# Juvenile Delinquency—What Do We Really Know About It?

*By* Sophia M. Robison
***Research Bureau, The Welfare Council, New York***

The question, what do we really know about juvenile delinquency, can be answered almost categorically—nothing that has been scientifically established. There are opinions and prejudices which relegate responsibility to single factors: bad heredity, poor environment, endocrine inbalance, etc. None of the studies so far, however, has established more than the fact of multiple causality, which does not distinguish delinquent from non-delinquent behavior.

This is clearly demonstrated in the recent volume, An Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice, directed by Dr. Jerome Michael of the Columbia University Law School with the assistance of Dr. Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago and a staff of experts. They lay the blame for a failure to attain scientific knowledge in the field of criminology to the lack of the development of an empirical science of psychology and sociology, both of which sciences must develop before criminology, a part of the science of human behavior, can establish any scientific generalizations. The piles of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, in the field of criminology have yielded no real knowledge of cause and no real knowledge of treatment efficacy, nor of prevention programs. The question of means and ends is involved as well as the question of cause. These ends may be revenge, retribution, deterrence, reformation, prevention. In their service programs of treatment and prevention have been evolved, but the ends have not always been kept clear. But the studies of these programs have established neither the efficacy of treatment nor the adequacy of prevention which would need an understanding of factors in the environment which always produce criminality, and factors in the individual which would need to be strengthened in order to increase his resistance to crime.

Not only do we not know about cause, treatment, or prevention, but we have no clear concept of what is meant by crime or delinquency. Definitions vary, and attitudes change. The Michael study claims that the convict criminal alone should be the study of the criminologist.

The present writer disagrees with this concept in its application to the field of juvenile delinquent behavior. While she recognizes the force and the validity of the criticisms of criminological research, both quantitative and qualitative, and recognizes the almost insurmountable difficulties in the older age field of attempting to do more than study convictions or perhaps, as Dr. Thorsten Sellin suggests, study the reporting of certain types of crime, she believes that in the juvenile field unapprehended but known delinquent behavior must be taken into account as well as that which has been officially recognized. She is at present engaged in a study under the joint auspices of the Welfare Council of New York City and the Department of Sociology of Columbia University which purports to test the validity of official statistics as a measure of the extent of juvenile delinquent behavior in New York City.

Issue was taken with the method of Shaw's "Delinquency Areas," both because of the unanalyzed concept of delinquency, which takes no account in the official figures of disposition, which may be dismissal, and which does not analyze nativity or standardize sufficiently for sex, age, color, and offense. The claim is made that this method is invalid not only from the point of view of his concept, but from the point of view of its statistical techniques, which, when subjected to the test by the application of the formula for significant difference, reveals that the hypothesis of the inverse ratio of delinquency for areas as they proceed from the Loop does not hold beyond the first two or three areas. Issue was taken also with the method of the Shulman study in "The Youthful Offender," which purports to distinguish outstanding areas of crime on the basis of health area distribution in New York City of the 1929 offenders in the 16 to 20 year age group. This study, like the previous one, falls down when tested statistically.

In the Welfare Council's study, the data cover all of the cases of delinquent behavior in the whole of New York City for the year 1930 which could be rounded up upon a search of the files of the fifty-odd agencies, official and unofficial, mental hygiene clinics, institutional and non-institutional, sectarian and non-sectarian, which operate within the metropolitan district. The 18,000-odd schedules resulting are tabulated by area, by borough, for sex, color, age, religion, nativity of parent, offense, petitioner, to test the hypothesis that group mores affect the registering of delinquent behavior, and that they must be recognized, analyzed, and accounted for before an adequate index of the extent of such behavior can be secured.



The factors which influence the validity of official statistics need to be recognized, analyzed, and accounted for. We propose to account for them in the following manner:

1. We assume that the extent of delinquent conduct is not measured by getting caught by public authority.
2. We assume that there is no significance in the working out of official rates for comparison of communities except under conditions of similar laws and similar administrative machinery, which includes unofficial agencies for the care of anti-social behavior.
3. We propose that in rate making, offenses which are trivial should either be omitted entirely or else separately rated; that is, we believe rates should be worked out for those offenses which manifestly are regarded as serious by all groups and about whose definition there can be comparatively little doubt. Truancy rates, we contend, should not be based on mass statistics covering such items as failure to get an employment certificate and unexcused absence due to illness, but on wilful truancy and unlawful detention, and it might be revealing to consider these rates separately since it is entirely possible that certain nationality groups, which exhibit other delinquent behavior, do not always exhibit truancy.
4. Rates, we believe should be worked out on the basis of population groups calculated to furnish logically and statistically reliable material.
5. Since social work in New York City has been divided on sectarian lines, with each one of the religious groups organizing and operating separate social work agencies, rates should be reckoned according to the proportion of the population which each one of the major groups represents in the area under study.
6. We believe that to be valuable in terms of social organization the rate making process must be executed in terms of manageable areas, the size depending upon the minimum necessary to secure a statistically reliable rate.

The study regards itself as an interim effort, to establish whether or not rate making is either feasible or possible, standardizing for offense, sex, age, color, etc. Several problems are involved which concern themselves not only with the technicalities of calculating age groups, estimating distribution of religious population, working out rates, but with the appropriate statistical techniques for testing the validity of rates worked on the basis of homogenous cultural areas.

The tentative findings which indicate that taking account of unofficial apprehension influences the rates, particularly for the Jewish group, and that in the whole count the Catholic child appears seven times more frequently than the white Protestant child and two and a half times more frequently than the Jewish child, that there are borough variations of these generalizations, that there seem to be types of behavior more consistently characteristic of one group than of another, that sex and age and color and nationality are differentials, suggest that certain areas of culture need investigation and probing for the revelation of significant causal factors.

# Interpretations of Childhood

*By* Dr. Harry E. August
***Director, Mental Hygiene Clinic, Jewish Social Service Bureau, Detroit***

In the routine of study and applications of techniques and approaches for treatment, the problems of the interpretation of childhood tend to disperse themselves in a maze of detail. Relationships become distorted. Minor significances assume disproportionate values. Age-old difficulties become emergencies. "Foot work" replaces "head work," and the spectacle is created of much action and movement, though relatively little of it in a satisfactorv forward direction.

One of the outstanding facts with which we must deal is the feeling of futility which is so often encountered among workers dealing with the problems of childhood. This is especially true among those workers using techniques involving the newer sociological and psychological approaches. For, as the workers develop deeper insight into the mechanisms of the individual and the group, the prospect for disentangling the snarled skeins in the lives of their patients appears appalling.

Nor is this feeling of futility difficult to understand. The problems of childhood are so manifold; they present so many facets for consideration, interpretations, and treatment—i. e. problems in psychiatry, sociology, philosophy, economics, legislation, education, industry, public health, religion, relaxation; problems of the individual, family, community, nation, and world. In so complicated a situation, where is the attack to be centered? Equally as important, what method of attack is to be chosen from the many that are advocated, which by their very number and variety merely add to the confusion?

These are but a few of the questions which can be propounded. It is because of their very multiplicity that the worker may be tempted to drop the modern psychiatric

approach and the solutions which this approach has devised so far and slide back into the pre-question and answer period where little was known, but where in ignorance, was at least comfort and security—the comfort and security of the unwitting and the unknowing. That period was the era of rules and regulations, when people lived by rote and there was confusion in people's minds between religion, morals, and the laws of nature. It was the era of sharp distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, of no questioning of each individual's liability for full responsibility for his own behavior regardless of his age or experience. Upon this type of thinking was based the philosophy that a child of two or three was a "good" or "bad" child, signifying not only his overt behavior but also his innate potentialities and characteristics.

But the very fact that a return to such thinking would be considered back-sliding and would be unacceptable to most workers today should be accounted as the measure of the progress which has been made in spite of the seeming chaos and confusion. It is recognized today that the "reason and common sense" attitudes which formed the basis for such social thinking as is now repudiated was far from fundamental; that it was entirely superficial, dominated by passion and prejudice, avoided consideration of primary causes and secondary causes, and limited itself almost entirely to dealing with remote symptoms and effects.

This progress in the social sciences has been characterized chiefly by two central concepts; one, representing a revision of our ideas concerning the role of heredity in behavior; and the other, an increased emphasis upon the individual and his life experiences as the determinants of behavior.

All of the important theories of today relating to an understanding of human behavior assume some element of constitutional predisposition, of heredity, in the causation of behavior disorders and problems of adjustment. Without this assumption, it seems impossible to understand many of the conditions with which we meet, regardless of the type of psychiatric interpretation which is adopted.

Modern concepts hold that heredity has to do only with the fundamentals of morphology, physiology, and constitutional predispositions. Heredity is engaged upon the problem of the transmission of those qualities and organizations which have been worked out by the species as most effective in coping with its environment. Any response less than fundamental must involve the action of other factors besides heredity. In terms of behavior and particularly faulty or problem behavior, the presence of other factors besides heredity must be recognized because of the conventional nature of behavior. Behavior acceptable at any given time or in any given circumstance may be entirely unacceptable at some other time or in some other circumstance. Obviously, the problem lies not with the behavior but with the attitude towards the behavior.

This minimizing of the role of heredity in its direct relation to behavior has resulted in turning attention upon other factors, notably the life experiences of the individual, as the more important behavior determinants. From the moment of his conception, the individual is subjected to a continuous series of stimuli, both helpful and harmful to his ultimate development.

The experiences affecting the individual may be either intrinsic or extrinsic. They may come from within, as the result of the over-functioning or under-functioning or distorted functioning of various of the bodily organs, tissues or glands of internal secretion. We have recently dealt with a situation in which the ravenous appetite and thirst engendered by an unrecognized diabetes in a young boy led to a series of thefts and other behavior episodes of a most distressing nature. Much more often, however, these stimuli are extrinsic in origin, the result of environmental pressures of various kinds, both physical and psychological.

Two questions arise in this connection. What is the relationship of these two forces? Granting that they are both largely accidental, chance forces, acting only to influence heredity potentials, which of them is of greater importance? And, as a corollary to this question, must both of these forces, unfavorable stimuli from within as well as from without, always be present in order to produce undesirable conduct or problems of adjustment?

All possible answers to these questions have been advanced at some time or other, to explain our problems. Our own experience, developed from work beginning with psychotics and gradually working back through neuroses and psychoneuroses into the problems of child guidance, would seem to indicate the outstanding importance of the factor of extrinsic pressures of an unfavorable nature in the causation of problems of adjustment. Internal pressures are also important. In fact, when they are recognizably present, they must be given first importance. Since the majority of persons are not maladjusted, unsatisfactory intrinsic stimuli must be considered as of lesser importance; at least, until they pass an at present undetermined threshold in body economy.

The general recognition and acceptance of this attitude is evidenced by rapid increase, (until the present economic depression caused a diversion of funds into direct relief channels) of child study and child guidance clinics, which stress the importance of the individual in his egoistic and libidinal relationships; the introduction into schools of the councillor system and the system of grouping children, not only by chronological age and grade achievement, but by ability, thus stressing the individual approach in education; the spread of the boarding-home movement with the object



of supplying to the needy child a satisfactory and constructive environmental situation as nearly like the normal home set up as possible; the broadening of the attitudes of juvenile courts, correctional and supervisory institutions so that legalistic interpretations with their emphasis upon the crime or other disturbing behavior are relegated into the background, and attention centered, instead, upon the individual and his problems leading to the behavior, etc.

Studies made with primitive groups answer these questions in a similar manner. So far is known, little or no fundamental difference exists between the organic heredity of primitive groups or races and of present day Europeans or Americans. Physically, intellectually, emotionally, and endocrinologically, except for certain isolated instances, e.g. pigmies, they are for the most part similarly endowed. On the basis of organic reactions there should be a very close correspondence in types of behavior. This is actually the case. But in social heredity, the primitive endowment is vastly dissimilar, and in many respects fundamentally different. Pervading all through the social attitudes, and, in fact, all through the whole life of the primitive is a type of traditional thinking which appears to be characteristic of primitive attitudes generally, and which re-enforces the fundamental stability of primitive organizations—traditional thinking which opposes change or innovation or newness, and stands definitely for the continuation of the old established order of things.

In social heredity, such an attitude provides tremendous force in favor of the stability of community organizations. Superficially, this stability may seem to arise out of inertia or unintelligent unwillingness to progress, but actually it is the response to a force which transcends the ability of the individual to withstand unless he be driven by needs and compulsions arising out of internal conflicts which set him apart as different from the rest.

Until the coming of the industrial era, less than one hundred years ago, social patterns and social organizations ran in ordered and accustomed grooves.

But with the spread of the industrial revolution, all of these conditions were changed. Narrow provincialism has become more and more difficult to maintain, with the result that changes—modification, expansion, and alteration of ideas and attitudes have occurred.

Psychological and sociological attitudes of our times are in marked contrast to those of primitives and of the pre-industrial era; and at present are marked by sharp conflict and confusion.

Age of marriage, especially among professional groups has been constantly increased with the introduction of extra-marital relationships and weakening of the marriage tie itself. Movement towards city life, with approximation to the nomadic existence of our ancestors, has led to difficulty in rearing and consequently lessening in numbers of children. As the industrial and economic changes have increased in number and importance, greater and greater readjustment has been required.

Sentiments, loyalties, dependencies, and the needs for security in familiarity all conspire against change. We are now at the peak of the period of change, in which we have come to recognize that many of our old institutions and attitudes can no longer be of service;—at least, in the form in which they have existed until now. It is this change which is in the process of actively going on which gives rise to many of the problems of adjustment of children. Regularity, definiteness, and orderliness give rise to security. Indefiniteness and uncertainty create anxiety ad uneasiness, which in turn produce efforts to regain security. It is this struggle which creates our problems over and above those problems and difficulties which arise in the normal course of events.

Let us study the effect of this change in one of the most fundamental of our institutions, the family. Through hundreds of years, the family as a unit has exercised a definite and vastly important function. It has been the hub, the center of the life of the individual until such a time as he has moved on to establish his own family unit and to become the center of the life of his children. In this capacity, it provided all the essentials for the growth, development, training and maturity of the individual, both direct and indirect, which were necessary to enable him to carry on in his generation.

The services the family formerly performed have now, in many respects, been taken over by a larger unit—the state; not only have they been taken over, but they are being performed with much greater efficiency.

The effect of such a change in the function of the family has been to create a very important barrier between parents and children, over and above any problem or difficulty which might have arisen because of the nature of the individuals themselves.

Working techniques, theories of treatment have tended to center themselves about individual problems without taking into account sufficiently the problems and difficulties which have been created by our transitional state. And yet, unless this broader viewpoint is adopted our efforts must lose a certain proportion of their efficiency and effectiveness.

In summary, though it has been necessary to wander into numerous bypaths, it has been the purpose throughout this discussion to present some of the more fundamental considerations which arise in dealing with an interpretation of childhood. Many phases of the problem have not been touched upon, but the attempt has been made to stimulate thinking beyond the realms of the individual case and along the broader lines of sociological and psychological inquiry.

# DISCUSSION

By EDITH B. BERCOVICH
*Director, Jewish Child Placement Bureau, Detroit*

THE contention that heredity is not the ultimate determinant of behavior will meet with but little resistance.

Much less acceptable will probably prove the emphasis on social environmental factors. As a group, we have habituated ourselves to think of the service we render the community in terms of scientific case work. Having adopted the psychological approach to the study of behavior, we have made the family and the individual within the family circle our focal point.

Our perfected techniques of approach, investigation and treatment concern themselves largely with attitudes. We study the attitude of the child to the family and the attitude of the family to the child. We interpret behavior as an end-result of the pleasant and unpleasant feeling tones experienced in early childhood by the individual in his family circle. We explain the harmful influences of the too authoritative or rejecting parent through the study of the parental conflicts as engendered in them through experiences within their own families.

Should we accept the emphasis on social environmental factors, we should have to revise not only our techniques but also our entire attitude towards case work. This may prove rather difficult. After all, social workers are subject to the same laws of nature as all human beings. Although conditioned to change by the rapid tempo with which we have recently been changing our theories and techniques, we probably still retained some need for stability and security. Will this new trend of thought break the "camel's back" of social workers?

Are there no other factors besides the family in our complicated civilization that may give the individual a feeling of inferiority, insecurity, rejection, inadequacy, or guilt, and is it not possible to so organize our community that not only will the social forces stand for the positive development of personality, but also provide resources for resolving conflicts induced by family relationships?

The all-inclusive character of the family was true with some limitations a half century back. In the modern family the child, at a very early age, becomes independent in all but his economic needs.

Social work being an integral part of any developed community must take form from the prevailing industrial and cultural status quo of the group. Until but recently the present order of our society seemed unassailable; change impossible. We were aware only dimly of the great injustices of our social order.

The last few years have brought a great change in our thinking. Never before were we confronted so sharply in both a personal and professional way with the stark realities of life. Never before were we called to such intensive thinking.

Translated into daily practice, the acceptance of Dr. August's theory will probably in no way diminish the value of the techniques already in use. It will simply mean that social workers will have to add to their equipment a habit of thinking in sociological, as well as psychological, terms. We will have to acquire a social philosophy, which together with the understanding of the root motivations of human behavior, may become of tremendous power in the hands of the skilled social worker.

A synthesis between the two sciences, psychology and sociology, which dominate the life of the individual, as well as society, must be found, and when found must be applied to case work as well as social legislation. Skills of approach and application will have to be worked out through the schools of social work and through planned training in agencies rather than through the workers joining political organizations to get the training in application of the sociological facts to the job.

Social service, as at present practised, is of tremendous value insofar as it goes, but to enhance its effectiveness, social work must develop its philosophy and techniques in accordance with the changes that take place in our industries, politics, and mores.



# The Vocational and Educational Outlook for Youth

By MARCEL KOVARSKY
*Psychologist, Jewish Board of Guardians, New York*

THERE are at the present time somewhat over 4,000,000 boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 20 who are, or wish to be, gainfully employed. This year at least another million will leave school and college to search for work. What are their chances of finding employment? What opportunities will they encounter; what hazards must they face? What types of jobs are open to them? What salaries may they hope to earn?

The world of industry which today's young man or woman enters is first of all a world of exploitation. Its primary motive is not to furnish employment, nor is it to produce goods.

What has been the effect of the depression upon the industrial status of youth? Although one cannot say exactly, it is probable that of the 17 million unemployed, 4 million are under 24, and 1½ million under 20 years of age. After an initial period, during which adults were replaced by juniors at lower wages, the number of jobs available for younger workers has steadily declined. The Vocational Service for Juniors (in New York City) reported less than 1500 openings last year, as against 7,000 in 1929. Meanwhile the number of applicants had grown, so that, whereas four years ago there was a job for every boy, last year four boys competed for every job.

Last year the Consumers League of Cincinnati conducted a very interesting study. They followed the working careers of 100 boys and girls who had left school the previous year and found that only 23 of them had been continuously employed (including 6 girls who were working for their parents without pay). On the other hand 20 children had never succeeded in locating jobs, while 14 others had done only part time work.

There is considerable evidence to show that the depression has borne even more heavily upon the younger worker than upon the population as a whole. In an investigation conducted in New Haven by the Russell Sage Foundation two years ago, twice as much unemployment was found among the 14 to 25 year old group as among adults. In November of 1930, '31 and '32, the New York Labor Department conducted unemployment surveys in the city of Buffalo. In 1930 the male population had 17 per cent of unemployment, but young men of 20 to 25 showed 26 per cent, and those under 20, 36 per cent. In 1931, the unemployment ratio for men in general was 24 per cent; for young men, 37 per cent; for boys under 20, 50 per cent. In 1932, the corresponding figures were 33, 49 and 59 per cent. A similar investigation in Syracuse revealed the same relationship.

The Pennsylvania Employment Commission recently published a study of 30,000 registrants in the Philadelphia district. They were found to be younger, on the average, than the normally employed population, one-half the applicants in clerical work, trade and transportation being less than 30 years of age. Nor are these young people unemployed for lack of skill or training. On the contrary, 75 per cent were able to qualify for skilled ratings in their specialties; a proportion of skill which is probably above that of the employed population as a whole. Other agencies also note the fact that junior registrants are steadily becoming better trained and educated. The New York State Division of Junior Placement reports that 70 per cent of its applicants in a recent month had worked before. The Vocational Service for Juniors, which used to place half its boys and girls and now places one-fifth, does so in spite of the fact that during the past five years the proportion of high school graduates among them has increased six fold.

The plight of the recent high school graduate is particularly striking. Nor is the college graduate in a much better position. The rapid rise in the enrollment of our graduate schools bears testimony to the lack of opportunity which he faces.

Equally discouraging is the temporary or routine character of such jobs as are available. Report after report emphasizes the rapidity with which the better type of job is disappearing, to be replaced by housework, canvassing and temporary errand openings.

Domestic service and certain types of factory employment have seen an actual increase in the demand for youthful workers. People who can no longer afford maids now ask for "mother's helpers" who are ostensibly supposed to assist with the younger children and the lighter work about the house.

One of the most tragic results of the depression has been the return of the sweatshop. These practices have spread most rapidly in certain industries, notably clothing and tex-