

## The School Progress of Nervous and Troublesome Children\*

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This paper describes some of the characteristics of children included in the National Survey of Health and Development who have been cautioned by the police or come before the Courts before their seventeenth birthdays.

The National Survey is a study of 5,362 children who were born in the first week of March 1946 and who have been followed up since then. Some 14,000 children were born during the week in the areas covered, and after excluding illegitimate children and twins the following were enrolled in the National Survey: all the children of agricultural workers, all the children of non-manual workers, and one-quarter of the rest. Losses from the sample have been small, and nearly twenty years after the start of this study the whereabouts of approximately 98 per cent. of the young people still alive and in Great Britain are known and some 90 per cent. of them are actively co-operating in the study.

The educational information available for this group consists of three batteries of tests of mental ability and attainment in school subjects, which were given to the children by the teachers when they were 8, 11 and 15 years. These tests were selected and standardized by the National Foundation for Educational Research on the complete population of children. The G.C.E. 'O' Level results are known for 98 per cent. of the Survey population, as also the ages at which they left school. Teachers' reports on their work, habits and behaviour in class and in the playground were obtained when the children were 13 and 15 years of age.

15 per cent. of the boys in the National Survey have either been cautioned by the police or have come before the Courts; 4.2 per

cent. had committed trivial offences and 10.4 per cent. indictable offences, and of these more serious offenders 40 per cent. (or 4 per cent. of all the boys in the National Survey) had been more than once before the Courts.†

The following comparisons were made between delinquent boys (N=288) and all lower manual working class boys (N=942):—

### (a) *The Home Background*

The delinquents tend to come from large families. The homes of the serious offenders are overcrowded and lack amenities. A high proportion of these delinquent boys have shared their bed with another child, parent or adult throughout the whole of their pre-school life. The mothers of serious offenders have in the past made little use of the available ante-natal and post-natal services.

Within the manual working class the risks of delinquency are not closely related to the occupation of the fathers. Indeed, the highest risk is found among the children of semi-skilled workers rather than among the children of unskilled labourers. There is, however, a very marked association between poor standard of education in the parents and delinquency in their children. The delinquent group show no excess of separation from their parents in early life, and their mothers are no more likely to have been in paid employment than those of non-delinquents.

Broken families are more commonly found among the delinquent group, but the excess is relatively small. Breaks that have occurred through the death of a parent are not associated with a high risk of delinquency, and it is in

† These figures of the proportion of delinquent boys are "population estimates", that is to say, allowances have been made for the fact that only one-quarter of manual working class children were included in the National Survey.

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families where there have been divorces and separations that the rate of delinquency is high.

(b) *Early Training*

There were no birth-weight differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent children. On the average, the trivial offenders, but not the serious offenders, were breast-fed for a shorter time than average lower manual working class children. Among the serious offenders, bowel training was started late and they were late in gaining control of both their bowels and their bladders.

(c) *The Schools*

The risks of delinquency are no higher in the Roman Catholic schools than in the other denominational or State schools, once the social background of the pupils has been allowed for.

At the primary schools the children who later are repeated offenders absent themselves rather more than lower manual working class children, and in the secondary schools they are frequent truants. Generally delinquents, throughout their school careers, are troublesome children who are badly rated by their teachers for their attitude to work, obedience and discipline in class. Even at 8, the children who are later going to get into trouble do badly in their work and in tests, and in particular score much lower on attainment tests than would be expected from their attainment and non-verbal intelligence. Their teachers pick them out as being both nervous and aggressive.

When the delinquents are divided up according to the severity of their offences, those who have committed one trivial offence are found to be the least disturbed in school behaviour and educational progress, and those who have been before the Courts for more than one serious offence are the most disturbed.

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