

IMPROVEMENT IN MENTAL DEFECTIVES IN COLONIES.

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ALTHOUGH one of the important objects of a mental deficiency colony is the return of patients to the general population, the number of cases on licence, or discharged from the provisions of the Mental Deficiency Acts, is not an accurate indication of the improvement-rate. Cases proceed on licence because their behaviour is sufficiently satisfactory for the houses to which they go. A defective may show no change whilst in the colony, but the environment to which he goes may be better than that which he left before entering the colony. Alternatively, the defective may return to the same home circumstances which he left, but he may have improved. All gradations of combinations of change of environment or of defectives occur.

In view of the licence figures failing to indicate the proportion of defectives who improve in a colony, an attempt has been made to estimate the improvement-rate.

METHODS.

Two methods were used. In the first, an investigation was made of medical notes on 540 defectives of all ages, all types and both sexes. The patients had been resident in Hortham Colony for at least one year. Of these cases, 447 (82.8 per cent.) showed improvement in the lodge, in behaviour at school or work, or in social age.

In the second method, a study was made of four aspects of conduct of adult males in a colony. Deterioration was compared with the causes of failure of adult male defectives on licence.

Conduct was divided into :—

- (1) General behaviour.
- (2) Personal habits.
- (3) Work.
- (4) Recreation.

The observation on General Behaviour was an overall, halo effect and included such aspects as irritability, aggressiveness and rudeness. Personal Habits related to cleanliness, tidiness, manners at meals, etc. Work included occupation, either in the blocks as domestic workers, or elsewhere, whether on the farm, engineer's shops, handicrafts, etc. The term Recreation included all types, both in-door and out-door, solitary or social, quiet or noisy. Reading, concentration on the wireless programmes, keeping of pets, walks, etc., were

included. Records were made at the ends of two periods, each of six months duration. The grouping was into Improving, Stationary and Deteriorating for each of the four aspects of conduct. During the first period 121, and during the second period 235, adult male defectives of all grades were investigated. Table I gives the results obtained, with the same staff, for the two adjacent six-monthly periods.

TABLE I—*Changes in conduct (per cent.) in adjacent six-monthly periods.*

	Period 1				Period 2			
	B	W	H	R	B	W	H	R
Improved ..	48.7	43.0	22.3	12.4	66.0	53.2	41.2	19.2
Stationary ..	34.7	47.0	66.9	86.8	27.2	44.7	54.2	78.9
Deteriorated ..	16.5	9.9	10.7	.83	6.8	2.1	6.4	2.1

B = behaviour W = work H = habits R = recreation

The table confirms the general experience that an all-round improvement does not invariably take place in a defective. The figures demonstrate that, in both periods, higher percentages of cases improved in behaviour and in work than in general habits and in recreation. More cases were stationary, in each period, in recreation and habits than in work and in behaviour, but more deteriorated in behaviour and in habits than in work and recreation.

Many defectives changed in the same direction, or remained stationary, in two or three of the aspects of conduct considered here. Comparisons of the proportions of those who deteriorated in all of two or three aspects cannot be made reliably as the numbers are small, varying from seven to one in each combination of aspects. Of those who improved in two aspects, a higher proportion improved in behaviour and work in both periods than in any other two aspects. Of those who remained stationary in two aspects, the highest percentage was, in both periods, in the aspects of habit and recreation. Table II gives the figures, percentages below 10 being omitted as the numbers of cases are few. The defectives who improved in two aspects numbered 28 in period 1, and 54 in period 2, whilst those who showed no change numbered 24 in period 1 and 64 in period 2.

TABLE II.—*Percentage of cases improving or stationary in two aspects.*

	Improved				Stationary			
	B+W	B+H	H+W	W+R	B+R	B+H	H+R	W+R
Period 1 ..	50.0	17.8	3.6	25.0	12.5	29.2	41.6	16.8
Period 2 ..	47.5	35.3	18.5	1.8	15.6	4.7	39.1	32.8

Of the defectives who either improved or remained stationary in three aspects (Table III) 81.8 per cent. of 11 in Period 1, and 72.4 per cent. of 47

TABLE III.—*Percentage of cases improving or stationary in three aspects.*

	Improved			Stationary		
	B+H+W	B+H+R	B+W+R	H+W+R	B+H+R	B+W+R
Period 1 ..	81.8	0	9.2	51.6	25.0	21.9
Period 2 ..	72.4	14.8	10.6	48.9	32.2	11.1

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cases in Period 2, improved in behaviour, habits and work. Of 90 who remained stationary in three aspects, 51·6 per cent. of 64 did so in habits, work and recreation in Period 1 and 48·9 per cent. of 29 cases in Period 2.

The total proportion of defectives who changed in a similar manner or remained stationary in any three aspects was 63·5 per cent. in Period 1, and 58·8 in Period 2 (Table IV). The numbers who behaved similarly in all four aspects were small, one case in Period 1 and six cases in Period 2.

TABLE IV.—*Percentages of cases behaving similarly in any three aspects of conduct.*

	Cases	Improving	Stationary	Deteriorating	Total
Period 1 ..	121	9·1	52·8	·16	63·5
Period 2 ..	235	20·0	38·3	·43	58·8

Similarity occurred in both periods with regard to the relationship between the changes in the four aspects. Of those who improved, the greatest percentage of improvement took place in behaviour, the next greatest in work, the third in habits and the lowest in recreation. Of those who remained stationary, the highest percentage occurred in recreation, the second highest in habits, the third in work, and the lowest in behaviour. This order was, as would be anticipated, the reverse of the proportions amongst those who improved. Of the cases who deteriorated, the highest percentage occurred in behaviour, the second highest in habits, the third in work, and the fourth in Period 1, equal to the third in Period 2, in recreation.

An investigation was made, in a similar manner, of the failures of male defectives on licence. Of 100 consecutive cases returning to a colony, 88 were due to failure in conduct, although, of course, the failures may have been produced by the environment. The remaining 12 cases were returned on account of illness or expiration of licence. Table V shows the percentages of failure in the different aspects of conduct for those returned from licence compared with those who deteriorated in a colony. The proportion who failed in general behaviour was similar in the two groups, but the proportions who deteriorated in personal habits and at work were greater in the colony. This lower percentage with regard to habits may be due to those with whom the defectives were living having a lower standard than that inside a colony. Hence, a change of habits which would be termed deterioration in a colony, would pass unnoticed in certain households. The higher rewards given for work outside a colony may, possibly, be the cause of the lower percentage of failure at work amongst those on licence.

TABLE V.—*Comparison of percentage failure in conduct of males on licence, with males resident in a colony.*

	No.	Behaviour	Habits	Work	Recreation
Licence	88	43·2	11·4	9·1	34·1
Colony	87	41·4	32·2	19·5	6·9

The part of Table V dealing with recreation shows that a remarkably higher percentage of failure in recreation occurs amongst those on licence, five times that of those in the colony. This higher figure points to the necessity of adequate supervision or control of defectives on licence during their leisure hours, including the choice of the right kind of individuals with whom they can mix socially.

SUMMARY.

1. Amongst 540 defectives of all ages, all types and both sexes, resident in a colony for at least one year, 82·8 per cent. showed improvement in some aspect of conduct.
2. Amongst adult male defectives, improvement in behaviour and in work occurred more frequently than improvement in habits and recreation. All-round improvement in behaviour, work, habits and recreation was unusual.
3. Comparison of adult males failing on licence with similar cases in a colony, showed that failure in behaviour was equal in the two groups. Failure in habits or work was more common in the cases in a colony, whereas failure at recreation was more common amongst those on licence.

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