

PSYCHOLOGY

Housewives in Mental Health

Housewives trained as therapists and child development counselors in experimental programs may help meet community needs for mental health workers.

By JUDITH VIORST

► EIGHT WOMEN who completed their first semester of training in part two of a unique experiment to determine whether mature, educated housewives can help relieve the manpower shortage in the field of community mental health have begun their second semester of the program.

The study, financed by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., juxtaposes two crucial but seemingly unrelated social problems—the growing need for therapists and counselors, and the growing desire of wives and mothers to use their brains and energies outside the home.

Perhaps, postulates Dr. Margaret Rioch, a research psychologist with the Washington School of Psychiatry, one problem can be answered in terms of the other.

She is currently testing this hypothesis as training director of a two-year pilot project at Children's Hospital, Washington, D. C.

The eight women selected for the project are being trained to serve in well-baby clinics as counselors in child development. This is a new category of mental health worker whose role is to disseminate information on child-rearing practices and to offer guidance to parents of pre-schoolers.

A mother bringing her three-year-old boy to the clinic for a periodic check-up may stop to ask the counselor about temper tantrums or toilet training, or why he insists on rising at 4 a.m. The counselor may begin by recommending some small change in the routine, later probing more deeply if attitudes, not actions, appear to be at fault.

An important part of the counseling service will be referral—telling a frightened or bewildered mother where she can turn for help when her child has speech difficulties, or shows the tragic signs of retardation.

Will Training Succeed?

Will two years of part-time training successfully equip these women—all presently nonprofessionals—to do such tasks? Dr. Rioch is diffident and frankly experimental.

"We don't really know," she said, "exactly what they'll be able to do at the end of this program."

During the first semester, which ran from February to June, the trainees put in a busy 20 hours of course work, case work, seminars and individual supervision each week.

They took classes in essential subjects like child and personality development, and heard a variety of lectures by experts in related fields.

They worked a half day each week in the District's well-baby clinics, slowly acquainting mothers with the existence of such creatures as child development counselors, and chatting with them informally in waiting rooms.

They analyzed their case work at group meetings and in private sessions with a staff psychologist or social worker.

The trainees did not lounge indolently in the sun during vacation. Accompanying them on the deck chair was Erik Erikson's "Childhood and Society" or Selma Fraiberg's "The Magic Years," required reading for the summer months.

In September the women spent a full day each week at the clinic, and had the opportunity to train in another setting, such as a nursery school, where mothers and young children convene. The rest of their schedule is basically the same.

"After that," said Dr. Rioch, "we don't have a rigid plan. We want to remain flexible and see just what is needed."

The Washington project is co-sponsored by the Research Foundation at Children's Hospital and by the D. C. Department of Public Health. Project directors are Dr. Reginald Lourie, chief of the department of

psychiatry at the hospital, and Dr. Samuel Shwartz, chief of the D. C. Bureau of Maternal Child Health.

The eight trainees were selected from 100 women in the Washington area who responded to a call for housewives of about 40 years of age with children of at least school age.

In screening the applicants, the interviewers sought women who displayed good general intelligence, perceptiveness, integrity and emotional maturity. A degree was not required and, as it turned out, three of the final candidates were not college educated.

Program for Mothers

Because the program is designed specifically for mothers, it is geared to the academic year, allowing time off for school holidays and summer vacations. Each trainee has been allotted \$1,000 a year to help pay baby sitters and other household expenses.

The women have been clearly told that their training is experimental, with no guarantee whatsoever of employment at the end of the line. They tend to be rather optimistic about jobs, however, because they are all well-acquainted with the impressive success stories of Dr. Rioch's first group of eight women, who completed a similar program two years ago.

In this experiment, funded by and conducted at NIMH from 1960 to 1962, mature,



Fremont Davis

GUIDANCE FOR MOTHER—Child-development counselors, like the woman shown in this posed picture, could be recruited from intelligent, fortyish housewives trained to provide information and guidance to mothers of pre-school children in well-baby clinics.

married women with children were trained in the special techniques of short-term psychotherapy. This form of treatment generally consists of a face-to-face session once a week, and does not require such specialized skills as the administering of shock treatment or psychological tests.

The project was not intended to be "a salvage operation for neurotic middle-aged ladies," Dr. Rioch stated firmly, "but rather the appropriate deployment of people who have performed successfully in one phase of life and who are now passing to another."

Emphasis on Therapy

The NIMH program, with its lectures, seminars, reading assignments and in-service training, resembled the one at Children's Hospital. But emphasis in this first experiment was on therapy rather than prevention, and on adolescents and adults rather than children.

Tape-recorded cases and one-way viewing screens enabled the trainees to observe experienced therapists at work. And soon after the program got underway, the women began conducting their own therapeutic interviews under expert supervision.

Today every one of these women is employed as a mental health counselor, doing individual or group therapy at community clinics, state hospitals, high schools or colleges.

As was intended, they continue to work under the supervision of a psychiatrist. But all have branched out and are performing a far wider range of functions than they were originally trained to do.

Since the summer of 1962, a group at

the University of Maryland, College Park, supported by an NIMH grant, has been evaluating Dr. Rioch's first program. So far, interviews with the women's colleagues and supervisors have disclosed virtually unanimous agreement on the fine quality of their work.

But chief investigator Dr. Stuart Golann hesitates to jump from these findings to the conclusion that the Rioch program may have broad national applications.

"Remember," he said, "these women were not randomly selected from the aisles of the A&P."

He questioned whether a small town could find women of this caliber, and supervisors of the high quality available in the Washington area. He wondered whether there would be employment locally for such women, even if they could be recruited and trained.

Dr. Rioch acknowledges these problems but believes that the larger cities and even small university towns could recruit, equip and utilize women for mental health work. She has received several letters expressing interest in setting up a similar project elsewhere, and hopes others will try it.

The key question in her mind is whether the professional community would be willing to accept a large infusion of mental health workers with graying hair and disappearing waistlines who have put in a fraction of the time required to produce a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist.

The first eight have made it.

If others succeed, a serious manpower shortage could be alleviated by the use of talented women ready and eager to serve their community.

• Science News Letter, 86:234 October 10, 1964

GENERAL SCIENCE

Strauss Heads Scientists

► DR. LEWIS STRAUSS, ex-chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, heads a Task Force on Science, Space and the Atom formed by the Republican National Committee to aid Sen. Barry Goldwater in his campaign for the presidency.

In a letter sent to several scientists asking that they join the Task Force, Sen. Goldwater said that the group is intended to inform "myself personally, and the entire American electorate" of facts that are "far more enduring than mere ammunition for partisan campaigning."

Dr. Glen Campbell, staff coordinator of task forces for the GOP Committee, said that this and the other task forces that have been formed are very different from the endorsing-and-campaigning groups such as Businessmen for Johnson.

Other members of the science task force are: Dr. Edward Teller, a key figure in the development of the atomic bomb, and now associate director of the University of California's Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Berkeley.

Gen. Arthur Trudeau (Ret.), U.S. Army chief of research and development from 1958 through 1962, currently president of

Gulf Research and Development Corporation.

Gen. James H. Doolittle (Ret.), former member of the U.S. Air Force Science Advisory Board and of the President's Science Advisory Committee, now a director of several companies including Thompson Ramo Wooldridge.

Dr. Williard F. Libby, director of the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics, University of California at Los Angeles, and 1960 winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Dr. Shields Warren, a Harvard medical professor and Atomic Energy Commission consultant.

The other Republican task forces include a defense group, called a "Task Force on Peace and Preparedness," a "Fiscal Monetary and Economic Policy" task force, and a foreign policy group for the "Cause of Peace and Freedom," headed by former Vice President Richard Nixon.

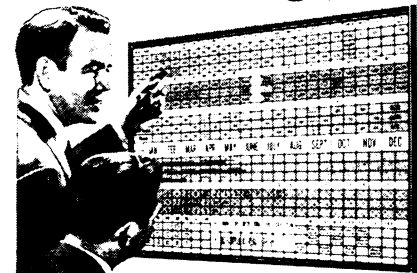
Two more task forces, sub-groups to the foreign policy organization, will be created soon on the topics of Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, and Cuba.

• Science News Letter, 86:235 October 10, 1964

Doctors Trim 2 Inches Off Flabby Waists!

German doctors at the famous Max-Planck Institute have discovered an instant-workout method that can reduce waistlines in 30 days. Called "Isometric Contractions," one 60-second daily workout can reduce waistline fast. 10 simple exercises can put the whole family in shape fast. No sweat, strain or tiring repetitions. Acclaimed internationally by physiologists, coaches, athletes. Results guaranteed. Free, illustrated information. Write AWARD-WINNING ISOMETRICS, Minute Home-Gym, Inc., Dept. B, 37 Centuck Station, Yonkers, N. Y. 10710.

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