

## A DECADE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN OKLAHOMA, 1937-1947

J. J. BHYNE

University of Oklahoma, Norman

In view of the fact that slightly over ten years have elapsed since the passage of the Federal and state social security acts, some indication of the trends and general influence of the program on the population may be gained by a study of the program in one state. For this purpose, the three public assistance programs, namely, Old Age Assistance, Aid to Dependent Children and Aid to the Blind, have been selected in preference to the other features of the Social Security Act because in Oklahoma the assistance programs have commanded major attention.

In the ten year period from 1938 to 1947, inclusive, the number of old age assistance recipients under care increased from 74,263 to 102,713. A study of the yearly trends for the decade showed a rapid increase from 1938 to 1942, little change during the war period from 1942 through 1945, and a very rapid increase since the close of the war.

An analysis of the amounts expended for the payment of old age assistance grants showed an even more rapid increase than the number who received the assistance grants. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1938 a total of \$12,094,178 was expended for old age assistance in Oklahoma. On the other hand, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1947, a total of \$44,529,952 was spent for the same purpose. This is an increase of 270 per cent in the decade. The much greater percentage increase in the cost of the program than in the number of recipients has been due to the increases in the individual assistance payments during the period under consideration.

A study of the average monthly payments for old age assistance for the decade reflected rather closely the trends with respect to total payments. The mean monthly assistance grant per person for June 1938 was \$15.14. For the same month ten years later the average payment was \$42.33.

A study of old age assistance rates by race showed that for both Negroes and Indians the rate was somewhat higher than for whites.

Translated in terms of rates per 1000 of the general population over 64 years of age by race it was found that the rate for whites was 605 and for Negroes 778. Similar comparison of the rate per 1000 for Indians could not be made because of the inability to secure the number of Indians in the state over 64 years of age. However, Indians composed 2.8 per cent of all recipients, while in 1940 the Indian population comprised only 0.9 per cent of the total population of the state.

Relatively little difference was found in the distribution of old age assistance on the basis of sex. The conclusion may, therefore, be drawn that dependency in Oklahoma falls with approximately equal force on each of the two sexes.

From the beginning of the old age assistance program, Oklahoma has consistently had the highest rate in the United States. In June 1947 the number of old age assistance recipients per 1000 of the general population over 64 years of age in Oklahoma was 574, as compared with 214 for the country as a whole and only 52 in Delaware. Texas, with a rate of 474, was second highest among the states. At the same time the rate in Arkansas was 316, in Missouri 314, in Kansas 190, and in New Mexico 290.

Furthermore, a study of the old age assistance rate and the per capita wealth by states (based on 1945) showed that, while Oklahoma ranked ahead of every other state in the rate for old age assistance, the per capita wealth of the population in the state was greater than the per capita wealth of eleven other states.

An analysis of the old age assistance rate per 1000 of the general population over 64 by Oklahoma counties revealed practically as wide a variation between the 77 counties in the state as between the 48 states. For example, the number of recipients per 1000 of the population over 64 varies from a high of 872 in one county to a low of only 276 in Grant County. In other words, the rate in one county was over three times the rate in Grant County. In general, counties in northwestern Oklahoma had the lowest rate, counties in the eastern one-third of the state had the highest rate, and the counties in the central section in general had a rate falling in between these two extremes.

The same trends as were observed for old age assistance for the decade from 1937 to 1947 were also observed for the aid to dependent children program. The number of children under care increased from 38,731 at the beginning of the decade to 73,918 at the close. Average monthly payments during that period increased from \$15.67 to \$44.96 per family. Total cost per year of the aid to dependent children program during the ten year period rose from \$2,391,239 to \$12,350,231, an increase of nearly 400 per cent.

Assistance to the blind, on the other hand, changed relatively little during the decade. The actual increase in the number of blind recipients in the state rose from 2246 to 2587, or about 15 per cent. Monthly payments per person, on the other hand, reflected the same general pattern of increase observed for the other two assistance programs, rising from only \$11.97 per person per month for June 1937 to \$42.91 per month for June 1947. Total cost of the program for aid to the blind per year rose from \$348,941 at the beginning of the decade to \$1,107,945 at the close.

---