

# **Delinquency and Parental Pathology**

**A Study in Forensic and Clinical Psychology**

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**ROBERT G. ANDRY**

**Methuen**

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R. G. A.

## FOREWORD

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Scientific progress usually seems to take a zigzag course. Whether this can best be expressed in terms of Hegelian dialectics as thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis or by any other general formula, it is probably true to say that most scientific theories are in the first instance framed in terms far too sweeping and uncompromising to remain unchallenged for any length of time. Other, often equally extreme, theories proclaiming the very opposite are likely to appear on the scene, soon in their turn to be replaced by a third view which tries to reconcile the first two and eventually becomes the starting point of a new dialect process. Sometimes such an antagonism takes the form of clashes between different scientific disciplines. The history of criminology, in particular, shows frequent changes from predominantly sociological to predominantly biological, psychological, or psychiatric interpretations of crime and criminals, and from the latter back to the original, though refined and modernized, sociological explanation. It also happens, however, that within the sphere of sociological or within that of psychological theories a similar zigzag course can be observed.

To the study of the part played by defective family relationships in the evolution of crime and especially juvenile delinquency these considerations apply with particular force. Here we are concerned with problems which can be approached with perhaps equal justification from all those widely differing viewpoints mentioned before. Here, too, we have witnessed profound changes in prevailing attitudes to certain specific phenomena, such as for example mental defect as a causal factor in delinquency, occurring within the boundaries of one discipline, psychology. To give but one illustration, to regard low intelligence as an important causative factor, as used to be the case fifty years ago, is now entirely out of fashion. Such changes are in no way surprising, nor do they reflect on the ability or integrity of those earlier workers whose theories have been superseded by more recent research using more refined techniques and starting with the advantage which even the existence of a wrong hypothesis gives to those who attack it. "All theories", writes Popper (*The Poverty of*

*Historicism*), "are trials; they are tentative hypotheses, tried out to see whether they will work . . . not only trial, but also error is necessary . . . all tests can be interpreted as attempts to weed out false theories."

In the fifteen years which have elapsed since Dr. Bowlby, in his brilliant paper on "Forty-four Juvenile Thieves" (1944), first drew attention to "maternal deprivation" as a strong factor in producing serious and persistent delinquents his theory has become one of the most widely discussed and accepted dogmas in the whole field of the social sciences, with correspondingly far-reaching practical consequences. Among those responsible for the care of children a tendency seems to have gained ground to regard early separation of a child from his mother as an evil to be avoided at any cost. It is only in recent years that a more discriminating attitude has emerged, and one of the most frequent criticisms has been concerned with the undue neglect of the role of the father which had been the almost inevitable, though perhaps not intended, consequence of the Bowlby theory. In the circumstances, it will be a matter of considerable interest to criminologists, psychologists, probation officers, child care and child guidance workers, and to institutional staffs everywhere to study Dr. Andry's book which I have the privilege to introduce to the public. Already in his work as a clinical psychologist in Australia, he had found the prevailing lack of interest in the part played by the father in the early training of children puzzling and dangerous, and he took the first opportunity which arose for him in this country to check the Bowlby hypothesis by way of careful systematic field studies. In the present book we are given the results of this painstaking investigation without any embellishments or exaggerated claims. Dr. Andry has been remarkably successful in obtaining first-hand information not only from the one hundred and sixty boys whom he personally interviewed, delinquents and non-delinquents (which latter term has now by general agreement been accepted as meaning "neither officially nor seriously delinquent"), but – at least for a smaller sub-group – also from their fathers and mothers. While the answers obtained from a lengthy Questionnaire were throughout exposed to the most rigorous statistical treatment, the statistical results are occasionally supplemented by clinical observations, and great care has been taken to check the consistency and meaningfulness of the replies. Proceeding patiently from one area of the whole field to another, the author has been able to build

up a revealing picture of parent-child relationships – a picture which not only lends support to his own hypothesis that inadequacies of the fathers were at least as responsible for the delinquent behaviour of these boys as similar weaknesses on the part of their mothers, but also illuminates certain far more general aspects of present-day working class family life in a large city in this country. And as he has not made the mistake of denying the mothers their due share it might even be said that he has provided not only the anti-thesis to the maternal deprivation theory but a synthesis as well.

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AUGUST, 1959

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## INTRODUCTION

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This book, as its title implies, deals with certain aspects of family mental hygiene, and their relationship to delinquency. This involves the use of components from the two related fields of clinical psychology and criminology.

The central feature of the book is its concern with a problem that has much exercised the minds of workers in the field of delinquency namely, the playing of parental roles as one of the most important aetiological factors in the child's character formation.

It is generally nowadays accepted that well-played parental roles are a *sine qua non* to good mental health in children. In addition to this, however, much emphasis has in recent years been paid to the especially important role of the mother in this connection. The author, whilst not wishing to underestimate the importance of the maternal role, hopes to contribute to the study of delinquency in this book by drawing attention to the recently much-neglected study of *the role of fathers*.

The very great importance of the role of the father in relation to delinquent mal-adaptive behaviour, together with that of the mother, will become apparent in the following pages, which represent a preliminary study.

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## Part One

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION



# 1 : THE BACKGROUND

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A very large body of literature has grown on the subject of juvenile delinquency. In recent years the workers in this field have created some unanimity in concepts which enables them to use a common language and to use the accumulated knowledge as the starting-point for further elaborations of theory, research methods and therapy.

Viewing this vast volume of work, it would seem difficult, at first sight, for research workers to make essentially new contributions. However, the author, whilst claiming to make no revolutionary contribution to the study of juvenile delinquency, does feel that in the present work he has made a new contribution in that he shows the need for a change in emphasis in certain aspects of the theory of the aetiology of delinquency and shows the usefulness of a particular research technique, both as a pure research tool and as a clinical instrument.

But before going on to outline the aim of this study and the techniques used, the author would like to review three recent books which are of particular significance to his own study, and which in no small measure helped in the orientation of this study. This selection of of three books is in no way intended to minimize the value of other studies – some of the latter are briefly reviewed in Appendix 1.

## Three Recent Key Studies

One of the more recent and best-known works in this field is that of Bowlby (1952) on *Maternal Care and Mental Health*. He points out that a child needs the warm feeling that derives from his relationship with his mother. If this is lacking, anxiety feelings are present and a state of 'maternal deprivation' develops. There may be partial or complete deprivation with resulting damage to the personality of the child. Partial deprivation causes acute anxiety and excessive need for love, and powerful feelings for revenge; whilst complete deprivation entirely cripples character development. Bowlby concludes that the following factors affect the extent to which damage may result in consequence of deprivation. (1) The age at which deprivation has occurred. (2) The length of deprivation. (3) The degree of deprivation.

(4) Frequency of deprivation. (5) Quality of mother-child relationships before separation. (6) The experience of a child with his mother substitute. (7) Kind of reception which the child receives from the mother on his or her return.

Bowlby lists some of the following disadvantageous after-effects following deprivation: (1) Hostility on the part of the child towards the mother on her return. (2) Excessive demands made on mothers followed by jealousy, temper tantrums, etc. (3) Cheerful but really shallow emotional attachment. (4) An apathetic withdrawal often accompanied by rocking and head-banging.

Deprivation is most damaging, Bowlby states, when a child is between the ages of 6-18 months. Periods less vulnerable in chronological order are the periods between 18 months to 3 years and 3 years to 5 years. Although still vulnerable, a child can survive deprivation from his 5th to 8th year with very little damage to character development.

Bowlby points out that three kinds of research techniques may be adopted to study deprivation: (1) Direct observation at the time separation occurs. (2) Retrospective studies, for instance, by carefully examining psychopaths and by delving into their early background. (3) Follow-up studies, i.e. longitudinal studies in which deprived children are observed growing up over a period of years.

It is, as yet, difficult to appraise fully Bowlby's most stimulating work, which in recent years has often been misquoted and misinterpreted. It should be remembered that further validation studies are still in progress under Bowlby's direction. A number of questions arise, however, which the writer feels need answering. One of the most important points is that the role of fathers has not been studied extensively by Bowlby, who has relegated the role of fathers to a secondary position to that of the mother, without having shown conclusively why this should be so. This omission is puzzling in view of the fact that Freud had much to say about the effect of fathers on the character development of children during the Oedipal stage. Furthermore, it is frustrating to find that some psychopaths and delinquents when examined do not appear to have had a history of maternal deprivation. It would seem difficult to assess accurately the many stages of deprivation, since individuals differ in their reactions to maternal separation as far as intensity, length and frequency of deprivation occur. Lastly, it should be pointed out that, by the very nature of his concepts, Bowlby's terms are difficult to define and to

test objectively. There is, however, little doubt that Bowlby's work, more than most other previous works on parent-child relationships, has stimulated further research.

Another study which has had tremendous impact on researchers in the field of delinquency is that of Glueck and Glueck (1950) called *Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency*. The Gluecks have contributed to the field of juvenile delinquency for approximately a quarter of a century. In this work they used a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, social investigators, anthropologists and statisticians. They matched non-delinquents with delinquents on a number of variables such as age, socio-economic background, I.Q., etc. They then investigated factors inside and outside the family structure of both groups and stress as one of the primary aetiological factors the major harm that may develop in a child if psychologically neglected by his parents. This 'under the roof culture' is thought to be more important than other factors, such as general environmental ones. The Gluecks have summarized much of the present knowledge about juvenile delinquency and have further confirmed a number of hitherto doubtful points regarding parent-child relationships. It should be noted, however, that their study may not be easily repeated. It must be borne in mind that the Gluecks have made great advances in this field through the publication of their prediction tables. These tables are based on their findings, and, according to the authors, are both reliable and valid and may be applied to any young offender who has not yet progressed far along the road of delinquency. The chance of any young offender's becoming a severe delinquent may be assessed by his score compared with that of the delinquents upon which the prediction tables were based.

The topic of prediction tables has recently come to exercise the minds of most workers in this field in the U.S.A., the United Kingdom and on the Continent (as evidenced by Fry's work, 1952).

A work that must be mentioned is that of Mannheim and Wilkins (1955), *Prediction Methods in Relation to Borstal Training*. This work is of specific interest from the point of view of methodology. Results of the validation study at once silence critics who query the possible value of the prediction tables. This work is largely based on the 'decision theory' which is an attempt to bypass concepts of causation and to re-emphasize the principle of practical operational research. According to this theory, no causal hypotheses are necessary, and a research worker may use a set of data to derive a maximal system of

control with respect to the end object via the possible decision. In bypassing aetiological concepts the authors do not deny the occasional use of such concepts, nor are they hostile to more familiar techniques which are employed in this field, such as the study of individual cases. The case-study approach and the prediction-table approach are not necessarily in opposition to each other, providing the case-study approach is objective.

Mannheim and Wilkins' (1955) approach to the study of juvenile delinquency is largely a utilitarian one in that the authors refrain from concentrating on aetiological questions but direct their research towards accurate predictions. Their study could be regarded as lying at one end of a continuum, whereas that of Bowlby's lies at the opposite end, since Bowlby's concentrates very largely on causative questions. The two approaches should be viewed as complementary to each other. Both works, together with that of the Gluecks, form a kind of triad since they approach the problem of juvenile delinquency in three different ways.

## 2 : THE PRESENT STUDY

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Many research workers, especially since the publication of Bowlby's previously mentioned work, have come to regard what is termed 'maternal deprivation' as being of primary aetiological importance in the fields of delinquency and psychopathology. The theory, in spite of its usefulness in special cases, can be criticized partly because it undermines the development of a theory based on interacting multi-causation and partly because it gives inadequate recognition (especially in view of Freud's findings) of the possible importance of the *role played by the father* – a role which complements that of the mother, forming a complex, subtle triangle of relationships between mother, father and child. The basic aim of the present work, then, is to study some important aspects of this triangle of relationships in certain key areas of the child's life experience – in other words, to study the role of *both* parents (and not merely that of the mother). It should be made clear here that the aim of the study is not to deny that the mother's role is important, but rather to investigate how important the father's role is *vis-à-vis* that of the mother's. Unless this is done, the primary importance or otherwise of the mother's role cannot be asserted. In short, the author does not believe that the theorists of 'maternal deprivation' have adduced sufficient evidence for their assumption of the essentially secondary role they attribute to the father.

The author felt that in order to carry out the task of examining the roles of both parents, considerable methodological rigour was required. The latter is often absent from clinical studies on the excuse that methodological rigour and subtle insight into complex human relationships are hard to combine. The author feels, however, that a truer statement of the position is that methodological rigour is often extremely hard to achieve in practice in any social research, and not that this necessarily conflicts with subtle insights. Thus, whilst he was fully aware of the difficulties, the author made every attempt to secure methodological rigour, in spite of many imperfections in the practical results of the attempt.

The research design was developed in the following manner.

First, the object of the research was defined. This was to investigate thoroughly the roles of *both* parents in order to determine whether differences exist between delinquents and non-delinquents in regard to the adequacy with which each parent plays his/her role.

Secondly, the decision was made to confine the research to a study of boys. The reasons for this decision were: (a) it is difficult to obtain girl delinquents for examination: (b) the majority of delinquents are boys: (c) since the study of the father's role was an important feature, of the research, and in view (according to Freudian theory) of the basic difference between boys and girls regarding emotional involvements with the father, girls were not studied in order to preclude over-complication of the findings.

Thirdly, in order to study subtle 'under the roof' relationships involved in the mother-father-child triangle, the decision was made to exclude boys from 'broken homes' from the research. Had the latter boys been included in the research, the pre-existing ill-balance in the family structure would have undermined the whole object of the research.

Fourthly, a series of interrelated hypotheses susceptible to empirical testing were set up regarding the adequacy of each parent's role in certain key areas of the life experience of the child. These hypotheses are set out in the relevant chapters of Part Two (The Findings) of this book and will not be further commented on here. A further set of hypotheses on the grandparents were set up, but it was found to be impossible to test them adequately; hence, no findings on these hypotheses are presented in this book. (The object of these latter hypotheses had been to establish whether there was any relationship between the roles of the boy's parents regarding him and the roles of the boy's grandparents regarding his parents when the latter were children, i.e. whether or not there was a transmission of parental attitudes from one generation to the other.)

Fifthly, a decision was taken as to what type of research should be used to test the hypotheses. It was determined that the research should be objective, quantitative and repeatable. These three criteria were essential if the hypotheses were to be properly tested and susceptible to independent testing by other research workers. Bowlby mentions three types of research which might be used in a study of this sort, namely, longitudinal or follow-up research, direct observation research, or retrospective studies. The ideal way, for instance, of studying 'maternal deprivation' and its consequences would be a