

Violence Not Surprising

► THE SHOCKING slaughter of eight nurses in Chicago has been dubbed the "crime of the century." But in the opinion of a psychiatric expert on violence, the crime was not unexpected in an age when killing is no longer abnormal.

Dr. Frederic Wertham of New York, who has worked in forensic psychiatry since an early association with Clarence Darrow, said there is violence "all the time now," but "we're always surprised when it occurs."

Neither society nor the psychiatric profession has realized, he said, that there has been an "enormous rise" of violence during the past 20 years.

Dr. Wertham believes it wrong to look for an explanation of the murders by studying a single aspect, such as why the women did not put up a better fight, or what individual sickness led the murderer into his crime.

"You can study a man's life in entirety, and you still don't have an answer."

But as it now happens, he said, the criminal is given a few psychoanalytic labels and that is it. Psychiatrists, law enforcement agencies and courts make excuses and "give the man an alibi."

From his interviews with hundreds of criminals and his close association with the legal processes, Dr. Wertham has concluded that forensic psychiatry is in "very bad shape." It has not kept pace with the changes in society.

The criminal is still being explained as a product of mother dominance or some such thing, he said.

Individual pathology is relevant, said Dr. Wertham, but it can only be understood in the context of the age.

The first step in preventing a recurrence of the Chicago murders is to "admit we live in a violent age." Since people do not understand this, they do little to counteract it. In fact, violence is used as a source of entertainment.

Dr. Wertham, who authored "Seduction of the Innocent," an expose of violence in comic books, said the average boy sees thousands of murders simply by turning on his television set.

The next step is to take up crime seriously and scientifically. "There hasn't been a single good paper on the simulation of insanity, for instance, in the last 20 years." Yet it is possible, though not common, for a criminal to successfully pretend he is insane.

Psychiatrists and lawyers use the prevalent insanity law (M'Naghten rule) as a "whipping boy," said Dr. Wertham. But, in his opinion, the law is a good one. The answer to violence lies not in changing the law, but in laying a foundation for understanding criminality by collecting case histories on thousands of criminals.

Dr. Wertham will publish a new exploration of human violence in "A Sign for Cain" (Macmillan), set for release in September.

NEUROSURGERY

Paste Plugs Hole in Skull

► A NEW WAY to "regenerate" the cranial bone following trauma has been reported by Russian medical researchers, who anticipate that it will make "skull plates" obsolete.

The trick is to crush pulverized bone to a powder, then mix it with the patient's own blood to form a thick paste. This is applied over the dura mater, or fibrous membrane covering the brain.

The crust itself does not form bone, Prof. Lev Polezhaev of the USSR Academy of Sciences said. Rather the body starts an enzyme reaction with the paste. On the seventh day after the operation, accumulations of osteogenic cells are found above the edge of the old bone, he stated.

After a few more days rods made from bone cells and the matrix of bone tissue are seen growing toward the center of the hole, Prof. Polezhaev said. New spongy bone begins to form, growing harder with time, until new cranial bone is produced with all the properties of the original.

"When skull tissue is damaged, the

cells become more active, acquiring the ability to form new bone more easily," he reported.

Prof. Polezhaev said that the bone for the paste can come not only from the patient but from a dead person, if taken six hours or less after death. Ribs, vertebrae and sternum can be used, but the best bones are the softer, spongier ones.

The technique is now being tried clinically in Moscow, Kharkov, Ivhevsk and other cities, with "invariable success." Russian scientists have reported conducting "thousands" of trials on dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, sheep, hens and mice, with "100% success" whenever they used powdered bone from the same species.

In a related development, engineers from the USSR Health Ministry's Central Institute of Traumatology have designed apparatus for crushing bone under sterile conditions.

Other work shows that bone can be preserved for future use by freeze-drying the fragments.

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