

A STUDY OF SOME OF THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AMONG THE ADOLESCENT CRIMINALS

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Human society is confronted with criminals and they have been presenting problems in all the societies and in all the ages. No society has ever been successful in making all its individuals to conform to its norms. The problems which these criminals present are of various types and have different causes. Despite the centuries of interest in crime, it is only within the past century that men have sought to study scientifically the factors underlying criminal behaviour. Gradually many studies have come up considering various aspects of crime. Present study is an attempt to study some socio-psychological factors in relation to adolescent criminals.

METHOD

Subjects of Investigation :

The group under study consists of 36 male adolescent criminals from two state institutions meant for criminals. Twenty four individuals were selected from the Borstal school, Bangalore and twelve individuals from the Central Jail, Bangalore. Both the institutions belong to Govt. of Mysore. All the subjects of this study were in the age range of 15 to 22 years. Urdu and Hindi were the common languages

spoken by all the subjects, while some subjects were conversant with Kannarese and Tamil also. The educational status of these criminals ranged from illiteracy to under-graduate level. All the cases were convicted because of committing thefts. Thirtyfive of these subjects were caught within the first two attempts of committing the crime.

TOOLS

In this study interview schedule, case History method and Intelligence test were employed.

Interview Schedule:

An Interview schedule was prepared to study the intra-familial-relationships and religious attitudes of the criminal and his family.

Case History :

A detailed "Biographical Inventory" was employed for each criminal to elicit information regarding the developmental history, emotional and interpersonal adjustments and some other socio-psychological factors.

Intelligence Tests :

To study the intellectual abilities of these criminals two tests were used. One was the

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Alexander's Battery of Performance tests and other was the Progressive Matrices. These two tests were selected, because they are relatively free from language and cultural influences.

PROCEDURE :

After establishing the rapport with the individual subject, the intelligence tests (Alexander's Battery and Progressive Matrices) were administered following standard methods provided by Alexander and Raven and subsequently information was elicited on the "Interview Schedule" and "Biographical Inventory". An attempt was made to check the reliability of information given on the interview-schedule and biographical inventory through subsequent interviews of each case after a period of few weeks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :

Most striking observation is that most of these convicts were involved in crime because of their friends. Either they came in contact with the criminal gangs through their friends or they became friendly with a person who was already a criminal. Also it was observed that step-mothers were most frequently the cause of throwing these individuals out of the family.

Childhood discipline was found to be lax in 19 cases and firm only in 7 cases. In rest of the cases discipline was normal.

Chi-square for the distribution was calculated

and was found to be significant at .01 level. The Central role of childhood discipline has been stressed by Burt (1945) and by Gluecks (1934). They say that if it is extremely restrictive, it may prevent the child from satisfying his recreational and associational needs in his peer group and if it is absent or extremely lax, the lad lacks a portion of direct control over his actions outside and inside the family. Gluecks (1934) found that problem of discipline was more closely related to delinquent behaviour than any other family characteristic or behaviour pattern. Nye (1958) in a very large study found that 18% of the delinquent cases were brought up under strict discipline and 37% of them were brought up under lax discipline. He worked up a chi-square for this, which showed that this difference was significant at .01 level. Nye states "Strict discipline is a characteristic of effective direct control. If it is enforced adequately without being or becoming a substitute for other types of controls, it should be related to low delinquency".

Another important finding of the present study is that 86% of the convicts were punished occasionally and inconsistently. 6% of them were punished frequently and 8% of them were never punished. During the childhood role of punishment in delinquent behaviour has been explored primarily as direct control over the individual by Gluecks (1934). Nye (1958) found that inconsistent punishment is directly related to delinquency, because young lads are not in a position to understand

what is right and what is wrong. Findings of the present study are similar to Nye's (1958) findings where it was observed that most delinquents and criminals come from families where discipline is lax and punishment is occasional and inconsistent. Nye says in this connection "If punishment is frequently withheld, the adolescent is not sure that it will be administered, with consequent loss of deterrent effect." Gluecks (1934) found "families of delinquents have been either too lax or too strict in their punishment".

Related to above discussion is reaction of these delinquents to punishment during their childhood. In the present study 77.78% of the convicts felt rebellious to punishment during their childhood. Rebellious feeling as a reaction to punishment seems to be of some value in this connection. There are personalities who cannot tolerate any stress, right or wrong put on them. They react to it and may react in a way that is harmful to other persons or to the society as a whole. Thus these are the types of persons who are easily diverted towards criminal behaviour.

Distribution of education in the group of convicts of the present study is interesting. 18 lads of this group were educated upto Primary school, 14 of them were educated upto middle standard and 3 of them did not go to school at all. Similar findings have been reported by Nye (1958) and Gluecks (1934). Gluecks studied 977 delinquents and found that only 17%

of these lads could go beyond class VIII.

Occupational adjustment of these criminals is also—interesting. 63.88% of the convicts were not satisfied with their jobs, which were just minor jobs and earned very small amount of money to these persons. 25% of them were unemployed. These results seem to be quite significant. Persons who are unemployed and come from poor families may indulge in stealing very easily provided they get a chance to do so. This process was facilitated either by organized gangs or by friendly relations with individual offenders in the case of subjects of this study. Another interesting finding of this study is that 97.22% of the convicts estimated their capacities as average and they were not satisfied with their achievements. Also most of them were not certain about their future. They perceived their life situation as frustrating

So far as emotional attachments are concerned, 77.77% of the convicts were attached to their mothers. Clinard (1957) says "With the deviant, however, this conflict (oedipus complex) is not resolved, there are guilt feelings over the incestuous desires for the parent of opposite sex and these guilt feelings are relieved by deviant behaviour or by punishment that arises from anti-social behaviour". East Norwood (1942) writes "Even the most innocent maternal affection, if it is not complemented by paternal affection, may predispose to crime especially in adolescent". In the

present study 91.66% of the convicts were moderately emotionally adjusted towards their siblings. It seems that convicts had very little to do with their siblings. They were usually having outside friends and used to spend most of their time outside the family.

Family size has been given due importance in the study of crime. Large families produce criminals more frequently than small families. Nye (1958) provides support for the idea that in small families parent-child relationship is more intimate and affectionate. Closer parent-child relationship in turn should result in more effective indirect controls and perhaps more effective internalization of these controls. In the present study 75% of the convicts come from families where number of family members is more than five. Most of the convicts had poor interpersonal relationship with their parents. Results of the present study show that 83.3% of the convicts come from lower middle and lower Socio-economic status. Findings are in the expected direction. Similar findings have been reported by Nye (1958).

13 Lads of study did not have any faith in religion and 22 lads had their doubts about the existence of God and therefore did not follow any religion to a considerable extent. Religion always has been taken as a positive check on crime. Nye (1958) found that religious knowledge and discussions lead to decline in delinquent behaviour. He tested his findings and found that knowledge and practice of religion is negatively related to crime.

Results of intelligence tests reveal that on Alexander's Battery of Performance tests 28 lads fall below the average group in regard to intelligence. Results of Progressive Matrices confirm these findings. 26 individuals on this test belong to below average and defective intelligence group.

Thus one finds that most of the criminals of this study are below average in intellectual abilities. These results are in agreement with the studies conducted by Gluecks (1934) and East Norwood (1942) and go in favour of "Low Intelligence Theory of Delinquency". However some of the studies do not agree with this theory (Clandin 1937). It seems that criminals with higher intelligence escape the eyes of police and authorities while the criminals with lower intelligence are easily caught and convicted.

Summary :

36 Adolescent criminals were studied for some of the Socio-Psychological factors in relation to criminal behaviour. Findings reveal that most of the convicts were under the lax discipline during their childhood. They were punished occasionally and inconsistently and felt rebellious to this punishment. These convicts were involved in crime because of their friends. Step-mothers helped them in running away from home. Most of the convicts were poorly educated and they were not satisfied with their jobs. Most of them estimated their capacities as average and were unhappy about their achievements. Frequently they were attached to their mothers than to their fathers. Their emo-

tional adjustment with the siblings was not satisfactory. Most of them came from larger families with lower Socio-economic status. They did not have much faith in religion. Intellectually they were below average.

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