

Indexed

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**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE RURAL AND SMALL CITY
RELIEF POPULATION IN OKLAHOMA**

By

T. G. STANDING

Department of Sociology and Rural Life

OKLAHOMA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Oklahoma A. and M. College, Stillwater

W. L. BLIZZARD, *Director*

LIPPERT S. ELLIS, *Vice Director*

SUMMARY

This discussion is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of the causes of the rural relief problem in Oklahoma. The attempt has been rather to present certain available data descriptive of the relief population and, wherever possible, to make comparisons between the relief group and the general or total population in the nine counties included in the study. Since these counties were carefully selected to represent the rural areas of the entire state, such conclusions as are warranted by the data should have considerable state-wide validity.

The principal factual findings, briefly stated, were:

1. There were 9,878 relief cases in the June, 1935 survey, which covered nine entire Oklahoma counties with the exception of towns of more than 5,000 population.

2. These cases represented 25.6 percent of all persons but only 23.9 percent of all families in the areas included in the study.

3. Persons in the age group below 35 were over-represented and those above 35 under-represented in the relief population.

4. The sex distribution of the relief population was essentially the same as for the total population.

5. The median size of relief families was 4.8 persons as compared with 4.3 persons for the total population as indicated by the 1930 Census.

6. Nearly 46 percent of the male heads of relief families were under 35 years of age; for the general population the corresponding figure was 34 percent.

7. Of the 9,878 cases, 84 percent represented unbroken or "normal" families.

8. Only 16 percent of the heads of relief families had lived continuously in the county where they were born, 56 percent having moved to their present residence before 1930 and 23 percent since 1929.

9. Of the occupational groups classified, farm laborers had moved the least and skilled and semi-skilled persons the most.

10. "Crop failure or loss of livestock" was the most frequent reason given by new relief clients for applying for relief; for the carried-over or re-opened cases, "decline of income from current employment" was the most frequent reason given.

11. The families surveyed contained an average of 1.4 gainful workers apiece.

12. The average number of dependents for each gainful worker was 2.4, but this number increased materially with family size.

13. Of the 8,970 persons in the relief sample reporting agriculture as their usual occupation, approximately 83 percent were currently employed in agriculture, 15 percent were unemployed, and the remainder had changed to some other occupation.

14. Of the nonagricultural workers, only 30 percent were working at their usual occupation, 53 percent were unemployed, and 16 percent had changed their occupation.

15. Four and one-half percent of all heads of relief households had not completed the first grade of school, 24 percent had progressed no further than grades 4 or 5, the same proportion had completed the eighth grade, while only 3 percent had finished high school.

16. Data on school attendance indicate that a comparatively large proportion of children in relief families, especially in the younger age groups, are not attending school.

Erratum: Garbled sentences in middle of long paragraph on page 6 should read, "Hence the June figures are probably more representative of the total relief population of the State. This change in the program of relief administration also means that a comparison . . ." etc.

C O N T E N T S

Summary	3
Introduction	5
Source of data	5
Percent of total population receiving relief	5
Age distribution	7
Sex distribution	8
Family data	9
Percent of total families and of total persons receiving relief	9
Size of relief families	10
Age distribution of heads of relief families	11
Composition of families receiving relief	11
Mobility of relief families	13
Prospects for rehabilitation	15
Reasons for applying for relief	15
Gainful workers in relief families	17
Change in occupation of relief recipients	18
Education	19
Conclusion	22
Literature cited	23

2 cards

Population, Rural

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By T. G. STANDING*

INTRODUCTION

The data utilized in the present study were originally gathered as part of a nation-wide survey conducted in 1935 by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in cooperation with the agricultural experiment stations of various states, including Oklahoma. The primary purpose was to secure information on relief needs and trends in rural areas of the nation as a basis for the determination of national administrative policies. The Washington office of the Works Progress Administration, which succeeded the F. E. R. A., has published certain of the findings pertaining to the nation as a whole but has attempted no separate analysis by states. This study presents an analysis of certain portions of the data for the state of Oklahoma.

It is felt that these data contain much valuable information concerning factors which are associated with relief and dependency in the rural areas and small cities¹ of the State and the resources available for the rehabilitation of dependent families. Although the information was collected in June and October of 1935² it is believed that much of it is of current significance. Economic conditions and administrative policies may have changed, but in all probability the factors associated with unemployment and family dependency are essentially the same in 1940 as in 1935.**

SOURCE OF DATA

The data were derived from official records in the various county relief offices. The nine counties chosen for the study were³ selected to represent the rural areas of the State in accordance with a sampling procedure devised by the Washington office of the F. E. R. A. and W. P. A.⁴ In each county a random fifty percent sample was taken on F. E. R. A. Form DRS 109 of all resident cases receiving unemployment relief during the months of the survey. These figures were then multiplied by two so as to secure a picture of the complete relief load in each county. This gave a total of 9,878 cases in the nine counties. It should be kept in mind that throughout this report the relief data pertain to the year 1935 whereas data on the general population were derived from the U. S. Census for 1930.

PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION RECEIVING RELIEF

Table I shows the percentage which the relief population comprised of the total 1930 population of the nine sample counties for the months of the survey. Variations are also shown for the three residence groups, rural-

* At the time this study was made, Dr. Standing was professor of sociology at the Oklahoma A. and M. College. He is now regional sociologist for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, at Little Rock, Ark.

** Dr. Standing's manuscript was submitted for publication in the summer of 1940.—Editor.

¹ The term "small city" as used in this bulletin indicates places having 2,500 to 5,000 inhabitants.

² While the June survey was repeated in October of the same year most of the data in the present bulletin pertain to the former month. The reasons for limiting the analysis to the June data are explained on page 6.

³ Carter, Custer, Harper, Hughes, Jackson, Kingfisher, Lincoln, Pushmataha and Rogers.

⁴ For a statement on sampling procedure used see Berta Asch and A. R. Mangus, *Farmers on Relief and Rehabilitation*, Appendix B. W. P. A., Division of Social Research, Research Monograph VIII. Washington, D. C.; 1937.

farm, rural-nonfarm, and small city. It should be pointed out that the small city cases included in this survey were limited to those residing in towns having 2500 to 5000 inhabitants, of which there were only three in the counties studied.⁵ For this reason this sample is probably not sufficiently representative of the urban areas of the State to be regarded as of great significance. It is included in the analysis, however, since it provides some indication of rural-urban differences.

TABLE I.—Percent of total 1930 population of sample counties receiving relief in June and October, 1935, by residence.

Residence	PERCENT OF TOTAL 1930 POPULATIONS RECEIVING RELIEF	
	June	October
All residences	25.6	18.4
Rural-farm	30.4	21.7
Rural-nonfarm	16.1	12.3
Small city	21.5	13.0

It is obvious from Table I that the problem of rural relief in Oklahoma was extremely serious in 1935. In June of that year more than one-fourth of the population of the nine sample counties was receiving relief from the F. E. R. A. It is also obvious that the problem was most acute in the farm population, the percentage here being almost twice that for the rural-nonfarm group. The figures for October were considerably lower than those for June, the decline being especially pronounced for the small city group. This reduction in the relief load between June and October may be partially explained by an increase in employment opportunities during the summer and early fall months. The chief factor in the decline, however, was in all probability a change in administrative policy associated with the liquidation of the F. E. R. A. and the setting up of the W. P. A. program. The latter was begun in August, 1935, but F. E. R. A. grants were continued until December of the same year. Records from the sample counties indicate that a considerable number of employable F. E. R. A. cases were shifted to the W. P. A. during and prior to the month of October. Hence the June figures are probably somewhat more representative of the total relief population was correspondingly under-represented, with a percentage of 29.7 as also means that a comparison of data from the June and October surveys will not yield a correct picture of actual relief trends during this period since persons receiving W. P. A. assistance were not included in the October sample. For these reasons the present analysis will be limited chiefly to a consideration of the June data.⁶ During this month more than three-fourths, or 76 percent, of the relief population of the nine counties was from the "Rural-farm" group. In 1930 only 63.6 percent of the general population was in this residence category. In the rural-nonfarm areas the relief population was correspondingly under-represented, with a percentage of 19.7 as compared with 31.3 for the general population. The small city percentages were not greatly different for the general and relief populations.

This concentration of the rural relief problem in the farm portion of the population was no doubt associated with the general decline of agricultural income during the economic depression. In Oklahoma this decline

⁶ For the State as a whole the estimated percentage of the total population receiving relief from the F. E. R. A. in 1935 fell from a peak of 26.5 in January to 15.3 for the month of October.

⁵ Kingfisher, pop. 2723; Chancler, pop. 2717; Claremore, pop. 3720. (1930 Census).

The age distribution shows some variation by residence but, except in the case of the small city groups, the differences between the relief and general population in the three residence categories are not striking. Among rural-farm persons the relief population was over-represented in each of the four age categories under 35, but in the rural-nonfarm and urban groups this over-representation was limited to ages under 25. The concentration in rural areas of unemployed persons in the ages of early maturity appears to be a phenomenon that is nationwide.⁷ A considerable number of these persons are young heads of families who have been unable to gain a livelihood in agriculture either as farm operators or laborers and for whom there are no alternative avenues of employment elsewhere.. (See Table VI.)

The disproportionate number in the younger age groups of the small city relief sample may reflect the relatively greater economic burden of children in the city as compared with the country. As indicated previously, however, the small city sample in this particular study was too small to be regarded as adequately representing the urban areas of the State.

The age distribution for October, which has not been presented in tabular form, was not strikingly different from that for June. For the former month there was a somewhat higher proportion of the relief population in the age groups under 15 (41.7 percent for June and 44 percent for October) and a correspondingly smaller proportion between the ages of 15 and 45. Since the total relief load declined from June to October these differences probably reflect a relatively greater handicap, in the effort to become self-sustaining, on the part of those families with minor children.

SEX DISTRIBUTION

There were few outstanding differences in the sex distribution of the relief as compared to the general population in the nine sample counties. In both cases there was a slight excess of males over females; this is also true for the population of the State as a whole.⁸

Variations in sex distribution by residence were negligible except for the small city sample which showed a percentage of females in the relief groups somewhat lower than that for the general population. For the small city males the opposite was true. (See Table III.) This may indicate somewhat superior employment opportunities for urban women as compared with urban men.

TABLE III.—Percentage distribution of the relief and general population of nine sample counties by sex and residence.

	Total		Rural-farm		Rural-nonfarm		Small City	
	Gen. Pop.	Relief Pop.	Gen. Pop.	Relief Pop.	Gen. Pop.	Relief Pop.	Gen. Pop.	Relief Pop.
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Males	51.8	51.6	52.8	51.9	50.1	50.6	49.6	51.5
Females	48.2	48.4	47.2	48.1	49.9	49.4	50.4	48.5

Data are not available which will permit a computation of the age distribution by sex for the general population of the sample counties. For the relief sample, however, slight differences in age distribution of the two sexes

⁷ See B. L. Melvin, *Rural Youth on Relief*, esp. "Introduction," p. XI. W. P. A., Division of Social Research, Research Monograph XI. Washington, D. C.; 1937.

⁸ In 1930 the population of the State was 51.0 percent male and 49.0 female.

were discovered in two of the age groupings, namely, those 15-24 and 55-64. The former category included 20.2 percent of all males but 22.0 percent of all females, while the group from 55 to 64 on the other hand accounted for 5.1 percent of the males but only 3.5 percent of the females. The sex differences in this older age group no doubt reflect the high masculinity of the general population at this age level resulting in part from the greater migration of men into the State during the period of settlement. There seems to be no ready explanation for the differences noted in the younger age category although it too appears to reflect a condition in the general population.⁹

FAMILY DATA

From many points of view data on the relief population are most significant when organized on a family basis.¹⁰ Notwithstanding recent changes in the institutional pattern the family is still, to a large extent, the basic economic and social unit. This is particularly true in rural areas. Regardless of area, however, such factors as family size, mobility, age and sex composition, and percent of "broken" as compared to "normal" families may be regarded as important indicators of present status and the possibility of future rehabilitation.

Percent of Total Families and of Total Persons Receiving Relief

Table IV shows the percent of total families and of total persons receiving relief and their distribution by residence.

TABLE IV.—Percent of total families and of total persons receiving relief, by residence.*

Residence	PERCENT RECEIVING RELIEF			
	June, 1935		October, 1935	
	Families	Persons	Families	Persons
All	23.9	25.6	17.5	18.4
Rural-farm	29.9	30.4	21.3	21.7
Rural-nonfarm	14.6	16.1	11.0	12.3
Small city	18.5	21.5	13.0	13.0

* Percentage computed on the basis of the 1930 Census.

It will be seen that in each of the three residence groups for June and in two of the three for October the proportion of persons is greater than the proportion of families. This would seem to indicate that relief families are, on the average, somewhat larger than the nonrelief. The difference for the month of June is greatest in the small city sample. This agrees with the findings in Table II, where it was discovered that in the small city relief

⁹ See O. D. Duncan, *Population Trends in Oklahoma*, p. 17. Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 224. March, 1935.

¹⁰ It should perhaps be pointed out that the relief data were collected on a *household* basis, whereas the Census data available for comparison were organized by *families*. The Census defines the family as "a group of persons, related either by blood or by marriage or adoption, who live together as one household, usually sharing the same table." (*Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, Vol. VI, "Population," p. 5.) The term *family* as used in the relief study included only husband and/or wife and their unmarried children living at home. The definition of a *household* employed in the relief study was "a group of related or unrelated persons who live together as a unit." Ordinarily the household is to be regarded as the more inclusive concept but it is believed that the rather elastic definition of the Census justifies using the two terms interchangeably in the present study. However, in order to avoid confusion, the term "family" has been retained throughout.

groups there was a disproportionate number of persons in the younger ages. As suggested previously, the reason for this may be the greater economic burden of children in the city as compared with the farm. While direct evidence on this point is not available from the study, it appears that the city family with a large number of children is more likely to require relief than is the rural farm family of the same size.

By October, the differences between the proportion of persons and the proportion of families receiving relief had been somewhat reduced. This reduction applied to each of the three residence categories, but was especially pronounced for the small city group where, for the month of October, the two percentages were exactly equal. The most plausible explanation of this reduction is to be found in the inauguration of the W. P. A. program in the autumn of 1935. The cases first selected for transfer from relief to the works program were in all probability those most urgently in need of increased assistance. Presumably those having the largest number of dependents would tend to fall into this category. There is also evidence that, due to the greater availability of suitable projects, the works program began to function effectively in the larger towns and cities somewhat earlier than in rural areas.

Size of Relief Families

At stated above, the percentage of persons receiving relief was found to be somewhat greater than the percentage of families, thus indicating a larger average size of family for the relief group than for the general population. The median size of the relief family in the nine sample counts was found to be 4.8 persons while for the general population as determined by the 1930 census the figure was 4.3. However, this may not be a strictly accurate comparison since, as indicated elsewhere (see footnote 10, page 9), the relief data were collected by household whereas the Census figures were assembled on a family basis. There is reason to believe that the depression tended to augment the size of the household unit among the lower income groups by encouraging the "doubling up" of small or broken families. In the majority of such cases, however, it is likely that the individuals involved are related to each other "either by blood or by marriage" and so would come within the Census definition of a "family." On the other hand it is reasonable to assume that the depression tended to reduce the number of farm laborers and other hired helpers, especially in those households on the economic margin. In the relief survey an attempt was made to identify households containing nonfamily members. Out of a total of 9,879 households, 1,952, or approximately 20 percent, were found to contain such "other persons." (See Table VII.) As indicated above, it is probable that many such persons would qualify as family members as defined by the Census. Obviously if they were excluded the median size of the relief family would be reduced somewhat below the figure given above.

A second reason for the possible inexactness of the comparison of size of families noted above is the fact that the only family data available by county from the Census include several small urban centers which were excluded from the relief sample. If it were possible to exclude these urban centers from the analysis, it is probable that the median for the general population would be slightly raised since urban families average somewhat smaller than those in rural areas. Hence, all things considered, the difference in size between relief families and those composing the general population is probably somewhat less than the figures previously given (4.8 for relief and 4.3 for the general population) would indicate. In this connection it may be noted that the families of both the general and the relief population in the nine sample counties were considerably larger than the median for the entire State, which according to the 1930 Census was 3.6.

Doubtless this is explained by the predominantly rural character of the counties selected. The rural-farm median for the State is 4.3, that for the rural-nonfarm 3.5, while the urban figure falls to 3.2. It is not possible to secure this residence break for the general population of the sample counties alone. For the relief population in these counties, however, the corresponding figures are 4.9 for the rural-farm and 4.5 for both the rural-nonfarm and small city groups.

Age Distribution of Heads of Relief Families

The age distribution of the total relief population and its comparison with that for the general population has already been discussed.¹¹ However, some additional data concerning the age of the heads of relief families have significance in connection with the present discussion of family composition. Corresponding data for the general population are not available by counties, but a rough comparison can be made between the distribution for the relief sample and for the entire State. This is presented in Table V. The relief percentages in this table were based on a total of 9,390 male heads of relief families. It will be seen that the largest proportion of these fall in the age group from 25 to 34 years, while more than two-thirds (68.3 percent) were under 45 years of age and nearly 46.0 percent under 35. It may be noted, in passing, that 488 female heads, not included in the table, had a much larger proportion in the older age levels, almost one-half being 45 or older.

The table also shows a much younger average age for the relief group in comparison with the general population, although, as indicated previously, these figures are not strictly comparable. A somewhat more accurate comparison becomes possible when the data are distributed by residence and the small city cases excluded. When this is done we find the age level of the relief group falling still lower in comparison with the general population, as indicated in Table VI. In the rural-farm group, for example, 47.5 percent of the relief heads, but only slightly more than 30.0 percent of the heads from the general population, were under 35 years of age. In the rural-nonfarm areas the differences were much less striking.

From a sociological standpoint the relative youth of the heads of rural relief households is of considerable significance. It reflects, in part, the traditions of early marriage characteristic of rural areas. It may also explain in some degree the relatively high birth rate which is said to exist among recipients of relief. From the point of view of prospects for re-employment and rehabilitation it may be a favorable factor.

Composition of Families Receiving Relief

Analysis of the composition of the 9,878 June relief families discloses that by far the larger proportion consisted of what might be called "normal" family groups composed either of husband and wife, or husband and wife with own children. These two groups together account for approximately 84 percent of the total. (See Table VII.) Of the "broken" or incomplete families the largest number involved persons without spouse or children. These composed nearly 10 percent of the total number of families. Men without wives or children accounted for most of this group or 8.6 percent of the total. Most of those without spouse or children had other persons, such as roomers, relatives or friends, living with them. Only 158 out of the total sample were found to be actually living alone. The majority of these were males, more than half of whom resided in the open country.

¹¹ See Table II, page 7.

TABLE V.—Percentage distribution of male heads of families in relief* and general population by selected age groups.**

Age Groups	General population	Relief population
All ages	100.0	100.0
Under 25 years	8.0	14.5
25-34	25.8	31.3
35-44	25.5	22.5
45-54	19.9	18.1
55-64	12.9	11.7
65 and over	7.8	1.8
Unknown		---

* Nine sample counties only, June, 1935.

** Entire state, 1930 Census.

TABLE VI.—Percentage distribution of rural male heads of families in relief* and general population by selected age groups and residence.**

Age Groups	RURAL-FARM		RURAL-NONFARM	
	General population	Relief population	General population	Relief population
All ages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 25	8.1	14.8	8.3	13.6
25-34	22.1	32.7	27.8	27.3
35-44	24.1	22.0	25.4	23.0
45-54	21.7	17.8	18.2	19.6
55-64	15.4	11.2	11.8	13.9
65 and over	8.6	1.5	8.6	2.6

* Nine sample counties only, June, 1935.

** Entire state, 1930 Census.

TABLE VII.—Percentage distribution of 9,878 relief families by family composition and residence June, 1935.

Composition of family	RESIDENCE			
	All	Rural-farm	Rural non-farm	Small city
Total families	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Husband-wife	12.6	11.9	14.3	15.2
Husband-wife and own children	71.3	74.9	60.6	62.5
Man without wife or children	8.6	7.9	11.2	8.9
Woman without husband or children	1.2	0.5	3.4	1.9
Father and children	2.7	2.4	3.7	3.5
Mother and children	3.6	2.4	6.8	8.0
Without other persons	80.2	80.8	78.3	79.0
With other persons	19.8	19.2	21.7	21.0

As the table indicates, slightly less than 20 percent of the relief families had persons living with them who were not members of the immediate family. These are designated in the table as "other persons."¹²

Analysis of the data reveals some significant variation in family composition by residence. For example, the proportion of "normal" families was highest in the rural-farm and lowest in the rural-nonfarm areas, the approximate percentages being 86 and 75, respectively. Conversely, what we have termed "broken" or incomplete families tended to be concentrated in the villages and towns. As the table indicates, men or women without spouse or children account for nearly 15 percent of the rural-nonfarm group but only slightly over 8 percent of those residing on farms. There is a concentration of widowed, divorced or separated parents and children, especially mothers and children, in the towns and villages.

These variations are probably due to a number of factors, not all of which are peculiar to the relief population. It is known that aged persons and other types of dependents tend to be concentrated in small towns and villages.¹³ Opportunities for suitable employment and facilities for the care of such persons are somewhat more favorable here than on the farm. On the other hand, farming, more than most other occupations, is dependent on a division of labor made possible by the normal family of husband, wife and children.

There were no very striking differences in the residence distribution of families containing other persons, although the highest proportion of these was found in the rural-nonfarm or village group.

Mobility of Relief Families

The American people have a deserved reputation for a high degree of mobility in comparison with the inhabitants of older countries. Migration, as a means of escape from diminishing opportunities or an attempt to find new opportunities, became a part of our national tradition during the long interval of westward expansion which followed the early colonial period. The tradition has persisted to the present time, notwithstanding its inconsistency with the changed conditions brought about by the passing of the frontier.¹⁴ These historic considerations should be kept in mind when analyzing the migration of persons and families on the economic margin. It may be that what is in some cases widely condemned as a shiftless and senseless moving about is in some degree a survival of this historic pattern of adjustment in the face of declining economic opportunities.

Due to the relative recency and unique character of Oklahoma settlement, it is possible that the migratory pattern of adjustment is somewhat more prevalent here than in older settled areas of the nation.¹⁵ While the data on mobility which were collected in the present survey are of a rather limited character they afford some insight into the nature of the problem as it relates to recipients of relief. No attempt was made to secure a record of all the moves of each household or of any moves within the county of

¹² As indicated previously, most of the "other persons" listed in relief households were found to be related by blood or marriage to the family head and thus fell within the somewhat more elastic definition of the family employed by the Census. (See footnote 10, p. 9.)

¹³ See Warren S. Thompson, *Population Problems*, p. 107, New York., 1935; also O. E. Baker, "Distribution of the Population in the United States," *Annals of the American Academy*, 188:275-277 (November 1936).

¹⁴ See David Cushman Coyle, *Depression Pioneers*, W. P. A. publication, Washington, D. C., 1939.

¹⁵ See J. T. Sanders, *The Economic and Social Aspects of Mobility of Oklahoma Farmers*, p. 5. Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 195, August, 1929.

residence at the time the survey was conducted. Information was secured for heads of families only and was designed to yield a rough indication of the length of residence in the county and the distance of previous moves, if any. Table VIII represents a summary of the data collected.

TABLE VIII.—Percentage distribution of relief families by mobility status and residence of head.

Mobility status of head	RESIDENCE			
	Total	Rural-farm	Rural-nonfarm	Small city
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Lived in county since birth	15.9	16.4	14.9	11.6
Moved to county before 1930	56.1	53.7	63.3	61.6
Moved to county since 1929	23.2	24.6	18.6	25.4
from within state	15.8	17.1	12.0	15.2
from another state	4.3	3.8	5.1	8.0
unknown	3.1	3.7	1.5	2.2
Unknown	4.6	5.2	3.2	1.3

Of the 9,878 heads of relief families represented in Table VIII, only 16 percent had lived continuously in the county of their birth. Fifty-six percent had moved to the county of survey before 1930 and approximately 23 percent since 1929. It will be seen from the table that this latter group of recent migrants composed a larger percentage of the small city sample than of either one of the two rural residence groups. Most of those who moved to the county since 1929 came from other counties within the State, although in the rural-nonfarm and small city groups the percentages of out-of-state migrants were considerably greater than for the rural-farm areas.

While comparison with the general population was not possible on the basis of available data, it is evident that the relief population in the rural areas of the State represents a highly mobile group. Of the heads of those relief households living on farms at the time of the survey, approximately one in four had had at least one inter-county move during the preceding five-year period. Since no information was secured on moves within the county there is no doubt that the above figures greatly understate the actual amount of movement of the group under consideration. There is, of course, no way of determining whether this high mobility rate was responsible for the low financial status of the individuals involved but there is reason to believe that it may have been a contributing factor.¹⁰

The amount of mobility of heads of relief households was found to vary considerably with occupation. For example, a larger proportion of farm laborers than of any other occupational group had lived in the county since birth, while those reported as skilled and semi-skilled represented the smallest percentage of this category (Table IX). Farm operators, constituting by far the largest occupational group (5,710 out of 9,878), had the lowest percentage of those moving to the county since 1929, while the skilled and semi-skilled occupations had the highest percentage of these recent migrants.

¹⁰ J. T. Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-53.

TABLE IX.—Percentage distribution of heads of relief families by mobility status and usual occupation.

Mobility status	USUAL OCCUPATION					
	All occupations	Farm operators	Farm laborers	Skilled and semi-skilled	Unskilled	Miscellaneous
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Lived in county since birth	15.9	16.6	17.2	10.5	16.1	11.7
Moved to county before 1930	56.1	56.7	51.5	58.3	55.4	60.6
Moved to county since 1929	23.2	21.7	26.3	28.2	24.3	24.3
Unknown	4.6	5.0	5.0	3.0	4.2	3.4

PROSPECTS FOR REHABILITATION

Presumably the F. E. R. A. and related types of federal aid were designed primarily to render temporary assistance during the most critical period of an economic emergency. Regardless of the immediate purpose of the relief program the eventual rehabilitation of its beneficiaries may well be regarded as an ultimate objective. Whether their restoration to economic independence is to be positively promoted by the State or is to come through unaided individual effort, it is desirable to know as much as possible about the potential resources of the recipients of relief that are available for their rehabilitation. Such factors as employability, occupational experience, and education would seem to be of particular significance for an understanding of the present problem and its implications for the future. In the following pages an attempt will be made to throw some light on these and related questions.

Reasons for Applying for Relief

Some indication of their prospects for rehabilitation may be afforded by the reasons which relief recipients gave for applying for relief. Each case is, of course, unique in certain respects, but the reasons given were grouped into the general categories indicated in the following tables. The total case load for the month of the survey (June, 1935) was divided into (a) those accepted during June by the relief agency for the first time (Table X) and (b) those that were carried over from the previous month or reopened during the month after having been previously "closed" (Table XI.) It will be seen from the tables that, while three main reasons account for most of the cases in both groups, there are some differences in the relative importance of each. In assigning reasons for applying for relief an attempt was made to designate those factors of most immediate economic significance rather than those of a more remote and perhaps more fundamental character.

The most important single reason for the new relief cases was found to be "Crop failure or loss of livestock." This reason, which was doubtless associated with serious drought conditions in the state in 1935, accounted for 38 percent of the total number of new cases and for 50 percent of those

in the rural-farm group. "Decline of income from current employment" accounted for 39 percent of the carried over and reopened cases and was the most important single reason applying to this group. This category was made up of cases who were not wholly unemployed but whose earnings had declined to a point below the level of self-support.

The outstanding reasons for applying for relief are doubtless closely related to the residence and occupational distribution of the group involved which, in the present instance, represented a predominantly rural population engaged in agriculture. This no doubt explains the relatively small number of cases affected by "loss of job in ordinary employment." It may safely be assumed that most of the farm operators and farm laborers in the sample were not actually unemployed but were unable to support themselves on the income from their current employment (See Table XIV). Those cases giving as the chief reason for applying for relief "loss or depletion of assets" were concentrated in the rural-nonfarm and small city areas. This is to be expected since town and village families are much more likely than farm

TABLE X.—Percentage distribution of new relief cases by reason for opening and by residence.

Reasons for opening	RESIDENCE			
	Total	Rural-farm	Rural-nonfarm	Small city
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Loss of job in ordinary employment	3.7	2.6	6.6	5.9
Loss or depletion of assets	22.0	14.9	38.6	50.0
Crop failure or loss of livestock	38.4	50.0	9.7	1.7
Decline of income from current employment	22.3	20.2	29.1	22.0
All others	13.6	12.3	16.0	20.4

TABLE XI.—Percentage distribution of carried over and reopened relief cases by reason for opening and by residence.

Reasons for opening	RESIDENCE			
	Total	Rural-farm	Rural-nonfarm	Small city
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Loss of job in ordinary employment	2.4	1.4	4.8	9.4
Loss or depletion of assets	25.8	17.4	48.7	66.9
Crop failure or loss of livestock	28.6	36.1	5.8	3.8
Decline of income from current employment	39.3	41.0	37.4	16.9
All others	3.9	4.1	3.3	3.0

families to be dependent on income from savings. "Crop failure or loss of livestock," on the other hand, affected a much larger percentage of the farm than of the nonfarm families.

As indicated previously, the reasons assigned in the foregoing tables represent the most immediate and recent adverse economic factors affecting the families concerned. In all probability they are not, from a long range point of view, the most fundamental or important.

Gainful Workers in Relief Families¹⁷

The number of able bodied workers in a relief family is perhaps the most important factor determining its prospects for becoming self-supporting. The importance of this factor in any particular case is, in turn, at least partially dependent on (a) the size of the family and (b) the training and earning power of the workers concerned. The 9,878 families included in the sample contained a total of 13,936 gainful workers, or an average of 1.4 per family. Since the median size of family was found to be 4.8, this would mean an average of 3.4 dependents for each family or 2.4 for each worker. Table XII shows these families classified by size and by the number of gainful workers present. Subsequent tables will indicate the usual occupation and employment status of these workers at the time of the June survey.

TABLE XII.—Percentage distribution of relief families by size and by number of gainful workers.

Size of relief family	NUMBER OF GAINFUL WORKERS						
	Total	None	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Total	100.0	1.1	71.3	16.8	7.7	2.4	0.7
1	100.0	11.4	88.6	---	---	---	---
2	100.0	3.3	91.5	5.2	---	---	---
3	100.0	1.4	82.5	14.8	1.4	---	---
4	100.0	0.5	76.5	16.2	6.4	0.4	---
5	100.0	0.3	71.7	18.3	8.3	1.4	---
6	100.0	0.5	63.8	22.3	9.5	4.1	0.3
7	100.0	0.3	55.3	21.3	17.0	4.1	2.0
8	100.0	0.4	44.7	29.0	15.7	7.8	2.4
9	100.0	---	35.7	26.5	23.2	11.9	2.7
10	100.0	---	22.1	27.9	31.4	13.9	4.7
11	100.0	---	10.3	27.6	34.5	13.8	13.8
12 or more	100.0	---	13.8	10.3	27.6	31.0	17.3

From Table XII it will be seen that, while the number of workers increased with the size of the household, the increase was not proportionate. For example, of those households having four members (the median for the sample was 4.8) one-half of one percent had no gainful workers, 76.5 percent had only one, 16.2 percent had two, 6.4 percent had three, and four-tenths of one percent had four. There was a total of 1,908 households and 2,474 gainful workers in this size group, representing an average of 1.3 workers and 2.7 dependents in each family.

Of the families containing eight members, four-tenths of one percent had no gainful workers, 44.7 percent had only one, 29.0 percent had two, 15.7 percent had three, 7.8 percent had four, and 2.4 percent had five or more. There was a total of 510 families and 986 gainful workers in this size group, representing an average of 1.9 workers and 6.1 dependents in

¹⁷The term "gainful workers" as employed in this survey included all persons 16-64 years of age who were working or seeking work.

each family. If the number of workers had increased proportionately with size of family the average would have been 2.6 workers for each 5.4 dependents. It is therefore obvious that, in terms of the number of dependents for each potential wage earner, the smaller family groups hold a marked advantage over the larger ones.

Differences in the proportion of gainful workers by family in the different residence groups were not striking. In comparison with the rural-nonfarm and small city residents those in the rural-farm areas had somewhat fewer households with no gainful workers and a slightly higher proportion with three or more.

Change in Occupation of Relief Recipients

In order to throw some light on recent occupational shifts presumably resulting, at least in part, from the economic depression a comparison was made between the reported usual occupation of gainful workers and their current occupation at the time of the June 1935 survey. These comparisons are shown in Table XIII. A total of 12,022 gainful workers reported a usual occupation. In 94 cases the usual occupation was not ascertainable, while 1,820 able-bodied workers reported no usual occupation. These were almost entirely nonheads of families and represented for the most part unemployed youths who had never worked at regular jobs but who were seeking employment at the time of the survey.

Of the 12,022 individuals whose usual occupation was ascertained, 8,970, or nearly three-fourths, were agricultural workers and 3,052, or approximately one-fourth, were nonagricultural workers. Occupational shifts had apparently been much more frequent in the latter group than in the former. For example, 82.7 percent of the agricultural workers but only 30.3 percent of the nonagricultural workers were currently employed at their usual occupations. A major part of this difference was accounted for by the larger proportion of unemployed persons in the nonagricultural occupations. The percentage here was 53.4 as compared with only 14.9 for those reporting agriculture as a usual occupation. This agrees with previous statements (see p. 16) to the effect that the problem of relief in the rural areas of the state is not primarily due to unemployment but rather to insufficient farm income.

TABLE XIII.—Comparison of usual occupations of 12,022 gainful workers in relief households with their current occupation as of June, 1935.

Usual Occupation	Total	CURRENT OCCUPATION		
		Same as usual occupation	Other than usual occupation	Unemployed
	%	%	%	%
Agricultural workers	100.0	82.7	2.4	14.9
Farm operators	100.0	87.5	5.7	6.8
Owners and managers	100.0	94.3	3.3	2.4
Tenants	100.0	88.5	4.8	6.7
Croppers	100.0	79.2	10.4	10.4
Farm laborers	100.0	67.3	3.4	29.3
Non agricultural workers	100.0	30.3	16.3	53.4
Unskilled	100.0	39.3	8.4	52.3
Other	100.0	10.9	33.3	55.8

It would also appear from the above table that the unskilled nonagricultural workers fared considerably better as regards continuity of employment than did those in the category labelled "other." Only 8.4 percent of the former but 33.3 percent of the latter are shown to have a current occupation different from their usual one. This may conceivably be due to the relative scarcity of skilled, semi-skilled, and entrepreneurial type of employment in predominantly rural areas.

Education

It is generally conceded that a positive correlation exists between economic status and the amount of formal education. A number of studies of the relief population seem to bear out this assumption.¹⁸ In the present study, educational data were not secured for the June sample but those for October are in general agreement with previous findings.

Of the 5,114 heads of rural-farm relief families in the sample counties in October, 1935, over five percent had failed to complete the first grade, one-fourth had quit school at grade four or five, and a slightly smaller proportion had completed the eighth grade. Fewer than two percent had finished high school and only 11 percent were reported to have had any high school work. Only 24 out of the entire number had ever entered college.

As in other studies, residents of the nonfarm areas showed somewhat higher educational attainments than did those living on farms. For example, the rural-nonfarm group showed 14 percent continuing in school beyond the eighth grade as compared with only 11 percent for the rural-farm group. Differences were much more marked in the sample (308 persons) of family heads from small cities. Of this group, 27 percent had gone beyond the eighth grade and over half of this number had finished high school. The better showing of the village and town residents in comparison with the rural-farm group is no doubt partially explained by the superior educational facilities available to the former. It is also possible that occupational selection may be a contributing factor. In other words, it may be that those household heads with least formal education tend to find their best employment opportunities in agriculture. Data concerning education of the heads of relief families are summarized in Table XIV.

Data pertaining to education, like other material descriptive of the relief population, has more significance when compared with corresponding information for the nonrelief or the general population. Most such comparisons in the preceding pages have been limited to pointing out resemblances and differences between the relief sample and the general population as recorded by the 1930 Census. In regard to education, however, very little information concerning the general population of the sample counties is available. The Census material on education is meager and is not broken down by counties. The best Oklahoma data available for purposes of comparison are furnished by an unpublished study of the rural-farm population of four rural counties.¹⁹ These counties—Cotton, Craig, Haskell and Major—were

¹⁸ For Oklahoma, see Mattie Faye McCollum, *A Comparison of Relief and Nonrelief Households of Two Oklahoma Counties in Relation to Social and Economic Organization*, unpublished M. S. thesis, Department of Sociology and Rural Life, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1938, pp. 88-96; and Robert T. McMillan, *A Social and Economic Study of Relief Families in Ottawa County, Oklahoma, 1934*, Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Technical Bulletin No. 2, July 1938, pp. 33, 34; 37-39. For the United States, see T. C. McCormick, *Rural Households, Relief and Nonrelief*, pp. 30-35. W. P. A. Division of Social Research, Research Monograph II, 1935.

¹⁹ This project, "The Social Correlatives of Farm Tenure Status," is being conducted under the direction of William H. Sewell of the Department of Sociology and Rural Life of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. The data were collected in 1937.

selected as representative of the rural areas of the State and are essentially similar to the nine counties included in the 1935 relief survey. While the data are not strictly comparable it is believed that they provide some fairly reliable indication of differences in educational background. The results are presented in Table XV. It will be seen from this table that the heads of the relief families are somewhat over-represented in grades below seven and, with the exception of grade nine, correspondingly under-represented in

TABLE XIV.—Percentage distribution of heads of relief families classified by last school grade completed and by residence.

Last grade completed	RESIDENCE			
	All residences	Rural-farm	Rural-nonfarm	Small city
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0	4.5	5.1	3.4	1.3
1-3	10.0	10.5	8.3	10.4
4 and 5	24.3	24.7	24.0	19.5
6	12.8	13.3	11.2	13.0
7	9.9	10.0	10.4	6.5
8	24.4	24.0	26.3	20.8
9	5.1	5.4	4.7	2.6
10	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6
11	1.4	1.2	1.7	3.9
12	2.9	1.7	4.3	14.3
More than 12	0.8	0.4	1.1	3.9
Unknown	1.3	1.1	2.0	1.3

TABLE XV.—Educational attainments of heads of rural-farm relief families and heads of families representing the total rural-farm population

Last grade completed	SAMPLE OF STATE RURAL FARM POPULATION**		RELIEF POPULATION*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1212	100.0	5114	100.0
0	62	5.1	260	5.1
1-3	87	7.2	536	10.5
4 and 5	239	19.7	1262	24.7
6	82	6.8	682	13.3
7	137	11.3	512	10.0
8	359	29.6	1226	24.0
9	55	4.5	276	5.4
10	45	3.7	128	2.5
11	22	1.8	60	1.2
12	59	4.9	90	1.7
More than 12	36	3.0	24	0.4
Unknown	29	2.4	58	1.1

* Data from the nine sample counties included in the October 1935 relief survey.

** 1937 data from Cotton, Craig, Haskell and Major counties.

the grades above six. The differences are particularly striking in the proportions of the two groups that had finished high school. These findings are similar to those of McCollum in a comparative study of relief and non-relief households in Payne and Cleveland counties, Oklahoma.²⁰

From the data on school attendance shown in Table XVI it would appear that the children of relief recipients are in the process of acquiring educational handicaps similar to those of their parents. At least, a much smaller proportion from the younger age groups of the relief population were attending school than was true of corresponding ages in the sample from the general population. For example, in the age group five to six, 48 percent of the general population but only 28 percent of the relief population was attending school. The fact that the differences were much less in the older age groups may be due in part to the operation of the State school attendance law, which requires that a child remain in school until he has

TABLE XVI.—Percentage distribution of persons 5 to 20 years of age in rural-farm families by specific age groups and by school attendance.

Age	SAMPLE OF STATE RURAL FARM POPULATION*		RELIEF POPULATION**	
	In school	Not in school	In school	Not in school
Total	71.3	28.7	69.3	30.7
5-6	48.0	52.0	28.2	71.8
7-9	96.5	3.5	91.0	9.0
10-13	97.4	2.6	97.5	2.5
14-15	88.7	11.3	89.7	10.3
16-17	58.1	41.9	57.9	42.1
18-20	19.8	80.2	20.0	80.0

* Sample from Cotton, Craig, Haskell and Major counties, 1937.

** Total rural-farm relief population in nine sample counties, 1935.

completed the eighth grade or until he is 18 years of age. If, as seems probable, the child of relief parents tends to enter school at a later age and to remain retarded in his grade progress in comparison with the child of non-relief parents, it is to be expected that the relief group would show a relatively larger proportion of older children in school than would be true at the younger age levels. Data on grade progress and the extent of retardation was not obtained in the present survey, but the Oklahoma study by McCollum previously referred to shows a definite retardation of children from relief households.

A word of caution concerning the significance of the educational status of recipients of relief is perhaps appropriate at this point. Notwithstanding the demonstrated inferiority of their educational background it would be a mistake to assume, as is frequently done, that inadequate education is a basic "cause" of economic dependence. The facts are that a large number of rural nonrelief persons have an educational background as poor or poorer than do most of the recipients of relief, while many of the latter have a better than average education. It may well be that poor education is as much a consequence as a cause of a low economic status. As long as the

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 88, 89.

prevailing economic system is subject to recurring "depressions" it is unlikely that educational or other individual qualifications can insure immunity from unemployment and loss of economic independence.

CONCLUSION

Aside from emphasizing the magnitude of relief needs in rural areas, one of the most outstanding facts which emerges from this study is the essential similarity of the relief population to the general or total population. It is true that relief families are slightly larger and that the relief group as a whole is somewhat younger and less well educated than the general population. But, when these and other possible differences are taken into account, the fact remains that a major proportion of all persons receiving relief are indistinguishable from the rest of the population except in regard to economic status.

It must be recognized that the discovery of differences between the averages of the two groups with respect to various factors such as those noted above does not fully answer the question as to the causes of these differences. In order to ascertain more fully the fundamental factors responsible for the relief problem it would be necessary to go beyond the consideration of individual characteristics and differences to an analysis of the social and economic structure itself. Such an analysis is, of course, outside the scope of the present study.

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