

The Relationship Between Duration of Treatment in a Therapeutic Community for Drug Abusers and Subsequent Criminality

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SUMMARY The conviction rates for the first 61 admissions to a therapeutic community for drug dependence were obtained for a period two years prior to admission and two years after discharge, by searching in the Criminal Records Office at Scotland Yard.

A long-stay group ($n = 20$) which had remained in residence more than six months was compared with a medium-stay group ($n = 20$) which had remained from one to six months and a short stay group ($n = 21$) which had remained less than one month.

The long-stay group had a pre-admission conviction rate of 60 per cent, which was significantly reduced to 10 per cent during the follow-up period. The conviction rate of the medium-stay group was reduced from 70 per cent before treatment to 45 per cent after treatment; that of the short stay group remained constant at 57 per cent before and after treatment. It is suggested that periods of more than six months treatment in the community are effective in reducing subsequent criminality.

Introduction

The Ley Community is a therapeutic community with facilities for the residential treatment of 30 young people with personality problems. Most of those admitted have been dependent on drugs and have a criminal record. The Community represents an example of a method of treatment which derives its principles from similar programmes in America such as Synanon (Yablonsky, 1962), Day Top Village (Collier, 1973) and Phoenix House (Rosenthal and Biase, 1969). In particular it has a hierarchical social structure in which the value of obedience to authority is stressed, employs ex-addicts as staff members, and emphasises encounter group therapy. Its aims are ambitious in that it seeks to effect profound changes in character; treatment is conceived as a long-term process occurring ideally over a period of one year or more.

Communities using this method have become known as 'Concept Houses' (Sugarman, 1974).

Very little is known about the effectiveness of such programmes in rehabilitating drug abusers. In the U.S.A. there are at least 68 programmes of this type (Scott and Goldberg, 1973), but few have published adequate follow-up studies and some have shunned them, rejecting the rehabilitation credo and embracing a utopian view of themselves as a 'way of life'. In Britain five communities exist and two have been described (Melotte, 1975; Ogborne, 1975).

It is generally agreed that the Ley Community began to function as a Concept House in September 1971, when a new Director with extensive experience of such programmes was appointed. The results reported here reflect the work of the Community between September 1971 and September 1973.

Method

All people, numbering 62, who were admitted to the Community between September 1971 and September 1973 were studied. The sample was

arbitrarily divided into three groups according to duration of residence: a short stay group of 22 persons who had remained in residence for less than one month, a medium-stay group of 20 persons who had remained in residence from one to six months, and a long-stay group, also of 20 persons who had remained in residence for over six months. The median duration of residence was 2 weeks for the short-stay group, 10½ weeks for the medium-stay group and 70 weeks for the long-stay group. Eight persons had stayed between six months and one year and twelve for more than one year. The maximum duration of residence was two years.

A search was made for the record of each individual in the Criminal Records Office of Scotland Yard. In two cases in the short-stay group the records had been destroyed following the subjects death from overdoses of drugs. In one of these cases further information was obtained from prison records; the other case had to be excluded from the study although evidence in the coroner's report suggested that re-convictions had occurred. The outcome analysis was therefore performed on a total sample of 61 people.

The three groups were compared with regard to demographic characteristics, history of criminality and history of drug use given at the time of admission. The rate of conviction during a two-year period following departure from the Community was obtained for each group, and the results were compared using the χ^2 test. In addition, the post-discharge conviction rate for each group was compared with its own pre-admission rate during the two years immediately preceding admission. In analysing the pre-admission conviction rate, convictions which were known to have directly precipitated admission were omitted, thus eliminating a possible source of systematic bias towards a reduction in convictions after treatment. The pre-admission conviction rates are therefore underestimated.

Results

The three groups did not differ significantly in their pre-admission characteristics. The population consisted predominantly of young, single,

British men. Eighty per cent or more of each group had been convicted at least once before admission. More than 80 per cent of each group gave a history of opiate abuse. There was no significant difference between the groups in regard to duration of previous drug use, type of drug used or mode of use.

Table IV shows that the long-stay group sustained overall significantly fewer convictions during the follow-up period than the short and medium stay groups ($\chi^2 = 10.36$, d.f = 2, $P < .01$). The conviction rate of the medium-stay group (45 per cent) was lower than that of the short-stay group (57 per cent) but did not differ significantly. The conviction rate of the long-stay group (10 per cent) was significantly lower than that of the other groups ($\chi^2 = 10.00$, d.f = 1, $P < 0.01$; $\chi^2 = 6.14$, d.f = 1, $P < 0.05$).

The post-treatment conviction rate for each group was compared with its own pre-admission rate, using the McNemar test corrected for continuity. The conviction rate for the short-stay group remained constant at 57 per cent before and after treatment. The rate for the medium stay group showed a reduction from 70 per cent before treatment to 45 per cent after treatment, but this did not reach significance. The rate for the long-stay group showed a significant reduction from 60 per cent before treatment to 10 per cent after treatment (see Table iv).

Discussion

Official records of crime are likely to underestimate the true level of criminal activity. Not all crimes are detected, and the number which are detected varies according to police enthusiasm and criminal ingenuity in evading detection. Criminal records may thus be considered to reflect the lower limit of crime actually committed. These factors, however, would only bias the present results if they were systematically operating in favour of one group rather than another, and there is no reason to believe that this was so. In the same way errors due to inaccuracies in the records and searching procedures at Scotland Yard are unlikely to have been systematically distributed.

TABLE I
Demographic characteristics for short-stay, medium-stay and long-stay groups

| Characteristics | Short-stay (n = 21) | Medium-stay (n = 20) | Long-stay (n = 20) | P |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----|
| Mean age on admission (SD) | 23.1 (4.4) | 21.3 (3.5) | 21.1 (3.6) | NS |
| Male (%) | 18 (86) | 14 (70) | 16 (80) | NS |
| Single (%) | 18 (86) | 15 (75) | 17 (85) | NS |
| British (%) | 21 (100) | 20 (100) | 19 (95) | NS |

Differences in proportions between the groups have been compared using the Chi-squared statistic while differences in mean ages have been compared using a one-way analysis of variance. Two-tailed tests have been used and values obtained having a probability of 5% or less are described as significant.

TABLE II
Total criminal history on admission for short-stay, medium-stay and long-stay groups

| Previous convictions | Short-stay | Medium-stay | Long-stay | Total |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| 0-2 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 24 |
| 3+ | 12 | 13 | 12 | 37 |
| Total | 21 | 20 | 20 | 61 |

$$\chi^2 = 0.27, df = 3, P = NS$$

TABLE III
Pre-admission drug use for short-stay, medium-stay and long-stay groups

| Characteristic | Short-stay (n = 21) | Medium-stay (n = 20) | Long-stay (n = 20) | P |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----|
| Mean duration of regular drug use in years(SD) | 4.1 (2.1) | 3.5 (2.3) | 4.1 (2.0) | NS |
| Used cannabis (%) | 20 (95) | 20 (100) | 20 (100) | NS |
| Used amphetamines (%) | 20 (95) | 19 (95) | 20 (100) | NS |
| Used sedatives (%) | 18 (86) | 15 (75) | 19 (95) | NS |
| Used hallucinogens (%) | 18 (86) | 18 (90) | 20 (100) | NS |
| Used opiates (%) | 17 (76) | 17 (85) | 18 (90) | NS |
| Used injection (%) | 16 (76) | 17 (85) | 18 (90) | NS |
| Notified to Home Office before admission (%) | 8 (38) | 13 (65) | 6 (30) | NS |

TABLE IV

Convictions obtained during two years prior to admission and two years following discharge

| Before treatment | After treatment | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | Short-stay group | | | Medium-stay group | | | Long-stay group | | |
| | Con- victed | Not con- victed | Total | Con- victed | Not con- victed | Total | Con- victed | Not con- victed | Total |
| Convicted | 9 | 3 | 12 | 8 | 6 | 14 | 2 | 10 | 12 |
| Not convicted | 3 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 8 | 8 |
| Total | 12 | 9 | 21 | 9 | 11 | 20 | 2 | 18 | 20 |
| McNemar Test | 0.00 | | | 2.28 | | | 8.10 | | |
| P | NS | | | NS | | | < .01 | | |

The present results need to be evaluated in terms of the likely outcome for a group of drug abusers without treatment, or with other types of treatment. This kind of comparison is difficult to make, since little information is available and the sampling criteria used in other studies of drug abusers are different from ours. Nevertheless, the post-treatment conviction rates of the short-stay and medium-stay groups in our study (57 per cent, 45 per cent) fall within the range indicated by other similar studies of drug abusers (D'Orban, 1975; Mott, 1974, 1975; Rathod, 1975).

The post-treatment conviction rate of the long-stay group in our study (10 per cent) was substantially lower than those reported in the other samples quoted, as well as being lower than the rates for the short-stay and medium-stay groups. This may have been a selection effect, since the study was retrospective and random allocation between the groups had not occurred. Age, sex and number of previous convictions are the variables known with the most certainty to be associated with conviction (Simon, 1971). In this study, however, the groups did not differ significantly on these variables, nor did they differ in regard to history of drug use. Furthermore, the long-stay group showed a significant reduction in convictions when compared to its own pre-admission level.

Further work will be necessary in order to elaborate the relationships between treatment, background factors and subsequent criminality. Other outcome criteria will also need to be investigated. The results so far, however, suggest that this type of treatment is effective in reducing criminal activity in drug abusers who remain in residence for longer than six months.

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