

Juvenile Delinquency

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No trans-oceanic air flight brings more complications in charting the route than the effort to segregate the factors in a child offender's personality and environment that have resulted in his becoming a "juvenile delinquent." Through the Mental Hygiene Clinic, the Juvenile Court of Milwaukee County attempts such a diagnosis, so that the most intelligent remedy may be applied in each individual case.

Bad companionship stood out strikingly as the most potent single cause of misconduct among the environmental factors in the lives of the 300 children—208 boys and 92 girls—examined over a period of two years. In the 300 cases, 867 separate factors were found to be operating to produce delinquent behavior, an average of almost three to a child. Results in this group showed that in the average case there were present two environmental causes and one individual (personality) cause.

Cold figures point an accusing finger at the home life of these unfortunate youngsters. Unwholesome conditions in or pertaining to the home represent the largest group of factors in the environment of these boys and girls who have gone astray. Inadequate parental control occurred in 96 cases; bad home conditions (immorality, drinking, quarreling, abuse, crowding, etc) occurred in 84 cases; unhappy home life in 19, lack of parental understanding in 11. And so on down the line of unstable home conditions which seem influential in causing a child to run counter to social rules.

Pursuing individual analysis into the more elusive mental factors, the results in the Mental Hygiene Clinic with this group of 300 indicates that mental defect has a great deal to do in predisposing a boy or girl toward delinquent conduct. In 126 out of 300 cases mental subnormality in some degree was a contributing factor.

Out of these 300 boys and girls it was found that 163, or 52.5 percent, had normal intelligence. Seventy-six, or 24 percent, fell into the subnormal group. Sixty-one, or 23.6 percent, were mentally defective. In the boys' group only 15.4 percent were defective, as against 31.5 percent in the girls' group. The clinic found that mental deficiency correlated pretty highly with sex offense among the girls seen. Mental

"Our figures tend to show, then, that the mentally diseased in any considerable number do not become delinquent unless environmental conditions are morally unfavorable. And those who hold that a strong casual [sic] relationship exists between mental disease as such and delinquency or crime will have to meet the challenge of the figures of our very carefully developed case studies in any of the four series, taken separately or comparatively."—Healy and Bronner, "Delinquents and Criminals—Their Making and Unmaking."

defect in girls is not characterized by aggressive sex behavior so often as mentally deficient girls are apt to be easily suggestible victims of sex approaches. The boys involved in these cases are generally older and do not come within the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court.

In exploring the inner mental life of the boys and girls examined, such important elements were found as inferiority feeling in 17 cases, mental conflict in 17, dynamic association in 4, grudge attitude in 3, theft ideation in 10, adolescent instability in 6, desire for recognition in 4, desire for possession in 9, desire for adventure in 8, desire for approbation in 1, and excessive imagination in 2.

Sex, as an instinctive urge in the individual life, makes for delinquency when the child cannot meet the issue adequately. This was brought out clearly in 34 cases, divided as follows: extreme sex ideation in 15 cases; early sex ideation or experience in 6; inadequate sex knowledge in 5; perverted sex ideation in 3; extreme sex curiosity in 3, and sex precocity in 2.

Thus it is seen that both the child and the environment need to be studied, the former in its physical and mental phases and the latter in its manifold aspects. Nothing less than a complete and comprehensive examination can hope to reveal all of the contributing influences in juvenile delinquency, and it is only through their knowledge and revelation that effective treatment can be instituted.

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