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A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A PERSONAL DATA QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO ADULT PRISONERS

Samuel Gerstein¹

INTRODUCTION

In penal institutions where the heavy case load does not allow for comprehensive psychological examinations for every inmate, various short-cut methods must be employed to expedite matters. The writer has attempted to develop a time-saving device in the form of a questionnaire which has been found useful and practical in personal interviews with prisoners. Its specific value lies in the fact that within a relatively brief space of time major personal difficulties and problems can be located, the diagnosis suggested, and the appropriate therapeutic approach presented. The prisoners' response to specific questions as well as their marginal comments are often found enlightening as to the trend of their problems and serve as an opening for discussion in the initial and subsequent interviews. It will be seen later in this paper that the questionnaire is of value also in the matter of group differentiation as well as individual diagnosis. Rapid surveys and comparisons of various groups can be made and studied.

The questionnaire, entitled Personal Index, deals with the subject's health, social and emotional problems, all

of which are essential to a proper understanding of the individual. It has been given routinely to new groups of literate prisoners entering the U. S. Penitentiary, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. These prisoners are a special group of law violators for the reason that they were involved in the violation of the federal narcotic laws, 41 percent of them having been addicted to the use of narcotic drugs² at some time prior to their present incarceration. Since only 310 cases are included in this study, the statistical data described herein should not be accepted as final but rather as suggestive and tentative.

The inmates are assured of complete secrecy because of the confidential nature of their responses. Also, stress is made on the purpose of the questionnaire, namely, to help and guide those presenting special problems and difficulties. In this way, it is hoped, the element of falsification is reduced to a minimum. Aside from these preliminary remarks and the assistance needed by some in answering certain questions, the Personal Index is practically self-administering. The amount of time consumed by the average group in completing it ranges from 10 to 15

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² This figure includes only those who admitted having been addicted assumably to opium or its

derivatives. Users of marihuana or cocaine were excluded since these drugs are generally considered non habit forming in the physical sense.

minutes. The 72 questions included in the present form were selected on the basis of diagnostic value, statistical validity, clarity of meaning of the language used, and as far as possible, objectivity. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: questions 1 to 22 dealing with health problems; 23 to 47 with social problems; 48 to 72 with emotional problems. The writer has originated 29 questions and 43 were selected from various personality questionnaires used for clinical purposes. The questions are worded so that the abnormal or unfavorable responses are recorded by encircling YES; thus the scoring can be done and the specific problem can be seen at a glance. The score is the total YES responses; the higher the score the more definite the indication of the inmate's maladjustment and, in all probability, the more individual attention and treatment will be needed in properly effecting his rehabilitation and readjustment to society upon his release.

In Table I is given a replica of the Personal Index mimeographed for use at this institution. Opposite each question is indicated the percentage of YES or unfavorable responses made by 310 adult prisoners.

Interrelationship of the Health, Social, and Emotional Sections

The section dealing with health problems should not serve as a substitute for a regular medical examination made by a physician but rather as a possible preliminary to or a check on such an examination. It is possible that the etiology of the individual's

difficulties in adjustment may be found here. It is important that the physician remedy whatever physical disorders he finds and the job of the psychologist is to deal with the issues which have brought about his maladjustment not so much due to the recognizable physical disorders as to the mental attitude with which he deals with his personal and other problems; not so much as what is actually the matter with him as what he thinks or feels is the matter with him. Most of the items in this section are factual and objective in character.

As seen in Table II, the emotional section correlates with the health section to the extent of .43 with a P.E. of $\pm .03$, indicating a fairly close relationship. In other words, men in poor health tend to be emotionally unstable and vice versa. Using the responses to specific questions on the emotional section as a guide, the examiner should make an effort to understand the origin and development of various emotional sets and attitudes and seek to give the individual a different viewpoint and provide interests of a healthy and normal type. The results will, of course, depend upon the intelligence and cooperation of the subject and the amount of time that can be spent in that direction. High scores in the section might suggest the need of a trained psychiatrist. The examiner should bear in mind that the answers in this section are the subject's own evaluations and may be exaggerated toward either the favorable or unfavorable end. The results should, therefore, be used with

TABLE I. THE PERSONAL INDEX AND PERCENTAGE OF YES RESPONSES

MADE BY 310 PRISONERS

PSYCHOLOGY DEPT PERSONAL INDEX U. S. P.
 NAME..... NUMBER..... AGE..... RACE..... WHERE BORN.....
 OCCUPATION EDUCATION
 UNDERLINE YOUR PRESENT MARITAL STATUS SINGLE MARRIED SEPARATED
 DIVORCED WIDOWED.

KINDLY ANSWER EACH QUESTION. BE PERFECTLY FRANK. THIS INFORMATION IS, OF COURSE, STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. TAKE YOUR TIME IN ANSWERING.

IF YOUR ANSWER IS "YES," DRAW A CIRCLE AROUND YES.

IF YOUR ANSWER IS "NO," DRAW A CIRCLE AROUND NO.

IF YOU CANNOT ANSWER DEFINITELY, DRAW A CIRCLE AROUND ?.

IF THERE IS ANYTHING YOU WISH THE EXAMINER TO KNOW ABOUT YOURSELF OR ABOUT ANYTHING THAT MAY BE ON YOUR MIND, WRITE IT IN THE MARGIN OR ON THE BACK OF THE PAGE. YOUR PROBLEMS, IF YOU HAVE ANY, WILL BE DISCUSSED WITH YOU DURING THE INTERVIEW.

(Questions about your health do not pertain to your condition while breaking habit*)

		% YES Responses
YES	NO ?	1. Were you in poor health during most of your childhood?..... 13
YES	NO ?	2. Were you in poor health during the last few years?..... 27
YES	NO ?	3. Do you worry much about your health?..... 22
YES	NO ?	4. Did you ever have a serious injury in an accident or fight?..... 30
YES	NO ?	5. Do you feel severe pains in your body very often?..... 19
YES	NO ?	6. Do you feel weak and tired very often?..... 26
YES	NO ?	7. Do you get many bad headaches?..... 19
YES	NO ?	8. Do you get dizzy spells very often?..... 10
YES	NO ?	9. Did you ever have epileptic fits or fainting spells?..... 1
YES	NO ?	10. Did a doctor ever say that you have high blood pressure, trouble with your heart, lungs, or kidneys? (underline which you mean)..... 22
YES	NO ?	11. Did you lose a hand, foot, or an eye? (underline which you mean)..... 2
YES	NO ?	12. Did you ever have the clap or syphilis? (underline which you mean).... 53
YES	NO ?	13. Were you ever paralyzed for a time?..... 6
YES	NO ?	14. Do you often have spells of vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea?..... 7
YES	NO ?	15. Do you have chronic constipation or attacks of indigestion?..... 27
YES	NO ?	16. Have you been very much underweight for a long time?..... 29
YES	NO ?	17. Do you have a serious skin disease?..... 5
YES	NO ?	18. Did you ever have asthma or hay-fever?..... 13
YES	NO ?	19. Do you get colds very often?..... 43
YES	NO ?	20. Do your eyes frequently pain you?..... 23
YES	NO ?	21. Do you have much trouble in hearing?..... 9
YES	NO ?	22. Do you have feelings of choking often?..... 6
(Questions 23 to 33 deal with your childhood before you were 15 years of age)		
YES	NO ?	23. Did you have an unhappy home life when you were a child?..... 10
YES	NO ?	24. Did your family have money troubles when you were a child?..... 32
YES	NO ?	25. Did your mother have to work out to help support your family?..... 31
YES	NO ?	26. Did one or both of your parents die when you were a child?..... 32
YES	NO ?	27. Were your parents separated or divorced when you were a child?..... 17
YES	NO ?	28. Were you neglected or badly treated by your family when you were a child?..... 5
YES	NO ?	29. Did you ever run away from home when a child?..... 25
YES	NO ?	30. Did you ever hate anyone in your immediate family?..... 5
YES	NO ?	31. Did you get poor marks in school?..... 20
YES	NO ?	32. Did you play "hookey" from school very often?..... 27
YES	NO ?	33. Were you disgusted with school?..... 22
(Has anyone in your immediate family (not you) ever):		
YES	NO ?	34. Been a drunkard?..... 7
YES	NO ?	35. Been a drug addict?..... 9
YES	NO ?	36. Served time in jail, prison, or reformatory?..... 20
YES	NO ?	37. Been insane, mentally defective, or epileptic?..... 2
YES	NO ?	38. Were you ever convicted of any felonies or major crimes before?..... 18
How many times?.....		
YES	NO ?	39. Were you ever convicted for any misdemeanors or minor crimes?..... 61
About how many times?.....		
YES	NO ?	40. Were you ever in jail, prison, or reformatory before?..... 74
YES	NO ?	41. Did you work dishonestly and illegitimately most of the time?..... 12
YES	NO ?	42. Did you get drunk very often?..... 14
YES	NO ?	43. Did you gamble very often?..... 24

YES NO ? 44. Did you ever use marihuana or cocaine?..... 25
 YES NO ? 45. Did you ever have a drug habit?..... 41
 YES NO ? 46. Were any of your friends ever convicted of a crime?..... 38
 YES NO ? 47. Do people find fault with you more than you deserve?..... 11
 YES NO ? 48. Do you usually lose your temper quickly?..... 11
 YES NO ? 49. Do you usually have much trouble in sleeping?..... 22
 YES NO ? 50. Do you have many frightful dreams or nightmares?..... 9
 YES NO ? 51. Did you ever walk in your sleep?..... 3
 YES NO ? 52. Did you ever have a great mental shock or fright?..... 7
 YES NO ? 53. Did you ever have the habit of stuttering?..... 8
 YES NO ? 54. Were you ever very much upset because of money troubles?..... 32
 YES NO ? 55. Did a serious tragedy worry you for some time?..... 20
 YES NO ? 56. Did you ever have a nervous breakdown?..... 7
 YES NO ? 57. Were you ever considered insane and placed in an asylum?..... 5
 YES NO ? 58. Have you ever been afraid of going insane?..... 4
 YES NO ? 59. Did you ever wish to commit suicide?..... 3
 YES NO ? 60. Were you ever troubled by thoughts of death?..... 8
 YES NO ? 61. Did you ever hear imaginary voices or sounds?..... 2
 YNS NO ? 62. Did you ever see a ghost, vision or imaginary things?..... 4
 YES NO ? 63. Do you feel depressed and blue very often?..... 24
 YES NO ? 64. Do you have ups and downs in mood for no real reason?..... 11
 YES NO ? 65. Did you ever lose your memory for a time?..... 4
 YES NO ? 66. Do you usually find it hard to concentrate for a long period of time?.... 15
 YES NO ? 67. Are your feelings easily hurt?..... 25
 YES NO ? 68. Does it make you uneasy to cross a high bridge?..... 4
 YES NO ? 69. Do you have the habit of twitching your face, neck or shoulders?..... 2
 YES NO ? 70. Do you worry much about little things?..... 12
 YES NO ? 71. Do things appear to swim before your eyes often?..... 5
 YES NO ? 72. Do you consider yourself a very nervous person?..... 13

* "Breaking habit" refers to the period when drug addicts present withdrawal symptoms as a result of being deprived of narcotic drugs.

much discretion and be carefully checked during the interview.

The social section, like the health section, involves mostly items factual and objective in character. Here are included various situational items centering about the individual's home and school life during his childhood, and his social life and habits during his later years. These, it was felt, are as integral a component of the syndrome as physical and emotional expressions. In Table II we note the social section correlating with the emotional section to the extent of .48 with a P. E. of $\pm .03$, pointing to the fact that the socially maladjusted tend to be emotionally unstable. A correlation of .30 with a P. E. of $\pm .04$ exists between the social and health sections, indicating a tendency for those in poor health to have difficulty in making social adjustments.

TABLE II. COEFFICIENTS OF INTERCORRELATION OF THE HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SECTIONS

	r	P.E.
Emotional and Health	.43	$\pm .03$
Emotional and Social	.48	$\pm .03$
Health and Social	.30	$\pm .04$

Tentative Norms

Table III presents the tentative norms of our prison group. The scale needs to be administered to a larger group before adequate standardization can be secured. The scores described as good, average, and poor, are based upon the quartile ranges, below Q1, Q1— Q3, above Q3, respectively.

Reliability

The coefficients of reliability for each of the three sections as shown in Table IV were determined by the split-half method and applying the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. A correlation of .79 with a P. E. of $\pm .014$ was found for the health section, a correlation of

TABLE III. TENTATIVE NORMS FOR A PRISON POPULATION

	Mean	σ	good (below Q1)	average (Q1-Q3)	poor (above Q3)
Health	3.98	3.01	0-1	2-6	7 and over
Social	5.58	3.28	0-2	3-8	9 and over
Emotional	2.64	2.02	0	1-4	5 and over

.87 with a P. E. of $\pm .009$ for the social section, and a correlation of .81 with a P. E. of $\pm .012$ for the emotional section.

TABLE IV. COEFFICIENTS OF RELIABILITY FOR THE HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SECTIONS

	r	P.E.
Health .....	.79	$\pm .014$
Social .....	.87	$\pm .009$
Emotional .....	.81	$\pm .012$

Validity

The validity of each section was determined by interviews, the internal consistency method, and comparisons of various selected groups. In the internal consistency method, items were retained which clearly differentiated between the upper and lower 15 percent of individuals in the distribution of scores. A few items, although not strongly differentiating between the two groups, were kept because of their specific importance in describing personality disorders and general maladjustment.

The validating groups are described thus: the health section was validated by 31 inmates with poor health and 31 with good general physical condition as reported by the prison medical officer; the social section was validated by 51 inmates with poor social adjustment and 51 with good social adjustment as indicated by the report of the prison social service unit; the emotional section was validated by 37 emotionally unstable or psychopathic inmates

and 37 emotionally stable or well balanced inmates as reported by the findings of the prison psychiatrist, designated in Table V by poor and good respectively. Table V presents a summary of the validating groups. We note the high critical ratios of the health and social sections indicating significant statistical differences which speak well for the validity of these two sections. Although the emotionally unstable group scored higher on the emotional section than the emotionally stable as we expected, nevertheless the critical ratio shows the difference to be statistically insignificant. It is reasonable to assume that some deception and falsification entered into the responses made by many in this section. In order to secure an occupational assignment within the institution in keeping with their desires and, also to avoid the stigma attached to individuals considered mentally or emotionally unbalanced, many inmates tend to conceal their personality defects thereby hoping to make a good impression.

TABLE V. VALIDATING GROUPS FOR THE HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SECTIONS

Section	Poor			
	N.	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	31	7.56	4.61	.98
Social	51	7.42	5.41	.76
Emotional	37	3.20	2.70	.62
Section	Good			
	N.	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	31	3.21	2.82	.60
Social	51	4.31	3.82	.66
Emotional	37	1.90	1.61	.37

Section	Diff.	σ	Diff.
			σ Diff.
Health	4.35	1.15	3.78
Social	3.11	1.00	3.11
Emotional	1.30	.72	1.80

Group Differentiation

In order to point out the value of the Personal Index in the matter of group differentiation our subjects were divided into various groups and compared. Tables VI, VII, VIII, IX, present the comparisons and the extent of the differences of recidivists (1) and first time offenders, narcotic drug addicts and non-addicts (2), whites and negroes, and 18-25, 26-40, and 41 and over age groups, respectively.

Recidivists and First Time Offenders

As seen in Table VI, the recidivists have more problems and difficulties in the physical, social and emotional aspects than the first time offenders. However, a significant statistical difference exists only in the social section, the critical ratio being 3.43.

TABLE VI. COMPARISON OF RECIDIVISTS AND FIRST TIME OFFENDERS

Recidivists n-183			
Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	4.78	3.09	.65
Social	7.46	2.42	.50
Emotional	4.15	2.40	.53

First Time Offenders
n-127

Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	3.10	2.39	.53
Social	4.89	2.70	.56
Emotional	2.88	2.97	.66

Section	Diff.	σ	Diff.
			σ Diff.
Health	1.68	.84	2.00
Social	2.57	.75	3.43
Emotional	1.27	.84	1.51

(1) Recidivists are considered here as those who have been convicted of at least 1 felony or 2 misdemeanors prior to this present predicament.

(2) The non-addicts are those who have never used any habit forming drugs.

Narcotic Drug Addicts and Non-Addicts

Table VII shows the addicts exceeding the non-addicts in the percentage of abnormal responses in all of the three sections of the questionnaire. However, only the social section reveals a high critical ratio, 5.18, indicating a significant statistical difference.

TABLE VII. COMPARISON OF NARCOTIC DRUG ADDICTS AND NON-ADDICTS

Addicts N 127			
Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	4.52	3.40	.37
Social	6.96	2.90	.31
Emotional	2.89	2.44	.26

Non-Addicts N 148			
Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	3.72	2.96	.26
Social	4.60	3.22	.28
Emotional	2.50	2.60	.23

Section	Diff.	σ	Diff.
			σ Diff.
Health	.80	.45	1.79
Social	2.36	.42	5.18
Emotional	.39	.34	.90

Negroes and Whites

A comparison of negro and white prisoners reveals no significant statistical differences although the former made more unfavorable responses on all the three sections. The summary is given in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII. COMPARISON OF NEGRO AND WHITE PRISONERS

Negroes N 55			
Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	4.04	3.06	.48
Social	6.20	3.36	.53
Emotional	3.04	2.64	.42

Whites N 230			
Section	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	3.96	3.28	.26
Social	5.32	3.28	.26
Emotional	2.40	2.28	.18

Section	Diff.	σ	Diff.
			σ Diff.
Health .....	.08	.55	.14
Social .....	.88	.59	1.49
Emotional .....	.64	.45	1.42

Section	Diff.	σ	Y-O	Diff.
			σ Diff.	σ Diff.
Health	-2.20	.73	-3.01	
Social .....	.90	.74	1.22
Emotional .....	.08	.56	.14

Age Groups, 18-25, 26-40, 41 and Over

Section	Diff.	σ	M-O	Diff.
			σ Diff.	σ Diff.
Health	-2.06	.68	-3.03	
Social	-.14	.61	-.23	
Emotional	-.24	.49	-.49	

The only statistically reliable difference found here is in the health section where the older group shows reliably greater percentages of unfavorable responses than the younger and middle groups. Tables IX and X report the statistical data.

TABLE IX. COMPARISON OF AGE GROUPS

Section	18-25 (N 72)		
	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	3.46	2.54	.37
Social	6.42	3.50	.50
Emotional	2.82	2.56	.37

Section	26-40 (N 174)		
	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	3.60	2.76	.26
Social	5.38	3.10	.29
Emotional	2.50	2.52	.23

Section	41 and over (N 64)		
	Mean	σ	σ Mean
Health	5.66	4.04	.63
Social	5.52	3.48	.54
Emotional	2.74	2.74	.53

TABLE X. EXTENT OF THE DIFFERENCES OF THE AGE GROUPS

(Y-M signifies that the mean of the middle or 26-40 group has been subtracted from that of the youngest or 18-25 group as part of the procedure in computing the critical ratio. A minus sign means that the mean of the M group exceeds that of the Y group. The remaining subtractions are read in the same way. The letter O is designated for the oldest or 41 and over group.)

Section	Diff.	σ	Y-M	Diff.
			σ Diff.	σ Diff.
Health	-.14	.45	-.31	
Social	1.04	.58	1.79	
Emotional	1.32	.43	.74	

SUMMARY

1. A Preliminary report on a questionnaire, entitled Personal Index, given to 310 adult prisoners was described. The questionnaire, used as a basis for personal interviewing, also for group differentiation, aims to provide information concerning an individual's health, social life and emotional make-up within, relatively, a brief space of time.

2. The three sections constituting the Personal Index-health, social, emotional-show a fair degree of interrelationship.

3. Tentative norms for the prison group are presented.

4. The reliability for each section, determined by the split-half method and the application of the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, was shown.

5. The validity of each section was determined by interviews, the internal consistency method and comparisons of various selected groups.

6. The subjects were divided into the following groups and compared with respect to the scores made on each section: recidivists and first time offenders, drug addicts and non-addicts, negroes and whites, 18-25, 26-40, 41 and over age groups.