
This slim volume presents two important contributions of the historical and statistical approaches to the ever increasing area where psychiatry and the social sciences meet. In the first of these studies, which were originally prepared as research memosenda for the RAND Corporation, the authors analyzed age-specific and sex-specific rates of first admissions to Massachusetts Mental Hospitals during the past one hundred years. They demonstrate convincingly that these rates have been constant for the age groups below 30, while there has been a great increase in admissions for the older age groups. However, the authors are doubtful whether this indicates more than differences in hospitalization practice. Thus a further blow is struck against the oft heard notion that "Civilization," urbanisation and modern times in general lead to an appreciable increase of the psychoses. The authors do not venture any explanatory hypothesis for their data; they merely suggest that possibly the constancy of rates might indicate the relatively greater importance of early life experiences in the etiology of the psychosis, and thus possibly the greater constancy of childhood and family patterns, as compared to those conditions of modern life which have their impact primarily on adults. Of course, we would need to know more of the family patterns presumably responsible for these constant rates. Also, and this seems to be unavailable from the hospital records, we would want to know something of the types of psychogenic disorders and their variability.
Goldhammer and Marshall's second and shorter paper presents expectancy rates for admission to a mental hospital in New York State, based on admission rates for 1940. In distinction to earlier expectancy tables, the present authors calculate expectancy of admission conditional on survival between any two ages, rather than calculate in a more traditional form the joint chances of both survival and admission to a mental hospital. This appears to present a much more realistic picture of the actual expectancy, and a rather dark picture it is.

Taken together, these two studies present an important contribution to the social science of psychiatry.

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