

Arrest Patterns among Mentally Disordered Offenders

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One unknown factor in the link between crime and mental illness is whether or not mentally ill offenders are more liable than others to arrest. Ninety-one mentally ill, and 76 normal, criminally offending men were asked about the circumstances of their offence and arrest. A majority of mentally ill men had been arrested at the scene of the crime, and more than a quarter of the schizophrenic group had reported themselves to the police. We argue that when many offenders are either unreported or undetected, the increased vulnerability of the mentally ill to detection and arrest makes them disproportionately liable to detection. Attempting to assess the relationship between crime and mental illness is thus extremely difficult.

A great deal is already known of the types of offence committed by mentally disordered people in the UK (Walker & McCabe, 1973). In the USA, a large number of studies have been carried out to determine the nature and extent of the relationship between crime and mental illness. Such studies have been critically reviewed, and all, for varying reasons, found wanting (Cohen, 1980; Berger & Gulevich, 1981). One problem concerns arrest rates. According to Cohen (1980) "Nationally, only one in five crimes result in an arrest . . . it remains unresolved whether mental patients' higher arrest rates might reflect their lack of adeptness at avoiding capture". There is also, of course, a large amount of unreported crime. For example, much theft from shops, either by the public or by staff, goes undetected and unreported. Large stores write off a percentage of annual turnover as being lost because stolen. This type of crime, involving many thousands of people, must be added to the vast number of minor thefts, damage-to-property offences, and even sexual and violent offences that also go unreported and therefore unrecorded by the police (British Crime Survey, 1983).

Even when crime is noted by the authorities, the arrest and clear-up rate is small. The report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for the year 1982 indicates that, of more than 700 000 notified offences, only a little over 100 000 were cleared up (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, 1983). This percentage varied with type of offence and was highest in the assault category, with a clear-up rate of over 50%. At the other end of the scale, criminal damage had only a 12% clear-up rate, and burglary, less than 10%.

A study carried out in a large English remand prison into the relationship between cognition, psychotic illness, and violence (Robertson & Taylor, 1984) allowed examination of the circumstances of

offence and arrest in a group of mentally disordered offenders.

Method

Variables involved in the offending, arrest, and detention of four groups of prisoners were examined. The largest of these groups consisted of men diagnosed as suffering from a schizophrenic illness. The second group comprised men who were suffering from an affective illness, usually of psychotic intensity, and the third group was made up of men with no record of a psychotic or other serious mental illness, but with an established criminal history of violence. The fourth group, labelled the normal group in the study, consisted of men with no history of mental illness and no record of serious violence. All groups were matched for age.

The mentally ill men were selected on the basis of present mental state as reported by prison doctors. Most had also been interviewed and assessed by a National Health Service psychiatrist. In the interview that preceded cognitive testing, they were asked to provide details of the circumstances surrounding their offence, arrest, and detention. Their responses to these questions form the basis of this report.

Results

Personal circumstances at time of offence

Details of the living arrangements of the men in the study are presented in Table I and highlight the social isolation of the schizophrenic group. Of the 61 schizophrenic men, two claimed to be married, but neither was in fact living with a (common-law) wife at the time of his offence. This is in contrast to the picture presented within the affectively ill group, in which 20% of men were living with their wives, and the comparable figure of 49% presented by the normal subjects.

In several respects, the normal, but violent, group occupied a midway position between the ill and normal groups. For example, as regards marital status and living arrangements, this group was much more likely to have been

TABLE I
Living arrangements at the time of offence

	Schizophrenic group (n = 61)		Affectively ill group (n = 30)		Violent group (n = 35)		Normal group (n = 41)		χ^2	P
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Never married	51	83	16	53	15	43	16	39	26.1	0.001
No fixed abode or alone	41	68	14	47	9	26	10	25	24.5	0.001
Unemployed for more than 6 months	53	87	18	60	20	57	5	15	56.1	0.001

married than the schizophrenic group of men, but was much more likely than the normal group to be either separated or divorced. As a consequence, they were less likely than the normal men to be living with their wife or female companion at the time of offence (23% compared with 49%), but were also less likely than the schizophrenic people to be homeless (3% compared with 43%).

Nature and circumstances of offence

The social isolation of the schizophrenic men has its parallel in the circumstances in which their offences were committed. For example, as indicated in Table II, only 5% had acted with others at that time. With regard to location of offence, it was in the affective group that the abnormality occurred. All 30 members of this group had offended without the help of others, and this may reflect the nature of the offences with which they were charged. Unlike the other groups in the study, the most likely location for their offence was the shared home of the man and his victim (41% compared with a range of 13–19% in other groups).

Each man was asked whether he had been drinking prior to his offence, the categories being: 1. not at all; 2. yes, but

not drunk; 3. drunk. The rating was made on the basis of the man's account and could not be verified. Drinking, but not reported drunkenness, distinguished the violent group from all the others. Of the 11 men who reported themselves as having been drunk, only three were not being charged with a violent offence, and of the 32 men who said they had been drinking, 27 were charged with a violent crime. Given that most of these men were on remand, it might be objected that those being charged with violent (and presumably serious) offences were presenting their drinking as a reason or excuse for their behaviour.

Very large differences were found in relation to victims. The term 'victim' is defined as the person against whom the act was committed, be that a shopkeeper from whom some article was stolen, or a homicide victim. If victim is defined solely in terms of violence, a clear difference emerges between the ill and normal groups. This is particularly true for the affectively disordered group. Whereas only 15% of the victims in the normal violent group were either family or close friends of the accused, the same statistic is represented by a figure of 39% in the schizophrenic group, and 61% in the affectively disordered sample.

TABLE II
Circumstances of offence

	Schizophrenic group (n = 61)		Affectively ill group (n = 30)		Violent group (n = 35)		Normal group (n = 41)		χ^2	P
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Location										
Shared home of victim	11	18	12	41	4	13	5	15	14.8	0.05
Public street	22	38	7	24	7	23	6	18		
Other	25	43	10	34	20	64	23	67		
Offence committed alone	56	95	30	100	17	47	15	38	57.8	0.001
Prior drinking										
Nothing	51	86	20	67	15	45	33	83	23.9	0.001
Drinking not drunk	7	12	8	27	14	32	3	7		
Drunk	1	2	2	7	4	12	4	10		
Witness present										
Yes	36	63	21	72	19	61	11	28	16.9	0.001

TABLE III
Patterns of arrest and detention

	Schizophrenic group		Affectively ill group		Violent group		Normal group		Not known	χ^2	P
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Arrested at location of offence	43	75	21	70	12	58	10	32	17	22.7	0.001
Arrested by uniformed officer	49	87	27	93	17	53	15	39	11	37.8	0.001
Man presented himself to police	16	28	5	17	3	9	5	12	9	5.8	0.15

Arrest and detention

The major differences found in regard to arrest and detention patterns were between the ill and normal. The general pattern was for ill men to have been arrested on the day of their offence (86%), and they were much more likely than their normal counterparts to be arrested at the location of the offence and by a police constable, as opposed to a detective. The details are presented in Table III. In fact, only 10% of the ill offenders were arrested by CID officers, and one may presume that in only 10% of cases was any detective work involved. The comparable figure within the normal population is 55%. Ill people presented themselves to the police more often, and this may be one of the reasons for the discrepancy. As the term is used here, people were regarded as having presented themselves to the police if they had either informed a policeman or someone in authority of their offence or had, for example, damaged property and then waited around until the police arrived to arrest them. Within the ill groups, the modal delay between offence and arrest was a matter of hours.

Discussion

The group of remanded prisoners with whom the mentally ill sample has been compared in this study

is matched for age, but it cannot be regarded as representing the wider population of offenders. For example, because of the selection procedure used in the main study, crimes of violence are greatly overrepresented (see Table IV). Furthermore, only 16% of remands are to custody, and this alone renders the normal groups in this study quite atypical of offenders in general. However, it is proposed that the comparisons made with regard to the personal circumstances of these men reflect real differences between mentally ill and normal offenders, and that the differences would have been even larger had the control group been drawn from a criminally offending, as opposed to a prison, population. What such differences reveal is the tremendous social isolation of the schizophrenic men. Most were without a home. Because they were wandering abroad, and because many of them were displaying florid psychotic symptoms, they were remanded in custody for offences that in other circumstances would have resulted in bail being granted. With one or two exceptions, all had been patients in psychiatric hospitals at some time, most having had multiple admissions.

TABLE IV
Nature of offence at time of study

	Schizophrenic group (n = 60)		Affectively ill group (n = 30)		Violent group (n = 34)		Normal group (n = 40)		Not known (n = 3)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nature of offence										
Acquisitive	21	34	12	40	2	6	24	60		
Sexual	2	3	0	0	2	6	11	27		
Minor violence	19	32	11	37	4	12	5	12		
Major violence	10	17	5	17	18	53	0	0		
Homicide	8	13	2	7	8	24	0	0		

Ill vs normal groups $\chi^2 = 27.43$, d.f. 4, $P < 0.001$.

Normal violent vs normal group $\chi^2 = 50.80$, d.f. 4, $P < 0.001$.

The use of a remand group is less satisfactory when comparing the offence and arrest pattern of the psychiatrically ill, but it is proposed that the picture presented by the psychotic group speaks for itself. The pattern is for such men to be arrested while committing their offence or very shortly afterwards. In a quarter of such cases, the man presented himself to the police. The social incompetence and carelessness evidenced by their living arrangements has its correlate in their pattern of arrest. In short, they are more liable to detection and arrest. Although no precisely comparable national figures exist, a study for the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure provides some indication of the normal pattern of detection (Steer, 1981). Steer reported that 37% of offenders were "caught red handed" or at the scene of the crime, and that only 1.2% of the 340 offenders in his study had given themselves up to the police. Comparable figures for the schizophrenic population in the present study indicate that 75% were caught at the scene of the offence, 28% having given themselves up to the police.

Many of the offences committed by the schizophrenic men involved petty larceny or criminal damage, and it is argued that the social incompetence and debilitated state of these men made them vulnerable to detection and detention. Furthermore, it is proposed that this increased vulnerability is large enough to make it very difficult indeed to compare the rate of criminal offending of the mentally ill with that of the general population. Perhaps the best analogy is to be found in the practice of fishing with

a net, where the size of the net's mesh determines the type of fish caught. The present net comprises a very wide mesh which catches a disproportionate number of clumsy, inept, or incompetent men. The result is that the mentally ill in the community are bound to be overrepresented, and the proportional relationship between crime and illness difficult to deduce.

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