A STUDY OF THE TENDENCY TOWARDS DELINQUENCY OF BACKWARD CHILDREN.

BY

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In discussions on juvenile delinquency it is often stated that mental defect and mental backwardness are associated closely with misconduct in the child. So far as certifiable mental defect is concerned, Professor Burt has laid it down that not more than 7 per cent. of juvenile delinquents are mentally defective within the meaning of the Act. Although there have been some authorities who have put the percentage as high as 20, most now find themselves pretty well in agreement with Professor Burt's figures, but it is frequently stated that if mental defect is not closely associated with delinquency, the moron or backward child often shows asocial conduct. This appears to be one of those generalizations which are not supported by carefully worked out statistics, and it seems desirable to bring forward some evidence as to whether this is the case or not. If such is to be adduced, we must not estimate how many delinquents are backward, but try to determine how many backward children become delinquent. An opportunity to do something towards this end was afforded by the fact that during the last nine years several cases have been referred from the schools of the city of Bath to Dr. Thomas, the deputy school medical officer, as supposedly defective. One hundred of these children who were not found to be certifiable under the Act, and were therefore not placed in a special school, have been carefully investigated and followed up. The appended figures give a summary of the result of this investigation.

NUMERICAL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.

Children reported by school masters and mistresses as probably subnormal = 100 (boys 56, girls 44).

Boys.

At the date of the inquiry the ages of the 56 boys ranged from 22 to 8. Of these, 1 showed an I.Q. (intelligence quotient) of 60-70 per cent.; 18 an I.Q. of 70-80 per cent.; 27 an I.Q. of 80-90 per cent.; 9 an I.Q. of 90-100 per cent.; while 1 showed an I.Q. of 116 per cent.

Conduct in School.

Forty boys showed good conduct in school; 16 were complained of in some way or another; 10 were noted as asocial with other children at school—that is, were either leaders in mischief, spiteful with other children, or too easily led; 15 were noted as unsatisfactory in their conduct in the home.

Of the troublesome cases, 5 were noted as causing difficulty both at home and in the school; 11 were troublesome in school, but good at home; and 10 were troublesome at home, but good in school.

Of the 10 who were asocial with other children, 3 showed a correlation with complaints from both the home and the school; 3 with complaints from the home; 2 with complaints from the school; and 2 without complaints from either.

During their school period, therefore, 28 showed some abnormality in conduct—that is, 50 per cent. Of these, 7 were noticed to have some defect of physical health—that is, 25 per cent.—but, of the well-behaved boys, 11 were noted to have a defect of physical health—that is, 39 per cent.

In 18 cases there was a broken parental relationship. By this is meant that either the father or mother was dead or separated. Of these, 13 cases showed conduct disorder. Of the 5 cases who showed no conduct disorder, 1 had neither parent and was in a home; in 1 case the father had deserted; and in 3 cases the father was dead. Of the 13 cases with conduct disorder, 4 had lost both parents, 5 had lost their father, and 4 had lost their mother.

Family History.

With regard to the family history: in 24 cases nervous or mental manifestations were noted. Of these, 8 had some sort of conduct disorder, and 16 were of good conduct. In 3 cases there was pronounced physical ill health in the family. Of these, 1 showed conduct disorder and 2 were of good conduct. In 6 cases, one or more members of the family were certified as mentally deficient. Of these, 3 showed conduct disorder and 3 were of good conduct.

The home conditions were reported as bad in 6 cases. Of these, 4 showed conduct disorder, and 2 were of good conduct. One boy had had encephalitis lethargica, but there was no conduct disorder, either at school or later.

In one boy, who showed conduct disorder in all respects, there was a history that his family had had a very bad experience during the Irish revolution, which had left a strong emotional impression on the boy. This is the boy referred to below, who was sent to a Home Office school and is only now doing well. He had no special treatment.

Of the 56 boys examined, 37 have now left school, and of these 17 showed no conduct disorder while at school, and 20 gave some trouble of one sort or another. It has been impossible to trace 4 cases, 3 of whom had shown conduct disorder at school.

Of the 16 who have been traced who showed no trouble during school age, none have given any trouble since leaving school: 13 are in work and are doing well; 2 have had work and did well in it, but are now out of work; 1 has so far found no work.

Of the 17 who have been traced and had given trouble during school age, 10 are in work and doing well; 3 have had work and did well in it, but are now out of work; 1 had work and was fairly satisfactory, but is now out of work; 1 has definitely been dismissed for misconduct; 1 is a waster and has never got work; 1 got into the hands of the police for stealing, was sent to a reformatory school, from which he tried to escape, and his term therefore was lengthened; he is now reported as of good conduct.

Of the 37 supposedly defective boys who have left school, 4 cannot be traced; 23 are in work and are doing well; 5 have had work and done well, but are at present out of work; 1 has had work and was fairly satisfactory, but is at present out of work; 3, one of whom has had work, have been definitely unsatisfactory, though one is now reported as having improved, and one has not yet found work, but is of good conduct. One boy 100 per cent. I.Q. is doing very well in a garage.

The boy with 116 per cent. I.Q. behaved well at school, but was uncontrolled at home and pilfered. His father had died in an asylum, his mother was nervous, and he was sent to a training ship, where he is training for the navy and apparently doing well.

The following list shows the types of employment: errand boy, 8; factory worker, 5; milkman, 3; gardener, 2; farm worker, 2; motor mechanic, 2; grocer, 2; warehouseman, 1; clerk, 1; chair-maker, 1; labourer, 1; soldier, 1; page-boy, 1; total 30.

GIRLS.

At the date of the inquiry the ages of the 44 girls ranged from 22 to 8. Of these, 2 showed an I.Q. of 60-70 per cent.; 16 an I.Q. of 70-80 per cent.; 22 an I.Q. of 80-90 per cent.; 3 an I.Q. of 90-100 per cent.; while 1 showed an I.Q. of 130 per cent.

Conduct in School.

Twenty-four girls showed good conduct in school; 20 were complained of in some way or another; 14 were noted as asocial with other children at school; 10 were noted as unsatisfactory in their conduct in the home.

Of the troublesome cases 7 were noted as causing difficulty both at home and in the school; 13 were troublesome in school, but good at home; 3 were troublesome at home, but good in school.

Of the 14 who were asocial with other children, 5 showed a correlation with complaints from both the home and the school; 2 with complaints from the home; 4 with complaints from the school; 3 without complaints from either.

During their school period, therefore, 26 showed some abnormality in conduct—that is, 59 per cent. Of these, 6 were noticed to have some defect of physical health—that is, 23 per cent., about the average for the total school population—but of the well-behaved girls 6 were also noted to have a defect of physical health—that is, 33 per cent. Of the 12 cases of defect in physical health 5 suffered from rheumatic infection; 3 of these had conduct defect and 2 were without conduct disorder.

In 17 cases there was a broken parental relationship. By this is meant that either the father or mother was dead or separated. Of these, 9 cases showed conduct disorder. Of the 8 cases who showed no conduct disorder, 1 had lost both parents; in 7 cases the father was either dead or unknown. Of the 9 cases with conduct disorder, 6 had lost both parents and were either boarded out or in homes; 2 had lost their father; 1 had lost her mother.

Family History.

With regard to the family history: In 9 cases nervous or mental manifestations were noted. Of these, 7 had some sort of conduct disorder, and 2 were of good conduct. In 7 cases there was pronounced physical ill health in the family. Of these, 2 showed conduct disorder and 5 were of good conduct. In 9 cases one or more members of the family were certified as mentally deficient. Of these, 7 showed conduct disorder, and 2 were of good conduct.

The home conditions were reported as bad in 10 cases. Of these, 7 showed conduct disorder, and 2 were of good conduct.

Of the 44 girls examined 30 have now left school, and of these 9 showed no conduct disorder while at school, and 21 gave some trouble of one sort or another. It has been impossible to trace 2 cases, one of whom showed conduct disorder at school.

Of the 8 who have been traced who showed no trouble during school age, none have given any trouble since leaving school: 7 are in work and are doing well, and one has been married for a year.

Of the 20 who have been traced and had given trouble during school age, 16 are in work and doing well; 1 has had work and did well in it, but is now out of work; 1 had work but was dismissed for misconduct; 1 cannot get work; and 1 is in a mental institution.

Of the 30 supposedly defective girls who have left school, 2 cannot be traced; 23 are in work and are doing well; 1 is married; 1 had work and did well, but is at present out of work; 1 cannot find work; 1 has had work and proved definitely unsatisfactory; and 1 is in a mental institution.

One girl 100 per cent. I.Q. showed no conduct disorder and is now in steady work. The girl with 130 per cent. I.Q. gave a considerable amount of trouble, both at school and at home, from pilfering and lying, but on being removed to another school the mistress gave her positions of trust and her conduct improved very markedly.

The following list shows the types of employment: domestic service, 11; factory worker, 5; tailoress, 3; barmaid, 2; waitress, 1; laundress, 1; nursemaid, 1; gardener, 1; messenger girl, 1; total, 26.

BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS.

Taking boys and girls together, at the date of the inquiry the ages of the 100 children ranged from 22 to 8. Of these, 3 showed an I.Q. of 60-70 per cent.; 34 an I.Q. of 70-80 per cent.; 49 an I.Q. of 80-90 per cent.; 12 an I.Q. of 90-100 per cent.; 1 an I.Q. of 116 per cent., and 1 an I.Q. of 130 per cent.

Conduct in School.

Sixty-four children showed good conduct in school; 36 were complained of in some way or another; 24 were noted as asocial with other children at school; 25 were noted as unsatisfactory in their conduct in the home.

Of the troublesome cases, 12 were noted as causing difficulty both at home and in school; 24 were troublesome in school, but good at home; 13 were troublesome at home, but good in school.

Of the 24 who were asocial with other children, 8 showed a correlation with complaints from both the home and the school; 5 with complaints from the home; 6 with complaints from the school; 5 without complaints from either.

During their school period 54 showed some abnormality in conduct. Of these, 13 (24 per cent.) were noticed to have some defect of physical health, but of the well-behaved children 17 (37 per cent.) were noted to have a defect of physical health.

In 35 cases there was a broken parental relationship. Of these, 22 showed conduct disorder. Of the 13 cases who showed no conduct disorder 2 had lost both parents and in 11 cases the father was either dead or unknown. Of the 22 cases with conduct disorder 10 had lost both parents, 7 had lost their father, and 5 had lost their mother.

Family History.

With regard to the family history: in 33 cases nervous or mental manifestations were noted. Of these, 15 had some sort of conduct disorder and 18 were of good conduct. In 10 cases there was pronounced physical ill health in the family. Of these, 3 showed conduct disorder, and 7 were of good conduct. In 15 cases one or more members of the family were certified as mentally deficient. Of these, 10 showed conduct disorder and 5 were of good conduct.

The home conditions were reported as bad in 16 cases. Of these, 11 showed conduct disorder and 4 were of good conduct.

Of the 100 children examined, 67 have now left school, and of these 26 showed no conduct disorder while at school, and 41 gave some trouble of one sort or another. It has been impossible to trace 6 cases, 4 of whom had shown conduct disorder at school.

Of the 24 cases that have been traced who showed no trouble during school age, none have given any trouble since leaving school; 20 are in work and are doing well; 2 have had work and did well in it, but are now out of work; 1 has so far found no work, and 1 girl has married.

Of the 37 that have been traced and had given trouble during school age, 26 are in work and doing well; 4 have had work and did well in it, but are now out of work; 1 had work and was fairly satisfactory, but is now out of work; 2 have been dismissed from work for misconduct; 1 cannot get work; 1 is a waster and has never got work; 1 got into the hands of the police and was sent to a reformatory school; and 1 is in a mental institution.

Of the 67 supposedly defective children who have left school, 6 cannot be traced; 46 are in work and are doing well; 6 have had work and done well, but are at present out of work; 1 has had work and was fairly satisfactory, but is at present out of work; 4, two of whom have had work, have been definitely unsatisfactory; 1 girl is married; 1 cannot find work, and 1 is in a mental institution.

Two children who proved normal—that is, 100 per cent. I.Q.—have done well and given no trouble. Two children who were supernormal gave trouble through pilfering and lying at an early age, but when put into better circumstances their conduct has improved and they seem to be turning out well.

In considering these figures it is perhaps worthy of note that most, if not all, these children were of the type who might well be sent to child guidance clinics as at present established and being established in many centres. With the exception of one or two, none of them received the specially organized treatment which is offered at these clinics, although in many cases they were the subjects of particular care on the part of both the teachers and the school medical department. None the less, the striking feature of the whole investigation is that adaptation to environment was difficult to a large proportion of them at school age, but 90 per cent. of them succeeded later in adapting themselves. This would seem to indicate that the enthusiasts for child guidance, amongst whom the present authors count themselves, should not make too extravagant claims for their methods. It is sometimes implied in the publicity notices of child guidance clinics—met with more particularly in other countries than this—that but for child guidance the younger generation must grow up neurotic, criminal, and maladjusted; but former generations have lied and stolen and played truant in their youth and yet grown up to figure wonderfully well in the struggle for civilized existence. Should we therefore hold with certain opponents of child guidance who maintain that the whole thing is a fad and of no practical service to the community? It would seem that the truth lies somewhere between these extremes, for it certainly does not benefit the individual or the community that pilfering, lying, or truancy should continue any longer than absolutely necessary, even though in many cases a successful adaptation may be made later. Further, if, as is generally admitted, specialist clinics are desirable for children for various physical disabilities, specialist clinics for mental disabilities are also necessary. Another interesting feature of the early difficulty of adaptation and later relative success is that it corresponds with certain, so far unpublished, observations of Dr. Thomas on the progress of mental development of certified mental defectives who, when they are at such a low level as to come within the official designation of feeble-minded, do progress rather than remain, as is sometimes supposed, at a constant level. Since mental defect is held by the recent departmental committee to consist more of difficulty in social adaptation than of intellectual incapacity, this slow development of adaptability in these backward children is characteristic. It also supports our opinion that no very elaborate treatment is necessary in child guidance work.

Certain other factors are brought out by the inquiry. The presence of physical disability did not show any marked correlation with conduct disorders. The chief influences in association with maladaptation were bad homes, broken parental relationship—though the absence of the father did not seem to make for trouble in any special degree—and what might be described as a psychopathic family history. The presence of nervous and mental disabilities or mental defect in other members of the family showed a high correlation with misconduct. The poor adaptation made by the two supernormal children is interesting; in one case—the boy—there is a definite psychopathic trait, while in the case of the girl it would seem that the routine work of early school life which was below her capacity failed to awake and hold her interest.