

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT IN OLD AGE

A Research Planning Report

By

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with the assistance of

Glen Heathers

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL
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FOREWORD

THIS research planning bulletin by Dr. Otto Pollak is a completely reorganized and largely rewritten edition of a mimeographed planning report on *Social Adjustment in Old Age* issued by the Social Science Research Council two years ago. The continuing demand for this publication after the supply was exhausted led to the decision to prepare a more systematic statement of needed and feasible research organized around an adequate conceptual framework. In this bulletin is presented, for the first time, a theory of the nature and process of social adjustment in old age, utilizing the available pertinent concepts of psychology and of sociology.

The original edition was a prospectus of proposed research upon adjustment in old age prepared by twenty persons actively engaged in research in this new field. The present bulletin, while drawing upon much of the data in the original publication, introduces considerable new material. Noteworthy is the inclusion of a basic orientation about which the projects for research are organized.

When the Committee on Social Adjustment in Old Age was formed in 1943, there were available in the literature only a few scattered studies on the social aspects of aging. This condition was in marked contrast with the existence of a considerable body of research findings upon the biological and psychological phases of old age.

In the past four years there has been a marked growth in research projects, stimulated in part by the work of this Committee and in part by the growing public realization of the problems of social adjustment which confront older adults in a modern industrial society. It is hoped that this research planning bulletin will be helpful both in providing an overview of the social aspects of aging and in indicating profitable directions of further research.

Particularly helpful to the author in preparing this bulletin have been suggestions and criticisms offered by two members of the Council staff, Glen Heathers and Paul Webbink. Grateful acknowledgment is also made to the twenty contributors to the earlier publication: Charlotte Buhler, Ruth S. Cavan, H. Warren Dunham, Lawrence K. Frank, Thomas M. French, Anne E. Geddes, Philip M. Hauser, Oscar J. Kaplan, Hertha Kraus, Judson T. Landis, George Lawton, Irving Lorge, Merrill G. Murray, Otto Pollak, Talcott Parsons, Ollie A. Randall, Rainard Robbins, Leo W. Simmons, Irene B. Taeuber, Clark Tibbitts.

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The task of developing a basic orientation for the study of adjustment problems in old age and of integrating and supplementing the material contained in the preliminary edition of a research planning report on *Social Adjustment in Old Age* forced the author to use the material in the earlier contributions in such a way that their unity and identity were lost. He has done so with considerable reluctance, yielding only to the pressure of his mandate to produce more than a symposium. He carries therefore a heavier burden of responsibility and owes the contributors of the original report a greater debt of gratitude than would an editor of a symposium. In at least partial fulfillment of this obligation he would like to stress his indebtedness to those contributors to the earlier research planning report whose materials he has incorporated in bulk into this presentation. To go further and identify the authorship of various individual paragraphs or sentences taken from the original report unfortunately would be too cumbersome. It would also not fulfill its purpose because it might give an impression of a smaller contribution than was actually given by the availability of the material from which the author was permitted to draw. His work would have been impossible without all the contributions contained in the earlier report.

Specifically the author wants to make the following acknowledgments: The idea of Chapter 3 was originally conceived by Ruth S. Cavan and the tabular material which she assembled represents the backbone of this chapter. Furthermore, a considerable number of detailed research suggestions with regard to old age adjustment in the area of family living go back to her contribution to the earlier report. The material on housing has been taken over with minor rearrangements from the research proposals contributed by Hertha Kraus. Many research suggestions and background material were contributed by Paul Web-

bink in the form of comments to an earlier draft of the chapter on old age and making a living. The chapter on attitudes toward retirement comes almost completely from the contribution of Clark Tibbitts. Material from his hand is also incorporated in Chapter 9. The material on financial adjustment in old age represents, except for rearrangements, minor rewriting and omissions, practically a combination of the earlier contributions of Anne E. Geddes, Merrill G. Murray, and Rainard Robbins. Many research proposals in Chapter 10 were originally made by Judson T. Landis and George Lawton.

The emphasis on the demographic basis of old age problems and various research suggestions in this respect originated with Philip M. Hauser and Irene B. Taeuber. Considerable parts of the theoretical approach to family problems in old age go back to the contribution of Talcott Parsons.

The usage of psychological concepts in the presentation of the proposed frame of reference and throughout the bulletin is a result of the active cooperation of Glen Heathers, who contributed the major part of Chapter 5. In the latter chapter there are also incorporations of material contributed by Charlotte Buhler, Thomas M. French, and Irving Lorge.

A special expression of appreciation is finally due to the members of the Committee on Social Adjustment in Old Age who supported the author with the wisdom of their counsel and the power of their encouragement.

Needless to say, the responsibility for the whole presentation rests entirely with the author.

OTTO POLLAK

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