SOCIAL CASE WORK SERVICE AND THE JUVENILE DELINQUENT

(MISS) G. R. BANERJEE

In the treatment of a juvenile delinquent, the police, the court and the parents concentrate on only a part of the problem and overlook the 'whole' child. In the following article, the author draws attention to this defect in the traditional methods and emphasizes the importance of social case work in the treatment of a delinquent child.

Dr. (Miss) Banerjee is a member of the Faculty of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Few problems in social case work are more important and involve greater responsibility than that of working with the juvenile delinquent.) Though delinquency is the concern of many people, e.g., the police, the court and the parents, all look at the problem from a different angle and try to handle it with their own special purposes in view and according to their own methods and traditions. For the safety of the people, the police want to remove a delinquent from their midst, the court wants to discipline him and the parents to shield or reject him. They all concentrate on a segment of the problem, i.e., the delinquent behaviour of the child and overlook the 'whole' child.

Delinquency is the overt expression of something that permeates the 'whole' child. Truancy, vagrancy, stealing and the like are the symptoms of that, just as fever, inflammation and pain are the symptoms of a disease. If the physician limits himself to clearing up symptoms, he does not necessarily cure the disease. New symptoms may replace the old. What parents or correctional institutions undertake by way of punishment, serves only to suppress the anti-social behaviour. If this behaviour disappears for some time, the problem is considered to be solved. However, the disappearance of a symptom does not indicate a cure. Following a period of socially acceptable behaviour, the original signs of delinquency often reappear and are more pronounced. In order to deal with the problem of delinquency it is necessary to study the 'whole' child.

An important feature of social case work service is bringing about an understanding of an individual's problem by focussing on the person as a whole and not by studying parts of him as a problem. It does not attempt to group delinquents as a class who deserve a particular handling, but to individualise the delinquent. In order to do so, it studies the person in his totality, i.e., the child in his home, neighbourhood, school, playground and work place and explores his physical, mental and moral developments. A case worker is interested not only in the present but also in the past of the child client. Knowledge of the past is helpful because it is part of and throws light on the present structure. He can understand the delinquent as a person best by knowing when the deviations occurred and 'what were the traumatic incidents which are now scars and to which the child is still reacting?' A case history bearing all these points cannot be prepared just by question-answer method. It needs case work interviewing technique which the worker must possess. Otherwise he will antagonise the client and the whole treatment will be jeopardised.

Case Work Service.—Case work service for the juvenile delinquent takes into account the work with the client as an important factor for modifying or changing his behaviour. The behaviour of the delinquent, more often than not, appears baffling to the lay public. A trained social case worker understands human behaviour and knows also the technique of interviewing. When through 'case work
Social case work service and the juvenile delinquent

Technique, as it is called, he helps the client to realise and express the reasons why he feels and behaves the way he does, an attitude of objectivity and reasonableness usually results. Opportunities of expressing his partially repressed feelings to somebody who understands and accepts him nonjudgmentally may help to relieve him of his anxieties in various areas and thus increase his ability to act upon his problem. A carefully planned interview, in most instances, helps the client to give up his irrational attitude, accept and act according to the reality of the situation. The method of approach is not so simple as to lead one to expect insight into the emotional difficulties of such a person by the mere question, "What are you worried about that you cannot change your way of life?". The behaviour of the client, however psychoneurotic it may seem to us, is in essence a reaction to some conflict or fear or anxiety motivated largely by subconscious psychological processes of which the person is totally unaware. Planning an interview in such a way as to bring to light significant factors is a service which can be rendered by a trained case worker.

A case worker's very approach is different from that of others dealing with the same client. We all know that much of the help that we give is generally characterised by an autocratic and/or a moralistic approach. The autocratic attitude of the helper is reflected not only in the tone of the interview but very often also in that the worker plans the solution and imposes it upon the client. There is no opportunity for the client to clarify his thinking, to give his suggestion or his opinion on the solution suggested by the helper. It is true that when a person has to seek help, he feels humiliated and inadequate. But if the attitude of the worker is also one of condescension, the client's self-respect is apt to be injured. If a moralistic attitude is adopted, the client is told again and again what standards he should maintain. The client may be well aware of them but due to real difficulties he is unable to attain these standards. In such a situation, what the client really needs is an opportunity to discuss his problem with one who understands and can help him in working its solution. It requires case work skill on the part of the social worker, a skill which can be acquired by training in this branch of service in an accredited school of social work. This service is one in which professional skill supplements man's deepest urge in offering help to his fellow men.

Principle of Acceptance.—The first and foremost principle in dealing with the delinquent is acceptance. What every individual does want and must have, if he is to grow at all, is acceptance of himself as a person, just as he is. Unless a person is respected and genuinely liked as a human being, we cannot expect him to give up delinquent behaviour and acquire any desire to change it. Acceptance should not be mistaken for nonjudgmental impartiality. Real acceptance is primarily acceptance of the feelings given expression to by a particular behaviour and not just accepting the antisocial behaviour and withholding judgment. For example, in children's institutions we come across boys who want to smoke 'bidis' or to chew tobacco. Such a behaviour usually shocks institutional authorities and they at once want to put a stop to it by threats or punishment. The after effects are tragic. These boys develop a hostile attitude towards the authorities. With some children smoking is a social habit. When all of a sudden they are debarred from it, they get irritated. Further, with some, smoking is a symbol of defiance. When these children smoke, they do not fundamentally want their behaviour to be accepted or condoned but want the
feelings behind that behaviour to be understood and respected. They want to be assured that we like them and care deeply for what they do and what happens to them.

A merely 'negative attitude of just not passing any judgment on a client's unusual behaviour may smack of indifference. If the guide or the worker takes this attitude towards the delinquent, he might be rejected as an unfit guide; or the delinquent might intensify his antisocial behaviour to test how far the worker would go with him in his 'non-conformity. A boy whose delinquency is 'ignored by the worker does not feel as relaxed as he would if he was confronted by him with the full knowledge of his misbehaviour and yet could feel that, inspite of his drawback, the worker accepted him by understanding his feelings and emotional conflicts which led him to delinquent behaviour. Such a person's acceptance will be regarded by the delinquent as a sign that he (guide) wants to help him in giving up socially unacceptable behaviour. Sometimes the very acceptance on the part of the worker takes a delinquent a long way towards solving his problems.

 Sense of Support.—Out of this acceptance, the delinquent is able to derive a sense of support. The question may arise as to how the delinquent gains it. Let us see what goes on in support. When there is warm relationship, the client feels relaxed and is able to tell his story in his own way. In most cases, it happens that the delinquent, for the first time perhaps in his life, gets a listener who does not ridicule or punish him for his mistakes but gives him a patient hearing. When the delinquent is able to tell his story he is able to lay out on table as it were his difficulties and see them himself. It is an educative process. The client gradually gains insight into his problems and tries to handle them. It allays his anxiety when he finds that there is a person who, though a representative of the society, does not punish him for his bad deeds but accepts him as he is. The client gradually gains confidence in himself and derives his strength from the worker and feels that there is the worker to stand by him. It also happens that when the client feels that he has gone down in the estimation of everybody he does not feel like pulling himself up again. But when he finds that there is somebody (worker) who does not look down upon him but has sympathy for him and shows confidence in him, he does not feel like remaining where he is. He wants to change for the better. He starts caring for the social norm through the worker who represents it to him and in whose estimation he wants to go up because he (worker) likes him and has shown interest in him. There may or may not be a basic change in the personality of the delinquent in the beginning. In other words, it is not always possible to bring about change in the attitude and motivations of the client. In these cases, the case worker tries to give the client some insight into the problem so that even though the motivations are there he can consciously control them rather than be swayed by them. To take an example from our daily life, we may meet a person in whom anger does not arise when he comes across a particular type of behaviour on the part of others because his personality development has reached a stage where such a behaviour does not affect him. In the case of another person, it might be that the same behaviour gives rise to anger. But the person may have insight into the motivations and, therefore, he may consciously control his anger. By conscious control of his behaviour, the delinquent can improve himself. It may ultimately lead to some improvement in his personality too.

In helping the client, the worker gives recognition to whatever strengths he has,
without, however, overlooking his weaknesses. The aim of the worker is to enable the client to make the best use of his strengths. Also does not force his help on the client. He allows him to move at his own tempo of progress. Thereby the client grows emotionally and reaches out for help. If the worker in his eagerness to build up the strength of the client starts pointing out his defects and gives lectures to improve his behaviour, the client will not be ready to benefit by his help. The delinquent may show an outward acceptance of these lectures in an 'authoritative setting' like a Remand Home and continue his associations with the worker. But he will not be able to derive any strength from him. The client will be threatened and the relationship will be on a superficial level. As growth comes from within and cannot be superimposed on the client, the chances are that the client will break down under the worker's pressure if the latter pushes him too much to improve him. The worker has to be consistent in giving warmth of feelings to the client. If one day he accepts him and the next day tries to dig out his defects and points them to him before he is ready to see them himself, the client will be baffled and it will jeopardise the relationship. As a delinquent generally has a weak conscience, strong inner drives and a poor acceptance of reality, the worker has to be very cautious about using authority. It is true that authority is important in the development of character. But we have to remember that too much pressure may curb one, too little may make one overthrow it while the right amount enables one to derive strength from it. In our development as social beings, we need to adapt to emotional gratifications and renunciation. As a delinquent is in the habit of projecting his own conflicts upon the environment, he finds the environment more than normally harsh and depriving. Therefore, such a person needs greater acceptance, less personal authority in meeting reality and more favourable environment than the average client.

The existence of support or supportive relationship predicates the client's ability to form a close relationship with one who shows interest in him and gives warmth of feelings and an ability to move towards greater freedom and self-reliance. There are many cases where the situation is complicated by intrapsychic problems to such an extent that the client is unable to relate to another person. Chances of this client's treatment by mere support are rare. Support is invariably present in all treatment. There are cases where just support can be of great therapeutic value. In the case of the treatment of a child or a young adult, support may be the only treatment which can be most successfully used. A child who has suffered from, emotional starvation and shows behaviour disorder can improve by a steady and consistent giving of emotional warmth. A young adult whose ego has 'not been strong enough to stand uncovering of the unconscious to a great extent can benefit by support. Besides, support can be helpful in consolidating the gains made by psychotherapy. Where there is no one in the child's environment able or willing to give consistent interest and encouragement after a period of psychotherapy, there is danger that the gains made in treatment may be dissipated and lost because of a hostile environment.

Need for Reconstructive Period.—Even if there is a fairly complete analysis, implying insight gained by the delinquent and deep changes in the emotional life, there is eminent necessity in many cases for a reconstructive period. Insight and emotional change alone i cannot bring about the total success in the case of an individual who is definitely handicapped in the preparation for life. Apart
from giving direct assistance to one in becoming self-supporting and obtaining minimum decencies of life, there is constant need for giving understanding guidance and encouragement to keep him steady towards the new goal. It takes sometime for assimilating or incorporating into his behaviour trends the insight which he has gained. At first, a person, right after the analysis or psychotherapy, may be nervous and frightened to face the world anew—the world that had looked down upon him as a 'bad lad'. He may seem like a person blinded by the rays of the sun after having been long in a dark chamber. Such a person needs to be regarded as a convalescent patient, without strength to meet the world and unfit to adjust himself to life. For many persons whose deep lying emotional conflicts are the motivating forces of their delinquency, there is need for a practical and personal reconstructive help following even a complete and successful analysis. A social case worker is equipped to give the type of help 'needed after the completion of the analysis. He has to find out new opportunities for such a person and jointly plan with him to get adjusted to the new situation. If there are environmental stresses he has to work towards their modification so that the person may not be overwhelmed by them at that stage and may not slide back into the old pattern.

Before the delinquent undergoes psychotherapy and even when it is already in progress, the case worker has to work with the client and his environment all the same. Sometimes the relatives and guardians, with their various backgrounds of prejudices and sentiments, either sheer at the idea of psychotherapy of which they know nothing and advise the client not to go through it or attempt in petty ways to make it difficult for him to keep his appointments or even tease him by saying that he must be a 'crazy' person to see a 'mind doctor'. If the delinquent is in an institution and goes to see the psychiatrist and the psychoanalyst at regular intervals other members start teasing him. In some places public opinion might interfere with psychotherapy. The objections would be founded on the unconscious sadistic attitude towards the offender; they are so often expressed thus: that a delinquent needs to be punished—that life should be made hard for him—that he is not to be coddled for his bad deeds. Psychiatrist interviews in such situations are very often regarded by the lay people as coddling.

**Fear of the Unknown.**—Over and above some of the attitudes that the delinquent finds in the environment, he himself often gets upset at the idea of having to see a 'mind doctor'. There is the common fear of the unknown—"what is going to happen to me"—"would I be the same person when I come back after my interview"—"would I be totally changed"—"would people probe into my life history and know how bad I am", etc. On top of that, if the Environment is not congenial, the client gets very disturbed and refuses to have psychiatric consultation. A trained social worker with his case work technique helps the client to work out his fears and resistances and prepares him for therapy. He gives constant support to the client when he goes through the treatment so that he does not break away.

In connection with case work approach towards delinquents, an important question mentioned earlier may be discussed here—whether such an approach will not lead to pampering them and encourage them to overthrow social norms and stand against society. In fact, case work approach is meant to enable the delinquent to come to new terms with the community. Most of the children who are delinquents have not come to terms with the inherent and reasonable limits of law. They need to be helped to do so by
means of individualised approach. They must be given a chance to struggle with their feelings about these limitations in the open and not merely inside themselves. An atmosphere needs to be created around these children which would encourage them to discuss freely their actions of revolt against reasonable limits of law with the social worker and discuss their views with him and in a relationship where a friendly helper does not condemn their feelings but helps them to feel responsible for their actions. He brings home to them the reality situation, i.e., if they do not abide by social norms they have to face the consequences. It is up to them to decide which path they would follow. The worker can give only guidance, the final choice is theirs.

Thus the worker neither pampers the delinquent nor takes away his sole right of determination. By bringing him in touch with the reality, the case worker allows him to determine his own path. He stands by him to give him proper guidance, suggestions and information which ultimately enable him to chalk out his programme in co-operation with the worker. He learns that the path he chalks out should be personally and socially satisfying. His interests cannot run contrary to social interest. This very fact refutes the charge levelled against the practice of social case work.Very often people state that social case work approach towards the client makes him individualistic and as a result he looks to his own interest overlooking that of the society. Much of this depends on the way the worker offers case work service. Individualising a client does not mean making him individualistic. When a case worker individualises a person he takes into account the whole person, studies him as a member of his family and community, evaluates his strengths and weaknesses and enables him to act in a socially as well as personally satisfying manner. This is contrary to the individualistic approach that takes into account the pleasure of the individual and does not hesitate to have it even at the cost of the welfare of the family or the community.

From what has been stated so far, an important question which may be raised is that case work service can be of value to a person who seeks help of his own accord, e.g., somebody coming to a family welfare agency seeking financial help or assistance in the area of family adjustment. A juvenile delinquent is brought before the court for his anti-social behaviour. It is not he who comes of his own accord. Either the police or somebody else brings him there. So, will he be amenable to case work service? Also, can case work be practised in a setting where the individual is not free to choose his own goal? Does the principle of case work, "it is the client who sets his own goal and not the agency that imposes it on him", work in such a case?

To clarify this, it may be stated that freedom in the absolute sense, i.e., freedom to do anything one likes is not allowed in society. Freedom in society is granted within reasonable limits of law and order. When the individual crosses these limits, he needs guidance in the matter of adjusting within these limits. A case worker helps him in that area. It is up to the client to take this help and learn to change his way of life or not to take and follow his own way of life which will bring him into clash with the reality situation. Law, court and order are established by the society and not by the case worker himself. As an individual, the case worker himself has to abide by them. If he indulges in anti-social activities, he will have to face their mandates just like any other delinquent. This is reality in the sense that it exists. Whether a person likes it or not is a different question. It is evident that freedom has certain limitations and the
client as a member of the society has to learn to abide by them if he is to remain in society. He has the right of self-determination.

Multiple Factors.—In dealing with the delinquent, there are several steps that a case worker has to take simultaneously or in succession as the case may be. It is no doubt true that in handling the case of a juvenile delinquent, a lot of work needs to be done with the environment as well as the person himself. Delinquency is a product of multiple factors. So one has to take account of them in the rehabilitation plan also. A case worker deals not only with the delinquent but also his family, as emotional relationships between members of the family are strong determinants in the character formation of a child. If there are certain factors in the family that goad a person towards delinquency, it is the duty of the worker to deal with that part also. In the case of a child, who for instance unconsciously indulges in anti-social behaviour due to the feeling of insecurity based on the lack of attention from parents and/or guardians, the case worker needs to work with the relatives. He has to help them to get an insight into the problem, i.e., to see their part in the creation of the problem. One has to be very cautious in this matter. Case work skill is "needed to enable parents to realise slowly that in most cases, they are the 'affectors' of the problem. This fact cannot be directly pointed out to them. Parents may be very defensive and refuse to accept the fact that, due to their lack of love and attention or rejection, their ward has taken to stealing money which is a symbol of love. They may break away from treatment. The social case worker must know how to enable them to grasp the truth. He should also encourage them to accept the delinquent back into the family and not to nag him for his behaviour.

Community Resources.—The case worker has much to do also with the community. He has to pool together all the available community resources like the school, the play centre, the club, etc., in order to help the client. When the community turns its face against the delinquent in utter disgust, the case worker tries to enlighten its members on the causation of delinquency and also enlists their co-operation in the rehabilitation of the client. At the same time, he prepares the client not to feel frustrated if he faces a certain amount of resistance from the community due to his past behaviour. A delinquent child who has been helped to give up his anti-social behaviour needs to acquire not a defence against but an acceptance of these situations.

As case work service is the very core of work with the delinquent, it can be made use of at three points in social service agencies dealing with such cases, viz., (1) intake (2) service while with the agency (3) discharge and after care which merge into each other and are continuous throughout the period of care in the agency.

Intake.—The delinquent needs help when he comes to an agency, say, juvenile court. He should have a chance to get acquainted with the case worker who gradually understands his problems and plans with him for his life. The understanding and relationship should grow out of talks about the client himself and his situation. Case work service should be a support to the client during the period when he feels insecure and is resistant about having to leave the established way of life and prepare for the new way of living. The case worker needs to study the client, his family and its resources and advise the court regarding disposal of the case.

Service while with the Social Service Agency.—Juvenile delinquents who are either sent to an institution or are on probation (with the agency) do 'need case work service. Some may need only to talk things over from
time to time, to know that there is somebody to whom they can go in time of need. Others may need continuous case work treatment to help them work out their feelings and relationships. Besides, the case worker on the staff of the institution can be available to other staff members for consultation and joint planning. A case worker, however, should not regard his service as that of a specialist. On the other hand, it should be an integrating factor that will enrich the entire service offered by the institution. The relationship between the case worker and other members of the staff should be of mutual consultation and supplementation. In participating with all staff members in planning for the care of the client the case worker can see the delinquent as a whole and not just as a child in the cottage or in the farm or industry. This is a valuable contribution for working with the individual client and also in the general planning and operation of the institution.

Discharge 'and After Care.—As much care and thought should go into helping the client to leave the institution constructively as into entering it. A client needs to be watched carefully by a case worker regarding his readiness for discharge. In reformatory institutions rehabilitation and discharge are most difficult and important items. In India restoration to guardians, or sending to a school or provision of work are taken to be the means of rehabilitation. But simply restoring a delinquent to his relatives does not always mean settling him to a normal life. The case worker should try to understand the problem why the client resorted to delinquency while staying at his guardian's place—whether conditions that led to his downfall have changed and whether there is still the possibility of his taking to anti-social behaviour again. He should try to remove unfavourable conditions and at the same time pool together all the resources to build up the personality of the client.

In short, all efforts of the case worker should be directed towards understanding the delinquent and not to abhor him, towards treating and not punishing him. The aim should be to rehabilitate and not to abandon him.