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a study of Migrancy and Reasons for
Resignations of Professional Social Workers

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A STUDY OF MIGRANCY
AND REASONS FOR RESIGNATIONS
OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree

Dr. Gwen Andrew
Social Work 895
Spring 1966
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Abstract

Forty seven professionally trained social workers who are now employed or who were formerly employed at state psychiatric facilities were asked by means of a questionnaire to give their reasons for resigning from these agencies, or why they would consider resigning. Data suggest that salary and promotion were the primary reasons, followed in importance by dissatisfaction with administration. Males were more concerned with salary and promotion than females, and as expected, females more often had personal reasons for resigning. Older workers were less influenced by salary and promotion than younger ones.

A high degree of migrancy was hypothesized for professional workers. There was a ratio of 2.72 years per position for males and 3.07 years per position for females.

A more accurate study of reasons for resignations could be done by individual interviews rather than a brief questionnaire.

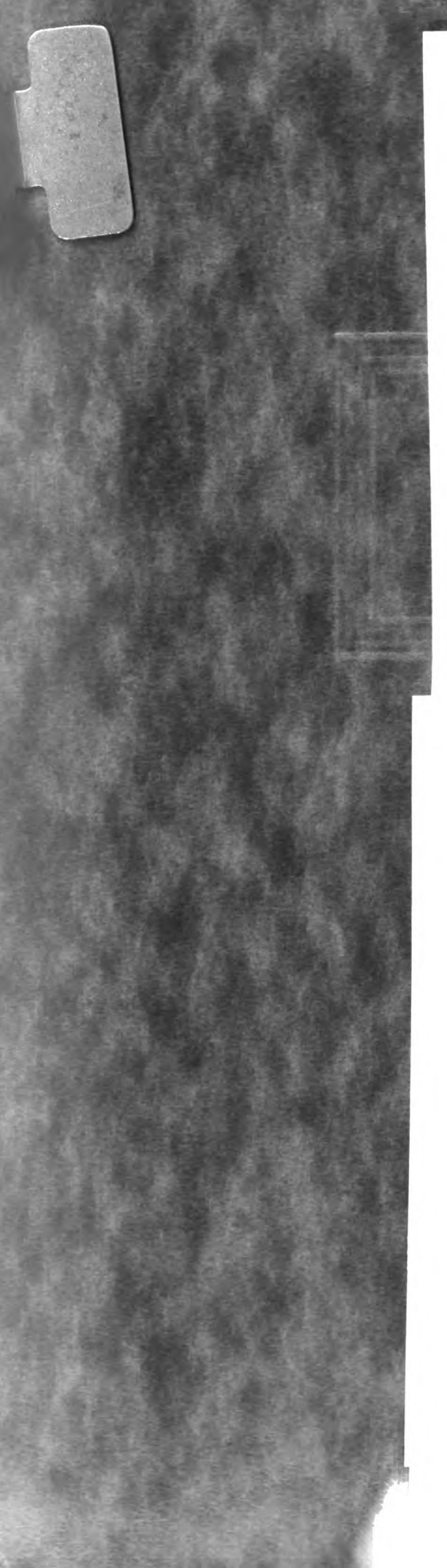


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Background

There is a new migrant worker on the American scene: not the sharecropper or the carnival trouper, but the social worker who settles briefly in one clinic and then goes to another where the pastures seem, if not greener, at least greener backed.¹ As new clinics open, they offer appointments with more prestige, higher salaries, more liberal fringe benefits, shorter hours, or more professional satisfaction.

Dr. Arnold M. Kallen points out in the December 1965 New Jersey District Branch Newsletter that this search for personal satisfaction leads to instability in the clinic. It is not unusual for a client to have several changes of workers during his contact with an agency. Although we advocate continuity of treatment, by migrancy we practice the opposite.

It is difficult for a client to repeat his life history to a new worker. It is not enough for a new therapist to read the record. He must sense for himself how the client says things and reacts to questions. But for the client, this is a wretched repetition of an old story, and a repeated and traumatic interruption of what is supposed to be a healthy and constructive relationship.

1. "The Migrant Professional", Hospital and Community Psychiatry, March 1966.

Relationship.

of what is supposed to be a healthy and constructive old story, and a repeated and dramatic interruption But for the client, this is a wretched repetition of an self how the client says things and reacts to questions. therapist to read the record. He must sense for him- history to a new worker. It is not enough for a new It is difficult for a client to repeat his life treatment, by therapy he practices the opposite. with an agency. Although we advocate continuity of have several changes of workers during his contact in the clinic. It is not unusual for a client to reason for personal satisfaction leads to instability 1966 New Jersey District Branch Newsletter that this Dr. Arnold M. Fisher points out in the December fifth, another point, or more professional satisfaction. practice, higher salaries, more liberal fringe bene- new all sorts of, lack of appointments with more been, it has seemed, at least greener pastures. I as clinic and then move to another where the pastures but the social worker who settles briefly in one sooner: not the short-term at the carnival proper, the American

One solution is to keep raising salaries. In a study by graduate students in New York 78% of 272 fully trained psychiatric social workers beleived that salary was the greatest motivating force contributing to job changing in the field of social work.² William B. Tollen³ found that for 740 fully trained social workers the most frequently given of a choice of 19 reasons for resignations were salary and better jobs. 78% of the better jobs also involved a raise in salary. Of the 209 fully trained male resignees, better job, salary, advancement, moving and supervision were the five leading basic reasons reported in order of descending frequency. Better job, moving, supervision, maternity, and program policies were the five leading reasons for resignations reported by the 531 fully trained female resignees.

The median salary for new graduates has risen from \$6,000 in 1963 to \$6,500 in 1965, an 18 percent increase over the past five years.⁴ But the current

2. "Determinants for Job Changing - A Pilot Study", group thesis for the M.S.W. degree at the New York School of Social Work, June 1957.

3. Study of Staff Losses in Child Welfare and Family Service Agencies, U. S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Children's Bureau, 1960.

4. Deborah Golden, "Selected Characteristics of NASW Members: The Third Study", Personnel Information, NASW, March 1966. Volume 9 Number 2.

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median for recent graduates is \$1,700 below the \$8,200 average salary offered in business administration and industrial management to persons without previous experience who have completed a master's degree.⁵

Another solution may be to reduce the time required for treatment by the use of new treatment methods as advocated by Parad and others.⁶ Other solutions offered as means of retaining staff and reducing turnover are the team approach⁷, a differential use of staff⁸ and more imaginative use of professionally trained staff.⁹ Supervision and administrative practices appear to be frequent causes of worker dissatisfaction.¹⁰

5. Salary Survey, Report No. 1, Bethlehem, Pa.: College Placement Council, January 1966.

6. Howard J. Parad, Editor, Crisis Intervention, Family Service Association of America, New York: FASA, 1965.

7. David G. Gil, "Social Work Teams", Child Welfare, October 1965.

8. Mary R. Baker, "Approaches to a Differential Use of Staff", Social Casework, April 1966.

9. Gertrude Leyendecker "A Comprehensive Staff Development Program", Social Casework, December 1965.

10. Virginia S. Ferguson, "Personnel Policies and Practices", Encyclopedia of Social Work, New York: National Association of Social Workers, 1965.

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The purpose of the study was to explore the degree to which the condition of the migrant social worker exists and the reasons for the professional migrancy. It is believed that there are several factors that influence social workers to change positions frequently. Some employees leave an agency for non-job related purposes, i.e., to have a baby or to go with a husband who is leaving the area. But of those who left or who plan to leave for the purpose of taking another position, it was expected that salaries in the new position or the position an employee was contemplating would be higher generally than in the present position, and that the raise in salary would be a principal reason for the change. Other reasons expected were potential for promotion, administrative practices, unpleasant physical surroundings, too great or too little degree of pathology of clients, treatment methods and goals incompatible with institutional administration, and desire to move to another geographical area.

A social worker is defined as a worker who has obtained a master's of social work degree. Agency is defined as an agency which employs social workers to work with clients. The agencies in this study are

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the Psychiatric Clinic at Jackson State Prison, the West Shore Mental Health Clinic, and the Social Service Department of the Ypsilanti State Hospital. Clients are the people served by these agencies.

The fundamental hypothesis is that salary is a primary, but not the only reason for social workers' frequent change of positions.

Method

Data were obtained by means of a questionnaire which contained identifying information: age, sex, year of M.S.W., number of positions since M.S.W., and reasons for leaving. Of the thirteen choices of reasons, respondents were requested to rank the first five in order of importance, 1 being the most important.

The thirteen reasons were categorized into three groups as follows:

1. PROMOTION - SALARY

To earn a higher salary (without a significant change in status or responsibility).

Potential for promotion in another agency.

Promotion (offer of a better position in another agency).

2. ADMINISTRATION

Dissatisfaction with immediate supervisor.

Dissatisfaction with administration.

Social work treatment methods and goals incompatible with those of institutional administration.

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Method

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reasons, respondents were requested to rank the first
five in order of importance, 1 being the most important.
The fifteen reasons were categorized into three
groups as follows:

1. PROMOTION - SALARY

To earn a higher salary (without a significant
change in status or responsibility).
Potential for promotion in another agency.
Promotion (offer of a better position in
another agency).

2. ADMINISTRATION

Dissatisfaction with immediate supervisor.
Dissatisfaction with administration.
Social work treatment methods and goals
incompatible with those of institutional
administration.

3. PERSONAL

Unpleasant physical surroundings.

Dissatisfaction with fellow workers.

Move to more desirable geographical location.

Personal reasons (baby, husband has new job).

Pathology in clients deeper than desired.

Pathology in clients not deep enough.

Other.

Each person's reasons were tallied by rank to indicate both frequency of choice of reason and importance of each reason relative to all others.

A frequency table of this type was constructed for each sex, each agency, each age group, and for the total group.

One analysis concentrated on reasons ranked as most important. Then all reasons ranked as first and second were considered together. Certain additional analyses of particular reasons by rank were also made. Following this all reasons ranked as first and second were considered in terms of sex and age.

Results

Results of these analyses are shown in Tables I and II which give comparisons tested for significance by χ^2 .

3. PERSONAL

Unpleasant physical surroundings.
Dissatisfaction with fellow workers.
Move to more desirable geographical location.
Personal reasons (baby, husband has new job).
Fatigue in office deeper than desired.
Fatigue in office not deep enough.
Other.

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Results

Results of these analyses are shown in Tables I and II which give comparisons tested for significance by %.

TABLE I

Results of χ^2 analysis of Primary Reasons for Resignations

First Choice

Type of Comparison	Frequency	χ^2	df	p
All Respondents				
Promotion-Salary	14	1.35	2	>.10
Administration	19			
Personal	13			
Total	<u>46</u>			
Males				
Promotion-Salary	10	5.74	2	<.10 >.05
Administration	10			
Personal	<u>2</u>			
Total	<u>22</u>			
Females				
Promotion-Salary	4	3.24	2	>.10
Administration	9			
Personal	<u>11</u>			
Total	<u>24</u>			
Younger*				
Promotion-Salary	7	.24	2	>.10
Administration	9			
Personal	<u>8</u>			
Total	<u>24</u>			
Older*				
Promotion-Salary	7	1.12	2	>.10
Administration	10			
Personal	<u>6</u>			
Total	<u>23</u>			

* Younger is younger than median age (33).
Older is older than median age.

TABLE I
Results of Analysis of Primary Reasons for Resignations

First Choice

Type of Comparison		Frequency	X	SD	p
All Respondents					
Promotion-Salary	14				
Administration	12				
Personal	12		1.32	2	>.10
Total	38				
Males					
Promotion-Salary	10				
Administration	10				
Personal	2		2.74	2	<.10 >.05
Total	22				
Females					
Promotion-Salary	4				
Administration	2				
Personal	11		3.24	2	>.10
Total	24				
Younger*					
Promotion-Salary	7				
Administration	2				
Personal	3				
Total	24		2.4	2	>.10
Older*					
Promotion-Salary	7				
Administration	10				
Personal	2				
Total	23		1.12	2	>.10

* Younger is younger than median age (33).
Older is older than median age.

TABLE II

Results of χ^2 Analysis of Primary Reasons for Resignations

First and Second

Choice

Type of Comparison	Frequency	χ^2	df	p
All Respondents				
Promotion-Salary	35			
Administration	33			
Personal	20			
Total	88	4.58	2	>.10
(Other - 6)				
Males				
Promotion-Salary	21			
Administration	15			
Personal	8			
Total	44	6.36	2	<.05 >.02
Females				
Promotion-Salary	14			
Administration	18			
Personal	12			
Total	44	1.55	2	>.10
(Other - 4)				
Younger*				
Promotion-Salary	18			
Administration	14			
Personal	13			
Total	45	.94	2	>.10
(Other - 3)				
Older*				
Promotion-Salary	17			
Administration	18			
Personal	8			
Total	43	4.17	2	>.10
(Other - 3)				

* Younger is younger than median age (33). per position.
Older is older than median age.

The 74 males ranged 21 to 64 years in 14 working years

Since the 23 females were 21 to 57 years per position.

TABLE II

Results of Analysis of Primary Reasons for Resignations

First and Second

Choice

Type of Comparison	Frequency	X ²	df	p
All Respondents				
Promotion-Salary	32			
Administration	32			
Personal	30			
Total	94	4.58	2	>.10
(Other - 5)				
Males				
Promotion-Salary	21			
Administration	12			
Personal	8			
Total	41	5.36	2	<.05 >.02
Females				
Promotion-Salary	14			
Administration	18			
Personal	12			
Total	44	1.55	2	>.10
(Other - 4)				
Younger*				
Promotion-Salary	18			
Administration	14			
Personal	12			
Total	44	.94	2	>.10
(Other - 3)				
Older*				
Promotion-Salary	12			
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Personal	8			
Total	43	4.17	2	>.10
(Other - 3)				

* Younger is younger than median age (33).
Older is older than median age.

These data indicate that the only distributions which are significantly discrepant from a random selection are the primary reason for resignation given by males and the first and second choice by older workers.

Males were concerned with salary and promotion. But, as was expected, the older workers were more concerned with factors other than salary and promotion than the younger workers. Females, as expected, more frequently gave personal reasons than did the males.

In response to the individual questions, the sample of 9 from the prison, all of whom were males, gave most frequently as their primary reasons for leaving administrative policies and incompatibility between clinic and institutional goals. However, their most frequently marked response was unpleasant physical surroundings (8 out of 9). Lack of promotional potential was given two first choices and four second choices in this group.

At the out-patient clinic, both males and females were primarily concerned with salary and promotion.

At the state hospital the most frequent primary reason given by males was dissatisfaction with administration but females gave most often as the primary reason incompatibility of treatment methods and goals.

The 23 males responding made 43 moves in 117 working years since the MSW, a ratio of 2.72 years per position. The 24 females changed jobs 42 times in 129 working years since the MSW, a ratio of 3.07 years per position.

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In addition to the frequency data some comments from the questionnaire elaborate the concerns of respondents regarding their feelings about resignation:

"The individual worker has no bargaining power with the administration...individual initiative is stifled...there is no opportunity for any implementation of a worker's ideas, projects..."

"Lack of learning opportunity."

"One of the problems in the field of social work today seems to be the tendency for agencies to become too rigid administratively as they grow and their functions increase. We need to find a way to operate within bureaucratic structure without losing the ability to work creatively with our patients. Also we will have to review our thinking in the area of social work supervision. Experienced, competent workers should not need to be under supervision, but rather, should have available consultation resources as they need them..."

"...family interests mean from time to time... that the period of time worked($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, etc.) and the hours must be flexible. If a given agency is flexible in this regard, the potential for retaining married females... would be increased."

"Other difficulties could relate to a lack of structured and coordinated treatment program for patients, lack of opportunity for patients to have individual psychotherapy, or inability of the social worker to provide such treatment because of restrictions of the setting - policy and number of patients, so that the only services possible are routine, concrete and environmental."

"Other states offer more 'exciting' programs - adopting new ideas without having to undo so much 'old' thinking as manifested in long established institutions."

"...decisions are made in the interest of the institution per se, or staff, instead of the patient."

"There is also for some obvious reasons a mobile pattern until one becomes a supervisor..."

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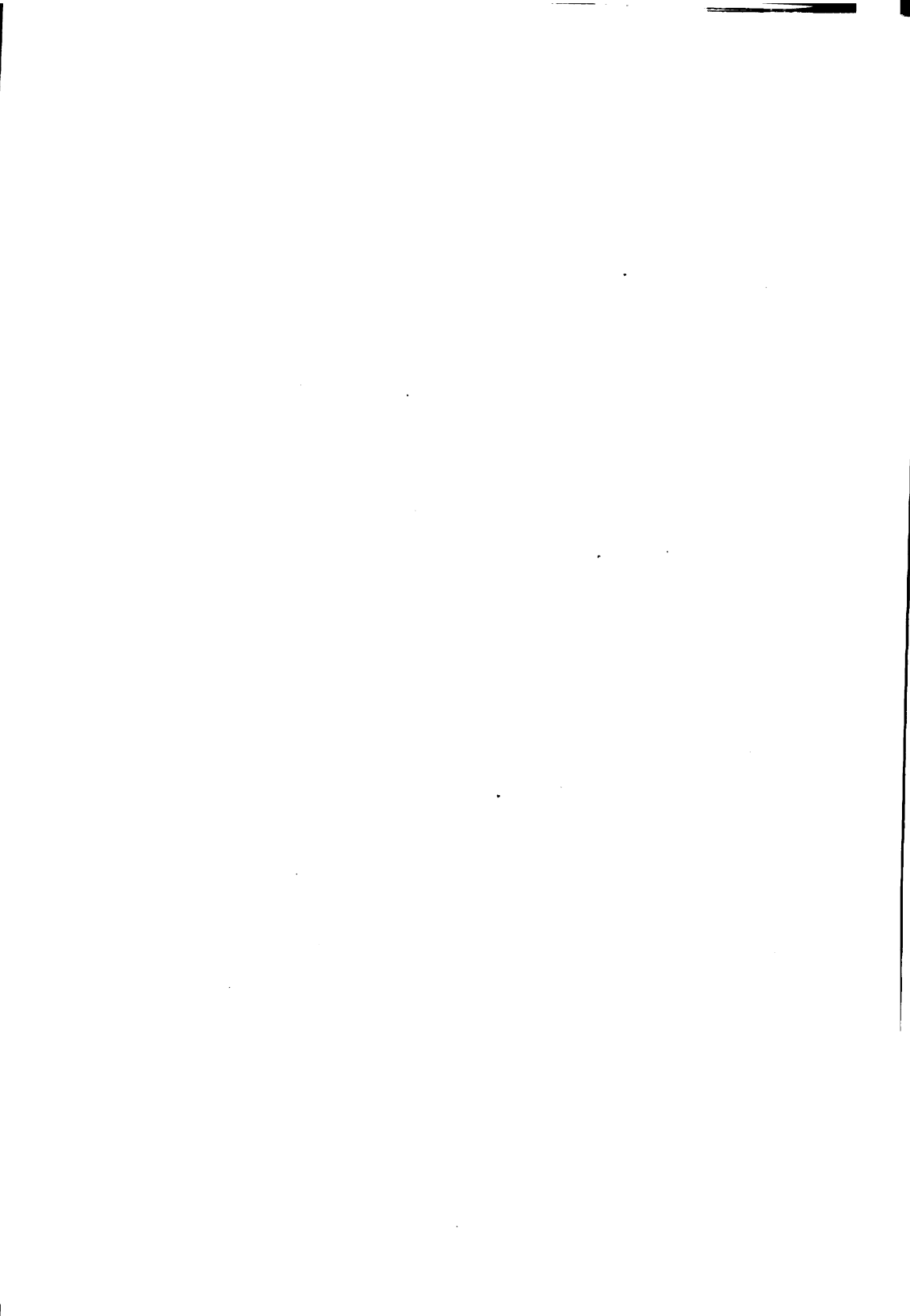
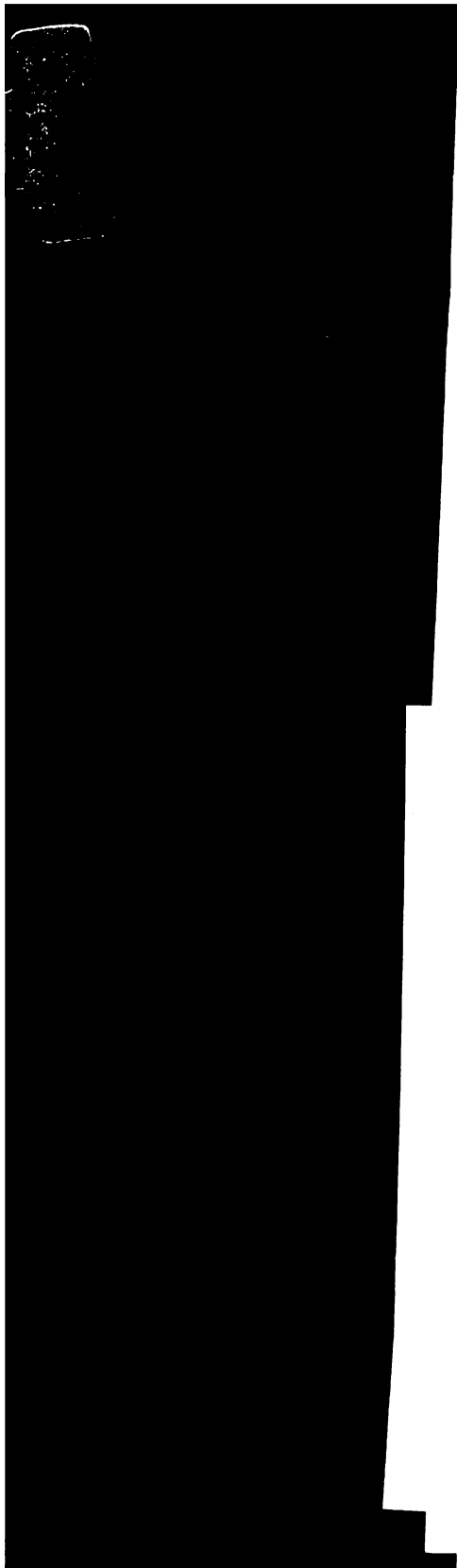
"There is also for some obvious reasons a mobile pattern until one becomes a supervisor..."

Implications

It was hypothesized that salary was the primary reason for the migrant tendencies of professional social workers. This study suggests that while this is a primary reason for 37% of the respondents, there were indications that other factors are at least as important in mobility of workers. Dissatisfaction with administration, and conflicts of social work treatment methods and goals with the methods and goals of institutional administration were of paramount importance.

The comments from the workers seem to stress the significance of the emerging recognition that administrative structure frequently operates to restrict the very creativity and adult responsibility which are requirements for professional people to serve effectively and in contentment. These remarks clearly indicate the professional social worker needs the opportunity to assume a responsible professional role, that they find it stifling to work in a rule bound bureaucracy and that they are concerned by the limited service concepts which often operate in highly structured agencies.

In view of the widely held belief that females have much higher turnover rates than males, it is interesting that the females show a longer period of time on a given job than the males which suggests that this belief may be based more on myth than on fact.



Discussion

The questionnaire might have been worded differently to get more specific accurate answers. A pilot test might have been run to determine the more pertinent questions and the questions could have been worded to yield a greater amount of unconscious material. There is some indication that the questions were not answered as honestly as possible. A larger sample should have been used to insure a greater degree of significance.

It must be recognized that although there are limitations in the method for obtaining data, these limitations appear relatively unimportant in the light of the fact that the results reinforce information gathered by a variety of other methods.

Further research might include comparing a sample of social workers with that of another profession such as psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses. This would determine whether mobility rates are similar in other professions.

Further study might also investigate the question of the particular type of person that is drawn into the field of social work.

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