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ABSTRACT

The current energy crisis appears to be presenting social work with a new
breed of client as the profession moves into the decade of the 1980's. This
new clientele - the boom town victim - may be an individual, a group, an entire
community or even a geographical region. Accordingly, an effective response to
these victims may well require the entire repetoire of social work's helping
functions (e.g., clinical, research, community organization, social planning,
social action, policy formulation). Since the energy crisis gives every indi-
cation of not only continuing, but intensifying, it behooves the social work
profession to devote more attention to the social consequences and human costs
of energy development. This paper will examine the magnitude of energy develop-
ment; it will discuss the social consequences and human costs of such develop-
ment; and it will suggest possible responses by the profession of social work.

MAGNITUDE OF ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

The national emphasis on energy self-sufficiency has affected every part
of the United States. However, this paper will essentially focus on the West
since that region is experiencing the most development, and since that region
may be the least prepared to cope with and manage rapid change. Small towns
and rural areas, when faced with burgeoning energy-related growth, encounter
dramatic increases in such social indexes as alcoholism, delinquency, and
child abuse. Social work could be in a unique position to help.

Energy development in the West generally refers to the development of such
resources as oil, oil shale, coal, gas and uranium. The region also possesses
hydroelectric, solar and geothermal potential. Additionally, rapid development
of these resources results in substantial growth in the construction and trans-
portation industries. A 1979 report by the U.S. Department of Energy covering
Region VIII (Colorado, Montana, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming)
indicated that some 325 communities in that region alone were either "currently
or imminently impacted" by over 900 energy resource impacts.[1] Region VIII,
which represents 16 percent of the nation's land area and three percent of the
national population, has 46 percent of the nation's coal reserves, almost half
of the uranium and all of the high grade oil shale deposits.[2]

According to the Department of Energy report:

> From 1970 through 1980, the population of 17 percent of the communities
> surveyed will increase by over 100 percent and 43 percent of the communities
> will experience a population increase of over 40 percent. The greatest
> impacts will be experienced in Wyoming where 58 percent of the communities
> will double in size from 1970 to 1980. Wyoming is followed by Colorado -
> 34 percent, Utah - 12 percent, Montana - 7 percent, North Dakota - 5 percent
> and South Dakota - 5 percent.[3]

Sufficient energy-related growth is also occurring in other Western states such
as Arizona, Idaho, New Mexico and Nevada. Furthermore, these statistics and
projections were compiled prior to President Carter's national address on energy.
His plans to continue the expansion of nuclear power, to step up the process of
converting factories to coal rather than oil-fueled power, and to stimulate the
development of synthetic fuel can only serve to increase rapid growth in the
energy-rich West.

Several specific examples should serve to illustrate the degree of growth
being experienced in states such as Colorado and Wyoming. Wheatland, Wyoming,
a small ranching-farming town of 2,498 residents in 1970, grew to an estimated
3,705 in 1977, and an estimated 6,000 plus in 1979.[4] Gillette, Wyoming, which
saw an oil gas boom followed by a coal boom, went from 3,500 in 1967 to 7,200
in 1970, an estimated 9,000 in 1976, and will reach an estimated 35,000 in 1985.[5]
Craig, Colorado grew from a population of 4,500 in 1973 to 10,000 in 1978.[6]
And as a final example, Rock Springs, Wyoming skyrocketed from 11,500 people in
1970 to between 40,000 and 48,000 in 1978, with a projected 1980 population of
80,000.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES AND HUMAN COSTS

Social workers and other human service providers from many parts of the
nation may be unfamiliar with the social consequences and human costs of such
rapid development and change. Those who have wrestled with the problems of
economically declining Northeastern cities or economically depressed areas in
Appalachia may well be surprised to learn that growth has negative as well as
positive consequences.

One phenomenon related to rapid growth frequently goes by the sobriquet
of boom town, defined by Weisz as "a community which is undergoing rapid growth
and rapid change,"[8] by Cortese and Jones as "the rapid and extreme growth of
population in communities adjacent to mines and construction sites,"[9] and by
the authors as:

1. a community experiencing above average economic and population growth,
2. which results in benefits for the community (e.g., expanded tax base,
   increased employment opportunities, social and cultural diversity),

3. but which also places or results in strain on existing community
   and societal institutions (e.g., familial, educational, political,
   economic).[10]

These definitions, and most others, tend not to affix a specific percent in pop-
ulation growth since communities vary in their capacity to absorb change. However,
the Denver Research Institute concluded that a small town could accommodate a
five percent increase in annual growth rate, that an annual growth rate of ten
percent strains local service capabilities, and that a growth rate above 15 per-
cent seems to result in breakdowns in local and regional institutions.[11]

Problems in impacted communities appear similar to those of any area under-
going rapid industrialization.[12] In fact, Cortese and Jones state that "the
boom town experience as it affects preimpact community residents can be better
understood within the theoretical constructs of urbanization and modernization."[13]
These problems, however, are accentuated by the relatively small population base
in many western communities. For example, a metropolitan area might experience
minor problems in accommodating one or even several industrial plants or business
organizations. But the ensuing problems (e.g., need for more classrooms) are
manageable within a framework of planned and orderly growth. On the other hand,
the construction of a power plant or the opening of a mine requiring several
thousand new workers and their families might all but overwhelm the typical
western town of several thousand inhabitants. Such projects result in significant
changes in the physical, social and cultural environment. These changes, while
perceived and defined somewhat differently, affect both "old timers" and "new-
comers."

Bates, a Montana social worker, examined the people problems of western
boom towns and asserted that frontier expansions were consistent in their crash,
unplanned development and that boom town results:

...seem always to leave in their wake the grim statistics of spiritual
depression, family disorganization, emotional damage and alcoholism,
·impaired social development of children, delinquency, suicide,
dissapation and death.[14]

Hanks, et. al., described the socio-physical problems associated with impacted
communities thusly:

... superinflation by which the already critical national inflation
is exacerbated with the special added inflation of boom towns arising
from high labor costs, shortages (such as in housing and shopping
facilities and services), and quick-buck exploitation by "get-rich"
entrepreneurs: the inundation of demands from the markedly increased
population on government and related facilities and services, such as
law enforcement, courts, streets, sewers, schools, hospitals, retailers,
and supportive business services and all social services, such as
mental health, senior citizen programs, vocational rehabilitation,
employment services, and Social Security District services.[15]

Inflation rates vary by boom town, but a rule-of-thumb used by the Department
of Housing and Urban Development holds that "the prices of lots and houses
double during the course of construction, while the rents for housing double or
triple."[16] Some workers, of course, locate housing elsewhere and commute. How-
ever, the immense distances between most western towns and extreme weather
conditions frequently make commuting a less than viable alternative.

     According to Hanks, et. al., some of the social consequences associated with
the socio-physical problems include: alcoholism and substance abuse; prostitution;
depression; family crises such as desertions, separations, divorces and parent-child
troubles; school difficulties such as truancy, drop-outs and rapid student turnover;
and the special vulnerability of the aged existing on fixed incomes.[17] These
problems, for the most part, exist to a degree in any community. However, available
evidence supports the contention that they are compounded and intensified by the
boom town environment and experience.[18]

     Kohrs, a social scientist and former clinical director of the Central Wyoming
Counseling Center in Casper, Wyoming, gained much attention and generated consider-
able debate by characterizing many boom town problems as the "Gillette Syndrome,"
based on the problems of impacted Gillette, Wyoming. This syndrome can perhaps
be best illustrated and understood through Kohr's graphic description of life in an
energy production boom town.

          A housewife, after fighting mud, wind, inadequate water and
     disposal systems, a crowded mobile home and muddy children all day,
     snaps at her husband as he returns from a 16-hour shift. He responds
     by heading back downtown and spending the night at a bar drinking
     and trading stories with men from similar circumstances.

     Divorce, tensions on children, emotional damage and alcoholism were
     the result. Children went to school in double shifts; motels turned
     over linens in triple shifts. Jails became crowded and police
     departments experienced frequent changes in personnel in the tradition
     of frontier justice. Out of frustration with the quality of living,
     it appeared that mayors shuttled in and out of office like bobbins
     in a loom. Depression was rampant with suicide attempts at a rate
     of one per 250 people. Suicide attempts were rarely fatal but they
     became the tool to regulate the lack of human concern. It was the
     ultimate method to express that something was wrong and needed
     changing.

     When neglect went beyond tolerable limits, divorce was the natural
     consequence. Fatigued men working long shifts and driving long
     distances to work came home to equally fatigued wives coping with
     a mud-spattered world.

     Trailer courts offered only a mud patty for children's play as they
     raced between trailer houses and trailer court traffic. Even schools

were in trailers similar to those in which the children lived.
Nothing seemed permanent. Difficulty in coping with transient living,
angry school personnel teaching under less than adequate conditions,
and parental conflicts led to poor school adjustment and achievement,
then truancy, then delinquency, and finally a residential environment.

Jails often became a protection of wives from beatings by drunken
spouses rather than detention for real crime. Psychiatric and
alcoholic withdrawal problems were maintained in the jail because of
overworked medical personnel and inadequate medical facilities. The
hospital was a first aid station to maintain life until transported
to a hospital in Casper, Billings, or Denver.

The pattern of depression, delinquency and divorce was so well
documented that the consequences were predictable.[19]

Kohr's "Gillette Syndrome," which gained wide recognition, was not favorably
received by everyone.

Thompson, a sociologist, and others questioned the validity of some of
Kohr's data and the existence of the "Gillette Syndrome."[20] Thompson's
research did not tend to substantiate all of Kohr's findings, and at the very
least, he maintained that social scientists should eschew such colorful phrases
as the "Gillette Syndrome" and even "boom town" in favor of more objective and
scientific terminology.

The middle ground between the "Gillette Syndrome" and the "Myth of the
Gillette Syndrome" may have been found by Weisz and associates at the Campbell
County Office of the Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center. Weisz, a community
psychologist, used the concept of stress as a bridge between public health,
mental health, medicine, sociology and other relevant human service disciplines.
During the summer and fall of 1977, his mental health center conducted "a study
of stress and mental health-related consequences of energy-related impact in
the town of Gillette and Campbell County."[21]

The study found that:

... at least in 1977, the population of Gillette experienced high
levels of stress generated not only by the amount of change in their
lives, but also from the needs and frustrations produced by deficits
in community services, the demands of adjusting to life in a new
community, family needs, plus a variety of other stresses stemming
from a boom town situation.[22]

Since high levels of stress are associated with mental health problems, Weisz
analyzed mental health records covering 1974-1978 to see if the expected
increase in mental health problems had actually occurred. A comparison of
Campbell County with four nonimpacted counties indicated that:

1. the total increase in mental health center admissions in Campbell
    County was well above the increase that might be predicted from
    population changes; and

2. the admission figures from the Wyoming State Hospital out of the
    Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center's other counties, when
    compared with Campbell County figures, seem to strengthen the
    hypothesis that highly stressed communities generate more than
    their share-by-population of severe illness.[23]

While additional research is necessary, stress theory appears to offer much in
terms of understanding and dealing with many of the immediate human problems
in boom towns.

However, some social scientists, including Cortese and Jones,[24] and Gold,[25]
perceive long-range problems which require much more attention and concern.
According to Cortese and Jones:

> ... our investigations clearly show that the social impacts of boom-
> town growth involve changes far beyond the mere increase in population,
> strain on municipal services, and the mental health problems usually
> attributed to such strains and which constitute the bulk of 'socio-
> economic' impact assessments. Less visible but considerably more
> important for the long range are the underlying changes in the social
> structure and cultural systems that are, and will continue to be,
> precipitated by energy-related boom town developments.[26]

They believe that these changes require more than the usual provision of more
adequate housing, more professionalized police departments or more mental health
centers. Instead they see such solutions as parts of the problem since "such
innovations add to the process of increasing anonymity, differentation,
bureaucratization, centralization, impersonalization, specialization and
orientation of local community units toward extra-community systems."[27] They
further believe that communities facing impact should possess a knowledge of
the possibility of major social and cultural changes before making a decision
for or against development.

These concerns over major structural changes in the community are shared
by staff of the Western Action Training Institute in Denver, who perceive the
danger as nothing less than social and cultural genocide. Their vision of the
future is as follows:

> Within the next decade, the people of the Rocky Mountain and
> Northern Plains region not only face the loss of the beautiful and
> awe-inspiring physical environment in which they live, but also --
> and of great impact -- they face social and cultural genocide, the
> destruction of their way of life. The social disruption affects
> everyone, even the new arrivals, people often working in resource

.

development, who find themselves in fractured environments hostile
to them, the 'newcomers,' and difficult in which to set down roots.
There is a widespread sense of hopelessness, a feeling of being
trampled in the stampede to strip the land of its resources.

The physical communities grow and change. So, too, do the social
and governmental organizations of the communities. Each person
becomes a smaller part of the larger community . . . the social
networks, presently a source of community strength and personal
individual support, will be unable to respond to the massive in-
flux of people. The social systems will break down, leaving old-
timers and newcomers alike in a sick community, glutted by growth.

The list of symptoms is long, the magnitude, awesome; and the
meaning clear. The social and cultural community values are being
overwhelmed. Longstanding informal social support and networks
are broken. The sense of community, of belonging, is gone. The
nature and quality of life have been destroyed. Craig and Rock
Springs are pictures of the future for more than 200 communities
in the region unless action is taken to help residents organize
themselves to deal with the issues which growth is forcing upon
them.

Indeed, unless the powerless organize themselves into effective
local, state, and regional coalitions to advocate for their
interests, they may as well start packing, for the boom will
surely and literally blow them out of their homes and communities,
socially, culturally, spiritually and physically.[28]

In sum, the vast amount of energy development in the United States,
especially in the West, has significant social consequences and human costs.
While experts differ in their definition and classification of these, several
major problem areas seem to receive the most attention: (1) superinflation
from the demands of large numbers of incoming energy-related personnel and
families; (2) demands for all types of services, including human services,
exceeding the capacities of local systems to meet them; (3) increases in
incidence and nature of many "people problems," commonly referred to as the
"Gillette Syndrome" and probably associated with stress related to rapid change;
and (4) structural changes in the community which change its very nature, and
which have even been characterized as social and cultural genocide.

A SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE

While individual social workers have struggled with the problems created
by energy development, the social work profession as a whole has been slow in
responding to the crisis. A partial explanation might lie in the fact that
most energy development has been in rural areas and social work has had a

definite urban bias and preoccupation. A related explanation is that graduate
schools of social work, which tend to generate research and publications, are
not especially numerous in the West. Region VIII, for example, has only the
urban-oriented University of Denver and the University of Utah with graduate
programs. An immense area covering Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and
Wyoming has no graduate program within it.

These circumstances, and perhaps others, have prevented or retarded the
development of social work responses to problems created by energy development.
This is unfortunate since the knowledge, skills and values of the profession
seem ideally suited to these problems. Additionally, boom town victims are
not served most effectively when non-social workers must take time to "rediscover
the wheel" in planning and delivering human services. For example, the Wyoming
Human Services Project is a relatively effective blend of a number of standard
social work and human service approaches. However, its non-social work
directors have claimed such "innovations" as a multidisciplinary team approach, a
systems perspective on problems, and the concept of the community as client.[29]
A cursory examination of the literature would have revealed that variations of
multidisciplinary teams can be traced back to at least the Charity Organization
Societies and Settlement Houses in the 1870's and 1880's, and that the annals
of community organization abound with examples, especially in O.E.O. and Model
Cities endeavors. Literally thousands of social workers who used the Pincus
and MinaHan textbook[30] would be astounded to learn that the application of
systems theory to human problems is new. And a number of social work community
organization practitioners who have gone to their reward would turn over in
their graves to hear that viewing the community as the client is a new concept.
Nevertheless, the absence of a solid social work commitment to energy impact
problems permits such situations to exist.

The social work profession would do well to develop a coordinated and
comprehensive strategy toward preventing and mitigating impact problems. The
National Association of Social Workers could allocate staff and fiscal resources,
including funding of chapter programs dealing with impact; it could devote
coverage to impact-related stories in N.A.S.W. News; it could publish articles
in its journals, perhaps even devoting one issue of Social Work to this theme;
it could make this issue a priority topic for the 1981 Professional Symposium;
and its advocacy, legislative and lobbying activities could include an emphasis
on impact problems. Since much energy development occurs in rural areas, N.A.S.W.
could incorporate at least some of these measures into its increasing emphasis on
social work in rural areas, perhaps utilizing the assistance of the Rural Social
Work Caucus and the N.A.S.W. Rural Task Force.

Another professional social work organization which should focus on this
area is the Council on Social Work Education. C.S.W.E. could encourage the
development of educational and training material via the provision of staff and
fiscal resources; it could give coverage of impact-oriented educational activities
in the Social Work Education Reporter; it could publish articles in the Journal
of Social Work Education; and it could feature boom town papers and workshops
at the Annual Program Meeting.

Since both C.S.W.E. and N.A.S.W. are not overly endowed with fiscal resources, they could secure grant and foundation monies for special education, demonstration and research projects. Jointly sponsored programs with agencies, institutions and state units actually located in impacted areas might be an excellent undertaking. Projects could range from developing educational modules to research and demonstration programs on the needs of sexual assault victims in boom towns.

Individual social workers, as well as professional organizations could initiate and/or support efforts to mitigate the confusion, fragmentation of efforts and lack of coordination in the burgeoning number of impact-related activities. One approach, which would incorporate a variety of social work functions, entails the creation of state and regional institutes on energy impact and the human services. These institutes, which would have a broader prospective than just social work, might possess some or all of the following functions: library, clearinghouse, research, consultation, planning and coordination, and education and training.[31]

Social workers involved in advancing the interests of such vulnerable groups as women, minorities and the aged should be aware that these groups experience added difficulties in boom towns. National policies and programs affecting these groups should include an equitable focus on boom town victims.

New endeavors should build on the work of the few social workers active in this field. These would include Bates' structural approach,[32] Agte's focus on the aged,[33] Jirovec's emphasis on community planning and organization,[34] and the Davenports' contributions in the areas of team approaches,[35] women's issues[36] and proposals for state and regional institutes.[37]

Furthermore, since urban models of social work intervention are not always easily and effectively transferred to rural or sparsely populated locales, much valuable information could be gleaned from the developing knowledge base of rural social work. Of special value would be the newsletter-journal **Human Services in the Rural Environment**, the proceedings of conferences focusing on education and practice for rural areas.[39]

SUMMARY

Concluding, this paper has examined the magnitude of energy development in the United States, especially in the American West; it has discussed the social consequences and human costs of this development, especially the boom town effect; and it has suggested possible responses by the social work profession. An underlying message has been that while social work has not played an active role in this crisis, the profession is uniquely equipped to deal with the social and human problems of energy impact, and the time for action is now!

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