

NEWS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
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DALLAS--The juvenile delinquent may actually try to get caught by police because of an unconscious wish to obtain control of his behavior, a UT Southwestern Medical School researcher has told an inter-American meeting of adolescent psychiatrists and psychologists.

Dr. Larry Kimsey, assistant professor of psychiatry at UTSMS, reported on four years work with juvenile delinquents in a joint project with the Dallas County Juvenile Department.

"We learned that you can treat them as outpatients--which was the object of the study," he told the joint meeting of the American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry and the Argentinean Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology in Buenos Aires this week.

Dr. Kimsey was chairman of a panel on adolescents of different cultures at the meeting.

In the Dallas study, Kimsey and others worked with delinquent boys in one set of groups and delinquent girls in the other. (One finding: Eighty percent of the boys had used drugs. For girls it was 100 percent.)

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The problem of controlling the group, both in individual outside actions and during the group sessions, became the most important factor of the therapy, said Dr. Kimsey. The first area was accomplished when judges began making sessions part of probationary arrangements. The spectre of reform school served to assure attendance, and acceptable behavior outside.

Teams of a male and female psychiatrists, psychologists and probation officers worked with all groups and provided the needed internal controls:

"Without internal control, there is frightful anxiety and destructiveness in the group," says Dr. Kimsey.

This illustrates how an adolescent's search for boundaries to his behavior may actually lead him to be apprehended.

Says Dr. Kimsey: " Delinquents are those who have been caught. In our experience, it is striking how these boys, prior to treatment, tended to gravitate to the police. Almost invariably, their crimes are committed either in close proximity to the police, or in such a way as to be easily detected.

"The fruits of their crimes were skimpy, to say the least.

"We were struck, therefore, by the idea that there must be some purpose, albeit unconscious, behind their need to be apprehended.

"They seem to provoke their own punishment."

Dr. Kimsey and co-workers, including Dr. John R. Price, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry, were also struck by the youths' mistrust:

"Delinquents distrust almost everyone--themselves, each other, their therapists, their environment. This deep-seated mistrust can only be dealt with by time, patience and absolute honesty on the part of the therapists.

The groups of delinquents usually consisted of from six to eight boys ages 15 and 16, who were neither retarded nor psychotic, and who generally, had been arrested for theft, particularly of cars and from vending machines.

While Dr. Kimsey's groups worked with boys, Dr. Price's groups worked with girls.

Expanding on the study, Dr. Kimsey observes: "Kids aren't like we were. These kids know what's going on all over the world. They have mobility and they live in a culture that's in a turmoil.

"Our basic cultural pattern now is poor impulse control: 'Do your own thing' or 'Grab all the gusto you can.' So, it's antithetical to work hard, store up and plan for tomorrow in the new culture.

"We haven't seen neuroses in years. Of course, there's more aberrant behavior. The crime rate is going up."

The need by juveniles for some belief or ethical system to live by--mythical or not--seems apparent, Dr. Kimsey concludes.

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