

behavioral sciences

DRUG ADDICTION

Methadone looks good

A program of motivation and rehabilitation with methadone (SN: 4/12, p. 364) has proven to be effective in decreasing antisocial behavior in a large proportion of criminal addicts.

In a study conducted at the New York City Correctional Institute for Men, 12 men were voluntarily started on methadone before they left jail and then referred to the program for aftercare.

Ten of the 12 men used heroin at least once after release from prison, but the blocking effect of methadone was successful—none became readdicted.

Nine of the 12 had no further convictions during the follow-up study of 50 weeks.

Every man involved in an untreated control group became addicted after release from jail, and 15 or 16 were convicted of new crimes during the follow-up period, Drs. Vincent P. Dole, J. Waymond Robinson and John Orraca, Edward Towns, Paul Searcy and Eric Caine report in the June 19 *NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*.

SUICIDE

Computer study

The causes of suicide are being investigated in a computer study in West Berlin. The study may prove to be of great significance for those dealing with the suicidal.

Fifty key characteristics of 10,000 patients in West Berlin's Medical Counseling Service for the Life-Weary were recorded and evaluated by the computers.

One set of results indicates that 3,623 persons were in serious danger of taking their lives.

Twenty-five percent of all patients said they had a feeling of helplessness, 39 percent described their situation as desperate.

Love conflicts proved to be an especially strong suicidal factor in patients under 20. An overall picture showed 14.3 percent with conflicts in marriage, love and sex as the causes for suicidal tendencies, while 2.1 percent listed financial, professional and legal problems as the reasons, says Dr. Klaus Thomas, head of the Medical Counseling Service.

About 900 West Berliners take their lives each year.

CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

XYY criterion doubtful

A chromosome abnormality, XYY, in males has been reported as a possible indication of criminal makeup (SN: 10/26/68, p. 410).

The XYY male should not be legally judged with regard only to his chromosomal abnormality, says Dr. Gerald R. Clark, president of the Elwyn Institute, Elwyn, Pa. "Though difficult and in many ways unsatisfactory," he says, "evidence should continue to rest on psychiatric history, observations and examination of the individual."

From a legal point of view, Dr. Clark says, a chromosomal abnormality may be an attractive plea of diminished responsibility. But there is growing evidence that many XYY males are stable, law-abiding citizens.

A study was conducted in penal, criminally insane and defective delinquent institutions in Pennsylvania comparing tall males with two kinds of abnormality: XYY chromosome abnormal males and males with XYY Klinefelter's syndrome who are tall, sterile and often mentally retarded. Results indicate that the XYY male may have been falsely labeled as being naturally predisposed toward criminal behavior.

The criminal records of the two types of males were quite similar, and Dr. Clark believes that the reports of normal males in the institutions would be the same, although no reports were available.

Very little is known of the characteristics of the XYY male in the general population. From the study findings Dr. Clark feels that the XYY abnormality does not necessarily cause criminal behavior, but the relationship between XYY chromosome and criminality is not ruled out.

More research is needed, Dr. Clark reported at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

CRIMINOLOGY

Crime-fighting computer

A new crime-fighting computer system in New Jersey will decrease the chance of escape for criminals.

The system will provide wanted lists and information on criminal records from police agencies. It will incorporate features from other crime-fighting systems and tie in with the FBI's National Crime Information Center and other systems as they are developed.

By dialing a computer terminal on his police phone, a policeman, while in the field, can get the information in seconds. Facts about the suspect's identity, criminal history, aliases, personal appearance and fingerprints can be determined almost immediately. Cross-referencing will also be possible. The user can request names of suspects matching fragments of his information.

The computer system will form the information nucleus for the entire State Department of Law and Public Safety. It will aid in planning police training programs, keeping track of the state's vast legal records and provide information to each agency.

ALCOHOLISM

New test for driving safety

A new test, the Michigan Alcoholic Screening Test, has been developed that may reduce the number of traffic accidents associated with the use of alcohol.

The 26-question test is intended as a screening device and is given to persons convicted of drunk driving, or drunk and disorderly behavior, or with several traffic violations. It can also be useful as a self-administered test for people with drinking problems.

Developed by Dr. Melvin L. Selzer, a psychiatrist at the University of Michigan, the test reveals just who is an alcoholic and just how alcoholic he is.

Considering the traffic safety problem, Dr. Selzer feels that his test is much more effective than measuring the level of alcoholic content in the blood.

The test was developed through work with the University of Michigan Highway Safety Research Institute and is still being validated.