BOOK REVIEWS


In our larger universities, which seem to follow the best retail merchandising practice of offering a choice of all things to all comers under one roof, “statistics” is usually presented by five or more departments. “Statistics,” supposedly adapted to the special requirements of these studies, is offered by psychology, economics, physics, anthropology, biology, sociology and/or astronomy departments. Where there are schools or departments of education and business administration these frequently provide their own courses in “statistics.”

“Statistics” means many things, ranging from the citation of any numerically expressible facts, like the runs, hits and errors of a baseball game, to extremely subtle mathematical theories of probability. “Statistical method” thus requires, on one level, little more than the ability to count and on another, the invention and application of ingenious calculi.

In “statistical” studies of social matters we occasionally find trivial and insignificant data subject to elaborate mathematical treatment; as it were, a statistical steamshovel is used where a teaspoon would be more suitable. Generally, however, the situation is reverse; in “social science” the adequacy of statistical methods is usually inversely proportionate to the need for them.

Our interest is naturally quickened when the authors of “Five Hundred Delinquent Women” explain that: “Case histories are impressionistic; though they suggest hypothesis, they supply no reliable estimate of the extent and ramifications of the problems involved in delinquency. The statistical method brings us nearer to such a goal.” In view of the conviction expressed, it is perhaps fair to assume that more adequate statistical methods than those employed by the authors would bring us even nearer to this goal.

“Statistical method” as the use of mathematical techniques which determine the relation between numbers and kinds of factors is not the sense in which the Gluecks mean the phrase. For them it means, for the most part, counting up the number of times certain factors are present or absent, in five hundred cases of delinquent women and expressing these totals in percentages. Because of the large number and wide variety of factors it is doubtful whether any more sophisticated mathematical treatment would have been worth while, even supposing a technique which could handle the number and variety of factors were available.

The statistical method employed in no way furnishes a reliable estimate of the ramification of the factors examined by the Gluecks.

The enormous complexity of the topic as it is treated by the Gluecks is revealed by a partial list of the factors they consider. Under the broad category, “Family Background,” they include nativity, citizenship, religion, education, and occupation of parents. Under this category is also included home and neighborhood conditions, mental characteristics, size of families, conjugal relations of parents and parental discipline. Under “Childhood and Adolescence” they are concerned with color, na-
tivity, citizenship, religion, physical condition, mobility, institutional experience, illiteracy, kind and extent of schooling, employment experience, church attendance and and other factors. Under the categories, sexual and marital life and legal entanglements are, among others, such factors as age at which illicit sex life began, duration of sexual irregularity, sexual maturation, prostitution, illegitimate pregnancy, venereal disease, age at first marriage, number of marriages, manner of meeting husbands, number of arrests, age at first arrests, number of convictions, nature of first offense, probation, and penal experiences. Other factors are introduced as they seem relevant to commitment, parole, and the conduct of the delinquent at the expiration of the sentence.

Representative of the findings as obtained by the "statistical" study of the cases are the following: "During the post parole period 25.6% of our women resided in households in which the moral standards were always or in the main good, 26.2% in homes in which they might be considered fair, and the substantial proportion 48.2% in households in which the moral standards were generally poor. . . . Catholics comprised 58.7% of the total, 39.3% are Protestants and 2.2% are Hebrews, whereas in the general population of Massachusetts there is presumably a somewhat higher proportion of Catholics than is found in our group, 66.4%, a considerably lower proportion of Protestant 25.2% and a higher proportion of Hebrews 6.7%. . . . An eighth 12.3% of these girls were between 12 and 15 years old on the occasion of their first marriage. . . . 37.6% of the entire number were first taken into custody for an offense involving chastity. . . . a total of 76.4% of the women were delinquent during the five year post parole period. Of these 51.5% were predominantly sex offenders. . . ."
This is not easily accomplished. Administrators and legislators must act. As a consequence of the need to do something, there is a tendency to oversimplify the problem and overemphasize one or another of the objectives of criminal law. In practice there is a tendency to assume a proportionality between crime and punishment. This provides a specious but expedient guide for administrators and legislators. Even if the retributive objective is disavowed, the consequence in practice of this policy is an emphasis on deterrence to the exclusion of the other objectives of criminal justice.

The Gluecks belong to the school which has severely reacted to the policy of "making the punishment fit the crime" as the best means to deterrence. Their concern is "to make the punishment fit the criminal." The consequence is that, in their study, they consider reform to the exclusion of the other objectives of criminal justice. For example they conclude: "As shown by the evidence in various parts of this book, the completely indeterminate or wide-zone sentence is so indispensable an adjunct to an effective administration of criminal justice that social statesmanship requires its adoption." We have questioned the reliability of the evidence submitted. Assuming, however, that the evidence is valid in showing that the indeterminate sentence is indispensable, or at any rate, extremely desirable as a means to reform, there is no evidence available whatsoever as to the extent to which this mode of treatment affects deterrence, public morale, or cost.

To attempt to demonstrate the effect of the proposed mode of treatment on these objectives, as well as on reform, would perhaps hopelessly overcomplicate the already complex problem which the Gluecks have proposed for their research. Just as the administrator and legislator have a tendency to emphasize first one then another objective, so it appears that even the scientific researcher succumbs to this human failing. It may be that this shift of emphasis is the mechanism by which society from time to time makes the necessary adjustments which properly coordinate the various objectives of law and administration. This study by the Gluecks may well contribute to this purpose.

We can discover under the scientific pretentions and language of the study an argument of wide applicability and significance in social affairs. In the administration of criminal justice there is much guess work and hunches. There is much argument for and against one thing and another based on vague opinions, prejudices, and speculations. The administrator of even a moderate sized business would not undertake, today, to work without a set of "books" or records of operation. He would make an audit of his physical and financial resources and constantly check on the personnel in his employ. If these things are essential in the administration of a business, how obviously important are they in the administration of justice. In "Five Hundred Delinquent Women," the Gluecks undertake simultaneously to provide an auditing system and an appraisal of the work of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women.

The significance of the work lies not in its positive conclusions of fact or positive recommendations, but in that it exhibits what should be self evident, the need and obvious advantages of keeping and working from records. It demonstrates, however inadequately, that an auditing system can be devised which will begin to tell us something about the effects of administrative policy and procedures. Such studies are invaluable if only because they serve to outline the small area of our knowledge and the unknown limits of our ignorance.

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