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RESPONSES TO SOCIAL SERVICES AMONG THE URBAN UNEMPLOYED*

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In an urban environment the individual is unable to function independent of other people. To fill even basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing, he must successfully become a part of the social system. To assist people in obtaining these, programs have developed in the areas of employment, housing, health, and welfare as well as other areas related to man's life in an urban environment. The provision of these programs does not automatically insure that needs will be met. The individual still must make a positive response before a service can be delivered. A review of the literature shows that little is known about the factors which determine whether a person in need of assistance will use an agency designed to provide that service. This article attempts to narrow that gap by exploring several factors which possibly influence use of a social service agency.

DATA

Sample:

Between July and September of 1971 a survey was made of 506 residents drawn as a multi-stage probability sample of adults living in the Model Cities area of Cincinnati, Ohio. Model Cities neighborhoods were low income areas designated to receive special federal assistance largely in the form of social services administered by agencies. The primary purpose of the study was to determine the standard of living in the neighborhoods prior to the beginning of the federal program. The research was conducted by the Institute for Metropolitan Studies at the University of Cincinnati.

The average family income of respondents at the time of the survey was \$301 per month with 76% receiving less than \$400. Most of these incomes were fixed with 31% of the families drawing retirement pensions, 21% welfare benefits, and 14% disability payments. Homes were usually rented while only a small minority, 8%, were either buying or owned their place. Thirty-four percent of the heads of households not retired or disabled at the time of the survey were unemployed. Seventy-four percent of the respondents had failed to complete high school, and only seven percent had any formal education beyond the twelfth grade. Thus the sample is representative of the type of population social agencies are frequently designed to serve. It is therefore appropriate to study their use of these services.

Variables:

Before an individual can be expected to go to an agency he must first have a use for the service it provides. Once this need exists, it

is reasonable to analyze variability in behavior among the potential clients. To limit analysis to people who could actually use an existing service, attention is focused on people with a particular need--the need for a job--and their use of the state employment service. The need for a job was determined by asking respondents if they were working full-time, working part-time, laid off, unemployed, a housewife, disabled, or retired. Those respondents who said they were either unemployed or laid off were classified as being unemployed. In addition, four people who had held their present jobs less than a year were included in the analysis. This made a total of 91 who could have used the state employment service in the year prior to the study.

The most obvious factor which might affect use of an agency, outside of need, is the knowledge that it exists. Before an individual can get help from an agency he must know that it is there and what service it provides. Eustace and Carol Theodore (1972) surveyed the population of a mid-Atlantic community to determine their awareness of a local poverty program organization. They found that while most people recognized the name of the agency, a sizeable number were unfamiliar with the services it provided. In particular residents living in the target area did not recognize the agency as a source of help. Floyd Fowler (1970) found similar results in a study of health care utilization among the aged. The implication is that many people might not use a service because they are unaware of it. To determine if respondents had sufficient knowledge they were asked if they had heard of the state employment service. If they responded yes, they were asked if they knew what kinds of things the agency did. Those who knew that the agency tried to find jobs for people were classified as knowing the service they needed was available.

Use of social service agencies may be further limited by alienation among potential clients. Alienation exists whenever an individual believes that he is powerless to influence others to meet his needs. Such a person would not expect agencies to respond to his request for assistance. Consequently he would not bother to use the service. Ira Harrison (1965) interviewed clients of a state employment service who had been classified by the agency as unemployable. He found that many of them expressed feelings of alienation and had only come to the employment service as a last resort. There was no way to determine how many people with similar attitudes never came at all. More recently, Seeman (1972) studied the relationship between alienation and knowledge-seeking among employed men. Those who expressed feelings of powerlessness avoided information about new careers and sources of training. Both of these studies reached the conclusion that perceived powerlessness limits the individual's search for knowledge about available services. For this study two separate measures of alienation were developed: (1) alienation from the political system, and (2) alienation from the community. Both scales focused on the individual's perceived lack of influence in the situation. Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, mildly agreed, mildly disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the content of four questions--two questions for each scale. Responses for each scale were then assigned numerical values and added together.

The extent to which the individual is socially isolated may affect the amount of use he makes of available services. One who is isolated has little contact with significant others and little participation in voluntary organizations. If knowledge about agencies is transmitted from person to person or through organizations which people join, anyone who does not have these contacts may not become aware of what services exist. Even if he is aware of the services provided, a person who is socially isolated may not be willing to use them. The same reasons which keep him from developing relationships with others may prevent him from going to an agency for help. Degree of social isolation is indicated by frequency of contact with friends or neighbors and by frequency of church attendance.

An individual's background may also be important in understanding his use of social services. Education and rural-to-urban migration are both variables related to the level of aspiration or ambition the individual possesses (Hannan, 1970). A person who stays in school through graduation or one who moves from a rural to an urban area has higher aspiration than someone who does not. This same ambition may cause the individual to go to an agency for help when he needs a job. However, if he expects the state employment service to only place people in medium or low paying jobs, then a person may not go to the agency if he thinks he could do better. In particular, respondents whose last jobs paid well may feel that they could get better jobs somewhere else than they could through the employment service. Finally, a person who has lived in the area longer has more chances to discover and thus be able to use the agency.

If a person believes that because of personal characteristics it may be difficult for him to get a job through the employment service, he may avoid use of that agency. People who fear discrimination because of their race, sex, or age may use other means to find a job.

FINDINGS

Although all 91 respondents were potential clients for the state employment service, only 36% had been to that agency for help in finding a job. This occurred despite the fact that the agency is located near the neighborhood surveyed. Need alone is clearly not a sufficient factor to cause people to use an available social service.¹

Table I shows that only 57% of the unemployed respondents knew that a state agency existed to help them find jobs. Since an individual could not be expected to go for help unless he knew about the agency, this may be the most serious factor limiting the service provided. This becomes even more apparent when attention is focused upon those respondents who reported knowledge of the service. Sixty-five percent of these people went to the agency in search of work. Lack of information limits the available service to a small proportion of potential clients although two-thirds of the unemployed with sufficient knowledge used the agency.

If a person feels alienated he may fail to use a social service because he thinks it will do little good or because he does not trust

TABLE I: EFFECT OF KNOWLEDGE ON USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

	%
Probability of using employment service among unemployed	36%
Probability of having knowledge of employment service among unemployed	57%
Probability of using employment service among unemployed having knowledge	65%

other people. Table II indicates that the measures of alienation in this study are moderately related to an individual's use of the employment agency. When alienation from the political system and from the community is low, a person is more likely to use available services. A person who is alienated may perceive himself as not fitting into the system. Other people are not believed to be interested in his needs, and he sees himself as incapable of influencing them. This creates a reluctance on his part to seek help from others. The result is that alienated people do not use the state employment service as often as those with low alienation.

Social isolation from the community, either through primary contacts or secondary associations, has little influence on use of the employment service. Despite the hypothesis that informal channels of communication are important sources of information in inner city ghettos, the data indicate that people who have more contacts with others do not make better use of available services (Table III). One reason for this may be the reliability of information obtained through informal contacts. Respondents were asked how often they felt that news and information they obtained from friends and neighbors was correct. Only 37% believed friends were always or usually correct, and 24% felt that way about neighbors. Given this, residents would not be expected to act in normal situations simply on the basis of what they hear through informal channels. Furthermore, 80% stated that either radio, television, or the

TABLE II: EFFECT OF ALIENATION ON USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Measure of alienation	r	Level of sig.
Political alienation	-.164	.068
Community alienation	-.174	.056

TABLE III: EFFECT OF SOCIAL ISOLATION ON USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Measure of social isolation	r	Level of sig.
Contact with friends	-.046	.349
Contact with neighbors	-.050	.321
Church attendance	-.013	.455

newspaper was their major source of information. As a result association with friends, neighbors, or church members does not increase use of available resources.

Both education and rural-to-urban migration increase the probability that an unemployed resident will use the state employment service (Table IV). People who fail to finish high school are reluctant to go to the agency for help. This may be because they believe that the only jobs available through the agency require the applicant to have a high school diploma. If this is the case there would be little motivation to use the service. A person who has dropped out of school before graduation frequently has low motivation to begin with. The situation is not limited to school but is part of a pattern of behavior. Once out of school the drop-out finds that the work available to him is low paying and uninteresting so he becomes discouraged over his inability to find a better job. In time he may quit and spend his time doing nothing. As a result he does not go to the state employment service or any other agency in search of new work.

People who have migrated to the city from farms and small towns more frequently use the state agency. These same people were initially motivated to move to the city, probably in search of work. If the

TABLE IV: EFFECT OF BACKGROUND ON USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Background factor	r	Level of sig.
Education	.183	.049
Rural-to-urban migration	.170	.057
Length of residence	-.036	.371
Income on last job	.010	.464

individuals who leave their homes in small towns to move somewhere else where opportunities are better have higher ambition than those who stay (See Hannan, 1970:101-120), then they may also have more ambition than the average resident who lives in the area where they move. Consequently, if they find themselves out of work they may try more things to find a job, including use of the state employment service.

People who have moved to the city from farms and small towns may use the employment service to find a job because they have no other alternative. Others who have lived in the city longer may know how to find a job on their own. However, the data indicate that use of the state employment service neither increases nor decreases with length of residence. Further, most of the migrants came to the area more than ten years before the survey. Together these findings demonstrate that increased use of the employment service among migrants is not a result of their newness to the area.

The amount of money respondents earned on their last job has little impact on their current use of the employment service. Although high paying jobs may be unavailable through the agency, few respondents have ever held such positions. Most of the people earned less than four hundred dollars a month on their last job, and all earned less than one thousand. Residents of low income neighborhoods are not the people who compete for white collar and professional positions which pay higher earnings. Irrespective of their past income the state employment service would still handle jobs with comparable pay.

Personal characteristics of the individual which might cause him to fear discrimination and avoid the state employment service have little actual influence on use of the agency (Table V). Respondents who are black go to the agency as frequently as whites, and women use it almost as often as men. Age also makes little difference in who seeks jobs through the service. Perhaps because it is a state agency people believe that they will be given an equal opportunity. In any case, fear of discrimination does not appear to be an important factor.

In summary, knowledge that a service exists to help them find jobs appears to be the strongest factor which determines whether unemployed individuals will use the state employment service. Only about a third of

TABLE V: EFFECT OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Personal characteristic	r	Level of sig.
Race	-.010	.464
Sex	-.013	.452
Age	-.101	.172

the total potential clientele had gone to the agency in search of a job, but two-thirds of those who knew about the agency went. Alienation, whether from the community or the political system, is a second factor which affects use of the employment service. People who have a high sense of powerlessness are less likely to go to the agency for help. Finally, background factors which reflect levels of ambition are related to the frequency with which the agency is used. Unemployed respondents who had completed high school or who had migrated to the city from smaller towns made more use of the agency than did those who showed less ambition.

DISCUSSION

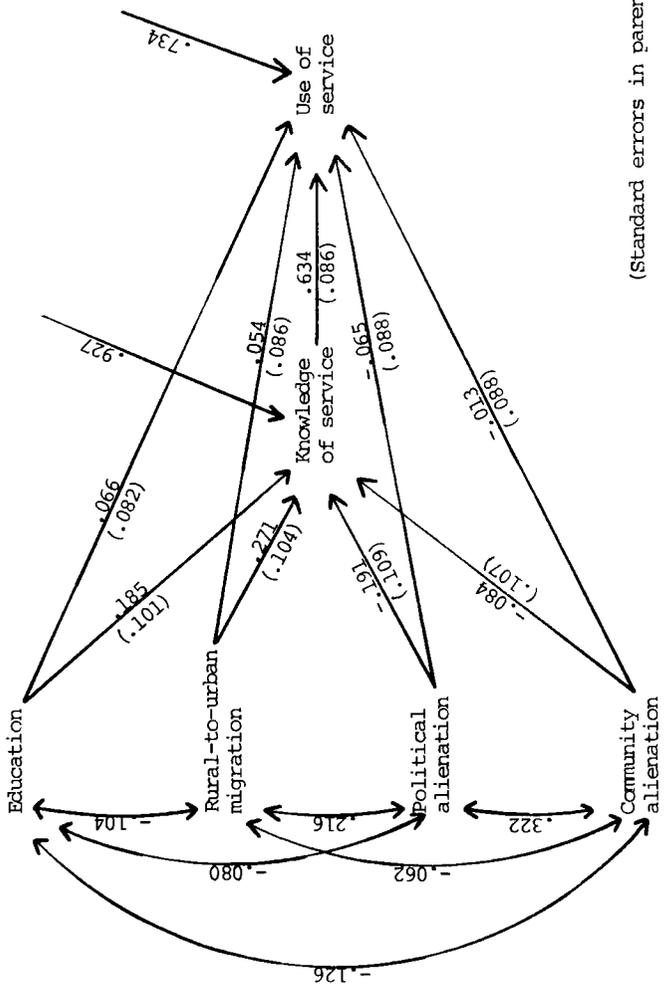
A better understanding of how these factors determine use of the employment service can be obtained by placing the variables in a path model. Path analysis forces us to consider interrelationships between the independent variables and treat them either as exogenous or intervening factors in the explanation. The standardized slopes, or paths, leading to the same variable indicate the relative direct contribution of each independent variable while the total effect is decomposed into its direct and indirect components.

TABLE VI: INTERCORRELATIONS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF VARIABLES RELATED TO USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Variable	Variable					
	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆
Education (X ₁)						
Rural-to-urban migration (X ₂)	-.104					
Political alienation (X ₃)	-.080	.216				
Community alienation (X ₄)	-.126	-.062	.322			
Knowledge of service (X ₅)	.182	.216	-.175	-.186		
Use of service (X ₆)	.183	.170	-.174	-.164	.672	
Means	4.01	1.65	4.81	5.62	0.57	0.34
Standard Deviations	1.20	0.90	1.16	2.06	0.50	0.48

FIGURE I: PATH ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF VARIABLES RELATED TO THE USE OF THE STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

SERVICE



(Standard errors in parentheses)

Use of the state employment service results directly from knowledge about its existence. Strong evidence already cited supports the hypothesis that an individual will go to the agency if he knows that it provides a service he needs. It approaches, for all practical purposes, the criteria of a necessary condition. The path diagram in Figure I conforms closely to this prediction. Knowledge of this service has a strong influence on an individual's use of the state employment agency. Other variables have no direct effect but instead operate indirectly on use through knowledge. Together these variables explain almost half of the variance in use of the state employment service. It now seems possible to argue that the major factor influencing an individual's use of this agency is his knowledge about its existence. Obviously, no one can be expected to take advantage of this service if he does not know about it, but, more important, the probability is 65% that he will use it if he does have that knowledge.

To understand why some individuals use available social services and others do not, it is necessary to study how this knowledge is acquired. It is not accident or chance which determines who learns about available services, but it is the result of a process influenced by alienation and motivation. When unemployed an individual must go through an information gathering process where he collects knowledge about possible sources of jobs. This searching procedure centers around sources which are believed to be helpful.

Because someone with low alienation believes that the system will respond to his need, he should look to the government for available services. Someone else who has high alienation has little reason to seek ways in which the state can be of assistance. His efforts to find work will be through other sources which are independent of that system. As a result, alienation should influence the amount of information obtained about state services. The path model indicates that political alienation does have a direct influence on the attainment of knowledge, but alienation from the community has little effect. Political alienation is oriented toward the system which controls the state employment service. As such it becomes immediately salient in deciding whether to look to the government for help. The result is that only those who expect to find assistance become aware of available services. Community alienation, on the other hand, concerns the neighborhood in which the respondent lives. Its influence on the knowledge attainment process is much weaker because it is further removed from the political system. Individuals who are less alienated from the neighborhood have a slightly better chance of learning about the service, but the difference is too small to be important.

Unemployed individuals must also have the necessary ambition to find a job when they are out of work. This ambition is reflected in levels of education and migration. It is not easy to leave the area where one grew up and move to the city, nor is it easy to finish school when you live in an urban ghetto where drop-out rates are high. Those who do these things must have a desire to get ahead in life and sufficient drive to stick with it. This same drive increases efforts to find employment when they are out of work. The result is that people who

have migrated to the city from smaller towns and those who have more education develop greater knowledge of available services than do other respondents.

In summary, the path model indicates that use of the state employment service results directly from knowledge about its existence. This knowledge is not distributed randomly through the population but is obtained by individuals with high ambition and low alienation. The argument in this paper has been that unemployed persons must go through a job-hunting process to find new work. How hard they try to find sources of employment and how much they believe the system will help them determine whether they look to the state for help. The higher the ambition, the greater the number of places the individual will try; and the lower the alienation, the greater the probability that the search will be directed toward government sources. The result is that knowledge of available services is determined by levels of ambition and by levels of alienation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has studied factors which influence use of social service agencies. Residents of low income areas designated to receive federal assistance in the form of services were interviewed to determine the need for and use of such services. Those respondents who were classified as unemployed or laid off from work within the last year were selected for analysis. The use they made of the state employment service was then analyzed.

Knowledge that a service existed to help them find jobs was the prime factor determining use of the agency. Those who knew about the service applied for help while others did not. The conclusion that increasing knowledge about available services would increase use is a tenuous one. Obtaining knowledge about services is a first step in using them. Those who now get that knowledge may already have a willingness to use the service while alienation and low ambition would prevent others from doing so, even if they too shared the knowledge. If increased use of social service agencies is a desired objective, it may be insufficient to merely increase knowledge about what is available without also dealing with those factors which presently limit the amount of information the individual obtains.

FOOTNOTES

1. Appreciation is due Rob Ayers who assisted in the analysis for this report and the Institute for Metropolitan Studies who made the data available.

2. Other agencies located in the area also assisted residents in finding jobs. However, respondents did not use these agencies in place of the state employment service. Instead there seemed to be a large duplication of services limited to the same individuals.

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