

Ruth Shonle Cavan was born in 1896 in Tuscola, Illinois. She took her PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago in 1926. She maintained an affiliation with the University of Chicago for many years, working primarily with Ernest Burgess on a variety of projects. Cavan left the University of Chicago in the 1947 to take a faculty position at Rockford College as the school's only professor of sociology. She retired from Rockford in 1962, but then took a position on the faculty at Northern Illinois University in 1964, working there until her second retirement in 1977, at age 80. Cavan served as a Professor Emeritus at both Rockford College and Northern Illinois University until her death in 1993 at age 96.

In her early works, she built upon the theoretical perspectives and methodologies of the Chicago School. Her first book, Suicide, was published in 1928, followed up by The Adolescent in the Family in 1934. During the twenty-year period following the receipt of her PhD, she published eight books and some thirty articles. These works focused primarily on the family, criminology, and delinquency.

She published Criminology in 1948. This work was adopted by the United States Armed Forces Institute. She turned her attention in the 1950s to prisons and prison reform, and wrote of the need for less reliance on prisons, and argued for an increased use of probation. Her research interests moved into the cross-national realm at this time, and she authored numerous articles in the area of crime and criminology that carried an international theme.

She maintained an interest in families and youth throughout her career, publishing numerous works on the topic. Two of her more notable works in these areas were Juvenile Delinquency (1962; this book went into four editions), and Delinquency and Crime: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (1968). "Negro Family Disorganization and Juvenile Delinquency," published in 1959, also achieved some measure of recognition at the time.

She was the President of the Midwest Sociological Society and of the Illinois Council on Family Relations, and served on the board of the National Council on Family Relations. The American Sociological Association granted her fellow status in 1959, and the American Society of Criminology recognized her as a Fellow in 1965. In 1974, the Ruth Shonle Cavan Auditorium was so named at Northern Illinois University.



Photo of Ruth Shonle Cavan taken July 5, 1979

For a bibliography of Ruth Shonle Cavan works, go to:

www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/rbannis1/SocWomen/Sources/Cavan.htm

For more information concerning the life and times of Ruth Shonle Cavan, see Imogene L. Moyer, "Life and Works of Ruth Shonle Cavan: Pioneer Woman in Criminology," Journal of Crime and Justice, Vol 12 (2), 1989, pp. 171-201.