

The Illegitimate Children of Members of the Occupying Forces in the Federal Republic and in West Berlin (1956)

Abstract

In the mid-1950s, West Germany's Federal Office of Statistics sought to collect reliable data on the children born since 1945 to German women and foreign occupation soldiers, mostly Americans. The office counted 67,000 occupation children, among them around 5,000 with an African-American father. More than three-quarters of these children lived with their mothers or with maternal relatives. About 30% required public welfare support.

Source

Statistical Reports

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Introduction

The sociopolitical discussion often highlighted the special situation of the illegitimate occupation children because there was no legal possibility, until May 5, 1955, of claiming child support from the fathers. Even after the end of the occupation regime and the activation of the Troop and Transition Treaty, claims for support can only be brought against members of foreign military forces if they are stationed in Germany, and only for the period after May 5, 1955. If the mothers are not able to support the children, public welfare is obligated to provide aid. However, nothing definite is known about the extent of the costs that the public will incur as a result of this special kind of aftermath of the war, about the general social situation of the illegitimate children of members of the occupying forces and German mothers, or about the total number of these children. There is a 1951 study by the International Association for Youth Aid that is based on surveys of public and private child welfare organizations. In addition, the German Association for Public and Private Welfare carried out a study, but it only included those illegitimate children of members of the occupying forces who are under the official wardship of the Youth Welfare Offices. A state-level survey was carried out in Hesse in 1951. In addition, there have been a few studies carried out on the initiative of the social security offices of a few large cities. However, these surveys do not yet give us a complete picture.

To remedy this deficiency, and to show the true quantitative significance of a problem that has frequently preoccupied the public, the Federal Ministry of the Interior has joined forces with the state governments on a statistical survey throughout the Federal Republic and in Berlin (West).

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The survey identified just under 68,000 illegitimate children of members of the occupation forces under guardianship in the Federal Republic and in Berlin (West). The births fall in the years 1945 to 1955, whereby the figures for 1955 are, for reasons given above, incomplete. These children make up nearly 1 percent of all children born in the area indicated in the years 1945 to 1954, and 11 percent of illegitimate children who were under foster care in the Federal Republic and in Berlin (West) at the beginning of 1955, or who were revocably removed from foster care. The rate is quite different state by state, as is shown by the relevant chart (Table 1).

Among the recorded illegitimate children of members of the occupation forces, in 55 percent of the cases the father was identified as a member of the American forces, in 15 percent as a member of the French forces, in 13 percent as a member of the British forces, in 5 percent as a member of the Soviet forces, in 3% as a member of the Belgian forces.

The remaining 9 percent were distributed among the other occupying forces; this group also included cases in which there was no information. Needless to say, this distribution correlates strongly with the number of occupying forces of the different nationalities that are stationed on federal territory and in Berlin (West), which is also reflected in the numbers for the various federal states. All told, just under 4,800 illegitimate children from colored members of the occupation forces (7 percent of all illegitimate occupation children) were reported. Three thousand and two hundred children were reported by the mothers as the result of a rape.

A breakdown of the children in the statistical survey by birth year shows that the greatest frequencies occurred in the first years after the war. A steady decline is then evident until 1951. Since 1952, the number of illegitimate children of members of the occupation forces has been rising continuously again, including the children of colored members of the occupation forces. Of 100 illegitimate children by members of the occupation forces, just under 75 percent were from members of the U.S. forces in 1953, just under 80 percent in 1954. These percentages have increased steadily in the last few years.

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Of significance for the social situation of the children are the conditions under which they must live. The statistical survey from the spring of 1955 has shown that just under 73 percent of illegitimate children by members of the occupation forces live with their mothers. Another 13 percent live with the mother's immediate relatives, which probably refers mostly to the parents of the mothers. This leaves, fortunately enough, only 14 percent of children who have been placed with outside families or in homes. Compared to these overall numbers, the situation is somewhat less favorable for children of colored background: here only 65 percent of the children live with their mothers and 10 percent with the mother's closest relatives, while nearly 25% are in outside families or homes. Of the illegitimate children by members of the occupation forces, a total of 4.9 percent had been offered by the mothers or selected by the Child Welfare Offices for adoption. Among the illegitimate children of colored members of the occupation forces, the relevant rate was 13 percent.

Another positive finding from the results of the special survey on the illegitimate children of members of the occupation forces is that nearly 70 percent of all recorded children are fully supported by the mother or relatives, which means that public aid is not required in these cases. This number also includes those children for whom the father provides all or some of the support; however, the number of those cases was not separately recorded. In addition to support from mothers, relatives, or fathers, public welfare had to get involved in 8 percent of the cases, while in 22 percent of the cases, the support for the children had to be completely paid from public funds. All told, then, public welfare was drawn on in 30 percent of the cases (Table 4 – without Bremen). Here, too, the corresponding rates are somewhat less favorable for the children of colored members of the occupation forces. The situation of support is also quite different among the children of fathers of various nationalities. The number of acknowledgments of paternity seems surprisingly low at only 6.7 percent of all illegitimate children of members of the occupation forces. Of the fathers of colored children, 6.1 percent have acknowledged paternity. [...]

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, Wiesbaden, *Statistische Berichte*, o. VI/29/6, October 10, 1956.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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