

RECENT RESEARCH ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

LESTER D. JAFFE

Research approaches regarding juvenile delinquency can roughly be divided into three major categories: first, etiological studies which explore the various factors associated with delinquent behaviour (either by groups or individuals), secondly, studies which attempt to identify and predict which children are most likely or unlikely to become delinquents, and thirdly, studies which attempt to demonstrate and evaluate empirical programmes developed to control or prevent delinquent behaviour.

It might be helpful perhaps to cite a few examples of each of these three categories of research, to say something about their respective findings, and finally something about the people who actually are involved in these projects.

Etiological Studies.—Etiological studies have as their major goal the discovery of "causes" which result in or are associated with delinquent behaviour. Latest trends of such "cause-effect" investigations are seen in the following titles of recent research studies: "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency,"¹ "Delinquency and Migration",² "The Conflict of Values in Delinquency Areas",³ "Psychopathology and Social Factors among Youthful Offenders",⁴ "Delinquency and the Concept of Identification",⁵ and "Anomie, Powerlessness, and Delinquency Proneness".⁶

These studies can be compared to the "basic" or "pure" research of the Natural sciences. They seek to build a body of theory to explain the causes of crime, to be able to generalize beyond the individual case. Because of the many factors associated with

delinquent behaviour, the more sophisticated researches are building "multiple-factor" theories rather than "single-factor" theories as was the case some years ago. Still, even if one looks for a combination of factors to explain criminal behaviour he then has to worry, like a physicist or chemist, about the balance or importance of one factor over another and the conditions which can put two or more factors together in an explosive combination. This question of the interrelationship between causal factors is the core of recent etiological research.

As yet there is no single theory which adequately explains delinquent behaviour, and indeed there is a trend towards studying specific *kinds* of offences and the kind of people who commit them, rather than try to explain all offences together under the single term "crimes". Some promising theories or hypotheses have been presented, but these will require much more "basic" research to evaluate their usefulness in explaining the causes of crime.

Predictive Studies.—Let us assume that we have firm convictions about what factors must be present (or absent) in a child's life to make him delinquency prone or non-delinquency prone. If these factors are valid we should be able to use them to predict which children will become delinquent. In recent years a greater number of social scientists are carrying out predictive studies which they hope will enable teachers, doctors, counsellors and social workers to spot potentially delinquent youngsters. Chief among these researchers have been the Gluecks⁷ of Harvard University, Kvaraceus⁸, Gough⁹, Monachesi¹⁰ and Reckless.¹¹ The basic research method involved here requires putting together an instrument or "test" made up of items or questions which can be answered the way known delinquents answer them or the way non-delinquents

Dr. Jaffe is associated with Paul Baerwald School of Social Work, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

answer them. In other words, specific answers to the test items have been shown statistically to differentiate delinquent from non-delinquent respondents. For example, one predictive test gives each child a total "proneness" score on the basis of five factors from his family life: father's discipline, mother's supervision, father's affection for son, mother's affection, and the cohesiveness of the family.¹² Another such test utilises a check list of 70 items which inquire about personal background, environmental and home adjustment, family relationships, and attitudes about school.¹³ Still another predictive test asks mainly about the youngster's concept of himself, a factor which has been linked strongly to delinquency in earlier "basic research."¹⁴

The next task, of course, is to see whether the test score actually "picks out" children who are now or will become delinquent. Since prediction means telling what will happen in the future on the basis of present evidence several long-term follow-up studies are now in progress in several school districts in the U.S. to test just this point.

So far, such studies have only succeeded in identifying *groups* of children from whom most future delinquents are likely to come, but they still have a long way to go before we can say confidently which particular, *specific* child is going to get into trouble with the law.

Demonstration Studies.—In both the natural and the social sciences, there is found what is called "pragmatic" research. Such projects accept or reject a hypothesis or an idea on the basis of results obtained when it is actually tried out. Examples of this kind of approach in Israel, are the "ship-to-shore" re-settlement programme or the "graded-by-intelligence classes" system introduced in Beersheva. In delinquency research too, we are "trying out" different

field methods for preventing or controlling delinquency. Three major programmes to demonstrate methods of controlling delinquency are the "Detached Worker Services", "Area Projects", and "Intensive Agency Co-ordination Projects".

The "Detached Worker" programme is usually used in large urban areas where there are "pockets" of adolescent boys and girls "which do not or will not use existing recreational, free-time facilities, and who, because of idleness, frustration or boredom, appear to be heading for delinquency or are already known to the police as delinquents",^{15, 16} Social workers, skilled primarily in group work services, are sent out to locate these groups of youngsters and they try to work their way into the group as its adult counsellor or guide who has legitimate, official connections with the community powers that be.¹⁷ The social worker, having gained the group's confidence and loyalty, then slowly attempts to change the activities of the group, redirecting the aggressive or delinquent behaviour of members of these street clubs by helping them to find legitimate outlets for their feelings of frustration and their ambitions. These workers usually operate out of a separate, "detached" agency or from established social agencies, but their working hours and skills are far different from the regular social agency worker.

"Area Projects" are based on the idea "that delinquency is due partly to the poor quality of the social and physical environment in low-income areas of large cities, and also, to the fact that slum neighbourhoods have lost their sense of mutual responsibility for children's behaviour." In order to rebuild this responsibility the social work community organizers responsible for area projects try to locate leaders, awaken the feeling of responsibility of slum residents to their children and community, and help

them set up services in their area. The accent here is on teaching people to help themselves.¹⁸

Another recent example of demonstration studies is the move towards co-ordinating agency services around what we call the "multiple-problem family."^{19, 20} This programme came about after several surveys showed that in many cities a small number of families were using a very large amount of community services. In other words, these families were in trouble, but were getting help in small doses from many different agencies. Thus the idea came to assign special social workers to these families rather than to the individual family members. Agencies work more as a team where these families are concerned, referrals move faster, and all of the community's services are involved in helping any and all members of these families.

Demonstration programmes have been plentiful in recent years as the need to experiment becomes a race with increasing delinquency rates. We still have much to do to adequately evaluate the outcome of these projects, but in the case of delinquency not moving means moving backward.

Research Staff.—Research in delinquency involves people coming from different academic backgrounds including psychiatry, social work, sociology, psychology, education and medicine. These differences help to explain the various etiological research approaches mentioned earlier. However, two basic factors unite each of these researchers: the desire to find answers to their questions about delinquency, and the technical knowledge as to how to go about seeking these answers in a systematic scientific way.

Social workers have long been acquainted with treatment of delinquents, but only recently with the initiation of demanding research training as an integral part of their university education for social work practice they have begun to contribute meaningfully to the research aspect of delinquency. This entrance of social workers into research signifies a real hope for the future, not only regarding delinquency, but the other "social problem" areas as well. It means bringing together, perhaps really for the first time, the guts of "raw life" experiences of human beings with the objective, methodological approach of science. In this union there is much to hope for.

REFERENCES

1. Walter Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 14, (1958), pp. 5-19.
2. Leonard Savitz, "Delinquency and Migration". University of Pennsylvania, 1960, Doctoral Dissertation.
3. Solomon Kobrin, "The Conflict of Values in Delinquency Areas", *American Sociological Review* (March, 1951) pp. 19-29.
4. Nathaniel London, "Psychopathology and Social Factors Among Youthful Offenders", *Research Relating to Children*, Bulletin No. 12, (Feb.—July, 1960), pp. 46 ff.
5. Donald Lederman, *Delinquency and the Concept of Identification*. Washington State University, (February, 1961).
6. Lester D. Jaffe, *Anomie, Powerlessness, and Delinquency Proneness*, Western Reserve University, (June, 1959).
7. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Predicting Delinquency and Crime*. Harvard University Press, 1959.
8. William Kvaraceus, "Forecasting Juvenile Delinquency", *Journal of Education*, (April, 1956), pp. 1-43.
9. Harrison Gough, "Systematic Validation of a Test for Delinquency", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 9, 1954, pp. 381.
- and Donald Peterson, "The Identification and Measurement of Predispositional Factors in Crime and Delinquency", *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, Vol. 16, 1952, pp. 207-212.
10. Starke Hathaway and Elio Monachesi, "The Personalities Predelinquent Boys", *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, (July—August, 1957), pp. 149-163.
11. Walter Reckless and Barbara Kay, "The Self-Component in Potential Delinquency and Potential Non-Delinquency," *American Sociological Review*, (October, 1957), pp. 566-570.
12. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Op. cit.*
13. William Kvaraceus, *Op. cit.*
14. Starke Hathaway and Elio Monachesi, *Op. cit.*
15. Mary Novick, *Community Programs and Projects for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency*. U.S. Children's Bureau, Washington. 1960, pp. 7 ff.
16. New York City Youth Board, *Reaching the Unreached: Fundamental Aspects of the Program of the New York City Youth Board*, New York, 1952.
17. Walter Miller, "Preventive Work with Street-Corner Groups; Boston Delinquency Project," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. 322, (March 1959), pp. 97-106.
18. Clifford Shaw, *et al. Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.
19. Charles Birt, "Family Centered Project of St. Paul", *Social Work*, (October, 1956), pp.41-47.
20. L. L. Geismar and Beverly Ayres, *Families in Trouble*, Family Centered Project, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1958.