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## The Juvenile on Probation and Reading Retardation

W. William Blackmore

### Introduction

The fact that delinquent boys tend to read at levels below their mental age is fairly well established in the literature (3). The suggestion is strong that delinquency and reading retardation may share a mutual etiology and causal relationship. Even stronger is the suggestion that the possibility of the rehabilitation of the delinquent youth on probation may be greatly enhanced if he is treated for reading retardation (5).

### Purpose

It is the purpose of this study to ascertain whether or not delinquent boys on probation to the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court are retarded in reading, and, if so, to determine what relationship exists between such retardation and other factors, such as intelligence quotient, school grade, family milieu, and apparent adjustment to probation.

### Methodology

A random sample of 33 delinquent boys on probation to the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court was individually administered the Detroit Reading Test in the appropriate form. Tests were given to the boys prior to their regular conference with their probation counselor. The test results were then scaled according to the reading grade level achieved, and this result in turn was compared with the boy's age and actual grade placement to establish in a quantitative amount whether or not the boy was at, above, or below grade level in reading. These data were then compared with selected data derived from the boy's court record, his probation counselor and his school record.

### Results

At the time the test was administered the boys tested were of an average age of 15 years 7 months. They ranked from 12 to 18 years of age as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Age Distribution**

Age	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Percent	3	9	9	21	52	3	3

Schools attended by the boys were:

**Table 2**  
**School Distribution**

	Percent
Kalamazoo City Schools	61
Kalamazoo County Schools	21
Parochial Schools	12
School Drop-outs	6

Examination of grade placement of the 33 boys reveals:

**Table 3**  
**Grade Placement**

Grade	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Percent				3	9	18	18	31	18	3

Further analysis of actual grade placement reveals that, of the 33 boys examined, 21% were retarded one grade in school and 3% were retarded two grades. The remainder, 76%, were in their apparent proper grade placement according to their chronological age.

The test results obtained from administration of the Detroit Reading Test placed the boys in terms of grade level in reading as follows:

**Table 4**  
**Reading Level**

Grade	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Percent	3			31	31	20	15			

In comparison with their grade placement, the 33 boys are retarded in reading on the average of 2 years 6 months, and when an adjust-

ment is made to take into account those boys who are behind their proper grade level, the average reading retardation increases to 2 years 8 months.

The Detroit Reading Test results permit some analysis of where the reading problem of the person taking the test is to be found, i.e. in terms of interpretive questions and factual questions missed. For the purpose of this study a detailed review of this area was not made, although this should be an important area to consider in future studies.

**Court Records**

The court records of the 33 boys tested on the Detroit Reading Test were examined with a two-fold purpose in mind: to determine whether or not any correlation between court records and test result data existed, and to attempt to determine whether or not the statistical population as randomly selected for this study compared with the total male probation population of the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court.

In comparing reading test results with such factors as: living arrangements of the child, parental marital status, source of referral, parental educational background, parental employment, family income and reason for referral of the boy to the court, no statistical relationships of any particular significance were found.

When a comparison of the statistical information derived from the court records of the 33 boys in question is compared with those of the total probation population of the court, and again with state-wide statistical information, similarities are great. Statistics covering the sample population are as follows:

**Table 5**  
**Whereabouts On Referral**

Boy Living With:	Percent
Both parents	70
Mother only	24
Mother and stepfather	6
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	100

**Table 6**  
**Marital Status of Parents**

Natural Parents:	Percent
Married, living together	67
Marriage intact, not living together	3
Divorced	24
Separated or deserted	3
Unmarried	3
	100

**Table 7**  
**Source of Referral**

Referrer:	Percent
Law enforcement officer	88
Parent or parents	9
School	3
	100

**Table 8**  
**Reason for Referral**

Reason:	Percent
Auto theft	12
Other stealing	40
Damage to property	3
Assault	6
Sex offense	3
Official traffic	0
Misconduct	15
Running away	0
Incorrigibility	6
Truant	9
Other (forgery)	6
	100
Total	100

**Table 9**  
**Education of Parents**

Grade Area Attained:	Fathers Percent	Mothers Percent
Grade School (1-8)	15	27
High School (9-12)	57	64
College (1-7)	7	9
Not Known	21	0
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	100	100

Family incomes of the 33 boys involved in the study covered a range of \$1,560.00 per annum to an amount in excess of \$22,000 per annum. In many instances, income information was lacking, or of questionable reliability. Of the mothers of the 33 boys in question, 55 percent were not employed, 39 percent were employed fulltime and 6 percent were employed in part. The average number of siblings of the group tested was 1.8 per family.

### **Mental Maturity**

An attempt was made to compare mental maturity of the 33 boys tested with the scores obtained by them on the Detroit Reading Test. Data pertaining to the intelligence of the boys were derived from the following sources:

**Table 10**  
**Mental Factor Information**

Source:	Percent
Schools	91
Boys Vocational School	3
Public Children's Agency	3
Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court	3
	<hr/>
Total	100

Test information from the schools came from the student's Cumulative Record (CA-39), and in the case of agencies, from agency files.

Tests administered to the 33 boys ran the gamut of general classi-

fication and screening tests and differential aptitude batteries. It quickly became evident, because of varying test norms, reliabilities and validities, that comparisons of mental factors between boys or with reading retardation scores would not be feasible and consistent with general practice pertaining to tests as discussed in the literature (1).

Nevertheless, within rough limits, some measure of grouping is possible. When all mental factor items are grouped, the following information is obtained:

**Table 11**  
**Mental Factor Grouping**

General Classification:	Percent
Below Average (70-89)	18
Average (90-110)	52
Above Average (111-150)	18
Not Available	12
Total	100

It may be seen that reading retardation is not solely a problem of low mental ability. Quite to the contrary, at least 70 percent of the boys were generally classed as being of average to above average intelligence. Yet only one of the 33 boys tested was reading at grade level. All the rest were retarded to some degree. One boy with an intelligence quotient of 126 was 4 years 7 months retarded, while yet another boy with an intelligence quotient of 148 was 5 months retarded. Furthermore, there is some evidence pointing to the fact that tests given to retarded readers which rely primarily on tests of verbal intelligence are very apt to give an erroneous picture of the learning capacity of the children involved (6) (7). Most certainly more uniform data from accepted testing instruments will be of great diagnostic use in working with retarded readers on juvenile court probation.

#### **Probation Factors**

Each of the 33 boys on probation to the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court in the sample under consideration has a probation counselor. It is the job of the probation counselor, in addition to making investigative reports, to supervise the boy on probation and effect

his rehabilitation (4). Most of the boys in the sample are well-known to their probation counselors, and had been reporting for counseling interviews for periods from 4 to 24 months.

Probation officers were asked to rate the boys in their caseload, without any prior knowledge on their part of reading test results, in terms of poor, fair or good adjustment. The average reading retardation for the boys in each group was then established, with the following results:

**Table 12**  
**Adjustment and Reading Retardation**

Group	Percent	Years Retarded
Poor	22	3.25
Fair	39	2.6
Good	39	2.0
	<hr style="width: 20%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	
Total:	100	

The foregoing table strongly suggests that there is a relationship between adjustment while the child is on probation and reading retardation. Undoubtedly, reading retardation in delinquent boys is symptomatic (4), and most certainly is an area for further study.

All 33 boys were rated by their probation counselors on the Glueck Prediction of Behavior of Male Juvenile Offenders During Straight Probation Table (2). This analysis served to draw from the probation counselor his evaluation concerning family inter-relationships quite possibly associated with the etiology of the adjustment disturbances in the child. The Glueck table takes note of factors found to have prediction value of success or failure of boys while on probation, such as parental discipline, levels of school retardation, school misconduct and the birthplace of the child's father. The table provides for the establishment of "violation" scores and their interpretation into score classes which can be related in turn to probable violation rates of probation. The Gluecks urge that the "cautious employment of prediction devices should act as a spur to general improvement in sentencing, treatment, and releasing practices and to a search for more promising devices" (2). It is in this spirit that the prediction device is used in this study.



**Table 13**  
**Probation Adjustment and Violation Prediction**

Adjustment Class & Average Retardation	Predicted	Violation	Rates	Total Percent
Poor (—3.25)	14	14	72	100
Fair (—2.6)	15	23	62	100
Good (—2.0)	38	31	31	100

From the foregoing table it may be seen that the Glueck prediction table relates to evaluation of probation adjustment and shows Detroit Reading Test scores which denote reading retardation on the part of the 33 boys in the sample.

### Summary

Most certainly caution must be used in making generalizations concerning delinquent youth placed on probation and apparent reading retardation. It appears that symptoms may be confused with causes, and that over-simplification of the problem, particularly in terms of treatment entities, may be an attractive pitfall. Nevertheless, it seems, in view of the fact that there is some relationship or association, not yet understood, between reading retardation and delinquency, that efforts to relieve adjustment problems must certainly include remedial reading measures. It is true that this may alleviate only the symptom, but certainly such relief in and of itself will have a most salubrious effect on the total adjustment pictures of delinquent boys. And, most certainly, the foregoing material points to a need for further field study of the whole problem of reading retardation, delinquent behavior and methodology at the juvenile court level with youth on probation.

### Recommendations

1. That every child, prior to placement on official probation, be given a standard intelligence test.
2. That every child, prior to placement on official probation, be given a standard reading test.
3. That every child, prior to placement on official probation, be rated on a Glueck Prediction of Behavior of Male Juvenile Offenders During Straight Probation Scale.

4. That remedial reading training for boys on probation be secured from Kalamazoo schools.
5. That a more intense study be made of reading retardation etiology and its effect on boys on probation to the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court.

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