

The College

Research in Forensic Psychiatry

In November and December 1981 a survey was conducted of the members of the Forensic Psychiatry Section. A questionnaire invited members to report any research they were undertaking. Although the response was incomplete, the replies indicated a wide range of investigation in the specialty. This brief report indicates the main areas of study.

Delinquency: Several studies are being conducted in Spain. One concerns the attitudes of the general population and of specific professional groups to juvenile delinquents. A second is examining the sociological and personality characteristics of personality disordered delinquents. A third study is a long-term follow-up of a group of delinquents. In the UK a three-generational study of loss of parental authority in delinquency is being undertaken.

Violence: A major study is comparing violent and non-violent psychiatric patients to see if abnormalities of cerebral functioning, as shown by psychological defects, distinguish the groups. Another investigation is examining latencies of imagery of violent and non-violent fantasies. At another centre sociologists and psychoanalysts are together analysing violent actions. Elsewhere a five-year prospective study of violent incidents at a psychiatric hospital is nearing completion.

Offences: Two offence categories are subject to analysis: one study is of shoplifting, with particular attention to the assessment of intent; the other is a prospective study of 100 arsonists with monitoring of their subsequent criminal history.

Regional Secure Units: Two studies are analysing referrals and admission to these units. One Regional Health Authority is reviewing its whole psychiatric population to identify those who should be treated in conditions of security. Another RHA has supported a study of the attitudes of professional staff and members of the general public to offender patients and security systems. The effect of forensic developments has been examined in a clinical and social follow-up of discharged patients.

Prison: A general study is looking at the work of the psychiatrist in a prison which takes both remanded and sentenced men. Also in Scotland, a retrospective study of all transfers of convicted persons from penal custody to psychiatric hospitals in the 11 years from 1970 has begun. In the South-East of England a prospective review is being undertaken of men over the age of 65 who are admitted to a large remand prison, and in Edinburgh a retrospective

survey of all arrested persons over the age of 60 is in progress. Two studies of murderers are being conducted, the first an electroencephalographic survey of all murderers detained in one remand prison over an 18-year period; the second a retrospective study of those remanded into custody charged with murder in the years 1967–80 from one large English county.

Special Hospitals: A prospective study is examining prison transfers to the State Hospital, Carstairs, and a retrospective study has examined nearly 600 patients discharged from the State Hospital between 1964 and 1978. In New Zealand, a statistical evaluation has been undertaken of the therapeutic techniques and methods of selection for discharge in a state maximum security unit, judged by successes and failures after discharge. At Broadmoor Hospital researchers are examining patients detained under the diagnosis of psychopathic disorder from the viewpoints of the treatments they receive and the changes that occur.

Clinical: A descriptive analysis of the phenomenological aspects of morbid jealousy is being undertaken. Elsewhere, a world bibliography of self-injury, self-mutilation and factitious illness is being prepared. Other clinical studies include: a description of the transcultural aspects relating to crime and mental disorders in 750 offenders referred for psychiatric assessment in South Africa; a computer analysis of a large number of accident litigants with neurotic symptoms; an investigation of suicides on Southern Region railway lines; a 20-year follow-up of treated psychopaths; a personal account of the forensic work undertaken by a general psychiatrist. Finally, one centre is examining the psychology of the investigation of crime and statement taking, and the after-effects of interrogation.

Medico-legal: A comparative examination of persons charged with murder, but found guilty of manslaughter, who are subsequently sent to prisons and hospitals is to be published shortly. The interpretation of the Homicide Act 1957 by psychiatrists is also being studied. Two researchers are examining fitness to plead: one is conducting a clinical study and the other is concerned with developing a standardized procedure for assessing fitness to stand trial. Lastly, the psychological relief of morbid grief after conviction for manslaughter is being investigated.

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Forensic Psychiatry Section