

In addition to physical problems, psychological factors are important. A large percentage of the criminal population is emotionally disturbed.¹⁵

The evidence presented to us indicates that the vicious criminal is often a misunderstood member of our society. He may live in a state of emotional turmoil. For reasons beyond his control he may have failed to bond with members of his immediate family in early childhood and later with his peers. Having failed to develop an adequate personality structure, he is unable to understand his own problems and how to cope with them. For centuries he has been punished for his failure to develop a normal life-style and to overcome the disabling and unfortunate influences of environmental, congenital, prenatal and postnatal handicaps. Today we know much about how these problems develop and how it may be possible to rescue such unfortunate children before they become delinquent and the potential criminals of tomorrow.

Our study, then, has been an interdisciplinary one. We have considered the various possible causative factors in the categories described and we have listened to the opinions of well-informed witnesses in the disciplines of education, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, criminology and anthropology. We have reviewed the evidence available and attempted to coordinate information provided from all these sources in order to develop some insight into the way in which early childhood experiences might be considered as causes of later criminal behaviour.

In reviewing the information, the material in this report has been divided for convenience into three time-related categories:— the prenatal period, the birth experience or the perinatal period, and the postnatal period including the early childhood years from birth to school age. In some cases it is, of course, impossible to separate neatly into arbitrary time periods those factors which have an ongoing effect.

It is apparent that there are many causes of criminal behaviour. Our inquiry has failed to establish a precise identification of cause and effect relationships. Apart from the possible exception of a physical stress, such as a brain tumour having a direct effect on the conduct of an individual, the reasons for criminal behaviour are complex and involve the interaction of diverse factors.

A child who is disadvantaged may be considered to be living under a condition of stress. Research has now revealed the very important interactive effect on child development of multiple disadvantages. It may tolerate one single chronic stress or risk factor with no apparent harmful effect. An additional stress factor, however, may cause the resultant risk of psychiatric disorder to increase as much as four-fold. In other words, the stresses seem to potentiate each other.¹⁶ One type of disadvantage tends to increase the likelihood of others in very direct and predictable ways.¹⁷ A child who must live with multiple disadvantages is thus in a position of high risk for psychiatric disorder and behaviour problems and is in need of all the assistance society can provide for it.