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PREDICTING THE INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF DELINQUENT BOYS

JACK HAND AND DELL LEBO

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"The impact of institutionalization causes different reactions in each individual. Some boys find it reasonably easy to adjust to the regimentation of institutional living, while others find the transition difficult"¹. A technique for indicating boys who could not be expected to conform immediately to institutional life would make for better intramural care. Such individuals could be dealt with on a different basis than those who could readily adapt to the somewhat rigid program.

In an effort to locate such individuals some schools place all newly committed boys in quarantine for as long as 30 days². During the quarantine period the boys undergo close observation by various institutional officers. Any personality difficulties are noticed that might hinder normal social relations with other boys or might produce an unfavorable reaction to discipline.

While a long quarantine period might be admirable in eliciting personality difficulties it hardly seems to provide a good mental hygiene atmosphere. The newly committed boy is in great need of an immediate period of guidance and psychological treatment. He cannot be long ignored nor can proper treatment be long postponed. A poor reception and orientation period could lead to failure in the remainder of the program³.

The present writers sought a device which would quickly and easily locate boys who might not conform to the expectancies of institutional living.

PROCEDURE

The California Test of Personality⁴, elementary level, form A, was administered to 116 delinquent white boys who had been in the Florida Industrial School for more than 30 days. Scholastically the group represented all the boys in the fourth through the eighth grades. Each boy's test scores in the areas of personal, social, and total adjustment were recorded.

In addition to the test scores an institutional adjustment index (IAI) was determined for each boy. The IAI was derived from the permanent record of all offenses

¹ COSTELLO, J. B., *Institutions for Juvenile Delinquents*. In P. W. TAPPAN (Ed.), *CONTEMPORARY CORRECTION*, p. 349.

² EAST, E. R., *Penal Classification*. *J. CRIM. L. AND CRIMINOL.*, 35, (1944) 93-104.

³ COSTELLO, J. B., *op. cit.*, *supra*.

⁴ THORPE, L. P., CLARK, W. W., AND TIEGS, E. W., *MANUAL: CALIFORNIA TEST OF PERSONALITY*. Los Angeles: California Test Bureau (1943).

TABLE I
CALIFORNIA PERSONALITY TEST SCORES FOR BOYS WELL ADJUSTED
AND POORLY ADJUSTED TO INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Part of Test	Mean		SD		SE		CR	P
	Well	Poor	Well	Poor	Mean			
					Well	Poor		
	Personal Adj.....	52.86	41.52	9.95	10.30	1.85		
Social Adj.....	57.62	45.65	8.22	11.66	1.53	2.16	4.43	.01
Total Adj.....	110.41	87.17	17.78	18.89	3.30	3.50	4.83	.01

during the commitment period. Each offense had been graded as X, 1, 2, or 3, by the officer observing the boy's behavior. The lower the grade, the more serious the offense. A grade of X, for example, might be given for running away. Stealing and cheating are usually graded as 1. Ignoring of responsibilities or abuse of property would receive a grade of 2. Making an unnecessarily loud noise at an inappropriate time might be scored 3. The grades were individual in that a boy's score did not depend on what other boys did. The grades, good or bad, were earned rather than granted or imposed. Consequently, there was a direct relation between their manners, attitudes, and conduct while in the institution and the grades they received⁵.

Minor offenses, those that had been graded as 3, were given a weight of 1. More serious offenses, graded as 1 or 2, were given a weight of 3. The most serious offenses, graded as X, received a weight of 5. Each boy's weighted score was totaled yielding a final score determined by the number as well as the seriousness of all his offenses. The total weighted score was then divided by the number of days the boy had been at the school. This calculation produced the IAI of each boy.

A comparison was made between the scores on the California Test of Personality and the IAI to see if there was a relationship between scores on the rapidly administered group test and institutional behavior for a period of 30 days or more.

RESULTS

Product moment correlations between the IAI and the California Test of Personality were: Personal adjustment and IAI, $-.35$; social adjustment and IAI $-.37$; total adjustment score and IAI $-.41$. These correlations while low are in the expected direction.

On further consideration of the value of the group test in separating boys who were institutionally well adjusted from those most poorly adjusted it was found that the test scores of those subjects whose IAI placed them in the lowest 25 percent (the well adjusted) were contrasted with the test scores of those boys whose IAI was among the highest 25 percent (the poorly adjusted) of all scores. California test scores for these two groups are shown in Table I. These data suggest the test is valuable in differentiating the institutionally well adjusted from the poorly adjusted.

A three by three chi square comparison of group test scores and the IAI was made

⁵ MORRIS, J. B., *An Experiment to Determine what Criteria Might be Best for Making Cottage Placement at the Florida Industrial School for Boys. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Florida State University, 1949.*

also. The cell designations for the IAI were: 25 percent of the lowest scores (the well adjusted), 50 percent of the middle scores (those neither well nor poorly adjusted), and 25 percent of the highest scores (the poorly adjusted). Cell designations for the California Personality Test were: 25 percent of the highest scores (the well adjusted *on this test*), 50 percent of the middle scores (those neither well nor poorly adjusted), and 25 percent of the lowest scores (the poorly adjusted *on this test*).

The chi squares were as follows: Between personal adjustment and IAI, 18.29; between social adjustment and IAI, 20.62; between total adjustment and IAI, 17.10. Each of these chi squares was found to be significant at better than the .01 level of confidence. Low scores on the California test were obtained by boys with high IAI's (poorly adjusted boys), while high scores on the California test were obtained by boys with low IAI's (well adjusted boys). Scores in the middle range of the group test were obtained by boys with central IAI scores.

DISCUSSION

It would seem that an instrument has been found which will help to eliminate a long period of quarantine and study from institutions for delinquent boys. Those boys not sufficiently plastic to adapt themselves to institutional demands tend to secure lower scores on the California Test of Personality than boys who are seemingly well adjusted. The present writers do not suggest that any cut off score procedure be used to segregate potential discipline problems. However, it is suggested that boys who fall among the lowest scoring 25 percent on the California test, in a good sized group of recent commitments, be individually worked with. Perhaps they could be placed in their own cottage to prevent outbreaks of hostility in otherwise good cottages. Boys among the high scorers on the group test could be scattered throughout several suitable cottages to lend their influence to the mental hygiene atmosphere.

SUMMARY

One hundred and sixteen delinquent boys who had been in the Florida Industrial School for more than 30 days were given the California Test of Personality. An institutional adjustment index was computed also for each boy. It was found that the California test could differentiate boys who were institutionally well adjusted from boys who were poorly adjusted.

It was suggested that the California test could be used as a screening device to eliminate a long period of quarantine and inspection. Boys with low personality test scores were found to be poorly adjusted to the demands of institutional discipline. While boys with high personality scores were found to be infrequent violators of institutional rules. Brief suggestions were made for dealing with such boys.