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The Relation between Large Families, Poverty, Irregularity of Earnings and Crowding. By STEWART JOHNSON.

It has been shown more than once in recent years, by means of statistics, that the poorer classes in this country have larger families than the classes better off, and that the nation in consequence is reproducing itself more largely from the less efficient section of society. This proposition, it may be, is so well founded as to require no further proof. Yet, if it be true, it is of such importance that scarcely too much emphasis can be laid upon it; and it is perhaps excusable to publish statistics that corroborate it, especially when they have the merit of impartiality, having been collected for quite a different purpose. At the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, as at most other voluntary hospitals in London, a statement of the patients' or patient's parents' means, is taken down, with a view to prevent what is called hospital abuse. The facts recorded about each patient at Great Ormond Street were as follows:—Patient's name, address, occupation of father, total family income and whether regular or irregular, number of children dependent, rent, number of rooms, and whether the patient had been to a doctor. The statements so taken down during the year 1908, and the twelvemonth April 1, 1909, to April 1, 1910, were tabulated to show the number of families that were above or below Rowntree's line of primary poverty, in order to ascertain, by a comparison with the conclusions arrived at by Rowntree in York and Booth in London, from what proportion of the general population they were drawn. The result of this investigation was published in the *Journal*.¹

The figures that are now presented are a by-product of those statistics and others collected in 1903 hitherto unpublished.

The number of families concerned in these inquiries was, in 1909-10, 9,851; in 1908, 13,377; and in 1903, 17,139. The total number of out-patients seen in each of these three years was rather over 30,000, representing with their parents and brothers and sisters a population of some 150,000 persons, a town almost double the size of York. These families resided in all parts of Greater London, and their heads belonged in 1909-10 to the various trades in the proportions shown in Table 4. These families, though a fair sample of the total patients attending the hospital, cannot be said to be a random sample of the population. On the contrary they are selected, first by the presence of a sick child in their midst, and secondly by their inability to pay for adequate medical treatment by a private practitioner. Fortunately, however, the method of selection causes a bias against the conclusion which ultimately emerges from the figures. For example a family, with 30s. a week and only one child, is more likely to call in a private doctor, instead of coming to

¹ Vol. lxxiv, part vi (May, 1911).

the hospital, or to be rejected at the hospital if they have failed to do so, than a family with 30s. a week and four children; while a very poor and a very large family is more likely to seek the assistance of the poor law than a voluntary hospital. The effect of these causes is apparent from the table given below:—

TABLE 1.

	Earnings of family per week.	Average number of children in family.
1	Under 20s.	1.83
2	20s. to 24s.	2.68
3	25s. „ 29s.	3.23
4	30s. „ 34s.	3.54
5	35s. and over.....	4.54

From this table it is seen that the higher the wages the greater are the number of children in the family.

It has already been mentioned, however, that the families were originally tabulated so as to show the percentage that were above and below Rowntree's line of primary poverty, and these percentages were then compared with the percentages of children in York, in primary and secondary poverty according to Rowntree. Table 2 shows how this comparison was made and its results:—

TABLE 2.

	Great Ormond Street, 1909-10.	Great Ormond Street, 1908.	York, 1899.
	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Above the line of primary poverty (secondary poverty) }	55	53	53
Below the line of primary poverty (primary poverty) }	45	47	47

Note.—The proportion under Rowntree's line of primary poverty is practically equivalent to the proportion in receipt of less than 24s. a week. Rowntree's method, however, makes allowance for the varying amounts of rent which have to be paid in different parts of London and its neighbourhood.

From the closeness with which the figures compared agree, it is inferred that the patients at Great Ormond Street are drawn approximately from the same classes which Mr. Rowntree found to be in poverty in York. Now, just as comparisons can be made between the "population" attending the hospital and the population of York or London, so similar comparisons can be made between various groups of patients attending at the hospital—such groups, for instance, as those formed by the occupations of the fathers of the patients. According to the varying proportions of those above and those below Rowntree's line of primary poverty, it is possible to tell the relative poverty of each trade. For example, if one trade

has 40 per cent. under the line, and another 60 per cent. under, it is easy to tell which is the poorer of the two. The average number of children in the families in each trade can be calculated from the information recorded, whence it can be ascertained whether the richer or poorer trades have the larger or smaller families. The average number of children in the families of each trade, and the difference of the average in each from the average in all, are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3.

Name of trade.	Average number of children in the family.	Difference of the average in each trade from the average for all trades.
Clerks and dealers	2.60	— 0.36
Domestic service	2.67	— 0.29
Public service	2.70	— 0.26
Food and drink	2.79	— 0.17
Printing and papers	2.82	— 0.14
Sundry trades	2.87	— 0.9
Precious metals	2.94	— 0.02
Locomotion	2.94	— 0.02
Average for all trades	2.96	± 0
Metal workers	3.07	+ 0.11
Builders	3.11	+ 0.15
Labour	3.13	+ 0.17
Woodworkers	3.15	+ 0.19
Dress	3.19	+ 0.23

Note.—These groupings of trades are the same as in the "Industry" series of Booth's *Life and Labour in London*.

Textiles have been included in sundry trades.

But first a correction must be made. A large family is itself a cause of poverty, so that, other things being equal, the larger the families in any particular trade the greater number of families would be found below the line of primary poverty. But, again, it is possible to allow for this. The average number of children in the families of all trades being known, the numbers of those above and those below the line of primary poverty in each trade can be re-calculated, on the supposition that the families in all trades are of the same average size. This can be done approximately without difficulty, since the families have not simply been divided into two classes, one over and one under the line of primary poverty, but have been graded by intervals of 1s. above and below. According to Mr. Rowntree's estimates the minimum cost of a child per week is 2s. 10d.; so that, if a particular trade has 1 child more or less than the average, all that it is necessary to do is to raise or lower the line of primary poverty by 2s. 10d., or, if the difference is less than a whole number, by a proportionate part of 2s. 10d. Thus, a trade whose average family is 0.3 of a child larger or smaller than the average family of all trades, will, by this re-adjustment, have 0.3 of all those families who are 2s. 10d.

above or below the line transferred from one side of the line to the other. The results of this adjustment are given in Table 4.

In only one case does the readjustment alter the order of poverty in which the trades stand. The trades "domestic service" and "metal workers," which originally stood 5 and 6, change places and become 6 and 5. It will be noted, however, that though the order of relative poverty, in which the trades stand, is altered in only one instance, yet the readjustment to compensate for the varying number of children has the effect of rendering the differences in degree of poverty between the various trades very much less.

On the other hand it should be remarked that the differences in poverty between the trades would be once more increased had earnings of members other than the father been deducted from the family income, and only the father's earnings counted. As this subtraction has not been made, another column No. 3 has been added to Table 4, to show the percentage of families in each trade, above and below the average percentage of families in all trades, where the father's earnings are supplemented by those of the mother or children. In many cases where this occurs the monetary poverty is only diminished at the cost of depriving the younger children of a certain proportion of their mother's care, or the elder of a portion of their education time or of earnings which might otherwise have formed the beginning of their own savings.

Table 4 may now be studied in detail. It should be read in this manner: Taking the first line "public service" as an example. Column 1. The figures in brackets below the name of the trade signify that 6.5 per cent. of all the families belonged to the "public service." Column 2*a*. 45 per cent. of all families, that is to say of all families of all trades, are below Rowntree's line of primary poverty. In the public services only 22 per cent. of the families are below the line, or 23 per cent. less than the average number. The difference is consequently expressed by the figure - 23. Column 2*b*. The average number of children in families whose father is a member of the public services is 2.70, or 0.26 less than the average number for all families 2.96. There are 87 families 3*s*. (approximately 2*s*. 10*d*.) above Rowntree's line. $87 \times 0.26 = 23$, and that number is therefore transferred from above to below the line, increasing the percentage below from 22 to 28 and reducing the figure - 23 in column 2*a* to - 17 in column 2*b*.

Column 3. In 6.5 per cent. of all families, the mother or children or both work and contribute their earnings to the family purse. In the public service this occurs in only 3.8 per cent. of the families. The difference is indicated according by the figure - 2.7.

Column 4. 50 per cent. of the families of all trades have three or more children, that is to say more than the average number 2.96 for all trades. Only 44 per cent. of the families in the public service have three or more children. Consequently the difference from the average is represented by the figure - 6. The divergence from the average is exhibited in this fashion rather than by showing the difference from the average in the number of children in the

family as in Table 3, in order that the figures in columns 2 and 4 may deal with the same class of things, namely, families, and that like may be compared with like.

TABLE 4.—*Showing the amount of divergence per cent. in the various trades from the average for all trades in the undermentioned particulars.*

1 Name of trade, and percentage of families of all trades, of families of particular trades.	2 Divergence from 45 per cent., the percentage of families of all trades under Rowntree's line of primary poverty.		3 Divergence from 6·5 per cent., the percentage of families of all trades in which others than father earn.	4 Divergence from 50 per cent. the percentage of all families that have less than three children, the average family.
	a. Unadjusted.	b. Adjusted as though average families in all trades were same.		
1. Public service } (6·5)	— 23	— 17	— 2·7	— 6
2. Clerks and dealers } (7·3)	— 21	— 15	— 1·6	— 8
3. Printing and paper } (4·5)	— 15	— 12	— 2·8	— 3
4. Precious metals } (1·9)	— 11	— 11	— 1·8	— 2
5. Domestic service.... } (3·4)	— 10	— 3	— 1·7	— 7
6. Metal workers } (6·7)	— 6	— 9	+ 1·0	+ 3
7. Food and drink } (8·5)	— 5	— 1	— 3·6	— 4
8. Locomotion } (19·9)	— 1	— 1	— 0·1	— 1
9. Woodworkers } (4·5)	+ 2	+ 2	+ 1·7	+ 4
10. Building } (5·6)	+ 11	+ 7	+ 2·2	+ 3
11. Labour } (21·2)	+ 13	+ 8	+ 1·1	+ 3
12. Dress } (8·1)	+ 14	+ 8	+ 4·2	+ 6

It should be noted that sundry small trades amounting to 1·9 are not included in the table, of the families belonging to them 62 per cent. are above and 38 per cent. below Rowntree's line. Widows, deserted, separated, single women with children, the occupations of whose fathers were not recorded, are not included in the statistics; of these 32 per cent. are above the line and 68 per cent. below the line. The average number of their children is 2·94.

A glance at the table is sufficient to show how closely the minus or plus signs accompany one another in the parallel vertical columns. Taking the two most important, 2b and 4, showing "adjusted poverty" and "size of family," respectively, it will be found that one trade occupies the same position as regards order in both, four differ by one place, five by two, and two by three, and none by any

greater number than three. The coefficient of correlation (although 12 cases is a small number on which to found one) is + 0.71.

It seems clear, therefore, that large families and poverty, irrespective of such poverty as is caused by largeness of family, are closely connected.

But before going on to consider what follows from this proposition, it might be well at this point to anticipate certain objections that might be brought against the statistics on which this conclusion is founded. First, it might be urged, that the parents of the patients are liable to understate their income, inasmuch as the medical treatment of their children depends on their success in persuading the hospital authorities of their poverty. This point was dealt with somewhat fully in the paper in the *Journal*, already referred to above, where it was argued that Rowntree's line of primary poverty is so low that there is no temptation to those on or about it to make false statements, and that there is no occasion for those far above it to make a misstatement sufficiently large to bring themselves below, in order to obtain hospital treatment. In an inquiry of this description, however, the point is of far less importance, since it is merely a matter of comparing various groups of patients with each other, and not of comparing all of them with the general population; and there is no reason to suppose that the temptation to make inaccurate statements is any greater for parents of one occupation than another. The same answer might be made to a second objection that could be made—that is to say, that the children counted are only the children living at home. There is nothing to lead us to believe that there are more children living away from home in one group than in another. In any case, the numbers of such children are comparatively few. More than a quarter of the children who attend the out-patient department are under 1 year of age, more than two-thirds are under 5 years, so that in only the very large families are the elder brothers and sisters old enough to have left their parents' home.

The omission from the statistics of families that have no children is a defect that cannot be avoided, but it might be presumed that the majority of them would be found in the trades that already have the smaller families. A more valid objection that might perhaps be made is that the nature of the trade itself has some effect on the number of the children. It might readily be supposed that trades which allow the fathers to work in the open air or the mother to inhabit the more salubrious parts of Greater London would contain larger families. Again it is obvious that parents with small families might drift into "domestic service," or that the desire to remain in it would induce them to restrict the number of their children. Moreover two trades at least contain large numbers of Jewish workers, so that the complication of race and religion is added to that of trade. It is desirable then to find some other test of inefficiency, independent of trade divisions. Such a criterion may perhaps be found in irregularity of work.

The families under review can be divided into two classes, those of which the head had been in regular work for the previous twelve months and those in which his work or pay had been irregular. Such a classification divides the families into two almost equal groups. To be exact 53 per cent. in 1909-10 and 54 per cent. in 1908 belong to the regular workers, and 47 per cent. in 1909-10 and 46 per cent. in 1908 to the irregular. The words regular and irregular do not admit of very exact definition. "Irregular," for example, includes on the one hand the artisan whose employment has been continuous throughout the year, but whose earnings have perhaps fluctuated by about 1s. a week at different seasons of the year, and on the other the workman so-called who has been out of work the entire twelve-month, and all the rest who fall between these two extremes. Similarly the word "regular" comprises some who have been in work for the twelve-months immediately preceding the recording of their statement, but who may have been unemployed for several weeks or months in the previous year, and others liable by the custom of their trade to dismissal at an hour's notice, who may have just been about to be thrown out of work for a lengthy period.

Yet on the whole it can be safely affirmed that one class comprises all those who are more regularly employed and the other those whose work and wages are more uncertain. For example, the regular class contains all policemen, postmen and others with practically life tenure of office, while the irregular class includes 11 per cent. of men actually out of work at the moment. With equal confidence too can it be stated that the latter class contains the least capable workmen, those most wanting in skill or character. It is true that irregularity of work is typical of some trades rather than of others. For instance, the wages in the trade "locomotion" are low and regular, and high and irregular in the trade "precious metals," so that it is quite possible that a worker in precious metals, although irregularly employed, might be more skilled and earn more than a lowly paid worker in the "locomotion" trade who was never out of work. Yet taken as a whole there can be no doubt that in each occupation it is the least efficient or least trustworthy man who is thrown out of employment when a shortage of work occurs in that particular trade, while the more highly skilled and steadier workmen are not dismissed. Table 5 compares these two groups. In this instance the figures for two years are available.

TABLE 5.

		Per cent.	Average number of children in the family.
Families in which the earnings of the father are regular	1909-10	53	2.71
	'08.....	54	2.86
Average for all families	'09-10	—	2.96
	'08.....	—	2.97
Families in which the earnings of the father are irregular	'09-10	47	3.26
	'08.....	46	3.12

Moreover, if the figures are analysed by comparing the average number of children in the regular and irregular sections of each trade (as can be done for the year 1909-10), the same conditions are found to exist in all trades but three. Table 6 shows the exact figures.

TABLE 6.

	Average number of children in regular section.	Average number of children in irregular section.
1. Public service	2·71	2·61
2. Clerks and dealers	2·43	2·93
3. Printing and paper	2·70	3·03
4. Precious metals	3·00	2·90
5. Domestic service	2·60	2·94
6. Metal workers.....	3·08	3·05
7. Food and drink	2·71	3·05
8. Locomotion	2·02	3·15
9. Wood workers.....	2·90	3·22
10. Building	2·86	3·21
11. Labour.....	2·73	3·36
12. D e a s.....	2·60	2·94

In the three exceptions it should be noted that, in the case of "public service," the numbers in irregular work are very small (only 10 per cent. of the total) in that section; while in that of "precious metals," the numbers of the entire trade are not large, only 1·9 per cent. of the whole. In the instance of "metal workers," the difference is infinitesimal—three-hundredths of a child.

Again it is seen that it is the less efficient class that have the largest families.

It might be objected that the older the man the more likely he is to be out of work, and the more likely he is to have a completed, and therefore a larger, family. Unfortunately the ages of the fathers of the patients are not known, so that it is impossible to compare those of the regular and those of the irregular workers. In Messrs. Rowntree's and Lasker's recent book on "Unemployment," however, it appears that, whereas advancing years account for some one-fourth of the unemployment in the casual trades, in those trades where work is customarily regular over half of the unemployed are under 30 years of age.² The conclusion then that can be deduced from Table 5 agrees with that already deduced from Table 4—that the nation is reproducing itself more largely from the less efficient classes.

One more test can be applied, as to the social condition of the families, in addition to that of irregularity of work, and of poverty as determined by the proportion below Rowntree's line of primary poverty, namely, that of crowdedness.

For this test the figures for 1903 supply the material. Out of the 17,139 families tabulated, 14,942 were living in tenements of which the number of rooms was recorded.

Of these, 5,913 were living less than two to a room (Booth's

² *Unemployment*. By B. Seebohm Rowntree and Bruno Lasker, pp. 53, 66.

standard of uncrowdedness), and 9,029 two or more to a room (crowded according to the same authority). The average number of children of the 14,942 families was 2·96; the average number of the uncrowded families was 2·11, and of the crowded families 3·53. Of course, a large number of children is a cause of crowding, just as it is of poverty, as judged by the position of Rowntree's line, but allowances can be made for it even more easily.

The 5,913 uncrowded families occupied 18,556 rooms, or 3·1 rooms per family; while the 9,029 crowded families inhabited 19,123 rooms, or 2·1 rooms per family. Had the number of children in both crowded and uncrowded families been the same, 2·96, the average of the whole, the uncrowded would have had 1·12 rooms per person, and the crowded only 0·72 room per person. Table 7 shows these comparisons in tabular form.

TABLE 7.

	Uncrowded families.	Crowded families.
Average number of children	2·11	3·53
Average number of rooms per family	3·10	2·10
Average number of rooms per person if both crowded and uncrowded had the same number of children, <i>i.e.</i> , 2·96 the average of all families	1·12	0·72

The result of the third test accords with those of the two former, namely, that the families in the poorer circumstances have the larger number of children.

One further point should be remarked before concluding. It should be remembered that the families under review are not necessarily completed families; and until a family is completed, not only by the cessation of births, but by the attainment of maturity by the children, it is impossible to say whether it is a large family or a small one. An attempt, however, has been made to obtain some information on this question. In 1908, 1,006 families were divided into completed and incomplete families. That these 1,006 were a fair sample may be judged from the fact that on investigation it was found that 53 per cent. were above Rowntree's line of primary poverty and 47 per cent. below, exactly the same percentages as those for the whole of the patients tabulated in 1908. On the other hand, the sample is not quite so good as it might be, as the average number of children in the family is 3·14 as against 2·97 for the whole year 1908, and 2·96 for the years 1909-10 and 1903. Completedness was determined as follows:

Families in which the father or mother were dead, or in which the youngest child was 4 or more years of age and no later born children had died, were deemed to be complete. The period of four years was chosen on the advice of a gynæcologist. As no questions were asked as to miscarriages during this interval or as to existing pregnancies, the number reckoned as complete on this account is probably exaggerated. On the other hand it is plain

that there must be many families among those whose youngest child is not yet 4 which are in reality complete. In fact many amongst the families now regarded complete would have been counted as incomplete had the inquiry been made one, two or three years earlier. These two inaccuracies therefore cancel each other to some extent.

Examining these 1,006 families in this manner it is found that 14 per cent. of them are complete.

Of those above Rowntree's line of primary poverty 19 per cent. are complete, and of those below only 9 per cent. are complete.

Taking families of various number, of children in order, it is seen that, in the case of families with

Per cent.				Per cent.			
1 child	19	are complete		5 children	4	are complete	
2 children	18	"		6 "	15	"	
3 "	12	"		7 "	11	"	
4 "	12	"					

It is apparent from the fluctuation, without intelligible reason, in the percentages of those families with 5 and 6 children, that the number 1,006 is not quite large enough to base a calculation of this character upon—at least, not to be valid for families of each separate number of children. If, however, the families with less than 3 children and those with 3 or more children are thrown together into two groups, the figures which they supply may be regarded as fairly reliable. Comparing these two groups, it appears that, of families with less than 3 children, 19 per cent. are complete; and of those with 3 or more children, 11 per cent. are complete. It only remains to add that the average size of the completed family is 2.54, and of the incompleting family 3.23. The inference that may not unreasonably be drawn from these figures is, that a considerable proportion of the small families are small finally, and not simply the larger families in an earlier stage of development; so that the conditions, of which these statistics of necessity present but an instantaneous picture, are perhaps less transitory than at first might be supposed.

It seems, therefore, clear that, among the working-classes, the poorer have larger families than those not so poor, and that the nation, in consequence, is reproducing itself more largely from the less efficient layers of society.

There was no intention when this paper was begun of discussing remedies. Yet as one writes suggestions form themselves almost automatically in one's mind, and it is difficult to resist at least an endeavour to answer the question.

Can any remedy be found? Before inquiring this, perhaps one should ask, Is any remedy required? Is not one already provided? For example, it might be pointed out that the families under consideration consist of youngish children, and that if a survey of the same families were held say, ten, fifteen, or twenty years later, death would have reduced the larger families of the poorer trades to an equality, or even a numerical inferiority to those of the trades

better off. It is quite possible that such a weeding out process does take place, and even if the stern view be taken that it is better that such lives should be extinguished than preserved, yet the terrible waste of bringing offspring into the world, only to send them out again, cannot be defended. Such a remedy is worse than the evil it is supposed to cure. It is in fact an evil in itself.

To repeat the question then. Can any remedy be found?

Two suggest themselves, pre-eminently. First, to draft the more numerous children of the less skilled into the more skilled trades or branches of trades, whose children are less numerous, and second to reduce the number of children born in the poorest classes. Once the child is born, undoubtedly the wisest course is to make the best of him. "Begin with the child" is a maxim, and not a bad one, of one school of poor law reformers. Let the child therefore be educated, fed and doctored if necessary, and above all be put into a skilled trade. But without reopening the ancient controversy as to the priority of the egg or the fowl, it may be suggested that in many instances the truest wisdom is to begin still earlier and see that the child is never born at all. Is this practicable?

With regard to the feeble-minded, definite proposals have been made to prevent their multiplication. But here it is not a question of feeble-mindedness. It may be that a certain proportion of the poorer patients might actually be classed as feeble-minded. That is not for a layman to judge. It is a matter of observation, however, that in the course of inquiries into the financial circumstances of patients, the poorer mothers are certainly slower of comprehension. Simple questions have habitually to be repeated, or put in a different form, before an answer is obtained. It is certain that, even if they are not feeble-minded, they are relatively feebler in purpose or in body than others, as their place in the social scale denotes. The fact that they have married when they had no prospect of maintaining a family is a sign they are lacking in foresight or self-control, or, perhaps, that the position into which they have been born is so hopeless from the beginning that they have no inducement to exercise either the one or the other. In the paper in the *Journal*, already referred to, it was shown that between 27 per cent. and 31 per cent. of the families attending at Great Ormond Street are below the line of primary poverty when they have no more than three children, the average-sized family, the smallest number that can ensure the increase of the race. Nevertheless, to apply to such of these people as are not feeble-minded the methods suggested to prevent the multiplication of the feeble-minded would probably be regarded, in the existing state of public opinion, as too great an infringement of the liberty of the subject. If, however, a reduction in the number of children born occurred as an incident in some schemes for the improvement of the position of those classes and not in others, its presence might be deemed to constitute an advantage. In fact, its incidental presence or absence might be used to some extent as a criterion of the value of such schemes. Such an advantage in-door relief possesses over out-door relief; continued detention over in-door

relief for perhaps a longer aggregate period, but broken by intervals; maintenance and training of the unemployed in colonies over the same treatment without removal from the home.

Each of the first of these pairs while fulfilling the primary purpose in the relief of the poor, involves secondarily the separation of the sexes and consequently prevents the aggravation and perpetuation of poverty through the birth of children. These conclusions seem to arise from a consideration of the facts disclosed, but the writer advances them not without hesitancy, lest the possible fallaciousness of his views should detract from the value of the facts which the statistics exhibit, and which certainly call for some remedy. If the propagation of children by diseased or imbecile parents or by parents who have no reasonable prospects of maintaining a home and family could be checked, it would be a boon to the community, but this possibility opens up many urgent and much debated questions and considerations of policy and morals which cannot be discussed here.