

APPLICANTS CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE TO ADOPT A CHILD,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOCIAL WORK SERVICE

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To my mother

PREFACE

A word of appreciation is directed to my promoter and head of the Department of Social Work, Professor D.J. Eloff, for his continued interest in my studies. His enthusiasm for Social Work cannot fail to stimulate those interested in the Profession to greater effort.

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To God alone the honour.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is well known to all workers in the various branches of the profession of social work, that economic, political, historical, religious and scientific factors all influence the practice of social work. The sources which mould a profession make their mark not only on the actual practice of the art, but they also modify the scientific structure underlying this art.

There is no better way of dealing with a plain question than by beginning at the beginning, and going on until everything necessary has been said. Writing about adoption- and more in particular, about applicants considered unsuitable to adopt a child, is in essence a plain and straightforward task, so long as one sticks to law and practice. But no sooner does one start on it than one comes up against the wider implications of the subject. The fact is, the topic just does not exist on its own. It is an important part of something greater.

A. MOTIVATION FOR SELECTION OF PROBLEM STUDIED

At the biennial conference of the South African National Council for Child Welfare in 1970 a prominent authority on adoption delivered a series of addresses on the findings of her research on adoptive children and how they grow up.

During a particular question period the rejected applicant was briefly mentioned, and this stimulated the researcher into taking another look at these applicants who were considered unsuitable to adopt a child. Why were these

Individuals being rejected as unsuitable, and what was being done about them after they had been informed that their application had been unsuccessful?

The research which follows is the logical outcome of a growing awareness that these people need attention, perhaps more than has been previously thought necessary.

B. TITLE OF DISSERTATION

The study and research done concerning these individuals, who, for a myriad number of reasons, are not accepted as adoptive parents, and the role that social work must play is presented under the title:

"Applicants Considered Unsuitable to Adopt a Child, with special reference to Social Work Service".

C. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1. Social Work

The inclusion of the word social in the title of the profession is far from accidental. Social work is frequently defined in terms that reflect the social worker's primary concern with the relation of the individual, the group, or the community to the social environment. Listed here are a few definitions which indicate this:

Witmer and Katinsky note that "... the profession that takes on as its particular task the job of helping individuals, one by one, or in groups, to deal with difficulties they encounter in operating in accordance with the require-

ments of a social institution is social work...".¹⁾

In the early beginnings of the profession, social work was practiced as social casework, and Mary Richmond, a pioneer defined it as: "Social casework consists of those processes which develop personality through adjustments consciously effected, individual by individual, between men and their social environment".²⁾

Because social behaviour is carried out primarily in the performance of social roles, there have been attempts to define social work in terms of social role performance. Boehm writes "Social work seeks to enhance the social functioning of individuals, singly and in groups, by activities focussed upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between man and his social environment. These activities can be grouped into three functions: restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources, and prevention of social dysfunction".³⁾

Wurth too, states that social work is primarily concerned with man, the man in need, man with a problem and therefore the help action to man includes his multiple life's needs.⁴⁾

Social work must see man in his totality. As background the influence on his of the social milieu, as well as the influence which he has in that particular social milieu.

1) Witmer, H.L. & Katinsky, R. Personality in the Making. New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1952, p.359.

2) Richmond, M. What is Social Casework? New York, Russel Sage Foundation, 1922, p98-99.

3) Boehm, W. Objectives of the Social Work Curriculum of the Future. Council for Social Work Education. Vol. 1, 1959. p.54.

4) Refer Wurth, G. Brullenburg. Mensbeschouwing en Maatschappelijk Werk. Kampen. J.H. Kok N.V.. 1957. d.11.

2. Premises, Goals and Functions of Social Work

Social work is more than a science - it is a specific activity in which the social worker as a human being has to do with a client, also a human being. For this reason the attitudes towards or view of man are of importance. The philosophy of the social worker will play a decisive role in the action taken by the particular social worker.¹⁾

Personal philosophy is an integral part of man and no one can set this aside. De Klerk says ... "As religieuse wese is die mens gebonde aan 'n bepaalde idee, 'n denkkategorie en 'n begrippe apparaat vanwaar uit hy opereer - ook as wetenskaplike en beroepsmens".²⁾

The supposition can be made that because man is a totality he integrates his life's philosophy in his science and profession. Social work is very closely allied to life's philosophy due to the fact that this science is in turn related to the normative. The specific philosophy thus applied contributes to the substructure of the profession.

In the practising of social work we find a material with which is worked, man, in various forms of need - physical or spiritual/psychological. To give aid to this man fully we must win him with a specific philosophy in mind. At the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education a Christian philosophy is upheld. Man is seen as created by God in His image with a destination in eternity. According

1) Refer Cronje, G: Professionele Maatskaplike werk. Pretoria, J.L. van Schaik Bpk. 1956, pl.

2) De Klerk, W.J.: Referaat. Die noodsaaklikheid van 'n Lewens- en Wêreldsbeskouing by die beoefening van 'n Wetenskap en Beroep. Referaat gelewer tydens 'n Simposium oor Maatskaplike Werk aan die P.U. vir C.H.O. Potchefstroom, 1969. p2.

to the Bible the aim of man's life on earth is that he lives to the honour of God.

Referring this back to social work we can more readily understand that the prime motive in social work should be to that which is to the honour of God and to help others to live to the honour of God.

With the above as basis we can now consider a variety of other premises which are own to the profession of social work. The premises are only mentioned here in point form as they will be discussed later in more detail. These premises are of primary importance and the disuse or misuse of them can only lead to a lowering of the standards and ideals of social work. These premises which cannot be proved but which are basic to the profession will now be named.

- (I) Every person is of the highest importance.
- (II) Every person can change, develop and grow under the stimulating influence of other people and life's experience.
- (III) People must be accepted as they are.
- (IV) People can only be helped if they help themselves.
- (V) People not only have rights but responsibilities too.
- (VI) The right of self-determination.
- (VII) All persons should, within the limits of their own capabilities, have equal opportunities to self-development.

3. Adoption

According to current literature adoption is being defined as a legal and social process by which the child of one pair of parents becomes the child of other parents.

Adoption confers upon the child and the adoptive parents the same mutual rights and obligations that exist between a

child and his natural parents.

Many writers are unanimous in their conception of adoption. Friedlander writes: "Adoption is the legal, social and psychological method of providing a family for children who have lost their natural parents or who cannot be reared by them under sound conditions.

"Adoption, as a legal proceeding of the courts, establishes the relationship of parent and child between persons who are not related by nature".¹⁾

Ferguson writes: "Adoption is a legal process, in which a court orders the old parental ties dissolved and substitutes a new relationship between the child so freed, and the adoptive parents".²⁾

From the above can then be deduced that through adoption, the child, in effect, becomes a permanent member of the adopting family. An adoptive child acquires the same legal rights and responsibilities as natural children of parents, takes their name and becomes an integrated part of the new family.

Although the goals of adoption appear to be fairly clear, the practical aspects of implementing these goals are considerably more complex. The major task of an adoption agency is to find suitable adoptive parents for children. To do so it must select some couples to become adoptive parents and determine that other couples cannot be accepted.

1) Friedlander, W.A. Introduction to Social Welfare. New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2nd. Edition, p.357.

2) Ferguson, E.A. Social Work, An Introduction. New York, J.B. Lippincott, 1963, p. 234.

"Placement of children in adoptive homes is a complex undertaking. Decision making of a high order is required to select suitable families for children who need adoption. In no area of social work practice is it more essential to achieve a fusion of science and art in child placement. Embodied in adoption as a placement of choice is the critical element of permanence, once an adoption is legalised the process is irreversible".¹⁾

Literature reveals that adoption practice has shifted from the former emphasis upon supplying children to adoptive applicants to a concern for understanding and assessing both the child and the adopters in order to bring about healthy family functioning.

"Since the security and happiness of a young life is at stake, careful home finding and evaluation of prospective parents is of central importance".²⁾

4. Selection

The process by which selection of adoptive applicants is done is complicated by the fact that the choices are limited by the number of applicants who have come to an agency for help. Furthermore, "Adoptive parent selection entails much gamble since decisions are made on the basis of limited kinds of information".³⁾

Selecting adoptive parents is not simple. Professed motives often are partial masks so that basic motives are

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- 1) Perspectives on Adoption Research. New York, Child Welfare League of America Inc., 1965, p.7.
 - 2) Hamilton, G. Theory Practice of Social Case Work. New York, Columbia University Press, 2nd. Edition, p.103.
 - 3) Quantative Approaches to Parent Selection. New York, Child Welfare League of America Inc., 1962, p.22.

not readily to either. The applicants often have a deep craving to love and care for a child and to receive love in return, and feel that they offer the affection and security of a happy home. These are sound and unselfish reasons that should lead to a happy adoption experience.

Rowe states that, "Contrary to general opinion, people who feel that at all costs they must have a child are not likely to make good adoptive parents. They expect the child to do too much for them".¹⁾

"Thus, much reliance must perforce be placed upon the verbal attitudes expressed by couples about their motivation for children and their child-rearing orientations as a basis for predicting potential performance as parents".²⁾

The judgement demanded in selecting adoptive parents is unique because it involves a family diagnosis stressing unity. Adoption workers who reject a couple, without working the reasons for rejection through with them, withhold gratifications and fail to offer services to overcome inadequacies.

5. The Welfare Agency or Welfare Organization

According to the "Woordeboek vir Maatskaplike Werk" a welfare agency is defined as an "Instelling in die kader van die maatskaplike sorg, insluitende 'n vrywillige welsynsorganisasie en die owerheid, wat dienste ter bevordering van die mens se maatskaplike welsyn lewer".³⁾

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- 1) Rowe, J. Yours by Choice - A Guide for Adoptive Parents. London, Mills and Boon Ltd., 1959, p.26.
 - 2) Quantative Approaches to Parent Selection. New York, Child League of America Inc., 1962, p.22.
 - 3) Woordeboek vir Maatskaplike Werk. Pretoria, Departement Volkswelsyn en Pensioene, Staatsdrukker, 1971, p.70.

According to Act No. 79 of 1965 Article (XVIII) a welfare organization is defined as: "Welfare organization means any association of persons, corporate or unincorporate, or institution the objects of which include one or more of the following, namely:-

- a. the carrying on of social work by individual treatment, group work or community organization;
- b. the provision wholly or in part of any of the material, spiritual or social requirements of persons or families in distress and in need of assistance;
- c. the carrying on of charitable activities in relation to persons or families who are in need and require assistance;
- d. the prevention of social distress and indigency of persons or families;.....¹⁾

D. METHODOLOGY

The tipological survey method has been used. This aspect covered the gathering of data from the source materials of books, magazines and pamphlets. The findings have been selected, abstracted, combined and certain sets of criteria have been accentuated which have all had direct bearing on the particular topic.

E. COLLECTION OF DATA

1. Reading

The research called for a carefully planned systematic reading programme to assist in clarifying the problem with which the researcher is confronted. The first step in this

1) Nasionale Welsynswet, 1965. Pretoria, Die Staatsdrukker, p.6.

reading programme was to study the available literature in the Republic of South Africa pertaining to the problem to be studied.

The preparation of a tentative bibliography was the next step. As the study progressed this bibliography was revised and amended.

The introductory reading was devoted to a general background on the subject of adoption which facilitated the gaining of further insight into the relative importance of the specific subject studied. Hereon followed the reading of more specialized material which could assist the project.

Many books were read and many of these contributed ideas and facts to the sum total.

The reading programme continued throughout the study, and although it was a time-consuming procedure, it made the data and study much more meaningful. Although there is a variety of literature available on adoption, the same cannot be said about the specific topic which has been studied. Many of the books consulted may mention the rejected applicant in passing, and others not at all. The general idea formed by the researcher is that this is a sadly neglected sphere of the adoption field.

2. Validity of Data Obtained

A considerable amount of data was collected from literary material. Although much information was treated with circumspection, such information seemed a vital purpose in leading the researcher to other authoritative sources which in turn could be studied.

F. PRESENTATION

The dissertation which follows is presented as a logical process starting with the history of adoption and the expected legal requirements as well as the deviations which are found. The research then proceeds to determine what role social work has in adoption in general and then in the handling of the rejected applicant in particular.

Chapter three includes discussions on the concept of parenthood and what it means to a couple when they discover that they are unable to have children of their own and find themselves considering adoption.

The next chapter involves the task of the social work agency in the preparation of the prospective adoptive applicant, their screening, selection and evaluating some as unsuitable to adopt a child.

The researcher moves on and attempts to describe the rejected applicant and the specific task social work has towards him. The elements of rejection are discussed and the role which the social worker play.

Lastly the researcher describes the social work process and specific attention is given to the treatment which the social worker can put into effect to assist the rejected applicant in adoption.

CHAPTER II

ADOPTION AND SOCIAL WORK

Adoption has been defined as a special field within the profession of social work. History, it has been remarked, is to the group what memory is to the individual. In order to trace adoption from the bygone eras let us take a closer look at the history of adoption and how it has developed to what we know today.

A. HISTORY OF ADOPTION

Although commonly thought of as a relatively modern practice, adoption, in fact, has a history of great antiquity.

There seems to be no time in the history of man when adoption did not exist. All of the ancient peoples, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans sanctioned adoption.

The Babylonian Code of Hammarabi (compiled from 2285 to 2242 B.C.) shows the actuality of adoption more than 4000 years ago. Specific laws set forth in this Code make it appear that the Babylonians were particularly interested in protecting the property rights of citizens who had adopted children and in ensuring that an orphan child would be provided for, that formal acknowledgement would be made of his adoption, and that he could not be cut off from the inheritance of property without legal process.¹⁾ The ancient Romans practised adoption as part of their civil law, the

1) Refer. Fredericksen, H. The child and his welfare. San Francisco, W.H. Freeman and Co. 1948, p.200.

principal motive being to acquire heirs.

Adoption was also an incident of early Spanish law and was incorporated in the Code of Napoleon. It is interesting to notice that in the "Great Code" of Alphonso V of Castile, provision was made for investigation to show whether adoption was good for the child.

Kadushin states that: "In India, adoptions were arranged so as to provide a male heir in order to meet the demands of religious ceremonials".¹⁾

The first recorded instance of adoption among the Hebrew people may have been when Abram assumed the responsibility for Lot, son of Abram's (later Abraham) deceased brother Horan. The Bible also refers to adoptions such as that of Moses by the daughter of Pharoah, and also that of Ester by Mordecai.

Adoption was also known to the Anglo-Saxon tribes, but, possibly owing to the peculiarities of feudal tenure, disappeared in England for some centuries. The first law legalising adoption in England was passed as late as 1926.

In earlier periods adoption was not, for example, so frequently resorted to in finding a solution to the problem of childlessness, because a simpler solution was more acceptable during those times. If a wife was infertile, the husband took another woman to bear him children, for example Abraham, at Sarah's insistence took Hager. Originally, then, the primary purpose of adoption was to provide the adopting parents with an heir. Today adoption embraces many other aspects of

1) Kadushin, A. Child Welfare Services, New York, MacMillan & Co., 1967, p.435.

the parent-child relationship. In this connection it may be noted that the term "adoption" is often employed loosely and inaccurately.

Modern adoption procedures are primarily designed for the protection of the interests and welfare of the adoptee, but they simultaneously safeguard those of the adopting and natural parents.

"In earlier periods of man's history, then, adoption served to meet the needs of adults; today it is supported primarily because it meets the needs of parentless children".¹⁾

B. PROCEDURE OF ADOPTION

Taking a cursory glance at the procedure of adoption, it may not seem to be very important. However, because of the legalisation of our adoption is one of which all the formal requirements must be satisfied and complied with - it follows that the adoption procedure as specified in pertinent statute must at all times be strictly adhered to.

1. Legal Adoption

South Africa's "Adoption of Children's Act" of 1923 preceded that of Britain who only brought in legislation concerning adoption in 1926 with the "English Adoption Act".

South Africa's Adoption of Children's Act, 1923 (Act No. 31 of 1923) was repealed by the Children's Act, 1937 (Act No. 31 of 1937) and further legislation for adoption has since

1) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.435.

been included in the Children's Act of 1960 (Act No. 33 of 1960) which was amended by the Children's Amendment Act, 1965 (Act No. 50 of 1965). This Act embodies the current legal provisions for the regulation and control of adoption in the Republic of South Africa.¹⁾

Taking a closer look at chapter 7 of the Children's Act, 1960, it is noted that provisions are made for all aspects in connection with adoption.²⁾

As detailed content of the Children's Act, 1960, regarding adoption is beyond the scope of this paper, the various aspects will only be briefly mentioned.

For the purposes of this chapter, the definition of "a child" is extended to include any person under the age of twenty-one.

The first section clearly sets out who may adopt, and who may be adopted. Specific attention is made to the sex and age of the particular parties concerned and the Act should be consulted for their relevance in particular instances.

Following on, the next section gives details on the consent for adoption. Consent must be signed by the child's parent/s or guardian and must set out the names of the proposed adopters, unless this is a non-disclosure adoption. Children over the age of 10 years have to also sign consent to be adopted.

1) Refer. South African National Council for Child Welfare. A Guide to Adoption Practice. Doornfontein, Preskor, Jan. 1972, p.6.

2) Refer. The Children's Act 1960 (Act No.33 of 1960). Pretoria, The Government Printers, p.70-82.

The power to grant adoption lies with the Children's Court which is directed to satisfy itself that all the matters mentioned in section 35(2) of the Act have been taken into account; that the applicants are duly qualified as to marital status, age and nationality; that they are of good repute, fit and proper to be entrusted with the care of a child and financially able to provide for his needs, maintenance and education; and that the proposed adoption will serve the interests of and be conducive to the welfare of the child.

An order of adoption has the effect of making the child the legal child of the adopters and automatically confers their name upon him. Particular attention is also given to the inheritance to which such a child is entitled.

In certain definite defined circumstances, an adoption may be rescinded on certain grounds by both the natural and the adoptive parents.

Children born of South African citizens can be adopted only by South African citizens resident in the Republic, but provision is made for exceptions in the case of relatives of a child living outside the Republic and of aliens who qualify for citizenship and have already applied for it.

Specific mention is made about the illegal practice of receiving consideration in respect of an adoption and there are severe penalties laid down.

As can be seen from the above, adoption is a judicial procedure. This country has a right to be proud of her Children's Act, and specifically of the adoption laws, as well as the provisions which have been made to protect the welfare of her children, and the people who adopt them.

2. Other Adoption Procedures

Besides the legal adoption which is the only recognised way of acquiring a child other than by natural means, the practice of independent adoptions is not unknown, and in many parts of the world this practice has caused great concern.¹⁾

The term "independent adoptions" applies to a number of different procedures. Firstly, the natural parents, who have a child, make their own contact with a couple whom they know are eager to adopt a child. Secondly, a mother, usually an unmarried one, is in contact with a professional person - a doctor, lawyer, midwife, etc. - who knows of a couple who want a baby. This person then acts as an intermediary between the parent/s and the couple proposing to adopt a child. The above is commonly known as the "grey market".

Furthermore there appears to be indications that in some cases no adoption procedure is entered into. The adoptive parents simply register the child's birth as if the child had been born to them.

Increasing interest in the welfare of the child has made it clear that grey and black market operations carry with them many hazards. These hazards include no important check on the family background of the child, no pre-placement evaluation of the home, and most critical of all, no clear guarantee in many cases that the parent's legal rights to the child have been permanently terminated.

1) Refer. Ferguson. Social Work, An Introduction, p. 237.
 Stroup, H.H. Social Work, an Introduction to the Field.
 New York, American Book Company, 2nd. Edition, p.145.
 Friedlander. Introduction to Social Welfare, p. 359.
 Grey, E. A Survey on Adoption in Great Britain. London,
 Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971, p.52.

This type of adoption involves dangers to each of the three principals in the adoption - the child, natural parent, and adoptees - as well as a danger to the communities in which the respective parties reside.

Where the confidentiality of the transaction has not been protected the threat to reclaim the child may be used as a device to extract payment from the adoptive parents.

Grey and black market adoptions are orientated to the needs and desires of the adoptive couple, rather than to the needs of the child.

Kadushin states that "The couple with whom the child is independently placed has been subject to no assessment process. The only eligibility requirement, in many instances, is the ability to pay, which bears little direct relationship to capacity for parenthood and is no guarantee of an emotionally healthy environment for the child".¹⁾

As already mentioned it is illegal in this country to receive any remuneration in connection with the adoption of children. Advertising for children to adopt is also illegal and carries a heavy penalty.

An adopter can take the right or wrong steps; and although the laws on adoption are sound, and the Courts vigilant, illegal practices will continue.

Those who work in the field of adoption and allied fields must constantly be aware of malpractices which may occur and

1) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.466.

which must be brought to the attention of the proper authorities.

C. THE PLACE OF SOCIAL WORK IN ADOPTION

The welfare agency which is approached by the prospective adoptive parents has on the staff a trained social worker who is trained and experienced to assist this couple with the problem with which they have come to seek aid.

If one takes a look back to Werner Boehm's¹⁾ definition of social work, one notes that social work acts as an enabling process which seeks to help individuals with personal problems. To be successful enabling must be rooted in the unswerving conviction of man's pre-eminence and worth.

The responsibility of the social worker is a serious one as adoption is not the temporary placement of a child. "Adoption imposes a heavy burden of responsibility, for the decisions are irrevocable".²⁾ Adoption is a permanent placement and will effect the child and his parents for the rest of their respective lives.

It is not a normal condition for children to have substituted parents, or for families to have adoptive children. Because of this, the social worker carries a great responsibility in evaluating and passing "judgment" on the "adoptable" child and the "acceptable" parent.

As in all phases of the field of social work, but perhaps more particularly here, the first requisite, is perhaps, for

1) Refer. Boehm, W. Objectives of the Social Work Curriculum of the Future, p.54.

2) Rowe J. Parents Children and Adoption. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p.1.

the social worker to strive for self-awareness and self-understanding. It is only by scrutinising oneself, that one may achieve the delicate balance of objectivity and warm understanding with which one may best serve the child and the prospective parent.

Since emotions and feelings largely determine one's thinking and acting, it is important to recognise that social workers bring strong feelings into the helping process and that these feelings may be determinants in the course of the help action.

Towle aptly remarks that "Insofar as he feels with them, which he must do to relate himself to them sympathetically and with understanding, he runs the risk of coming to feel like them".¹⁾

Unfortunately the social worker cannot cope with the person's problems when he feels the same way as they do - the social worker's emotional response reinforces those of the client, thus adding to his confusion and ineptitude.

The goal in adoption is to fulfil the needs of the child who has no parents - yet the needs that the social worker himself has and brings into play, are important factors.

It is of utmost importance that the social worker be able to recognise in his clients, the child, the natural and adoptive parents, not only their needs and motives as exemplified in their behaviour, but also the basis and cause of this behaviour. The degree to which the social worker achieves this

1) Towle, C. Common Human Needs. New York, National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 1965, p.125.

recognition is largely determined by the degree of self-awareness.

As one focusses on understanding emotions one soon realises that both positive and negative feelings occur in close interplay. It would be much simpler to help and understand people if they always felt decidedly in favour of, or definitely against a situation or course of action.

It is thus clear that at the very start of a relationship with an adoptive applicant, one can often sense a conflict in feelings about applying for help.

The feelings of a client vary with the culture form which he comes. "Knowledge of these is essential if a case-worker is to offer help in an acceptable way. Whatever else, the client will be under stress of some form or other, and this is what makes a warm accepting attitude on the part of the case-worker important, so that the client can feel free to express his feelings".¹⁾

It is of initial importance for the social worker, in adoption work, at the start of the help action, to determine if the applicants seem to be able to fulfil the needs which the agency has found to be the child's. The social worker must try to gauge the applicants' readiness for the step of adoption. At this initial stage it would seem out of place for the social worker to become involved with problems which seem to be present in the prospective adoptive parents. The applicants have come with a request for a child, and the so-

1) Moffett, J. Concepts in Casework Treatment. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p.18.

cial worker must first focus on that.

If the social worker is to treat clients according to their needs, and use the right sort of treatment for each one, he must be prepared to make decisions about the way in which the help action is to be carried out.

According to Jane Rowe, "Adoption workers must be idealists behaving in the power of love, the inherent capacity of the individual to change and mature and in the validity and strength of the adoptive relationship".¹⁾

D. SUMMARY

In the preceding chapter attention was drawn to the history of adoption on which modern day practice is based. Legal aspects are discussed and reference is made to the malpractices which seem to be evident and against which we must guard. The function of the social worker in adoption is discussed and it becomes clear that the applicants in adoption are of primary importance and attention will now be given to them.

1) Rowe. Parents Children and Adoption, p.1.

CHAPTER III

THE APPLICANTS IN CHILD ADOPTION

People appear to want children for a variety of reasons, some of which they find hard to explain. Most couples want a family because they enjoy children and feel that life is not complete without them.

Factors which have to be taken into account when studying applicants is the gauging of potentiality of parenthood, whether the couple realise and show insight into the rights and responsibilities of parents; what brings them specifically to the decision to adopt and the motives they present.

In this chapter the above aspects are discussed in more detail and although separated for research purposes, the aspects are so linked in reality that the concepts must be regarded as being part of one another.

A. THE CONCEPT OF PARENTHOOD

Examination of the child development literature reveals that the issue is still relatively open in respect to what constitutes the ingredients of a good parent or a bad parent.

Although it may be true that most couples marry with the idea of having a family after a while, many have conflicting needs and even weak parental drives. Many people are unable to escape the feelings of guilt, society imposes on them because they are expected to want children.

To experience fleeting qualms about parenthood may be natural and even permissible - but to declare a permanent

aversion to children and also act on this, is not socially acceptable.

Humphrey states that: "The voluntarily childless couple belong essentially to the present era; theirs is the agony of free choice which society refuses to endorse".¹⁾

The normal person shows no symptoms of mental disorder and is free of emotional conflicts. Man normally desires a life beyond the narrow confines of an infantile self. He wants to learn, he wants to marry and establish a family, he wants to work, he wants a participating and contributing part in the life of the community.

The mature parent has a clear understanding of himself, accepts his own weaknesses and strengths, and has the minimum unresolved developmental conflicts, can adequately fulfil social rules. He has the ability to postpone gratification and to deny self-gratification out of consideration for the needs of others. He has a flexible conscience that can accept some failure, some occasional sinfulness without crippling guilt. A capacity to form permanent inter-personal relationships, the ability to be independent and yet be capable of dependency if it is objectively justified. Kadushin maintains: "It is said that in order to be a happy parent one must first be a happy person".²⁾

Implications of the above indicate the health of the parent, yet capacity for parenthood goes beyond emotional health. It includes the capacity to love, accept and offer

1) Humphrey, M. The Hostage Seekers. London, Longmans, 1969, p.2.

2) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.441.

emotional security to a child, the capacity to permit him to grow in terms of his own individuality; a readiness to accept, understand and meet the inevitable behaviour problems which will occur.

The good parent must be flexible in his expectations and realistic in accepting the child as he is, with his limitations and potentialities. The parent must be able to accept the child as an end in himself - and not as a means to an end or as a means towards a parent-defined end. The parent must like children and be able to enjoy them.¹⁾

1. Implications of Parenthood

The following may be regarded as the normative aspects which parenthood implies:

- (i) The parent is expected to provide an income that will permit him to meet the basic needs of the child.
- (ii) He is expected to provide for the emotional needs of the child which will aid him in his emotional growth.
- (iii) He is expected to provide the necessary stimulation for normal intellectual, social and spiritual development.
- (iv) The parent is required to discipline the child and keep him from developing patterns of behaviour, feelings and attitudes disapproved of by the society of which he is a part.
- (v) The child must be protected from physical, emotional and/or social harm.

1) Refer. Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.441.

- (vi) The parent must present a model for identification of sex-linked behaviour; the father, a model of masculinity; the mother, a model of femininity.
- (vii) The parent must strive to promote family interaction on a stable basis so that an effort is made to meet the significant needs of all the members of the family. The parent must help to resolve discomforts, frictions and dissatisfactions and meet emotional needs by accepting affectionate responses.
- (viii) The parent is expected to provide a fixed place of abode, so as to legitimize the child's membership in a social group and thus provide a clearly defined "place" for him in the community.
- (ix) The parent is required by the Word of God to bring up his child to the Honour and Glory of His Name. It is thus essential that the child has a religious background provided by the parents and on which his own religious beliefs could thus be based.

Even under the most advantageous circumstances, the complete dependency of infants and the prolonged demands of children can make parenthood very trying. Parenthood can only be carried out satisfactorily by those persons whose relationships have given them a capacity to meet the needs of others freely and flexibly.

When a parent has this capacity, he is not only able to meet the dependency needs of children, but also because he does not need to realise his own frustrated self in them, is able to grant them self-identity and release them for growth toward independence.

The sense of security which is essential for the child's growth towards independence is founded on parental love. "A child's emotional wellbeing depends on the assurance that his parents care for him, want him and accept him as he

is".¹⁾ And further, "Thus the child comes to know who he is and to whom he belongs, and ultimately comes to achieve a stable self-identification".²⁾

2. Parental Rights and Responsibilities

It is essential that there is a balance between rights and responsibilities. Parents who have a sound value system will appreciate that although there are certain rights connected to parenthood, there are definite responsibilities which have to be faced and cannot be evaded.

Katz and Thorpe state that "Everyone recognises that parents should provide for the physical care and nourishment of their children. Few parents however, seem to realise that it is equally important for them to care for emotional growth and welfare".³⁾

Society rightly believes that parents should be held responsible for the welfare of their children. Anything which weakens family life is prejudicial to the children and to our whole social structure.

Today it is no longer expected, or even allowed, for parents to retain total responsibility for their child. Education is provided, as is medical services and some public services are even made compulsory. Thus parents, although no longer perhaps fulfilling these functions themselves, have

1) Katz, B. & Thorpe, L.P. Understanding People in Distress.. New York, The Ronald Press. Co., 1955, p.14.

2) Kadushin, A. Child Welfare Services, p.9.

3) Katz and Thorpe. Understanding People in Distress, p.43.

the responsibility to see that the child receives the service which is offered.

Towle is of the opinion that: "The family in which parental responsibilities are jointly carried out and in which there is mutual sharing in many aspects of life, such as financial management, companionship with children, discipline, recreation opportunities, religious beliefs and activities, theoretically shows the pattern most favourable to a child's development. Such a sharing is generally conducive to a harmonious home atmosphere, security in relationships with both parents, a minimum of hostile rivalry between brothers and sisters, and a minimum of conflict in growing up".¹⁾

Parents need to provide a balanced family life. These are parents who value their freedom, but are prepared to shoulder their responsibilities, and who observe their duties and do not over-emphasize their rights. They are spiritually disciplined persons who are clear about the fundamental values of life. These would be the parents who form the foundation of the family of which a child can be proud to belong.

The role of parents in the family life of society is an exacting one and is certainly one which cannot ever be replaced in our social structure.

3. The Inability to have own Children

A child born of a marriage is accepted as a gift from God, and thus the concept of parenthood is closely connected to the relationship between man and his Creator.

1) Refer. Towle, C. Common Human Needs, p.111.

Both man and woman directing their lives to the honour and service of God have a deep-seated desire to have children, and when a child does arrive, the parents acquire new experiences, new responsibilities and their personalities become enriched. The task of the parent assumes greater responsibility and dedication, and is a vocation because the child is a gift from God.

In general, there are two major concerns with respect to the needs of the adult - preparation for work that will assure survival and the attainment of some degree of productivity. On reaching maturity the individual's energies will be largely concerned with the struggle for existence, but he will also largely be concerned with the establishment and maintenance of family life.

The realisation for the married couple that for some or other reason they are unable to have children of their own touches at the very base of their souls and may be an almost unbearable agony with life-long suffering ahead.

However different its impact on husband and wife, childlessness is bound to concern both parties in more ways than one. Here it is not simply a question of causation, but of deeper emotional reactions and religious beliefs.

The normal reaction to news of sterility is usually shock, feelings of inferiority, concern over one's own inabilities, doubt about one's own masculinity or femininity, concern with security of marriage, guilt toward and compassion with the marriage partner.

There follows a wish to correct the situation by talking things over and working them out with the spouse, minister and

near relatives. In the case of organic sterility, there appears to be a gradual resignation to the fact that one will not propagate one's own. Feelings of inferiority are alleviated by restored confidence in functional potency, by a wish and hope that one can satisfy the marriage partner emotionally.

Gradually there appears to be a renewed interest in the wish for a child. The compensatory wish to give and to rear a child again becomes stronger. Slowly the idea begins to germinate that if one cannot create a child oneself, one can contribute to a child's growth and development which will also provide an inner satisfaction. At this stage the couple are already contemplating the idea of adopting a child.

B. THE DECISION TO ADOPT

The adoption of a child is a matter on which individual outlooks differ. For the childless couple the decision to adopt a child has to be taken in a much more conscious and reflective state of mind than is the case when most fertile couples have a child of their own.

Some couples cannot tolerate the idea of adoption, but others find it attractive.

Jeffcoate writes that: "Fertile couples seldom have the same problem in deciding whether to start a family as infertile couples may experience in regard to adoption".¹⁾

Furthermore it has been found that many childless couples may still hesitate to adopt a child for the simple reason that they are indecisive by nature.

1) Jeffcoate, T.N.A. Principles of Gynaecology. London, Butterworths, 3rd Edition 1967, p.48.

In the majority of cases, however, parents want to adopt a child because they have not had one of their own. In many situations this is because of a biological inability to produce a child, which inevitably results in feelings of anxiety and insecurity, which will have to be worked through with the couple.

The decision to adopt a child is one that must be made jointly by both husband and wife. Many couples may believe that a child can save a shaky marriage, or that a child can help a neurotic wife to overcome her problems. To all these and similar problems, Jane Rowe has written that: "...experience has shown that adoption almost always makes a bad situation worse".¹⁾

Successful adoption can obviously only be the outcome of a secure, happy and mature desire on the part of both parties, to become parents, fully aware and prepared to take on the responsibility.

Adoption will certainly not be the right solution for every couple, and it goes without saying that a child should never be used as medicine for neurosis, or as a cure for personality difficulties or for marriage problems.

1. Characteristics of Adoptive Parents

Adoptive parents normally have their "first" child later in life than most other couples, and it is thus important to note that the marriage has been "childless" much longer. This may mean more stable patterns of interaction and family

1) Rowe. Yours by Choice, p.27.

ritual that have become institutionalised with time, and that now it might be more difficult to change in response to the incorporation of a child into the family.

Jeffcoate writes: "Adopting a child is a very different matter from giving birth to one, yet both experiences will initiate far reaching changes in the couple's way of life".¹⁾

How much greater then the change and adjustment which must be made by the couple who has received into their care permanently, the child of another?

Documenting the characteristics of adoptive couples is of particular importance to those who work intimately with them. Typical among the factors studied include the average age of the couple; the length and quality of the marriage; economic and educational levels of the applicants; religious views and beliefs and the similarity of religious affiliation; attitudes towards infertility and each other and often their specific preferences. Health factors are also considered as well as the couple's psychological stability.

Although the characteristics and personalities of the mass of applicants cannot be changed to suit some theoretical "ideal type", infected attitudes and irregularities can be diagnosed before the possible placement of a child with such a couple.

In the majority of cases today, however, it appears that most couples want to adopt a child for reasons arising directly out of the conditions of modern life.

Rowe maintains that: "Adoption workers have come to the realisation that couples who apply to adopt are seldom just

1) Jeffcoate, Principles of Gynaecology, p.71.

worthy citizens offering succour to a needy child - but are usually people with a problem - their childlessness".¹⁾

Although it is important to have such factual data as to how old the couple are, what their education has been, what the nature of the marriage relationship is, what their economic position is, and other relevant facts, all these become meaningful only in the light of our understanding them as people.

Real understanding of adoptive parents involves not only discussions but analysis of the reality of the attitudes expressed. To take the statements literally is to ignore some of the hidden motivations for the things people say.

2. Reasons or Motives of Applicants wanting to Adopt

It is not the aim here to categorically attempt to note all the motives given by those who are eager to adopt a child and who then apply to do so.

The writer attempts rather to give a broader perspective on motivation and touches on those aspects which are of specific importance as allied to the topic being discussed.

The study of motives in adoption is endlessly interesting and reveals a good deal about people, although not necessarily whether applicants are "worthy" to adopt a child.

The motivation in applying for a child is best understood in the light of the dynamics of family life. As mentioned earlier on, marriage and parenthood follow on one another and the specific interacting relationships between husband and wife and the implications thereof to them of a family is of vital importance.

1) Rowe. Parents Children and Adoption, p.154.

Kornitzer states that: "Childlessness, in itself, seems a straightforward enough reason for most people who want to adopt, though it is not as simple as it seems. It is at any rate the most common motive".¹⁾

Feelings about childlessness are vitally important. Until they can be comfortable about this, parents cannot be comfortable with an adopted child, for the child will be a constant reminder of something they are trying to forget.

Jane Rowe writes in this connection that, "...The desire for children should grow out of a happy marriage, not from an attempt to make up for disappointments or deficiencies in marriage, work or anything else".²⁾

The child adopted to be a companion to another child begins with a handicap because he is expected to be, or do something which is perhaps beyond his capacity.

Similarly is the case of a mother who has lost her own baby. It is tempting then to place another baby in the empty arms, but such a mother might not want to adopt a child when she was in a more normal frame of mind.

Again one may be a little suspicious of the motives of adopters in a large childless house who apply for a girl of twelve or thirteen. Many adopters are not quite free of the beguiling thought that it would be nice to have a daughter when they are old.

1) Kornitzer, M. Adoption and Family Life. Putnam, London, 1968, p.72.

2) Rowe. Parents Children and Adoption, p.176.

None of these people would be consciously aware of their misguided or unworthy motives. But it is a fact that unconscious motives are in constant operation and that people cover up, rationalize and even distort reality for their own ends.

Kornitzer maintains further that: "Motives cannot be taken at face value, however. Often what seems to be a "selfish" motive was associated with a frank and honest desire to do right by the child for its wellbeing, whereas 'unselfish' and idealistic motives might be poor soil for the transplantation, since there might be no real acceptance....".¹⁾

Motives for adoption are important, because it is not what the adopters say which reveals unconscious factors, but that which lies behind their words. "Children must be wanted for themselves and not as tools to achieve some other end".²⁾ Even though some motives are promising and some suspect, there is no such thing as a good or bad motive in and of itself. Motives cannot be lifted out of context and evaluated. They are relevant only in relation to other factors and forces in the life of the applicants and in the lives of those who are in close relationships to them.

In accordance with others Kadushin states that: "Some motives can be regarded as less desirable and more indicative of possible future difficulty, than other motives. In general, motives that focus on the needs of the adoptive parents are regarded as less acceptable, more suspect, than those that centre on the needs of the child".³⁾

1) Kornitzer. Adoption & Family Life, p.75.

2) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.176.

3) Kadushin, Child Welfare Services, p.442.

It becomes clear from the various literature studied pertaining to this particular subject that people's motives often appear in disguised forms and are difficult to unravel. That there are various suspect motives and sentiments, which are not always immediately obvious for what they are.

This then obviously implies that people never have one simple and direct motive, and are more likely to present their rationale for wanting a child than the underlying reasons of which they may not even consciously be aware of.

Current available literature indicates that there is a common fallacy that to know the motive of an adoption is to know the outcome of the course of action.

It is of extreme importance that social workers who tend to think on these lines, do not blind themselves and fail to recognise the changeable and unpredictable nature of man. In assessing the particular motives of a couple who apply to adopt a child, the flexibility of motivation and possible re-motivation must remain in the foreground of thought of the investigator.

C. SUMMARY

From the aforesaid it becomes clear that applicants wanting to adopt a child have to be mature, responsible persons who would be able to rear a child with love and understanding, but also with discipline and guidance.

The inability to have children is a severe blow to a couple, and special attention must be given to them in their planning of a future. The social work profession who deals

specifically with people in need, here the rejected applicant, has a specific task for the social worker, and this service should be available to all who need it.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL WORK SERVICE TO APPLICANTS

The prospective adoptive parent, unlike other clients of the social agency, is not seeking help. To be sure he is asking to be given a child, but his feeling often is that he is giving himself and his resources more than what he is asking. In understanding the applicant as a person, the focus must be on him as a potential parent.

The problem to solve seems to be in determining whether the need he brings will be met through becoming an adoptive parent and whether he has the capacity and can offer the conditions of life essential for his success as a parent.

It thus becomes the task of the social worker to prepare those people who feel that they should adopt a child which they have not been able to produce themselves.

A. PREPARATION OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Most couples think first of adopting a small baby and this is quite natural for childless couples, who see their friends' growing families, and long for the day when they too have a baby of their own.

Most couples who apply to an agency to adopt a child are unable, for one reason or another, to have a child of their own. This may be due to absolute sterility for organic reasons on the part of one of the marriage partners; to marginal fertility; or it may be due to psychological rather than organic problems.

Regardless of the cause, the experience of adoption agencies strongly indicates that the fact of infertility and

the prospective adoptive couple's attitude towards it, is of prime importance to the outcome of the adoption by that couple.

The couple's inability to have their own children may even affect their attitudes towards one another or towards a child they may adopt, or towards both.

It appears that even more important than the fact of infertility is the couple's attitude towards it. One indication of this couple's attitude towards their infertility, is their ability to discuss the problem as mature individuals with honesty and frankness.¹⁾

Once this initial problem has been fully discussed with the couple, individually and together, it is then to turn to another important aspect which is whether this couple really like children.

Most people, when asked, will assure one that they like children, but on closer investigation this "likeing" is very varied. On the one end of the scale are those couples who "borrow" children and are not happy unless they have a child or two to stay with them. On the other end of the scale are those couples who enjoy having a well-behaved child to spend a few hours or even a week-end in their chiefly adult-centred home.

It is of vital importance for the prospective adoptive couple to decide on which end of the scale they are. To de=

1) Refer. Lawder, E.A.; Lower, K.D. and others. A Followup Study of Adoptions: Post Placement Functioning of Adoption families. New York, Child Welfare League of America, 1969, p. 68.

termine for themselves what kind of children they enjoy most, and what it is about others they find trying.

The couple must be enlightened before they embark on an adoption, that it is well to remember that babyhood is a very short period, and to look ahead to the two-year old tantrums, the five-year old measles and the moods and defiance of the average adolescent.

Jane Rowe in her book "YOURS BY CHOICE" gives some excellent guide-posts that will help the social worker and, more important, the prospective adoptive couple to determine their readiness for the adoption experience. These guide-posts are as follows:

- "1. Have you satisfied yourselves that medical science cannot help you have your own child?
2. Is your marriage built on mutual love and trust and can you share your thoughts, problems, and pleasures? Is your sex life satisfying to both of you?
3. Do you both have a sincere desire and longing for parenthood? Are you agreed about the sort of child you want and the way you hope to bring them up?
4. Are you able to discuss adoption plans not only with one another but with your family and close friends? As you do this, does it seem to you an acceptable and happy way to build a family or do you think of it always as a second best?
5. Have you taken the trouble to find out whether you really like children about the house when they are naughty as well as when they are good?
6. Do you feel comfortable about your willingness and ability to **whether** the work, the anxieties, and the big and little

crises that are an inevitable part of family life?

"Do you believe that you can offer a warm, secure home in which children can grow up to be themselves even if this is rather different from what you hoped or expected"?¹⁾

Rowe rightly states that the prospective adoptive couple who cannot both honestly answer 'yes' to all these questions are not ready to adopt, and should rather find future happiness along some other path.

B. PRELIMINARY SCREENING

Current literature reveals that one of the trends in modern adoption practice is to place more emphasis on decision-making after the first interview, and to use subsequent interviews to help the couple develop role competence as adoptive parents: This then indicates that the intake interview assumes far greater importance than previously thought.

In order to decide whether to accept applicants, their suitability must be determined. Initial screening appears to be relatively course. Gross criteria of ineligibility are applied, eliminating applicants with outstanding negative characteristics. Usually the presence of any one disqualifying characteristic places the family below the level of acceptability.

This first screening deals with, amongst others, the "physical well-being" - e.g. age, health, family structure, accommodation, income. Inquiries made about the applicants and the roles expected of them are neither arbitrary nor

1) Rowe. Yours by Choice. p.47.

capricious. Certain information must be obtained and the applicants must understand the extent and character of the roles they will assume, if accepted.

It thus becomes clear that the initial screening eliminates families of low motivation as well as families with gross and readily observable deficiencies.

Most authorities are unanimous that in principle... There are two ways of proceeding in the initial screening process, which are not mutually exclusive but which may result in a difference of emphasis.

Firstly, the couple may be evaluated primarily for their adjustment as adults - terms of adequate personality development - or they may, secondly, be evaluated specifically for capacity for parenthood.¹⁾

There are indications that "Some social workers following the model of diagnosis preceding psycho-therapy, concentrate on the adult personality and antecedent events that may have made it what it is. Other workers focus more on experience with children, the couple's attitudes towards them, child-rearing techniques, as well as other relevant aspects of the parental role. From the responses received here, it is obviously possible to derive impressions of adult personality as well as parental potential"²⁾

It would appear that judgment begins apparently as an overall reaction to a couple. They are gradually perceived by the social worker as people who are "liked" or "disliked" as

1) Refer. Brieland, D. An Experimental Study of the Selection of Adoptive Parents at Intake. New York, Child Welfare League of America Inc., 1959, p.25.

2) Idem, p.25.

potential parents.

Through questioning, the worker is able to broaden his perceptions and get additional evidence to confirm or contradict the early impressions. It must be remembered that the worker is reacting to two individuals as persons and as a marital unit; he is influenced by the way people look and the way they dress, and the worker's own general values that operate in any social situation will come into play.

It is essential that in this preliminary screening period the social worker will evaluate the verbal content of the interview in terms of what is said and of what is meant.

According to Alexina McWhinnie, "The assessment of the suitability of any couple for adoptive parenthood is perhaps even more complex from the social worker's point of view than the assessment of the background of the biological family. This assessment is also of vital importance for the ultimate outcome or success of adoption. Research work and experience in child psychiatry departments show that without careful assessment the wrong people may be allowed to adopt, with disastrous results later for all, adoptive parents as well as child".¹⁾

C. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

According to Rowe, "...Selecting adoptive parents means predicting a couple's ability to accept, love and cherish a

1) McWhinnie, A.M. A Team Approach based on Research and related to the Basic Needs of the Child. Published by the Standing Conference of Societies Registered for Adoption, p.9. (Place, Publisher and Date not mentioned.)

child not born to them".¹⁾

In theory this statement appears clear and quite simple. In practice, however, it soon becomes very apparent that selecting parents is far from a simple procedure.

Professed motives often are partial masks so that the basic motives are not readily known either through words or action. And when they are known, this knowledge does not necessarily solve the problem of determining whether a couple can accept the child and also meet his needs in the way which will promote his development.

Hazel Fredericksen writes that: "In trying to estimate the parental motive for adopting a child, the worker must try to be aware of all possible factors. She should try to discern whether the parents, in addition to bestowing love on the child, will be able to see him as an individual with qualities for growth and not merely as a satisfaction of their own needs. They should be able to accept the child's limitations and through their love and understanding help him to achieve maturity. The child should not be an object on whom they can project their own thwarted ambitions".²⁾

It is appropriate now to consider some of the factors that are generally regarded as important in the process of selecting and matching a child with a couple:

1. Placement of the Child According to the Sex

Rowe states emphatically that: "Since sex differences are the most significant and basic of all, the placement of a

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.155.

2) Fredericksen. The Child and His Welfare, p.209.

boy or girl child merits careful thought". And further that it is of vital importance that, "Workers be clear about whether the adopters are just stating a mild preference because asked to do so, or if they have strong feelings about it. If the latter, it is almost certainly unwise to ignore these feelings. Whether the reasons for them are conscious or unconscious they are probably important and a child of the "wrong" sex may start with a handicap".¹⁾

Furthermore, in this connection common sense will obviously suggest that a man who has had difficulty in accepting his sterility may be a better father to a girl than to a boy. So may be the man who tends to be dependent on his wife and who may regard a boy child as competition for her mothering.²⁾

Similar, women who have struggled with feelings of jealousy of a sister or are unsure of their own femininity may have real difficulties with an adopted daughter.³⁾

2. Appearance

Research indicates that when adoptive parents are truly receptive of their role, they are unlikely to be unduly concerned about the child's looks, and are prepared to accept him without making specifications beforehand.

If people, however, are specific about appearance, insist on fine bone structure, curly hair, green eyes, demand

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.200.

2) Idem.

3) Idem, p.200-201.

certain physical attributes, it is often a danger signal indicating they are being unrealistic, non-accepting of differences and generally not ready for adoptive parenthood.

3. Intelligence

Adoptive parents, deprived of children by birth, are apt to be ambitious for those they adopt. They need to prove themselves successful parents and one way to do this is to have the child achieve well in school.

Disappointments and tensions over scholastic problems can be a serious hazard to family happiness and children's wellbeing. Though they occur in other families too, the fact of adoption tends to aggravate the situation. It could be said that really good adopters will accept and love a child of a different intellectual level from themselves.

4. Personality and Temperament

The parents who are selected must show some degree of stability, warmth and unstinting affection. They must be individuals who will not subject the child to undue pressures of any kind.

It becomes essential to investigate the couple's background to discover aspects which at the present time might not even appear to them as indicative of the potential as parents.

Here one thinks specifically of persons who are exceptionally creative, artistic, bohemian, bizarre, conventional or extremely conservative. All these aspects must be considered in the light of the couple's potential ability to stand in as the worthy parents of a child.

Other specific factors, such as age, income, accommodation, occupation, education, etc., which also have to be taken into account, in the final selection process, will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter.

It is evident that "One of the most interesting and important tasks of an adoptive agency is to choose the most appropriate family for each child needing new parents".¹⁾

This principle of the most suitable home available, makes it possible for an agency to be flexible without feeling unfair. Jane Rowe writes in this connection that social work is therefore in a position to explore adoption with the applicants, instead of investigating them from a distance.²⁾

Literature reveals that most social workers feel that a couple worthy to adopt ought to be able to accept and love any child. Although many experts insist that it is impossible to make any valid predictions at all about the future of a baby's development, there are others who will attempt a total matching of child and adopters in order to try and reproduce as close an approximation to the natural family as possible.

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.194.

2) Idem, p.156.

Although knowledge of human nature and laws of heredity are important, child placement still remains an art rather than a science.

It becomes clear that the making of predictions about the suitability of a particular child and a particular family for one another, is based largely on the worker's convictions and personal knowledge of the parties concerned.

It appears essential that the decisions by which parents are selected for a child, must be made by a social worker who knows both the child and the couple. This then implies that sufficient detailed and accurate information must be obtained to provide a vivid picture of both parties. It would thus be obvious that the more specific and detailed the information the better the placement would be.

The whole concept of matching and selection has its bitter critics and ardent supporters. Although exact matching would appear to be patently impossible, it is the work of the agency to enable adopters and their children to aim to live together as happily as is possible.

D. BASIS OF UNSUITABILITY

Studying adoption applications is like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Motives, needs, feelings, attitudes, capacities, personality traits, social relationships, expectations, ideas about discipline, about natural parents, these are a few of the characteristics which form an interlocking pattern.

According to the available literature studied there are certain factors which are total disqualifications for adoptive parenthood. These are usually obvious and quite easily dis-

covered. Here one thinks specifically of the criminal; the person who displays anti-social behaviour; has a communicable illness or disease; has a disability which is so serious that it may affect life's expectancy or physical activity; mental illness or severe neurosis; and a standard of living too low for the safety, health and normal development of a child.

The unsuitable applicants, although being childless may in all probability be over the specified age limit; be unsuccessful economically; may have bad ego strengths; may not have any reasonable educational qualifications. These persons also often cannot relate socially and are suspicious and impatient towards others.

In the final assessment of applicants there will be certain couples who cannot be accepted as adoptive parents for reasons which are often more subtle than merely not qualifying as regards to age, health, economic, religious, housing or education, to name but a few. It is these hidden traits which play an important role in the assessment of applicants and which often cause them to be found unsuitable to adopt a child:

- (i) Persons who are basically uncaring about others and unresponsive to the needs of others;
- (ii) persons who are incapable of giving affection and caring for a child in order to meet his needs;
- (iii) persons who are not very strongly motivated to become parents and accept what goes with it;
- (iv) persons who do not have the capacity to give, and when they do, expect immediate returns;
- (v) persons who have not worked out a satisfactory and stable marital relationship, and who have severe problems in their sexual identification, or in their re-

- relationships with each other;
- (vi) persons who are unable to maintain meaningful relationships free from conflicts with other members of their own families as well as with others outside the family;
 - (vii) persons who are emotionally unstable and are not able to function adequately in relation to family responsibility and employment;
 - (viii) persons who do not have reputable characters, values and ethical standards conducive to the well-being of a child;
 - (ix) persons who are so rigid in their thinking and actions that they are unable to modify their expectations, attitudes and behaviour in relation to the needs and problems of children; and
 - (x) persons who are so convinced of their own adequacy that they will never approach outside help to meet the demands and problems of family living should the need arise.

E. SUMMARY

In selection, as in all other aspects of adoption, the social worker makes a crucial decision which is irreversible and, "Ironically enough, the decision not to place a child with them may be one of the ways in which an agency protects people".¹⁾

The task, however, is not an easy one, and affects the lives of various people, the status of the agency as well as the social worker's own professional integrity.

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.156.

The problem is further complicated by an apparent marked absence of specific knowledge about the meaning of the practical position held by the applicant who is considered not suitable to adopt a child. In the following chapter a closer look will be taken to determine who this rejected applicant is and what service can be offered to him.

CHAPTER V

THE REJECTED APPLICANT AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

As indicated in the previous chapter both theory and practice have revealed that it often occurs that not all applicants are successful in being accepted as adoptive parents. Michaels notes that: "If it is occasionally necessary to choose between a possible injustice to a family and possible injustice to a child, the agency must by virtue of its essential responsibility, protect the child by rejecting the applicant".¹⁾

In this chapter a closer look will be taken at this rejected applicant - who he is and what this rejection probably means to him. The role and function that social work has, concerning these persons in need, will also be discussed.

A. THE REJECTED APPLICANT AS SPECIALIZED PROBLEM

Parenthood is an experience which is highly charged with emotion. This applies equally to those parents who expect a child of their own and to those who apply for one through adoption.

With adoptive applicants these feelings are further complicated by the fact that makes adoption necessary and which involves, amongst other things, a social agency and the adoption worker. Emotions are definitely further heightened when couples are rejected for adoption.

1) Michaels, R. "Casework Considerations in rejecting the adoption application" in Social Case work No. 28, Dec. 1947, p.370.

It follows then that social workers enter the family scene at a time of instability - when the life of this group is reshaping itself or is being reshaped by circumstances. It is of vital importance that the social worker have some awareness of the part he will play.

Some applicants are rejected because they are assessed by the agency to have "limited capacity for parenthood" - or perhaps because of immaturity or as a result of psychosocial deficiencies. These factors, to many, are as real and as important if not more so than requirements of age, health, income etc.

Is it not the general policy of those in the social work field that persons with more tangible problems, are aided almost immediately - what, one may ask of those persons who came to an agency and do not know that they may not be asking for a child - but that they may be presenting something that is unconscious or pre-conscious to them, and that they have little or no awareness that they will be observed on both the conscious and pre-conscious levels.

Jane Rowe writes that: "...there will always be couples whose request for a child must be denied".¹⁾

Since it is a "law of nature" that couples should reproduce, the prospective parents usually feel they are doing something that belongs to the normal growth processes of life when applying for a child. When so basic a function as a normal biological phenomenon is threatened by the agency, the prospective adoptive parents to be rejected definitely need casework support.

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.190.

It is generally the accepted view that a client come to an agency with an acute need for service - they come in a sense to overcome a weakness.

How much doubt, fear, anxiety preceeded the ultimate decision to approach an outside agency for help? With what misgivings and hesitation does the person come forward?

Is it not that the persons who come for help - the couple who apply to adopt a child - and who are turned away - rejected - who need support and a better understanding than the one to whom help can be given?

Is it not one of the basic fundamentals of social work that one does not build on the individual's weaknesses and/or shortcomings - but rather on their strenghts and virtues, so that the potential of the person may reach the highest level of development which in turn will affect his self realisation and thus help him to fulfill his task and calling on earth?¹⁾

This view is of prime importance as the client must be assisted to regain his strengths, develop his potentials, and aid him to again function as a worthwhile being in the society of which he is a part.

Eloff too, stresses this positive approach with regard to the client in need and states that this is own to the Christian point of view.²⁾

1) Refer. Cronje, G.: Professionele Maatskaplike Werk. Pretoria, J. v. Schaik Bpk., 1956, p.3.

2) Refer. Eloff, D.J.: Enkele Aspekte van Belang by die ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van Maatskaplike Werk. Potchefstroom, Pro-Rege Pers Beperk, 1968, p.140.

1. Procedure of rejection of applicants

According to Alfred Kasprovicz "... The question of whether to discuss with adoptive applicants the reasons for their rejection if fraught with controversy".¹⁾

Thinking logically there will thus always be couples whose request for a child must be denied. This then creates problems for the agency as well as for the applicants.

Social workers are understandably reluctant to hurt the client's feelings, and may be fearful of the disappointment and hostility that could be aroused and may wonder if they can justify their decision.²⁾

The trend as indicated in literature seems to be to tell the prospective parents the reasons for the rejection in a face-to-face interview rather than in a general non-acceptance letter.

Handling rejections will never be easy or pleasant, but the adoption worker must always bear in mind, that although the needs of the child are of primary importance - the applicant who is rejected because of one of numerous reasons, cannot just be turned away without any proper explanation and further help.

Whenever possible, applicants should be given reasons which are not too personal and which they can interpret comfortably to their friends. It is easier for the rejected applicant to accept reasons such as health, age, or shortage

1) Kasprovicz, A.L.: "Interpreting rejection to adoptive Applicants" in Social Work, Vol. 9, No. 1, Jan. 1964, p.98.

2) Refer. Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.190.

of available infants - than aspects of a personal nature or which indicate personal inadequacy.

Explanations to applicants must be based on the knowledge of themselves which has been imparted by them.

Many writers feel that it is often unnecessary and also unwise to try and explain everything to the rejected applicant. It does not help to question a woman's inadequacy to be a mother or a man's over-dependency on his wife.

Aronson, a psychiatric consultant to adoption agencies, notes that "The key to this technique of rejection lies in the awareness of the fact that telling the whole truth may, instead of being a virtue, actually be an act of the crassest cruelty and may throw into disequilibrium a situation which has some stability".¹⁾

In line with this, Brown suggests that it is healthier for the couple, and their relationship with each other, if the agency interprets rejection in such a manner so as to deliberately focus the applicant's hostility on the agency rather than have the marital pair turn against each other.²⁾

Rowe also indicates that: "We do not have the right to risk upsetting a marriage, to break down people's defences and make them more unhappy".³⁾

The most difficult situations would appear to be where personality problems are the main reasons for rejection, and it would be a great temptation to take the easy way out and

1) Aronson, H.G.: "The problem of rejection of Adoptive applicants" in Child Welfare, Vol XXXIX, No. 8, Oct. 1960, p.23.

2) Refer. Brown, F.: "What do we seek in adoptive parents" in Social Casework, April 1951, Vol. 32, p.160.

reject such applicants with the minimum of explanation.

These would be the cases where it is of particular importance to the social worker to try whenever possible to help the clients understand the reasons why adoption would be inadvisable for them.

Under these circumstances it would appear that one must not only permit, but encourage rationalization which will aid the applicant to explain acceptably to themselves, the agency's rejection. The principle would then dictate that the agency leave helpful psychic defenses intact.

Kadushin maintains that: "It is helpful to stress the acceptability of the applicants as individuals despite the fact that the agency questions their acceptability for a practical social role - that of parenthood".¹⁾

It is clear that the rejection of adoption clients must be handled by a senior social worker as the task requires time, skill, careful thought, and appraisal. As Jane Rowe so aptly puts it "Doing it badly may be worse than not doing it at all".²⁾

2. Implications of rejection to applicants

Probably the greatest strain and anxiety for the agency staff doing adoption work comes from the hostility of rejected applicants, whether this is expressed directly to the worker or through complaints to outsiders in the community.

1) Refer. Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.461.

2) Refer. Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.191.

Rowe also indicates that: "... angry, frustrated or embittered applicants can do a great deal of damage to an agency's reputation in the community and thus to the whole cause of adoption".¹⁾

Taking a closer look at the various available literature on adoption there appears to be three types of parents who react in three specific ways.

Firstly there are those parents who voluntarily withdraw their application during the investigation of the case and before there has actually been the need to reject them. These are the parents who came to recognize through the skilled interviewing of the social worker, that adoption would not serve their own interests or those of a child.

Then there are the parents who have accepted the social worker's advice to withdraw their application. Here they have been made aware of, and have been able to accept, to a certain extent, their shortcomings as prospective parents.

Lastly are those parents who are unable to grasp and also often unwilling to listen to any kind of reasoning. Since they are incapable of facing their own shortcomings they do not recognize the necessity for rejection.

In the first place, the very nature of the couple's inability to have children may create an aura of inadequacy. Couples may wonder if their sterility has been predestined by God. The anxious and insecure woman may damage her self-image even further by the uneasy, unconscious feelings of inadequacy

1) Refer. Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.190.

because of her infertility. Observations on infertility indicate that the woman is far more affected than the man, who may feel uncomfortable with regard to his masculinity but this does not necessarily unpair his image of successful fatherhood. Infertility in the woman often creates doubts of capacity for motherhood and what this implies.

Furthermore couples are often painfully aware of their own personality defects - and they often fear that the social worker will find out how they really feel about themselves.

Generally speaking there are such varied responses to rejection which stem from the specific mental make-up of the applicants. Persons react to rejection as they react to everything else in life, according to established patterns of life.

Aronson names four types for whom rejection evokes different reactions.

Firstly are the parents in whom rejection evokes no obvious response. The decision is accepted without any fuss and there is a stoical acceptance which is probably an expression of their basic life pattern.

The second group react with overt rage, and anger when refused a child and there follows a verbal attack on the worker and the agency. Often these people are basically demanding and suspicious - prestige and outward appearances are of prime importance to them. Being denied a child is indicative of an insult to their integrity.

The next group put up a show of aggressiveness which acts as a veil for their insecurity and depression. Here one

finds feelings of hurt and anger. These people are often weak and insecure despite the outer facade.

Lastly are those applicants who react in immediate despair and depression - these persons do not fight back, question the decision. They often feel so undeserving and unworthy that they use the rejection as a further indication of their own hopelessness.¹⁾

Kasprowicz maintains that: "Adoptive clients deeply appreciate the worker's willingness to give them the opportunity of defending themselves when presented with the reasons for rejection. Although they will attack or cry, deny or admit, get angry or become defensive, and even scream during the process, they will often come away from the interview with a better feeling about the agency. Most important, they have been provided with an opportunity to discuss their weaknesses, to understand themselves better and to seek help if this is indicated".²⁾

B. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL WORK TO THE REJECTED APPLICANT

Social work is characterized, throughout the literature by its direct concern for the well-being of the individual.

Social work can be regarded as an enabling profession which seeks to help individuals with their personal problems as well as their human relationships.

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- 1) Refer. Aronson. The problem of rejection of Adoptive applicants, p. 25.
 - 2) Refer. Kasprowicz. Interpreting rejection to Adoptive Applicants, p.99-100.

In many situations, the individual is faced with a problem which he cannot solve himself. The question of whether he can be helped immediately arises and the social welfare agency is approached.

Here then, we have a couple who with much hesitation approach an agency with their request to adopt a child. The social worker is geared to aid this couple - but after further investigation finds they are unsuitable and the couple are turned away - often without any further explanation.

If social work is directed to aid persons in need or with problems, why then are these people not given a second thought? The available literature studied in this respect, as well as the very lack of it, gives an indication that the rejected applicant is almost psychologically wrecked after refusal.

Social work, like many other professions, is based on certain principles or premises which are own to the profession. If social work is to be applied effectively then the premises which form the foundation of the profession must be clearly understood and applied as far as possible at all times.

The social worker who practices his profession from a Christian point of view cannot then fail to make these premises a part of his professional make-up, and where he is confronted with the rejected applicant offer him the help to which he is entitled.

1. Basic Premises of Social Work

The basic premises of social work have not just sprung up, but are instead rooted in the beliefs of civilization. Our

civilization has grown from beliefs in ethical and spiritual equality, freedom of individual development, free choice of opportunities, fair competition, personal independence, freedom of speech, expression and communication. The system of social sanctions is based upon mutual respect and concern for the rights of all. Although these ideals of democracy have not been perfectly implemented in our civilization, social work is directed toward their realization.

The following are a few of the basic premises, which according to Cronje¹⁾ can be regarded as the postulates of social work:

(a) Every person is of the highest importance

This principle is closely allied to the general philosophy and stems directly from the religious view that man is created in the image of God and thus has a particular relationship towards his Creator, his fellow and to nature. For this reason alone man becomes an exceptionally important person who when in need must be helped.

There would thus appear to be no doubt that even the rejected client is worthy of the social worker's concern. Because of the fact that each person is of the utmost importance, the social worker can under no circumstances differentiate between those who need help, and those who do not.

Even those persons, who are found unsuitable to adopt a child have the right to be regarded with the utmost respect. They should be approached and helped as any other person who seeks assistance from an agency.

1) Refer. Cronje. Professionele Maatskaplike Werk, p.1.

There are indications that when the individual is turned away - the social worker's own sense of failure and defeat are added to that which the unhappy rejected applicants are already carrying with them.

There appears no doubt in the literature that the essence of this premise lies in the recognition and understanding of each person's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods in assisting each toward a better adjustment.

This premise is based on regarding this person - the rejected applicant as example, not as just a human being but as a human being created by God and thus worthy of even more than what social work can offer him. To deny him help is paramount to denying his existence.

(b) Every person can change, develop and grow under the stimulating influence of other people and life's experience

According to Eloff¹⁾ this premise is not only of essential importance in social work, but also forms the basis of many other sciences.

If social work withholds the conviction that potential strengths in man can be brought to positive development then why is the rejected applicant in adoption not offered the opportunity?

Gordon Hamilton states that one of the chief goals to which social work must strive is the creation of opportunities

1) Refer. Eloff. Enkele aspekte van belang by die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Maarskaplike Werk, p.150.

for social growth and development through satisfactory relationships and experiences. Hamilton stresses the value of positive life's experiences which enable the person to bring about the necessary changes in his social environment or within himself.¹⁾

If the social worker believes that people are capable of changing their attitudes and behaviour and that there are techniques which can be communicated and learned which can help people to change, why is this then not applicable to the rejected applicant?

The rejected applicant, no matter what the reason for his rejection, should be given the opportunity through social work service to change, develop and grow so that they too can be again brought to normal acceptable action, and functioning.

(c) People must be accepted as they are

According to Biesteck: "Acceptance is a principle of action wherein the caseworker perceives and deals with the client as he really is, including his strengths and weaknesses, his congenial and uncongenial qualities, his positive and negative feelings, his constructive and destructive attitudes and behaviour, maintaining all the while a sense of the client's innate dignity and personal worth.The purpose of acceptance is therapeutic: to aid the caseworker in understanding the client as he really is, thus making casework more effective; and to help the client free himself from undesirable defenses, so that he feels safe to reveal himself

1) Refer. Hamilton. Theory and Practice of social casework, p.12.

and look at himself as he really is, and thus to deal with his problem and himself in a more realistic way".¹⁾

Cronje²⁾ maintains that people, and in particular clients in social work must be accepted as they are because each person is a unique being who differs from every other person. It is essential in social work to continually stress the uniqueness of man and thus of his problem. The foregoing thus implies that each client will have to be handled in a unique way.

The applicant who comes to an agency to apply to adopt a child is essentially a person with a problem. He has ambivalent feelings about himself. On the one hand he is somewhat aware of his weaknesses and inadequacies and on the other hand he has a sense of his own dignity and worth. When he seeks help because he is unable to cope with his own problems and is turned away, his rejections often sets in motion a series of other reactions with which he cannot cope.

If the client is accepted as he is, with his limitations, in his present situation which is obviously not at present satisfactory, the help-action directed towards him cannot just be severed when it is determined, for example, that he/she are unsuitable to adopt a child.

The service social work offers should continue, and though this in itself will not remove the difficulties, the persons can be helped to accept themselves and help them to face their problems constructively.

1) Biestek, F.P. The Casework Relationship. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 3rd. Ed. p, 72.

2) Refer. Cronje. Professionele Maatskaplike Werk, p.17.

(d) People can only be helped if they help themselves

Social work is also based on the fact that all help offered will be to no avail if the person does not want to be helped. The will to be helped is usually connected to man's relationship to God, his fellow-man and to nature.

The very fact that people approach a social agency themselves is to some extent indicative of the fact that they are expressing the need to help themselves.

Hamilton states: "Help is most effective if the recipient participates actively and responsibly in the helping process ... what most people are grateful for in the long run, ... is a chance to help themselves - to work out their own solutions, at least to have a hand in shaping their destiny. The poor and less fortunate have this desire just as strongly as the captains of industry. It is resources, capacity and opportunity which fail them".¹⁾

Social work is then confronted with a couple who are obviously for one or other reason unsuitable to adopt a child. Is it not our task to offer help - to develop resources in the individual, to stimulate innate capacities and open new fields for opportunity through which this couple could direct their lives more fully?

(e) People not only have rights but responsibilities too

Friedlander describes this premise as follows: "A value common to all methods of social work is the conviction that

1) Hamilton. Theory and Practice of Social Casework, p.13.

man's individual rights to self-respect, dignity, selfdetermination, and equal opportunities are connected with his social responsibilities toward himself, his family and his society..."¹⁾

Rights and responsibilities are closely connected and are in turn allied to the individual's world and life's philosophy. People in need have the right to be helped, but with that right goes responsibility and those who practice social work should see to it that even this person in need realizes his responsibility.

Take for example, the rejected applicant who has primarily been rejected because of inadequate economic status, or asocial attitudes or even instable marital relationships; the applicants have the right to be helped but they must be shown on the responsibilities of their roles; that the child needs certain financial security; that social contact is essential for his growth and development and a stable and secure relationship in the home is essential.

Only those persons who strive to maintain a balance in their value systems between rights and responsibilities can claim that right and social work service is in a good position to help these persons towards that goal.

(f) The right of self-determination

The very fact that people have the right to determine how they should be helped, immediately implies that this person has the responsibility of self-decision. Rights and

1) Friedlander. Concepts and Methods of Social Work, p.6.

responsibilities are closely connected and cannot be separated. The person who insists on his rights must be aware of his own responsibility and be prepared to accept it with whatever consequences may follow.

Friedlander states "... the conviction that the individual who is in economic, personal, or social need has the right to determine himself what his needs are and how they should be met. In the practice of social work, the individual in material or emotional need is entitled to retain his right of self-determination. His claim to exercise 'self-help' is accepted as a human civil right".¹⁾

The decisions people make daily are the outcome of the life's situations with which they have to cope according to their own value systems. Cronje states that self determination of a person "... wesenlik saamhang en gepaard gaan met die intrinsieke waarde en waardigheid van die mens, maar geen mens se eie beslissingsreg is onbeperk en sonder grense nie. Die mens se eie beslissingsreg word beperk en begrens deur sy onbevoegdheid en onvermoë om tot ewewigtige beslissings te geraak ooreenkomstig sy besondere waardesisteem".²⁾

Where the client has been found unsuitable for a role which he himself has determined, it falls to the social worker offering help to assist this person to find another solution to his problem and help him to follow this through.

With the supportive aid of the social worker the client regains his self-confidence and is then better able to re-

1) Friedlander. Concepts and Methods of Social Work, p.3.

2) Cronje. Professionele Maatskaplike Werk, p.9.

direct his decisions towards overcoming his problems or learning to live with them comfortably.

- (g) All persons should, within the limits of their own capabilities, have equal opportunities to self-development

Although this principle is also basic to democracy it does not imply that all people are equal and for this reason some opportunities should be available.

Each person, through his Creator is unique, with his own capacities and make-up which differs from every other person on earth. It is thus logical that a person will only develop, grow or change within his own specific limitations.

In this connection Friedlander states: "A ... concept that is of decisive importance for social work in a democratic society is the firm belief in equal opportunity for all, limited only by the individual's innate capacities".¹⁾

It is thus evident that social work services must be directed according to that which the client can incorporate for himself most effectively. The social worker attempts in a sympathetic, understanding manner to help the client meet his needs within the framework of the available resources.

Although the above premises have been discussed separately they are not separable in reality, for each necessarily implies the other. The above can be regarded as principles of action, based upon fundamental truths which influence, guide and direct and in which both the client and the social

1) Friedlander. Concepts and Methods of Social Work, p.5.

worker are actively involved,

2. The Goals and functions of Social Work

"Within the framework of the basic premises that have been discussed above, social work aims to assist individuals, group and communities to reach the highest possible degree of social, mental, and physical well-being".¹⁾

Social work is primarily concerned with helping people who are faced with problems largely involving a breakdown in performance of one or other role which they are required to perform.

Role is a sociological term denoting the way in which society has invested socially important activities with standardised obligations and rights, and people come to think in terms of roles and measure themselves against them.²⁾

Likewise Kadushin states that "A role is the prescribed behaviour and attitudes that a person occupying a particular status is expected to assume".³⁾

Social work focuses upon how and with what effectiveness the the person performs his various social roles. Threats to, or actual impairment of role-functioning are the situations for which the social worker is trained to help.

"In dealing with the problem, the social worker must examine the particular social relationship (or area of interaction) in which it arises and address himself to the factors

1) United Nations Economic and Social Council, Training for Social Work: An International Survey, 1960, p.10.

2) Refer. Moffett. Concepts in Casework treatment, p.6.

3) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.6.

in it that block social functioning...".¹⁾

How can the social worker promote man's welfare in practice? According to Boehm, it is the goal of social work to enhance man's social functioning, wherever the need for such enhancement is either socially or individually perceived.²⁾

The enhancement of social functioning may be accepted as a legitimate goal in social work. Since this is such a complex concept, it appears to be advisable to break it up into its component parts, i.e. into the different roles that each person has to fulfill in interaction.

According to Van Rooyen, different meanings are accorded to the concept "role". The most important difference, for our purposes, is that some regard role as the actual behaviour of an individual in a specific situation, whereas others regard it as expected behaviour.³⁾ Role is thus regarded as being both factual and normative, that is, how it actually is and how it actually should be.

Role, would then describe those activities and tasks which an individual is expected to perform by virtue of his membership of social groups and his participation in social institutions.⁴⁾

Social work accepts the concept "role" for measuring dysfunction and to this end the ideal typical role is used, and is founded on values and a value system, acceptable to

1) Boehm. Objectives of the social work curriculum of the future, p.7.

2) Ibid, p.54.

3) Van Rooyen, I.J.J. Maatskaplike Funksionering en die Maatskaplike Werk, Pretoria. Universiteit van Suid-Afrika A.24, 1963, p.23.

4) Refer. Skidmore, R.A. and Thackeray, M.G. Introduction to Social Work. New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964, p.20.

the specific society in particular, and the social work values in general.

In this particular study concern is expressed about the rejected applicant in adoption. Here there is clear evidence that there is a dysfunction of several roles which the individual under normal circumstances would be required to carry out. The parent-role is unfulfilled in a society where it is expected to be carried out. The marriage relationship may be disturbed by virtue of the fact that either or both parties are experiencing difficulties in their particular role functioning.

Although problems can be regarded as challenges to greater effort and achievement, in this particular set-up it will more likely contribute to the breakdown of social functioning.

Social work seeks to help individuals adjust and make constructive use of their opportunities and resources. To assist them in using existing services and resources to solve unmet needs and lastly to aid in the prevention of family breakdown and discrimination of social problems.

3. The social work approach towards helping-applicants unsuitable to adopt

It appears today that in adoption practice, the selection of a child does not present the major problem. In fact it appears to be much more difficult to find the right parent for the right child.

It thus becomes of vital significance that the social worker knows something about human behaviour. Knowledge of others also only becomes meaningful when there is some insight into oneself.

Charlotte Towle states "That there is a growing recognition . . . that this concept of skills and procedures alone will not enable the social caseworker to help human beings unless he understands them".¹⁾

It thus appears essential that the social worker knows something about himself and his own feelings before dealing with adoptive parents.

Social workers, then, need to apply all the available knowledge of the profession concerning people, in order to study and evaluate parental capacities of applicants wishing to adopt and applying to do so.

The social worker is required to reach a decision about the client's situation and the best way to help him, for this purpose use must be made of both psychological and sociological knowledge for the light that these sciences throw on the client's behaviour.

While in social work practice we are loath to take over the responsibilities that the client might carry himself, and it is frequently preferable to help him face his feelings so that he may view his situation more realistically and tackle his problem himself, the immediate support of the social worker would logically seem right.

When a social worker not only knows the relationship needs of a child, but also sees in the specific case the meaning parenthood has for each parent concerned, the worker

1) Towle, C. Helping: Charlotte Towle on Social Work and Social Casework. Chicago, The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969, p.28.

may be more helpful to this couple to whom parenthood is denied.

C. SUMMARY

In this chapter the rejected applicant has been introduced as one who has not been able to comply with the standards set out by the agency for adoptive parenthood, and who on being informed of the rejection possibly feels inadequate, self-deprecatory, and harbours guilt feelings.

Research in the literature consulted indicates, however, that many are willing to receive the help of the social worker, if such help is offered to them. The help offered by social work has a definite basis as a foundation. The application of this basis enables the social worker to assist this applicant in a specific way.

Where applicants have been rejected it can be assumed that according to existing standards, they are experiencing some or other problem in their social functioning. These various aspects are discussed in detail in the following chapter and the way in which the social worker could assist them towards a better functioning.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL WORK PROCESS WITH THE REJECTED APPLICANT

The usual procedure of adoption would appear to be strictly a diagnostic process including the collecting of facts and the interpretation thereof. It is not generally regarded as being therapeutically orientated.

In this research project specific attention is given to the social work process as the researcher regards this as essential if proper attention is to be given to the rejected applicant in adoption. The social work process consists of three parts, and although these three ordinarily proceed simultaneously from the beginning, there is usually a sequential order. Hamilton states in this respect that: "the arbitrary division of the ... process into steps, is an intellectual device to help us comprehend the nature of the total process".¹⁾

In this chapter attention will be given to the social work process as applied specifically to the rejected applicant in adoption.

A. STUDY

The social study includes the finding and determining the relative or related facts which will be used in the social work process. The social worker must be prepared to delve deep for facts which may not seem at first to be important, but which later become meaningful. All data obtained is

1) Hamilton. Theory and Practice of Social Casework, p.216.

of course confidential, and this must be made clear to the respective parties.

The information or data is usually obtained from the individuals themselves as well as from other social resources. The literature studied reveals that the following information is essential in any application and must be collected as correctly as possible.

1. General Factors. Age, religion, economy, education, physical and mental health, occupation, planfulness, rigidity in thought, adaptibility and the ability to set standards.
2. Availability. Time to spend with the child; and would the prospective adoptive parents be available at critical times?
3. Role Confidence. Experience of the parental role as well as insight into each role and respective concern about the role which each specific parent will have to play.
4. Perception and Performance of Role. Would there be physical and social interaction with the child; Are the prospective parents aloof; dutiful or very emotional; What are their perceptions of the child as a human being?
5. Tolerance of Developmental Problems of a Child. Do prospective parents have a knowledge of the developmental problems of the child; and would they allow for independence?
6. Authority and Discipline. Would there be a balance between verbal and corporal punishment; would there be reprimand without withdrawal; permissiveness and the acceptance of their social responsibility?
7. Domestication. To what extent are both parents a part of the household; and who plays the leading role?

8. Parent-Child Relationship. It is important to determine what the relationships between the respective parties will be with regard to play; school; hobbies; achievements; ambitions; as well as the degree of concern displayed and approval of the activities of the child?

Concerning the couple themselves it is important for the following aspects to receive particular attention:

1. Marital Status. Were the couple previously married and what were the reasons for the marriage to disintegrate?
2. Family Cohesion. Is there a convergence of attitudes and interests; what is the extent of friction if present; what are the relationships with the in-law parents as well as with other family members?
3. Religious Affiliation. Does the couple belong to the same church denomination and have the same religious convictions; if not, what are their attitudes towards religion and the bringing up of a child according to the Word of God?
4. Decision Making. Is there a pattern of submission present; are the parties autocratic; and who would take the lead as decision maker in the area of child care?
5. Domestic Operation. Is there a rigidity of role differentiation and are the parties functioning in their traditional areas?
6. Leisure Pursuits. Is there a joint participation in activities; in vocations, sport and recreation; as well as to the degree and quality of mutual interest and participation?

Although the above list at a cursory glance may seem formidable, a closer look will bring the realization that these **are vital aspects** which must be closely considered if the social work process is to be effectively applied.

B. DIAGNOSIS AND EVALUATION

If the social worker is to treat his clients according to their needs, and use the right sort of treatment for each one, he must be prepared to make decisions about the way in which he is going to do this. In social work, diagnosis and evaluation is the process of making these decisions.

Diagnosis and evaluation can be regarded as the finding and evaluating of the problems as well as the effects of the milieu on the problems of potential clients. Essentially diagnosis is the social worker's professional opinion as to the nature of the problem, and in this respect to what degree it affects the rejected applicant and his relationship with his environment.

In this research project the social worker is faced with a person who has been found unsuitable to adopt a child. If the information gained is studied carefully various aspects may arise which will need further study before a decision can be made.

If in the domestic arrangement, for example, it is found that the mother is the dominant figure, and not fulfilling her traditional role, the social worker would have to determine to what extent such female domination would effect the placement of a child in a home where traditional roles are reversed.

Likewise if in the evaluating of the information on religion indicates gross differences in approach, beliefs and

practices, then it is essential that caution be maintained. Ideally a child would be placed where the religious affiliation of both parties are the same, and where the child could be brought up without any conflicting ideas.

Where the parties come from different cultures and status groups it is essential that both feel comfortable about their previous positions as well as about their present one. Should either, or both keep on harping about a previous life, marital discord will probably set in, and if a child is involved, this would definitely be to his disadvantage.

If the couple are so engrossed in their present occupations or social lives, it would have to be determined if they are prepared to sacrifice any of this, and give more of their time to a child who will require time and attention.

During the course of the investigation it may have become evident that both parties are actively involved in sport and other recreational activities. Where such leisure pursuits are shared by both the couple, a closer bond would be expected. If, however, each party goes his own way, having little in common with his or her partner, then it would be necessary to discuss mutual sharing with the couple and point out how beneficial a sharing relationship is.

C. TREATMENT

Taking into consideration that the social worker is dealing here with people who are experiencing some breakdown in their capacity to cope unaided with their own affairs and have therefore sought aid, only to find their application to adopt a child turned down, emphasis is now placed on those specific

aspects which will feature prominently in the treatment process. Treatment is regarded as a problem solving process and here specifically the social worker faces many problems of the client with which he can be aided.

1. Economic-Physical

(a) Economic

It is generally agreed that lack of basic economic security heightens the stress of parenthood and intensifies relationship problems. Clients must be made aware of the fact that a large bank balance will not take them to the head of the queue. A good adoption society is concerned to find the right home for each child, not the richest or grandest, but a home which will suit that particular child. It is more essential to know that the father has steady employment and earns enough to maintain his family in security and comfort.

Fredericksen writes too: "A basic factor in providing the child with a feeling of security is adequate provision in his home of the material necessities of life. This means an income sufficient to provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter".¹⁾

It is thus evident that financial stability is more important than maximum or minimum income and should provide security for the child for his proper maintenance and education.

When this aspect is worked through with the clients, it is essential that specific attention is given to the following points; viz.

1) Fredericksen. The Child and his Welfare, p.8.

- (i) Planning of a budget. How is the income spent in relation to the needs of the family?
- (ii) Is the income adequate under the present living conditions and does the expenditure correspond to the income?
- (iii) Has precautionary planning been made in the form of savings, insurances and policies?
- (iv) What steps have been taken with regard to the ownership of property?

When working this through with the applicant, evidence will soon indicate the responsibility of the client and whether in this sphere they have acted responsibly and have maintained a balance with respect to the material.

Couples who appear irresponsible about their financial status, whether it be due, for example, because of the husbands continuous unemployment, or the mother's inability to work with money, can be guided to more responsible action for their own sakes as well as for a child which they may one day have.

(b) Housing and Environment

There is a great difference to the concepts of "a house" and "a home". A house is seen rather as the concrete structure which provides shelter from the elements of nature.

A home on the other hand is regarded as a place where the individual feels secure and loved. Where he is safe to expose himself to his family without fear of condemnation. A place where he can turn to when in need of help or when hurt. A place where he is understood.

The home then to be provided for a child must have adequate accommodation and a place which that child can call his own and proudly display his possessions.

Parents offering such a home to a child must keep in mind safety precautions with regard to fire and health. That they will have to tolerate the child's behaviour and that breakages and damages are almost inevitable.

The home should provide facilities for the child to play - in and out of doors.

The environment plays a determining factor and there should be accessibility to socialization facilities, the school, play facilities, medical resources, other children. Also of importance is the acceptance of the neighbours and the community at large.

Should there be any factors which become evident through the thorough investigation, done by the social worker, which will preclude the placement of a child with the couple these will have to be worked through with the couple. When the relevant factors have been studied and evaluated thoroughly, it may become evident that some couples do not even have the basic requirements concerning a house or on the other extreme, a house so palatial but which is cold and impersonal. The whole concept of the aspect, however, is one which can be tactfully discussed with the particular couple and it can be pointed out to them that a child needs a warm happy home in which he feels secure and at ease, and which fulfills his basic requirements.

Most persons would want such a home for their children and would improve it, but in their despair and frustration, may have neglected to make their house a home.

(c) Age

Literature studied indicates that the age of adoptive parents should be more or less within the span that is normal for natural parenthood. It is evident, however, that a certain degree of flexibility in this matter is essential.

The maximum ages between 35 and 45 years of age increase the probability that the parent will be alive and well the 14 to 18 years of the adoptive child's dependency.

There are strong indications that most adoptive agencies do not place children with couples who are above child-bearing age. Often this age limit is 40 years for the wife and 45 years for the husband.

When applicants are middle-aged, the social worker will have to determine whether the couple can be flexible in meeting the needs of a child. Many authorities are of the opinion that too great an age difference between child and parent may well be more important during adolescence than in early childhood.

Kadushin sums this up very aptly when he writes: "Furthermore, too great an age spread between the adoptive parents and the child increases the possibility of intergenerational difficulties in understanding. The older adoptive parent would be too far removed in time to empathize with the child".¹⁾

1) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.440.

With great tact and understanding the worker will have the task in explaining to the rejected applicant that such a gap in age puts great strains on the energy needed for the physical burden=some demands of childcare. Furthermore there would be a decrease in the possibility of parental participation in the activities of the child which is of such vital importance.

Too great an age gap is discrepant with the normal family situation, and, appearing **atypical** calls attention to the fact that this family is different from others, which often then is detrimental to both the child and the parents. This basically is a problem which even the social worker can do little to change or correct. The social worker must, however, judge each case on merit and must be flexible in his decision. Where the couple are suitable as adopters, except for their advanced years, the possibility of adopting an older child should also be discussed with them.

Should this couple remain unacceptable, the acceptance of the situation will have to be tactfully and sympathetically discussed with them, and they should be helped to find other constructive outlets for their interest in children.

(d) Health factors

It is logical that any person to whom the care of a child is entrusted must have the requisite physical capacity to care adequately for that child.

The question often raised on this aspect concerns the disability of either parent due to one or other handicap.

It would seem important, firstly, to understand the meaning of the illness or handicap to the individual. In

one way or another his life will have been affected circumstantially, and psychologically, in varied ways and varying degrees.

When, for example, physical handicaps are congenital or have had their onset in infancy or early childhood, it does not appear to have the same threat as when it occurs later in life.

It may, however, have been deeply influential in forming the personality of the individual. The effect on the individual will depend to a large extent on the meaning the handicap has had for parents and other family members responsible for the care of the individual.

If the parent has had deep feelings of inadequacy or great frustrations, he may identify closely with the child, and in such cases unrealistic wishful strivings may characterize his relationship with the child.

It thus becomes clear that where the applicant is rejected because of a handicap, the worker through an understanding of the persons attitude towards his handicap, will be in a better position to help him come to terms with his physical state and that a child is not the answer to his possible frustrated embittered self. Where one of these parties does have a physical disability a careful assessment will have to be made as to acceptance and attitude towards himself and his disability. If the person is well adjusted and accepts his disability without any overt frustration, future parenthood is possible. If, however, the person is so embittered about his disabled body, or suffers a chronic disease, the doors to parenthood

through adoption are more or less permanently closed.

It is essential in adoptive practice that up-to-date medical reports on all applicants be obtained. Besides the importance of physical health, temperament and emotional stability must be gauged. A thorough medical examination and possibly a psychiatric assessment will be of great value in the assessment of the couple.

Where couples are then found to be either physical or mentally ill, the social worker is in a better position to refer these applicants to those disciplines where they can receive professional help.

2. Emotional - Social

(a) Education

An essential element in enabling the child to grow toward greater freedom is the opportunity for the maximum development of his intellectual capacities.

Again one must turn to the applicant and determine the level of the couple's education and assess what level of achievement they are likely to expect from an adopted child.

The applicants must realize and show insight into the fact that there should be an opportunity for education commensurate with the capacity, needs and interests of the child and there should at all times be reassuring encouragement for the child to persist in learning.

The provisions which are made in our society make it possible for every child to obtain, under conditions conducive to productive learning, the education which is essential for

the full realization of his parents.

Fredericksen states: "The impulse to learn in order to gain self-sufficiency, and to ease anxiety, is a positive innate tendency, so the denial or lack of opportunity to learn may produce frustration and emotional disturbance .¹⁾

Furthermore it is vital that every child has the chance to play and to pursue intellectual and physical interests which will stimulate growth and give him a feeling of adequacy and self-sufficiency. The child should be guided to use leisure time constructively - learn to develop hobbies - to participate actively in sports.

The couple who cannot allow the child this freedom for growth, possibly have their own problems which will need to be sorted out and discussed. Perhaps this couple themselves had deprived childhood years where learning and education were not available to them. Whether they are now going to be fanatic about the child achieving the highest possible education, or whether they are going to be quite passive must be determined. Much will depend on their own intellectual abilities as well as the insight they show.

(b) Occupation

The importance of work in the life of the adult is well recognised. It is commonly agreed that work is "good for people" and that in idleness, man deteriorates in one way or another.

1) Fredericksen. The Child and his Welfare, p.9.

It is necessary to obtain information into the occupation or profession of the applicants. The latter's adaptation to his employment would give valuable insight into the personality of the couple.

The manner in which the person adjusts to his work and finds pleasure therein and maintains a balance between work and leisure, serves as an indication of a stable personality and, on who can be relied. Such a person, would obviously have his family's welfare at heart and aim to provide them with the necessities of life.

The person who changes his employment frequently, is often without a job, shows signs of inner dissatisfactions, frustrations and is obviously incapable of coping with the stresses and strains of life. This person is unstable and insecure and should he be a party in an adoption application, could not be considered in view of his instability and lack of security which will ensue. Where there are obviously problems in connection with employment, the social worker should frankly discuss these with the respective parties, and if necessary, aptitude tests can be arranged so as to assess whether this individual is in fact in the correct employment for his capabilities and interests. Most people are proud of their jobs, and if done with honesty, application, and a sense of achievement, all employment should be regarded as equally important.

(c) Ambivalent feelings

Few couples come to adoption agencies with a very clear idea of their own feelings or of what is really involved in the adoptive relationship.

Therefore at the very start of a relationship - we frequently sense a conflict in feelings about applying for help. On the one hand, the individual may feel relieved, even gratified that there is an agency to which he can turn in time of need and an understanding worker on whom he can depend, on the other hand, he may resent the agency. He may resent his predicament and feel hostile towards those with whom he must share his problem. His initial response may be one of dislike and resentment because he feels humiliated.

"Applicants may give a clue as to their anxiety in regard to adoption and ambivalent feelings about having a child when they set up a detailed list of specifications which the child must fit".¹⁾

Rowe also states in this connection that: "There are some individuals whose conflict about wanting a child is kept in balance by an incompleting adoption application.

"Their unconscious rejection of parenthood remains untried and untested, while the socially approved desire for a child is fulfilled by the application. When an actual child is offered the conflict bursts wide open".²⁾

This would then explain in part why in practice so many couples inquire about the adoption of a child, appear to be very keen, express a response which the adoption worker believes to be encouraging, and then withdraw.

1) Fredericksen. The Child and his Welfare, p.208.

2) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.229.

Through the investigation by the social worker it would thus be very appropriate for the worker to be aware of possible ambivalent feelings and assess whether these are normal as any prospective parents would experience, or whether there are deeper underlying factors which have come into play.

Through counselling the couple it seems to be the task of the worker handling the rejection to willingly stand apart from themselves a little and consider their own attitudes, fears and longings realistically.

3. Spiritual - Religious

(a) Religion

For those who believe that man's relationship to God is the most important factor in his life, the provision of a religious upbringing unquestionably is of primary importance.

Spiritual needs of the individual must also be recognised, understood and respected. They must be seen as distinct needs and also in relation to other human needs. Through the influence of religion the purpose of human life is better understood and a sense of ethical values achieved.

Rowe states emphatically that "The genuine Christian's integrity, respect for individuality and joyful acceptance of life will make him a good parent."¹⁾

Most adoption agencies have put great store on the religious affiliation of the applicants. A frequently encountered obstacle in this respect occurs when the parties are of dif-

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.171.

ferent religions. Should this be the case then it should be carefully determined whether there are any conflicts about this. This does not mean that the mere fact that they belong to two different church denominations make them unsuitable to be adoptive parents. Where couples belong to the Protestant faith, for example, their basic religious beliefs are similar. In contrast the parties of two vastly different faiths, the Roman Catholic Faith or that of Judaism cannot be accepted if married to a Protestant.

The Children's Act 33 of 1960 also makes provision for this aspect and the adoptive worker must bear in mind Art. 71(i) (b) which also refers to Art. 35(2) and which clearly sets out that the religious, cultural and ethnological background of the prospective parties be similar.

Having accepted the fact that this child is a gift from God, created in His image, the parents have a great responsibility in bringing that child up to the Honour of God and according to His word.

It is the right of every child to be taught religious ideals and concepts in conformity with his background and individual needs and these can give him a sense of intrinsic worth.

As religion plays a vital role and is an intimate part of the person's personality, it follows that the worker himself must have religious affiliation in order to understand these applicants in their present situation.

The worker will have to bear in mind that long philosophically discussions are neither necessary nor in fact ap-

appropriate. The worker must, however, be aware of the fact that most people who are faced with childlessness, start to question the meaning and purpose of their lives, and will benefit from the help which they can receive by discussing their basic beliefs and values. It is thus clear that with therapy, here probably by a Minister of Religion, the couple can be helped to accept their position and not just pushed aside and forgotten.

(b) Ethics and Values

Of exceptional importance in the study of applicants for adoption will be the client's values. Values are seen to represent adjustment to society and the attitude towards the welfare of one's fellow.

Hollis states that: "Socially determined psychological realities also exert profound pressures, particularly in the areas of values and perceptions. ...At first these influences are transmitted primarily through the parents ...".¹⁾

Hollis states further that the values of the parent are of decisive importance in the nature of the child. "Only if the parent believes that a child should do well at school will he become interested in improving his child's school adjustment. Only if he believes that a child should be happy and spontaneous, will he be disturbed by his child's excessive anxiety and inhibitions".²⁾

1) Hollis, F. Casework - A Psychosocial Therapy. New York, Random House, 1963, p.14.

2) Ibid, p.208.

Fredericksen too states that: "Each child needs to have a personal appreciation of ethical values consistent with a developing philosophy of life".¹⁾

Again the social worker has an important task in interpreting to these rejected applicants that non-conformity of both religious beliefs and ethical values, which in fact cannot be separated, is essential and a primary requisite in the life of a child. The absence or neglect of these basic factors can only lead to detrimental influences on the child.

4. Personality Deviations

(a) Integration into Society

Modern life is conspicuously interdependent. So much more the family who live in close contact with one another as well as with the society of which they are a part.

The integration of the family is particularly essential here, for the development of play and friendship groups which serve to satisfy deep-seated needs of the human being.

For the child such a play group would help to satisfy the child's need for muscular development and skill. It is further in this play group that the child for example, learns new rules, new standards of social behaviour supplementary to those taught in the family. It is in this group that the child makes his first experiments in interaction with others - that he takes his first steps toward independence in society.

1) Fredericksen. The Child and his Welfare, p.8.

The socializing value of society depends on the fact that each member is keenly aware of the other's existence and conditions their behaviour appropriately.

The couple who for one or another reason are not integrated into society - are antisocial to extreme or are even at continual loggerheads with those around them, can offer a child little with regard to additional stimulation so essential for his growth and development to eventual independence.

The integration into society gives the members the realization of being part of a broader, more inclusive unit than the family and therefore also extends their horizons. Integration into society would then also further imply that members would acquire certain social ideals which are vital to the socializing phase and essential in the development of a child.

(b) Emotional Maturity

That unique hypothetical person, an emotionally mature adult, defies a precise descriptive definition. Perhaps certain characteristics of what is meant by "maturity" might be stated roughly as those of a person in whom enjoyment of dependence or inordinate pride in independence are replaced by gratification in interdependence.¹⁾

Although man has a considerable need to depend on others he has a need to be loved as well as the need to be cared for at times in those areas of his life in which he is unable to care for himself.

1) Refer. Towle. Common Human needs, p.76.

"A thoroughly adjusted individual is one who satisfies his ego needs while meeting his social responsibilities..."¹⁾

The parent who appears to be or in actual fact is cold and unemotional, who displays little emotion, would not be regarded as a suitable candidate to adopt a child. The addition of a child into any home will evoke some or other response, and this should rather be a warm, loving and accepting one.

The capacity for emotional relationships stems directly from the caressing and maternal love, in particular, which the child is entitled to from birth. The ability to give and receive love would then seem to be essential in any couple who contemplate bringing a child into their home.

It is only when parents themselves are emotionally secure, with regard to themselves individually as well as with one another, and are unselfish about this, can they accept another into their circle and guide him to a secure future.

(c) Attitude toward Sterility

Sterility and infertility, though sometimes used interchangeably, are not the same thing. Sterility is irreversible and often due to one or other physical defect. Infertility is regarded as a lowering of the ability to reproduce and can often be cured. It is essential that the social worker be informed of the current concepts concerning sterility.

1) Katz and Thorpe. Understanding People in distress, p.26.

It is essential to determine if there are guilt feelings on the part of either husband or wife and how does this effect their relationship to each other. Furthermore, the question must be asked whether this couple are able to accept the reality of the condition and are they able to develop constructive compensations.

If guilt feelings are present in either or both parties, special attention will have to be given to these. The aim should be to make each accept the situation and feel more comfortable about it. As far as possible the marital relationship should be strengthened instead of one party condemning the other which will probably lead to discord.

Kadushin maintains rightly that: "The adoptive child is a constant living reminder of the adoptive parents' deficiency. If the problem has not been adequately resolved, it is likely to make for difficulties in the parent-child relationship".¹⁾

Rowe also states in this connection: "When an adopted child is added to the family circle he may not only be a source of pride and pleasure, but also a constant reminder of sterility; instead of bolstering his parent's self-esteem he lowers it".²⁾

The feelings and attitudes of the couple with regard to their childlessness play an important role in the adopter's ability to accept their role comfortably.

1) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.442.

2) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.159.

"Couples who have supported each other through a full physical and emotional exploration of their childlessness and their feelings about it, usually end with a deeper understanding and a special closeness".¹⁾

It is of importance that the social worker not only determine the couple's attitude towards their childlessness, but also to what extent have they made an emotionally mature adjustment to the fact. Should there be bitterness, blame resentment and/or guilt feelings to name but a few, these resolving conflicts in the couple, should receive the attention of the social worker with whom a relationship has already been established.

(d) Quality of Marital Relationship

As the adult establishes and endeavours to maintain a family, the success of the venture will depend in large measure on the extent to which he is no longer immersed in a self-centred struggle to meet his own needs.

The stability of a marriage will depend to a large extent on chance factors and on the extent to which limitations in the capacity of one partner for relationship is balanced by the capacity of the other partner to give.

The arrival of children is a crucial test of the maturity of the individuals, and the stability of the marriage relationship.

Because a child is likely to be affected by the dynamics of the marital interaction, it becomes essential to assess the

1) Rowe. Parents, Children and Adoption, p.160.

degree of mutual emotional satisfaction the partner's derive from their marriage.

If it is evident that there is tension in the marital relationship, attention will have to be given to this, so as to bring this couple back to a healthy relationship.

It is important that: "The worker ... give thoughtful attention to the pattern of dependence and protectiveness that has evolved between the man and woman. Is it such that a child will inject a rivalry situation causing irritations and tensions so great that a harmonious, emotionally stable family life cannot be worked out?" 1)

Kadushin maintains that the factors to be noted with regard to the quality of the marital relationship are amongst others: "Is there mutual participation in decision making; to what extent does each partner accept, comfortably, his sexual identification; what is the degree of mutual sexual satisfaction and lastly, do the partner's accept their allocated roles in the marriage responsibly. Furthermore, Kadushin maintains that: "A happy family starts with a happy marriage". 2)

Marital discord is a primary cause in the development of insecurity, inadequacy and emotional tension. It interferes with satisfying the child's ego needs and works against the development of social skills which is important for the child's good social and personal adjustment.

1) Fredericksen. The Child and his Welfare, p.208.

2) Kadushin. The Child and his Welfare, p.442.

Katz and Thorpe state that: "Marriage is a wonderful goal and a great reward, but it can involve dangers to personality adjustment",¹⁾ and "Marriage demands an adjustment In almost every point of contact between two persons who have never lived before in such close proximity and with such communal interests. Each partner must assure certain obligations if they are to have a satisfactory relationship".²⁾

To determine the quality of the applicant's marriage is by no means a task to be undertaken lightly. When applicants are found whose marriages are unstable it would be the task of the social worker to discuss with this couple the nature of their marriage and where it could possibly be improved.

The applicants would be led to strive for a better adjustment so that they are better able to face the problems of marriage themselves and also enjoy the rewards. It is only in such a marriage that a child can grow up with the basic requisites needed for his education and development.

(e) Attitudes towards and Experience with children

Literature reveals that the key to a good adoption is a love of children. Where there is doubt about the couple's feelings about children, or even an obvious dislike to children, the situation will have to be carefully assessed and then worked through with the clients.

It is thus important for the prospective adoptive client to realize that if they have not had any contact with children,

1) Katz and Thorpe. Understanding People In Distress, p.54.

2) Ibid, p.55.

or even know any, it will be more difficult for them to know whether they will enjoy having them 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

During the service offered by social work it is thus desirable that the applicant's experience with children be determined. If these applicants have had satisfactory experiences they are likely to have developed positive patterns of identification with good parents.

Negative experiences would then not only imply the absence of such patterns of identification, but would possibly lead to problems developing in the parent-child relationship should they too become parents.

It remains the task of the social worker to gain this background information as it affects the enactment of the parental role.

Society is made up of many peoples, each displaying another nature. It is thus possible that there would be some who do not particularly like children. Although this is frowned upon by society, these people will need aid in order to come to terms with themselves in this society.

Couples who have had little or no experience with children should be encouraged to make contact with children, to see them in all their moods, and if possible, participate in their care.

It is only through their involvement with children that this couple will be able to judge if they too are prepared to accept a child and care for him.

(f) Motivation with regard to adoption

According to Kadushin: "One important dimension of motivation is the extent to which the applicant has insight - conscious recognition of his motivations. 'Undesirable' motivation of which the applicant has some awareness is subject to modification and change...".¹⁾

In determining the motives for the adoption, the worker would also note specifically any undesirable motives for example, playmate for an only child; mend a shaky marriage - or to replace a lost child amongst others.²⁾

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, it is important for the social worker to discuss in detail with the couple their motives for wanting a child. If the reasons are undesirable and unacceptable, it would be required of the worker to explain to the applicants in what way their motives are found to be unacceptable as well as what they can do about it.

The worker would attempt to point out to the couple that a child enriches family life, that there should be the desire in both, to love and receive love; and that the acceptance of a child involves giving him all that which will be needed for his full development physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

5. Image of the Rejected Applicant(a) Own Image

The couple who have already been denied a child by nature, now turn to find themselves rejected by an agency as being un-

1) Kadushin. Child Welfare Services, p.443.

2) Refer. Tod, R. (Ed.) Social Work in Adoption, London, Longman, 1971, p.48.

suitable to adopt a child.

What do these couples experience when turned away - increased frustration, hopelessness, guilt, bitterness? Whatever, it could probably be assumed that this rejection by society will have a marked influence on a couple and leave them feeling incapable, self-accusing and inadequate and worthless.

Couples who have already experienced difficulties in the adjustment to, for example, sterility, are now faced with the additional fact to which they have to adjust, viz, to their limited capacity for parenthood as has been determined by society.

Many individuals who are mature and have insight would probably be better able to accept the rejection and although not feel "good" about it, will be able to adjust to the situation and find other means of directing their interests.

Couples who, however, are less mature might very well ascribe their rejection to others - and so place the blame on society who does not find them acceptable.

In order for social work to assist these individuals it would be of value to keep in mind that people act the way they do because of their efforts to obtain basic satisfaction. That man is compelled, consciously or unconsciously, to search ceaselessly for the satisfaction of all his needs - spiritual, physical and emotional.

Here then are presented a couple who through their rejection are unable to have found satisfaction for that which they sought.

It follows that the social worker is faced with a situation where these individuals are in dire need of help. Are these rejected applicants to be turned away and left to sort out their own muddled and bewildered selves?

(b) Image to the Public

Generally speaking it is found that whenever there is a discrepancy between the expectation of the community and the individual's participant's performance in enacting a social role, a social problem exists.

The couple who are unable to have a child of their own - and are rejected by the social agency find themselves almost alien in the community of which they are a part. They are open to the criticism, condemnation of society and generally frowned upon. Society when not speculating about why they have not any children of their own - or why they have not been able to adopt one, the couple are often overwhelmed with pity - which in itself may be even worse.

The rejected applicants who already have derogatory feelings about themselves now have to face the society in which they live with one or other defence mechanism in order to protect themselves.

Because this couple cannot be regarded as an isolated unit it is important to bear in mind that the outside world is continually breaking into it and that there is a reciprocating influence.

No treatment of this couple could be undertaken without the social worker considering the stresses and strains imposed on the couple continually from without.

It would be the task of the social worker to assist this individual to again adapt himself satisfactorily to the demands of everyday life. Although his basic needs have not been fulfilled in all respects, his behaviour and attitude be such that he again fits in, and is accepted by the society in which he lives.

6. Guilt and Feelings of Inadequacy

The worker has to do here with a person who feels deeply humiliated and ashamed about the problem with which he is confronted. It is of essential importance that the worker understands the person's feelings, his humiliation and his anxiety about his status which all reinforce his feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

Many couples probably have guilt feelings about their inability to have a child, and these feelings of guilt are often increased when the couple unconsciously feel their childlessness is a judgement on them.

Guilt feelings, if not correctly handled in the initial stages through counselling and interpretation, may form the basis for further neurotic behaviour which in turn may lead to more serious mental disturbances.

When a rejected applicant feels inadequate the likelihood is strong that he may become more dependent. With the feelings of guilt that this person already has, and the developing feeling of being inadequate and worthless, he soon becomes a further problem to himself and to those around him.

Therefore, if we are to strengthen individuals at this particular time, when commonly even an adequate person may

feel a bit helpless, it is important that the negative feelings about the experience be dissipated so that the positive ones may emerge.

Only as the individual feels more secure, has little resentment, and maintains and regains his self-respect, will he be able to make use of the help offered by the social worker.

7. Personality Deviations with regard to Parenthood

There are several personality patterns and characteristics of potential parents which would be conducive to the development of insecurity, inferiority and guilt in the child.

There is firstly the parent who is regarded as being perfectionistic and whom the child will have difficulties in pleasing. The vacillating parent who emotionally swings from one extreme to the other. The nagging parent who is persistently finding fault with the child, and closely allied is the stubborn one who insists that everything that the child does is wrong.

A demanding parent may exercise such pressure on the child to achieve goals beyond his abilities and potential that the child begins to develop a sense of worthlessness as he is not able to cope with what is expected of him. On the other extreme is the parent who is so neglectful that he fails to notice or spend any time with the child who is then largely left to his own devices.

It has been determined that the over protective parent whose extremes of caution have the result of instilling fear

into the child which he may very well carry with him for the rest of his life. Lastly there is the unforgiving parent who never permits the child to forget any of his misdeeds and is continually reminding the child of them.

It must be obvious that the impact of such parental attitudes and reaction patterns will have a tremendous effect on a child's developing ego.

Should applicants have been rejected because of one or even more of these personality traits, which have been taken to the extreme, it is again the task of the social worker to interpret to those applicants that a child living in a home environment clouded by a number of these personality deviations, is almost certain to show some personality scar which will in all probability manifest in one form of personal or social maladjustment or another.

Where interpretation is found to be not enough to help these rejected applicants to overcome minor personality traits which hinder their functioning, and which could develop into more serious debilitating ones, and where serious personality deviations are present, the applicant should be referred to that discipline trained to assist this person to either overcome his difficulty or to make a satisfactory adjustment to it and thereby increase his social functioning. The client cannot just be turned away without the help which is his right.

8. Community and Family Attitudes

Although there is a trend today toward greater public acceptance of adoption, the applicant who is rejected would ap=

pear to receive little comfort from the community at large. This is possibly due to the fact that adoption itself still has a residual of derogatory community attitudes. When applicants, after much hesitation, do apply for a child and are rejected, they may feel that they have let society down again - a society which expects its members to have children.

Family attitudes too, play a vital role as the addition of a grandchild is eagerly awaited. When he does not arrive, naturally or through adoption, there is great disappointment and the relationships between the various family members may even become strained. This in turn will in all probability effect the couple even more and intensify the feelings which they might already have about themselves.

Once more the social worker has the important task of drawing the community as well as the family of the couple into the treatment programme. Other individuals can be regarded, if used correctly, as valuable assets in the treatment process. Each individual will have to know exactly what his role is, what is required of him, and exactly what he can contribute towards helping the rejected applicant regain his self-esteem and again feel a worthy member of society.

The involvement of the community and all the members therein who can make a contribution should be drawn into the helping process. Here one thinks of such people as the minister, the doctor, the teacher, amongst others.

9. Acceptance of the Situation

When all the above have been thoroughly discussed with the rejected applicants tactfully and with empathy, there

comes the realisation that this couple have a minimal chance of ever becoming adoptive parents.

It is now the task of the social worker to discuss honestly with the applicants that in spite of their desire for parenthood, they will have to find some other way to fill the longing in their hearts. That they should rather now turn their attention to other alternatives which might better suit their needs.

The social worker will have to explain to the couple that at first it will not be easy for them to talk about their disappointment and what it means to them. But that gradually the couple should be able to share their hurt and then again plan - in another direction for their future.¹⁾ Rowe states further that: "Even if these alternatives do not seem so satisfying it does not mean they are not worth considering. It's foolish to say that because one can't have exactly what one wanted then one won't have anything at all".²⁾

The social worker will have to bear in mind that the very soul of the client has been wounded, and that service to him will have to be given with extreme tact, diplomacy, empathy and with the knowledge that here is a person who is in need.

D. SUMMARY

In this chapter the process of social work has been described with regard to the rejected applicant in adoption. Although the study, diagnosis and treatment have been separated, the social worker will know that the three steps are

1) Refer. Rowe. Yours by Choice, p.46.

2) Ibid, p.49.

interwoven and treatment, for example, may start during the first interview.

It has become evident in the social work process described above that here social work has to do with a client with perhaps a myriad number of problems, some of which he may not even have been aware of.

Many aspects which have been essential for assessment according to agency standards, have brought to light unsuitability. Of these factors such as age, chronic, physical and mental illnesses, overt personality deviations, cannot be readily changed and these individuals will have to be helped to gain insight into their difficulties.

Where the social worker comes across problems facing the clients which bar them from adoption, and which can be corrected, it is his duty to help these individuals right the wrong and thereby make them more worthy individuals who could later again apply to adopt a child with the knowledge that their chances are better this time.

In the following chapter the researcher looks back on the whole study and gives guidelines which could be useful to the social worker who is confronted with the rejected applicant and realizes his responsibility towards him.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt has been made to determine who the rejected applicant is in adoption, and what service social work can offer to these persons who are in need of assistance.

The task of the social worker in the adoption field has been, traditionally, the finding of a home for every child who is eligible for adoption. This has meant evaluating the capacity of applicants for parenthood, and consequently often determining that some applicants are unsuitable to adopt a child.

In the first chapter definitions have been given in order that the reader will have some clarity about the concepts as well as observe how adoption fits into the social work field and the role that the agency plays.

Next a brief review is given of the history of adoption from the earliest times up to what we have today. With regard to the legal requirements of adoption, the social worker should carry a continuing realisation of her responsibility for conformity to the legal requirements which are set up primarily as safeguards for the child, but also serve as protective measures for the adoptive parents. Where those in the social work field become aware of irregularities, it is their duty to report such matters immediately to the proper authorities.

The following chapter discusses the concept of parenthood in general and then in more detail. These are the couples who discover that they are unable to have children

of their own, with the frustration, guilt and feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy which ensues. Gradually, the couple do come to the realisation that although not being able to have own children, they can adopt.

It is mostly at this stage that the applicants come into contact with a welfare agency who is now faced with the responsibility of preparation, preliminary screening, evaluation and selection. The decision in adoption is a weighty one. Minimum standards which have been set up for determining a good home should not be regarded as complete and absolute, but rather as a guide in evaluation and selection.

A home and parents may fulfill all the prerequisite requirements "on the list", and yet may lack other desirable features, it is often the small things in a home which are of greater importance than those listed as standard. Fredericksen points out that agencies have set up rather discretionary requirements as to the children they regard as adoptable, and the perspective parents they will consider. As a result of agency requirements, many applicants are rejected. Many persons who could have provided good homes for certain children are not considered.¹⁾

In the field of social work, the social worker is often confronted with the placement of children with special needs. Finding a home for a less desirable child is often more difficult, and it may be necessary to place this child in a home, which according to mere exact standards is less desirable.

1) Refer. Fredericksen. The Child and His Welfare, p.206.

According to the article "Perspectives on Adoption Research" the "Placement of children with special needs is of considerable importance to adoptive practice. Documentation of characteristics of families able to accept such children contributes to the practitioner's ability to identify these families".¹⁾

Indications are thus that the range of parents who can be approved of should be increased. Parents whose age is regarded as unsuitable for the placement of an infant, may be found to be of an appropriate age for an older child. Parents with special handicaps themselves are probably more sensitive to the special needs of the handicapped child.

Fredericksen²⁾ writes that every placement is a special problem, because each child has some or other special need which requires a specific adoptive home.

Ideally in the matching of child and adoptive parents, constitutional types, appearance and temperaments would be identical. In practice a general similarity is strived at.

The judgement demanded of social workers in adoption is unique because it involves a family diagnosis. It should be important that the worker notes and tries to understand the interplay of relationships within the family. This of course implies a knowledge of common family patterns.

It seems important though, that the agency and the social worker be flexible about their judgements of standards,

1) Refer. Perspectives in Adoption Research, p.109.

2) Refer. Fredericksen. The Child and His Welfare, p.206.

and should be able to see beyond fixed requirements such as age, income, education and the like. Each case must be judged on merit rather than on fixed preconceived ideas.

Just as social workers cannot be expected to find perfect homes for they are non-existent, as are perfect parents, there will obviously be couples who are not considered suitable to adopt a child. Whatever the reason the social worker has a definite role and task with regard to this rejected applicant.

In chapter five the specific role which social work has to play is discussed. Social work being based on certain premises cannot ignore that this person is in need of help, and in the ensuing discussion of the goals and functions of social work the task of the social worker becomes a reality.

Hereon follows the social work process as applied to this specific rejected applicant. His whole problem is studied and then evaluated and diagnosed as far as social work is concerned. Then follows an intensive treatment programme in which numerous aspects have to be discussed with the rejected applicant until he can again feel comfortable within himself and towards others. The social worker bears in mind that this rejection has in all probability been a tremendous shock to the individual, and it would take time to accept the situation in which he now finds himself.

From the above it has become clear that although a couple have been rejected by an agency as being unsuitable to adopt a child, this does not mean that they may never in the future adopt a child.

If, however, attention is given to these rejected clients, through the social work process, then surely many would be able to improve themselves and with the help of the social worker, correct many of the aspects which have condemned them.

Where the social worker is concerned about the rejected applicant it would seem that the following points could be of value in the approach to the problem of the rejected applicant.

1. Agency requirements, although having to maintain a certain set standard should be flexible without lowering the standard.
2. Rejected applicants should not simply be told of their unsuitability and then set aside, instead, as has been indicated in this study, they should be considered valuable clients of the agency.
3. Social workers must realise that these rejected applicants are individuals with problems, which they were often not even aware of previously. Now that their "deficiencies" have been brought into the open, it is cruel to leave them to sort out the problems themselves.
4. Where rejected applicants are to receive social work aid it would seem more appropriate that this should be done by the agency and the adoptive worker with whom they have already built up a relationship - and who is skilled at handling prospective adoptive parents - rejected or not.
5. The literature studied indicates a notable lack of uniformity in the investigation of prospective adoptive parents. It would seem that attention should be given in setting up uniform standards for selection.
6. Where the difficulties which face the rejected applicants are surmountable, the couple should be given an indication that their problems can be solved or improved with the

aid of the social worker, and there is little doubt that those really desiring to adopt a child will do all in their power to improve their situation.

7. As indicated previously the range of parents who can be approved of, should be increased, also
8. Children with special handicaps are likely to make an easier adjustment with parents who themselves have made satisfactory adjustments to their own disabilities, and
9. Likewise older couples are probably better able to adopt an older child than an infant.
10. Where adoption seems inadvisable at all levels the social worker should discuss with the applicant the possibility of having a foster child for a short period. Although not their own, and a temporary measure, the satisfaction of helping to care for a child can mean much to them.
11. The possibilities of taking children into their home during the holiday, can be very satisfactory and rewarding to both the couple and the child. Many children in children's homes crave to stay in a home, even if only for the vacation.
12. The rejected applicants could if possible, be drawn into voluntary work in a children's home in their city or town. Once actively involved in the activities of the children's home their own frustrations and feelings of inadequacy can be overcome to a certain extent.
13. Rejected applicants would surely benefit from group work, and through the group work process come to gain more insight into their position and realise they are not alone and unwanted.
14. Greater effort should be made to draw these individuals into community services, the improvement, for example,

of general standards for all children. Community service of this kind can bring great reward and satisfaction.

The researcher notes that this being chiefly a literary study, the practical aspects of this important subject have to a large extent been left untouched. This of course would serve as an interesting and rewarding research project and it is hoped that in the future others will be conscientiously stimulated to action concerning applicants who are considered unsuitable to adopt a child.

If social workers keep the basic premises in mind as well as the goals and functions of their profession, then the questions can be asked: Why are these rejected applicants being disregarded? Are these individuals not in need of the help of the social worker? Is social work to aid only those persons suitable to adopt a child, and who in principle are not really regarded as clients - but deny help to those who are rejected and so obviously need attention?

If we in the profession of social work fail to regard the rejected applicant as worthy of our attention, then, to a certain extent we have failed our task as social workers.

This human being, created by God in His Image, has an intrinsic value, and if we practice social work according to christian principles then we cannot fail to see the importance of the rejected applicants, and turn our attention more actively to them than has probably been the case in the past.

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