewardesses, secretaries, technicians, underwriter and artist. The professional category included teachers and nurses.

TABLE 4
OCCUPATION

Occupation	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Student	5	20	0	0	5	12
Unskilled	10	40	6	40	16	40
Skilled	8	32	7	47	15	38
Professional	2	8	2	13	4	10
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

It may be noted that all of the five students in the sample surrendered the child for adoption. Since the student is probably a minor and reliant upon parents for support, her inability to support the child and the parents' unwillingness to assume the responsibility are probably strong influencing factors. It is interesting to note further that a slightly higher proportion of skilled and professional women kept their children. These women are more likely to be financially independent and therefore are freer to make a decision of this nature.

CHAPTER III

REFERRAL

Child placing agencies generally prefer an early referral of an unmarried mother so that the caseworker has an opportunity to establish a relationship prior to the birth of the child. This preference is based on the theory that, with this relationship established, the mother is enabled to proceed more efficiently in working through her decision regarding the ultimate plans for the child.

Time of Referral

It has been the author's impression that continued casework contact for a period of at least two months prior to delivery enables an unmarried mother to work out her feelings sufficiently to arrive at a decision to surrender her child. It is a further thought by the author that, regardless of the ultimate decision, the mother is enabled to complete her planning at a relatively early date when she has had consistent contact with a caseworker prior to delivery.

The author's impressions regarding the influence of an early referral of an unmarried mother on her final decision is borne out to some extent by the data. For purposes of this study an early referral is defined as a referral which occurs prior to the eighth month of pregnancy.

TABLE 5
TIME OF REFERRAL OF MOTHER

Month of Referral	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Up to 8th month	15	60	6	40	21	53
8th month	2	8	2	13	4	10
9th month	3	12	3	20	6	15
After delivery	5	20	4	27	9	22
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

The above table shows that in the cases in Group 1 60 per cent of the referrals occurred prior to the eighth month of pregnancy, while 40 per cent of this group was referred after that time. In Group 2 the percentages are in reverse ratio, i.e., 40 per cent of the referrals were made prior to the eighth month, and 60 per cent were made at a later date. The conclusions to be drawn from these figures are limited. It had been anticipated that the figures would show more variation. However, the figures do indicate that there is an association between early referral and surrender.

Time of Referral and Completion of Plan

According to the findings of this study early referral is associated with the mother's ability to arrive at a permanent and realistic plan for herself and the child in less time.

TABLE 6
TIME OF REFERRAL AND COMPLETION OF PLAN

Time Within Which Plan Completed	Referral Made Prior to 8th Month		Referral Made 8th Month-- Postpartum	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Within Three Months	15	71	5	26
4th--6th month	3	14	7	37
7th--9th month	2	10	3	15
Over 9 months	1	5	4	22
Total	21	100	19	100

Table 6 shows that early referral is associated with the mother's ability to reach a decision more quickly than does a later referral. In this study eighty-five per cent of the women who were referred prior to the eighth month of pregnancy had completed planning within six months of delivery. Only sixty-three per cent of those who were referred after the eighth month of pregnancy had worked out plans for the child within six months. If a mother can reach a decision within six months after delivery, she is not in a continuous turmoil caused by either ambivalence or denial of the necessity to reach a decision. It is possible for the child to be placed with his permanent family, and the agency is not required to support the child over a long period of time. This results in less emotional and financial hardship for the mother and less expense for the agency.

Source of Referral

The child placing agency in which the research was carried on is closely associated with two maternity homes in the community. It is the policy of both maternity homes to refer every unmarried mother to a child placing agency to discuss and formulate plans for herself and her child. Therefore the majority of referrals were made by the maternity homes. Referrals were also accepted from other social agencies, professionals other than social workers (doctors, lawyers and clergy), as well as self referrals.

TABLE 7
SOURCE OF REFERRAL

Source	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Maternity Home	16	64	12	80	28	70
Other Social Agency	3	12	2	14	5	13
Professionals	4	16	1	6	5	12
Self	2	8	0	0	2	5
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Table 7 shows that sixty-four per cent of the mothers in Group 1 and eighty per cent of the mothers in Group 2 were referred to the child placing agency by a maternity home.

Influence of Maternity Shelter

There has been an assumption on the part of child wel-

fare workers and the general public that a prime purpose of the maternity home is to provide refuge and anonymity to an illegitimately pregnant woman. The element of secrecy is a part of the maternity home atmosphere. Concealment of an illegitimate pregnancy is designed to assist a woman to return to her former way of life with her former associates without stigma. It therefore would seem to follow that among those referrals which were made by maternity homes there would be a rather high percentage of women who surrendered their children for adoption. The data under study raises questions about this assumption as illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 8
SOURCE OF REFERRAL AND DECISION

	Maternity Home		Other	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Group 1	16	57	9	75
Group 2	12	43	3	25
Total	28	100	12	100

Table number 8 shows that of the twenty-eight cases referred by the maternity homes sixteen or fifty-seven per cent surrendered the child for adoption, while forty-three per cent kept the child. Of the twelve referrals which came from other sources seventy-five surrendered and twenty-five per cent kept the child.

These figures are interesting in light of the fact that one of the advantages of maternity home care is said to be ". . . security and the protection she [the unmarried mother] may need from society, herself and her family."¹ One wonders if the unmarried mother sees refuge and anonymity as prime factors in her decision to enter a maternity home, or if she is seeking only refuge in an immediate crisis situation. A further question arises regarding the large number of women who sought refuge from the community but who later flaunted their illegitimate pregnancy by returning to the community with the out of wedlock child. Despite the fact that six out of the fifteen single girls who kept their babies married when they returned to the community, the illegitimate aspect of the pregnancy was generally known.

¹Child Welfare League of America, Standards for Services to Unmarried Parents, p. 44.

CHAPTER IV

ALLEGED FATHER

The alleged father's role as an influential factor in an unmarried mother's decision regarding her child seems to be important.

Mother's Contact With Alleged Father

For purposes of the current study material obtained in regard to the alleged father is limited to the postpartum period.

TABLE 9

MOTHER'S POSTPARTUM CONTACT WITH ALLEGED FATHER

	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Contact	9	36	15	100	24	60
No Contact	16	64	0	0	16	40
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Table 9 shows that sixteen mothers in Group 1 had no contact with the alleged father while in Group 2 all mothers had contact with the alleged father during the postpartum period. These findings were anticipated since some mothers in an attempt to conceal their pregnancy did not share the information with the alleged father. In other cases where there was no contact the reasons given by the mothers included

situations in which there was parental objection to continuation of the contact as well as the mother's own desire to discontinue the relationship. In other instances the mothers were deserted physically, emotionally and financially by the alleged father.

The fifteen mothers in Group 2 who kept their babies looked to the alleged fathers for emotional and/or financial support. The positive responses to the appeals for assistance may have been a prime factor in the ultimate decisions to keep the child.

Nature of Mother's Contact With Alleged Father

In order to clarify the nature of the relationship between the mother and the alleged father those twenty-four cases in which there was a continued contact were examined. It became apparent that the purpose of the relationships varied. In some situations the relationship was primarily social in nature, and in others the relationship was purely business.

TABLE 10

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Social	1	11	6	40	7	29
Business	8	89	9	60	17	71
Total	9	100	15	100	24	100

In the process of studying the raw data in preparation for categorizing the material in Table 10, it was noted that in the one case in Group 1 in which there was a continuing social contact the child was surrendered for adoption shortly after the contact with the alleged father was broken. The business contacts which the eight mothers in Group 1 maintained with the alleged father were in connection with the prenatal and confinement expenses. This differs somewhat from the business contacts which the nine mothers in Group 2 had with the alleged fathers. In this second group the chief purpose of the contact was to insure continued financial assistance to the child's majority.

Mother's Attitude Toward Alleged Father

The mother's feelings about the alleged father seem likely to have some bearing on her decision regarding her child. In order to study this factor a judgment regarding the nature of the relationship was made and classified under one of three categories: positive, ambivalent, and negative.

For purposes of this study a positive attitude toward the alleged father is one in which the mother has a continuing contact or desires to continue the relationship, is protective of him, and expresses a genuine warmth of feeling for him.

Case # 8 illustrates a positive attitude.

Miss S. said, "I am still in love with the baby's father. He visits me regularly, and we plan eventually to be married."

An ambivalent attitude denotes some feeling of warmth

toward the alleged father, combined with overtones of hostility.

Case # 4 illustrates an ambivalent attitude.

Miss L. said, "I feel that both the alleged father and I are responsible for the child's existence, and we both must cooperate in working out the plans. I like Bill, but I am not sure that I love him."

A negative attitude is indicated by little warmth of feeling and direct expressions of hostility.

Case # 3 illustrates this attitude.

Miss H. said, "I hate him, I don't even want to tell him I am pregnant."

TABLE 11

MOTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ALLEGED FATHER

	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Positive	5	20	7	46	12	30
Ambivalent	8	32	5	34	13	32
Negative	12	48	3	20	15	38
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Table 11 illustrates that fifty-two per cent of the mothers in Group 1 had either positive or ambivalent attitudes toward the alleged father, while eighty per cent of the mothers in Group 2 had positive or ambivalent feelings. The

table shows clearly that negative attitudes toward the alleged father were far more prevalent among the mothers in Group 1 than they were among the mothers in Group 2. These findings agree with the author's thought that a woman is more likely to keep the child of a man towards whom she has at least some positive feelings.

CHAPTER V

MOTHER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHILD

Sex of the Child as an Influential Factor

The role that the sex of the child seems to play in the mother's ultimate decision to surrender or to make other plans for her out of wedlock child is of interest. In the course of the study it has become apparent that the sex of the child may have a direct bearing on the mother's decision.

TABLE 12
SEX OF CHILD

	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Male	18	72	6	40	24	60
Female	7	28	9	60	16	40
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

Table 12 illustrates that seventy-two per cent of the children in Group 1 were male and forty per cent of the children in Group 2 were male. These percentages indicate an interesting variation and suggest that it is more likely that a male child will be released for adoption.

The question comes to mind of the mother's identification with a female child and the influence this factor has on her ultimate decision. In the author's work with the eighteen

mothers who surrendered male children, a repetitious expression of feeling was noted. For example in case # 3 the client stated: "A boy can make his own way in the world." In case # 14 the client stated: "If the baby was a girl I could not think of giving her up, but he needs a father, and that is something I can't give him." This type of comment was not unusual among the eighteen mothers who surrendered male children. In the author's experience it was in fact repeated with startling regularity. In casework with the mothers who kept their babies the expression of feeling was quite different. For example in case # 31 the client stated: "No one is going to separate me from my daughter, she needs me, if my baby was a boy it wouldn't matter so much." Again in case # 33: "No one ever wanted me, but I want my daughter, she needs me. A boy can make it alone."

These statements suggest that the sex of the child was one of the mother's primary considerations in respect to planning for herself and her child.

Mother's Contact with the Infant in the Hospital

Each mother in the study delivered the child in a hospital. In all but two cases mothers had the choice of feeding the infant or of having the infant fed in the nursery. One mother in each group delivered a premature infant who was placed in the premature nursery, according to hospital regulation, where only personnel attached to the nursery could handle the child. The mother in Group 1 stated that she did

not wish to have physical contact with the child and expressed no feeling in regard to the restrictions imposed because of the prematurity factor. The mother in Group 2 expressed disappointment in not being allowed to feed her child. If the mother did not choose to feed the infant she was still able to see the child through the nursery window, but under these circumstances there was no physical contact with the infant.

TABLE 13

MOTHER'S CONTACT WITH THE INFANT IN THE HOSPITAL

Contact With Infant	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
No Contact	6	24	0	0	6	15
Seen in Nursery	7	28	3	20	10	25
Fed in Hospital	12	48	12	80	24	60
Total	25	100	15	100	40	100

As seen in Table 13, fifty-two per cent of the mothers in Group 1 had no physical contact with the child. In Group 2 only twenty per cent did not have physical contact with the infant. In Group 1 forty-eight per cent had physical contact while in Group 2 eighty per cent had physical contact with the child.

Mother's Visiting in the Foster Home

As would be anticipated the mothers who surrendered the child for adoption visited less frequently than the mothers

who kept the child. Nine mothers in Group 1 visited in the foster home on one occasion, and in each case they gave as their reason reassurance that the child was placed in a foster home of which they approved. Sixteen mothers did not visit in the foster home.

In Group 2 three children were never placed in foster homes. Upon discharge from the hospital the mother abandoned any further consideration of adoptive planning and took the child home immediately. Twelve requested foster home placement while they considered further advisability of surrendering the child for adoption or accepting the child in their own home. In each instance the mothers visited regularly. They used foster home placement as a substitute for caring for the child themselves while working out plans to have the child with them.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine a group of forty unmarried mothers (twenty-five who surrendered the child for adoption and fifteen who kept the custody of the child) referred to the New England Home for Little Wanderers to identify some factors which may influence a mother to surrender her child for adoption. The factors examined in this group of forty unmarried mothers were: age, race, religion, national background, education, occupation, time and source of referral, attitude toward the alleged father, the sex of the child and the extent of contact with the child.

In respect to age the sample is in agreement with similar samples which have reported the highest incidence in the sixteen to twenty-five age group. The findings of this study show that a younger woman is more likely to surrender her child.

The national and racial distribution does not reflect the incidence of illegitimacy in the general population. This may be attributed to the specific factor of the private agency setting in which the study was done, and to the more general and recognized fact that few Negroes are referred to child placing agencies. It is therefore impossible to draw any conclusions regarding the part that national and racial background plays in a mother's decision.

The religious distribution of the sample permits some

speculation. Since almost seventy per cent of the Protestants in the sample surrendered the child and only fifty per cent of the Catholics and Jews surrendered, it seems that in the caseload of this agency a Protestant woman is more likely to release her illegitimate child for adoption.

The occupational and educational level of the sample is fairly high. The implication here is that the more highly trained individual is more likely to make use of the facilities of a private agency. Forty-eight per cent of the women in this study were highly skilled or professional women. Forty per cent of the women in Group 1 were classified as skilled or professional while sixty per cent of the women in Group 2 were so classified. It is therefore assumed that education beyond high school and responsible and remunerative occupations were somewhat influential.

The question of the time of referral has been one of the major concerns of this study. It was felt that a referral which was made prior to the eighth month of pregnancy would be more likely to help a woman arrive at a decision to surrender her child for adoptive placement. The findings bear out the preliminary assumption to some extent although the variation was less than had been anticipated. It therefore must be concluded that while early referral may have some bearing on a mother's decision to surrender her child, it is not a prime factor. The findings of the study indicate, however, that an early referral does help a mother to reach a decision

regarding future plans for her child more quickly. Eighty-five per cent of the unmarried mothers in this sample who were referred to casework service prior to the eighth month of pregnancy had completed planning within six months of delivery. This finding is in agreement with the empirical knowledge expressed by many authors including Florence Clothier, who states, "The social worker who is fortunate enough to have contact with the unmarried mother early in her pregnancy has a unique opportunity to do groundwork in preparation for the baby's future security."¹ It is also in agreement with Maud Morlock and Hillary Campbell who state, "The majority of unmarried mothers need the skilled help of a social worker. The sooner the mother receives such help, the more satisfactory is the protection given the baby."²

Because of the social service organization of the community in which this study was undertaken, it is not surprising that a majority of the referrals were made by maternity homes. However the findings were rather startling in that they showed that forty-three per cent of the women who were referred by maternity homes kept their babies.

This finding raises question as to the role and purpose of the maternity home in working with the unmarried mother

¹Florence Clothier, M.D., "Problems of Illegitimacy as They Concern the Worker in the Field of Adoption," Mental Hygiene, vol. 25 (October, 1941), p. 579.

²Maud Morlock and Hillary Campbell, Wanted: A Square Deal for the Baby Born Out of Wedlock, p. 1.

during her pregnancy. As is noted above it is a rather general impression that the prime purpose of the maternity home is to provide refuge and anonymity to an illegitimately pregnant woman, yet a sizeable number of mothers who sought shelter in a maternity home kept the child. This fact also raises question about the general attitude in our society toward illegitimacy. Social scientists and others have considered the attitude in our society toward illegitimacy and report a variety of findings. Deutch states:

The idea that mothers who have given birth to children without the sanction of marriage are sinners is obsolete, and generalized condemnation has given place to the tendency to consider unmarried mothers a social symptom, resulting from economic and sexual conditions.³

The findings of this study indicate that the formerly accepted Victorian attitudes regarding the problem have at least been modified. One wonders how much the apparent judgments which our society places on illegitimacy really influence the unmarried mother's decision to keep or surrender her child. Again one wonders what these judgments really are. In regard to the amount of influence which residence in a maternity home may have on the unmarried mother's decision concerning her baby the findings of this study indicate that it is minimal.

A continuation of the mother's relationship with the alleged father following delivery of her child, regardless of the nature of the relationship (i.e., business or social)

³Helene Deutch, The Psychology of Women, vol. 2, p. 332.

according to the findings of this study seems to be associated with the mother's keeping her child. The findings of this study indicate that the quality of a mother's attitude toward the alleged father is influential in the decision to surrender her child. The findings of this study further indicate that those women who have more negative feelings for the alleged fathers are more likely to surrender.

The sex of the child is an influential factor in the decision to surrender. The study demonstrates that a male child is more likely to be surrendered. Those mothers who have no physical contact with the child in the hospital are more likely to surrender than are women who do take advantage of this opportunity, and similarly women who have little or no contact with the child in the foster home are more likely to surrender.

In summary the younger the mother the more limited her contact with her child and the alleged father and the more negative her attitude toward the alleged father the more likely she is to surrender the child. Several factors which were examined and thought to be possible influences on the decision to surrender proved not to be strongly associated with this decision. Among these factors are level of educational achievement, occupational status and the source of referral.

The original hypothesis that early referral of an unmarried mother to casework service is associated with the de-

cision to surrender the child for adoption is not sustained. While early referral does facilitate planning, it does not seem to influence the decision to surrender.

APPENDIX A

SCHEDULEREFERRAL

By Whom: Maternity Home; Self; Relatives; Physician;
Minister; Friend; Other.

Time: Prior to delivery; Month of pregnancy; After
delivery; Age of child.

MOTHER

Age:.

Marital Status at time of application: Married;
Legally separated; Separated; Divorced; Single.

Race:

Education--last grade completed--circle:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4

Graduate Special: Specify--

Religion:

Nationality Background of Mother:

Occupation: Student; Unskilled, Skilled; Professional.

Mother's Relationship to Father: Hostile; Negative;
Ambivalent.

SURRENDER

Age of Child when Mother Signed Surrender:

Sex of Child:

Other Plan Made:

ALLEGED FATHER

Continuing Relationship with Mother: For Financial Aid
Only: For Adoptive History: For Planning Inde-
pendent Placement of the Child--Marriage to
Mother--Care by Paternal Relatives.

MOTHER'S DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE CHILD

Hospital--Feeding--Seen in Nursery, but not held.

Care Prior to Placement:

Visiting in Foster Home:

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Katherine Spencer