

CAN'T WE STUDY THE FAMILY, TOO? Increasingly over the past year or two the spotlight of public scrutiny has been turned on the family. Educators, psychiatrists, social workers, the church, the law courts are searching trends in family life for causes of delinquency or breakdown and prescribing a good family life as a preventative or cure for these ills. The subject was important enough to move the Governor-General and Madame Vanier to set up a Conference on the Family, bringing authorities from all over the Dominion to study the problems and the responsibilities (and, let us hope, something of the attainable happiness) of family living in these present confused and changing times.

Not many of us could get into the conference — there was barely room for the professionals and the leaders of organizations. But why can't we study the family ourselves? Isn't the subject "a natural" for a Women's Institute? When Institutes were organized the family was their first concern; their programs were centered around family welfare. Now some people seem to think we have outgrown this entirely. It is true of course that we have to take responsibility as citizens outside the family and this gives us an opportunity, working with others, to do things for our own family and families all over the world that we could never do working alone. But it can be very impersonal; if we should suddenly disappear our beneficiaries wouldn't even miss us. The little group in our own house depend on us. Surely we want to learn anything we can that will help us.

How can we study family life in a Women's Institute?

Many branches are already giving considerable attention to the family in their regular programs. They do this when they have a speaker on Child Psychology or Child Guidance or Farm Family Partnerships; when they have a discussion panel of teachers and parents on such subjects as "How Can I Prepare My Child for Public School?" or "Home and School Cooperation in the High School Years."

After some experience with the clear thinking and the ethical standards of sixteen to twenty-year-old girls at the 4-H Homemaking Club girls' conferences, I feel that we could profit greatly by having young people on panels in the Institutes. They should be especially qualified to talk about social activities to take the place of too-early dating; what the community needs in recreation facilities and how to provide these.

What about a panel on "The Social Segregation of the Age Groups", trying to bring out how much of it is good and how much bad, with the panel including an elderly man or woman or both, a middle-aged member or two, a young adult, a teenager?

A panel on Money Management. Women should have a good deal to contribute on installment buying, impulse buying, sales resistance, assessing advertisements. Someone from the Consumers' Association of Canada might be brought in as a consultant.

Then surely the Institutes will want to do some thinking on the popular controversy as to whether housewives have a right to work away from home. It is possible that Betty Friedan's book "The Feminine Mystique" is generating more heat than light; still the question is worth thinking about. Because every Institute is likely to have members who feel keenly on one side or the other it is better to avoid a direct debate. Even a panel might become too heated. But there could be two speeches "When is a married woman justified in taking employment outside the home?" and "When is a married woman *not* justified in taking employment outside the home?" The topics could be dealt with by two speakers or by one.

A church commission on "Married Women in Gainful Employment," after several sittings found that the only recommendation they could agree on was that the church should recommend a standard for every home, and that the individual woman should aim at living up to it in her own situation. For such a standard we have not found anything better than one that has been quoted many times in this paper and including among others specifications that a satisfying home is "morally wholesome", "mentally stimulating", "socially responsible", "spiritually inspiring", "founded on mutual affection and respect" . . . How do you make a home "morally wholesome", "mentally stimulating", "socially responsible", "spiritually inspiring", "founded on mutual affection and respect"? Right there we have five good subjects for a study of Family Living.

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