



SONOMA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SELF - ASSESSMENT PROJECT

THE DIAGNOSIS OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES
AMONG A JUVENILE DELINQUENT POPULATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

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NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

There is evidence, in fact, that there may be grounds for concern that the child receives the worst of both worlds: that he gets neither the protections accorded to adults nor the solicitous care and regenerative treatment postulated for children.

--Kent vs. U.S., 383 U.S. 541 (1966)



SONOMA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROJECT

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FOREWORD

The implications of the information gained from the learning disability grant recently completed in Sonoma County are awesome. If the sampling and testing were correctly done and the Sonoma County incarcerated youth population is fairly typical, all of which are a strong probability, then the juvenile justice system is routinely inundated with many youths with learning disabilities.

The statistics, which were conservatively developed, indicate that approximately one half of the youths incarcerated in Sonoma County have some form of learning disability. The project was a relatively large scale study to systematically search for those youths who exhibit a well-defined, severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in two or more critical areas.

The social, health and educational systems are failing to screen, identify and remediate many youths with serious learning problems, and through some circuitous path many of these youths are entering the juvenile justice system.

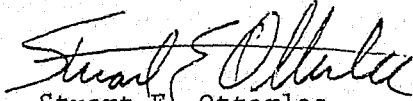
Every precaution was taken in this project, and must be taken in subsequent efforts in this area, in appropriately using and disseminating findings such as these to avoid labeling youths. Although it is becoming apparent that there are large numbers of youths in the juvenile justice system with learning disabilities, a child with a learning disability is obviously not necessarily a potential delinquent.

The current national dialogue on a causal link between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency must not be allowed to subliminate the operational implications of the data. The findings are too important to be lost in the theoretical semantics of the day. The vital questions which must be immediately addressed are:

- HOW CAN THESE YOUTHS BE ACCURATELY IDENTIFIED?
- HOW CAN THEIR PROBLEMS BE REMEDIATED?
- HOW CAN THEY BE KEPT OUT OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

The project developed a comprehensive test battery which can be administered effectively by paraprofessionals and can be understood from an administrative and diagnostic perspective by persons with little or no training or experience in this area of assessment. The real impact will only be realized when such a test battery is an ongoing part of screening, testing and diagnosing youths who enter the juvenile justice system, and when it is an integral part of juvenile justice decision making and of remediation.

The results of this study should be given widespread distribution, not only to juvenile justice administrators but also to the schools. Practical methods and plans are required to thoroughly identify and then properly educate and train youths with learning disabilities. Comprehensive educational programs of remediation are needed in the schools to provide those youths so identified as learning disabled with the methods and techniques to aid them in leading successful and rewarding lives.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stuart E. Otterlee", written in a cursive style.

Stuart E. Otterlee

February 1978



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OUTLINE

The final report of this research project was divided into four major parts. These are:

INTRODUCTION - provides a review of current literature, the present status of learning disabilities, symptoms, causes, a look at a comprehensive study of the juvenile delinquency-learning disability connection and a project approach to juvenile delinquency.

METHODOLOGY - includes a narrative description of the site, the staff, the participants and their selection and involvement in the study. Details on the construction and design of the diagnostic test and subsequent revision and refinement are included.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS - analyzes relevant information about the participants in the study, and describes the factors and components that make up the classification design. Demographic, interview and performance data are included.

DISCUSSION - reviews the purpose of the study as well as a summary of test construction and test results. Concludes with the process of test revision, definition of juvenile delinquency, implications from the research and recommendations for future researchers.

The appendices to the report contain a checklist for interview and demographic data, copies of materials, list of performance variables and test scores.

BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATUS

Since early 1976, the Sonoma County Probation Department has been engaged in a study that may have far-reaching implications nationally in the field of juvenile justice administration. This study, which developed into a large research project during the course of its funding by the California Office of Criminal Justice Planning, was initiated by the now retired county Chief Probation Officer, William Mulligan, who, along with others in the fields of law enforcement and education, has long been concerned with the possible connections between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency.

Interest in "learning disabilities" has developed relatively recently, and the term did not come into widespread recognition until 1963, although there were studies done as early as 1938. Attention to this condition in children and adults has now become nationwide.

For several decades, educators have been concerned about learning problems which did not appear to be caused by low intelligence or lack of motivation,

or by any of the other usual explanations for poor school performance. Various labels have been attached to these disorders. Some were specific to a symptom - "word blindness," in the 1920's - while others denoted the apparently neurological foundations of the symptoms - "brain injury" and "minimal brain dysfunction." The term "learning disabilities" caught on quickly, perhaps because it pointed directly to the real source of concern: children who suffered from these disorders were failing to learn as well as they should. "LD" has become by far the most popular label among parents and teachers of these children. It has secured a firm if controversial place in the language of professional fields which deal with the development of children.

The definition of LD which is in widest use - often called "the national definition" - is the one adopted by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children. It reads as follows:

Children with special learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or to environmental disadvantage.

This definition is the basis for approving federal and state funds for programs in learning disabilities and the one that is generally adopted by the forty-three states which have incorporated LD programs into their educational activities. Moreover, the national definition appears to have achieved widely shared "understood meaning" among juvenile justice personnel and educators, despite the ambiguities in its wording. Currently, learning disabilities have arrived at a secure but controversial position in the fields of psychology, medicine and education. Opinions differ considerably, and the term continues to be poorly understood by many professionals in this field.

SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES

Learning disabilities are almost always associated with either spoken or written language difficulties. The term, dyslexia can be anything from reading retardation or what is called "word blindness" (alexia) to specific reading disabilities of a mild nature. Aphasia is a more comprehensive term than dyslexia since it includes language difficulty in any of its many forms. The word hyperkinesia typically refers to excessive muscular movement and is believed to be a result of brain damage. Hyperkinesia is usually difficult to diagnose.

Controversy surrounds the causes of learning disability, and the range of probable causes varies from inadequate reading instruction to neurological

difficulties. A review of the literature on learning disabilities indicates that a great deal of emphasis is placed on the organic (neurological) origin.

Much of the contradiction and inconsistency is due to a lack of agreement concerning a definition and classification. The term "learning disability" is currently the most widely recognized term connected with this complex disturbance of behavior and learning, and studies in this particular area are very active.

THE SITE OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted at Sonoma County's Los Guilucos Juvenile Detention Facility. The complex also includes the Juvenile Division of the Probation Department and the Juvenile Court Referee for the County of Sonoma. Los Guilucos, formerly a state school for delinquent girls, consists of several buildings on 300 acres of which 35 acres are in a compound. The area is about ten miles east of Santa Rosa, California, in a rural setting in the Sonoma Valley.

PROJECT STAFF

The project was directed by the Sonoma County Probation Department. Three doctoral level psychologists acting as independent consultants to the project were responsible for the development of the diagnostic battery, the testing and clinical diagnosis of the 250 participants. Technical assistance and consulting services were received from the University of California, Langley Porter, Neuropsychiatric Institute, and California State College at Sonoma.

RECENT STUDIES

The project staff began their work by examining a rather comprehensive study in learning disabilities prepared by the American Institute of Research in April 1976. The monograph entitled The Link Between Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Delinquency - Current Theory and Knowledge provided an excellent detailed review of existing literature, expert opinion, current theory, and an outline of learning disability demonstration projects.

The American Institute of Research reached two major conclusions, the first of which is:

The cumulation of information reported by professionals who work with delinquents indicates that more systematic exploration of the learning handicaps of delinquents is needed.

The second major conclusion of the AIR report was that:

The existence of a cause between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency has not been established, and the evidence of a cause and link between the two is weak.

The staff and consultants reviewed these findings as well as a great deal of narrative information and opinions from local professionals interviewed during the course of the project.

THE ROLE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In order to obtain a true cross section of all youths processing through the juvenile hall facility during the period of the study, a random sampling procedure was employed.

The participants were young men and women who were detained at the Los Guilucos facility for a period which varied from a few hours to several months during the period of August 1976 through April 1977. A total of 250 subjects were involved, 183 males and 67 females. The age range was from eleven years to eighteen years, with a median age of sixteen. A total of 117 were considered "601's" (e.g. status offenses) and 133 were "602's" (e.g. delinquents).*

Everyone of those tested and almost all (99%) of the youths agreed to participate in the project when approached by the examiner. In some cases a youth who at first refused, later changed his or her mind when contacted by another examiner.

TESTING CONDITIONS

Any one of six examining rooms was used for interviews and testing depending upon assigned living quarters and available space. The rooms had adequate space and furniture although background music was a minor distraction.

INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Rapport was established at the beginning of the session, and then the following information was requested:

- TYPE OF OFFENSE AND PRIOR RECORD
- FAMILY SITUATION
- SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE
- PHYSICAL CONDITION, HEALTH, ACCIDENTS

THE TEST BATTERIES

Both instruments, Battery A and Battery B, were designed to evaluate I.Q., language ability, memory, attention, reading ability and spelling. However, after a short period of time, it was found that the initial test, Battery A, took too long to administer and Battery B was compiled after a brief suspension of testing. Some of the subtests were deleted and some were modified in order to meet the shorter time requirements.

A larger sample would be needed to adequately examine the contribution of all of the new tests. The revised battery shows promise for future research

*Note: See Definition Table in Appendix.

to identify the incidence of learning disabilities among the juvenile delinquent population. A sample copy of the refined test battery is contained in Appendix B of the project report.

ANALYSIS

After reviewing the participants' "self" reports, it was found that the typical youth in the study was 17 years old, white, male, disliked school and had a previous juvenile record. The examiners noted any illnesses, emotional problems, school attendance, school performance and notable accidents or misfortunes.

The development of the classification system, based on the testing, took into account I.Q., reading and other language skills. The diagnosis of learning disabled is a difficult one in most cases and many things have to be considered; e.g. how far behind expected grade level must a youth be to be diagnosed as learning disabled, or should the rules apply equally at all ages?

The participants in the sample were then classified as Developmentally Disabled (mentally retarded) (DD), Learning Disabled (LD), or Not Learning Disabled (NLD). 13% of the sample were found to be DD, 49% LD and 38% NLD. The figure of almost 50% in this population is clearly higher than most estimates for learning disabled youths in the general population, which are estimated to be between 10% and 20%.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Until this project, very little research in the area of the contribution of learning disabilities to delinquent behavior has been beneficial in formulating meaningful conclusions concerning the incidence of learning disabilities among juvenile delinquents. This study has been a systematic endeavor to identify delinquent youths who have a clearly diagnosed learning disability. The project developed a comprehensive test battery which can be administered effectively by paraprofessionals and can be understood from an administrative and diagnostic perspective by persons with little or no training or experience in this area of assessment.

A substantial number of youths, 250, randomly sampled from the Sonoma County Juvenile Hall population, were tested and the results cannot be ignored:

13.3% WERE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED
48.9% WERE LEARNING DISABLED

The real impact of this project will only be realized when such a test battery is an ongoing part of screening, testing and diagnosing youths who enter the juvenile justice system, and when it is an integral part of juvenile justice decision making and remediation.

The results of this study should be given widespread distribution, not only to juvenile justice administrators but also to the schools.

Practical methods and plans are now needed to thoroughly identify and then properly educate and train youths with learning disabilities. Their disabilities must be thoroughly understood and treated. Comprehensive educational programs of remediation are needed to provide those youths so identified as learning disabled with the methods and techniques to aid them in leading successful and rewarding lives.

The results of this project clearly indicate that juvenile justice personnel can easily test for and identify learning disabilities. Those who are so identified can then be forwarded to the appropriate professionals for treatment, correction and remediation.



SONOMA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROJECT

THE DIAGNOSIS OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES
AMONG A JUVENILE DELINQUENT POPULATION

Evaluation of Grant #2597-1-75
Awarded by the California Office of Criminal Justice
Planning to the Sonoma County Probation Department

EVALUATION

GOALS OF THE PROJECT

The goals of the project were to devise a relatively brief and inexpensive test battery for use with delinquent youth to identify learning disabilities and to construct a classification system which considered I.Q., reading factors and other language measures.

The rationale for the task was to supply the empirical evidence that an inordinate number of juvenile clients seen by probation officers, and others in law enforcement apparently suffered from learning disorders which resulted in serious consequences, both in personal and community terms. Failure, frustration and conflict are caused by this disorder, in addition to school alienation, increasing involvement in antisocial delinquent behavior and inestimable human suffering.

The price paid by the learning disabled, and their immediate families and friends, becomes even greater when it is recognized that the early identification and successful treatment of these youths is within the grasp of our knowledge, skill, abilities, technology and education.

There was need, then, to develop locally a model test battery and a classification system to be used by anyone concerned with screening for learning disabilities. The model and the attendant procedures for administering and evaluating the tests were designed to provide a major improvement in the efforts to identify learning disabled youths.

GRANTS AND FUNDS

The proposal was approved as written, and was funded on schedule. State rules, laws and guidelines have been complied with and there have been no difficulties with grant administration. Applications were well written, and contained comprehensive plans for fiscal management, evaluation, project administration and coordination with other agencies. Interim reports were accurately finished, submitted on time, and clearly indicate the nature of the responsibilities completed during the reporting period.

EFFICIENCY

Good use has been made of local resources provided by the County of Sonoma and participating public and private agencies. In addition, sound administration and management procedures have insured that all facets of the project were completed as proposed and within the constraints of the budget.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The project was carried out as scheduled from June 1, 1976 through June 30, 1977, by the staff and special consultants of the Sonoma County Probation Department, Santa Rosa, California. The program has all indications of being extremely well administered, coordinated and supervised as determined from on-site discussion with the staff, and from personnel reactions in other government and community agencies. The qualifications, background and training of the staff and consultants was excellent.

THE METHOD OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The study was conducted with volunteer delinquent youths at the Los Guilucos Juvenile Facility, Santa Rosa. Two hundred fifty youths were randomly selected from 3,500 detained at the facility during the year of the study. The volunteers were examined by one of three doctoral level psychologists, and after a substantial number had been tested, the battery was modified and refined.

The approach was standardized, and the study was met with acceptance on the part of the youths and staff alike. Extensive interview and demographic information was requested from the participants.

An analysis of the test results in terms of I.Q., reading level, and other language skills found that 13% of the sample was Developmentally Disabled (DD), 49% was Learning Disabled (LD), and 38% were Not Learning Disabled (NLD). Even though there was not a comparison group for the study, the figure of nearly 50% is higher than most estimates for learning disabled youths in the general population, which are estimated to be between 10 and 20%.

Boys differed significantly from girls on a number of characteristics. Generally the boys were older, more likely to have an arrest record and performed less adequately in school. Girls appeared to read better and had less spelling errors.

It was found that the original test battery took too long to administer and it became obvious that a revision was needed in order to keep the testing time down to 45 minutes. The modified test battery was diagnostically sound and could be administered by persons with little or no training in test administration. Probation Department personnel felt that the test battery was obvious in purpose and lent itself to brief explanations concerning the details of administration.

TIMELINESS

Recently the entire field of learning disabilities has received considerable congressional attention. Representative Claude Pepper (D-Florida), former chair of the now defunct House Select Committee on Crime, introduced a bill in 1977 providing \$5 million for a national conference on learning disabilities

and juvenile delinquency. In addition, Senator Jacob Javits (R-New York), Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) and the late Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota) have all called for increased funding for research in identification, testing and treatment as well as the development of model demonstration and remediation projects. Because of the serious problems identified, Sonoma County is now prepared to address the next phase of learning disabilities remediation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although the causes of juvenile delinquency are clearly complex, much of the information and data gathered by this project is significant. The idea that approximately 13% of the juvenile delinquents may be developmentally disabled (mentally retarded) and nearly 50% may be learning disabled is cause for considerable concern.

The staff and consultants of the project are now awaiting approval of a \$240,000 federal and state grant to implement a delinquency prevention program to develop and evaluate a county-wide demonstration project of early detection and remediation for first-time and status offenders with learning disabilities. The refined development of comprehensive educational methods designed to correct the learning problems which were identified in the incarcerated youth population is the next logical step.

If a delinquent is seriously learning disabled, knowing that fact and taking appropriate action at the earliest possible time is important if a meaningful treatment approach is to be developed. Early identification of learning disabilities will enable the staff of juvenile incarceration facilities to better understand and respond to a youth's behavior and needs. The existence of the disability means that tailored educational and vocational training programs are needed. A broad range of remedial approaches should be proposed, and demonstration projects assigned to investigate the more promising approaches.

APPENDIX

There are three types of juvenile referrals. In California, these types are usually identified by the section number of the State Welfare and Institutions Codes covering juvenile behavior. Briefly these statutes are:

300 Dependent Children

. . . any person under the age of 18 years who comes within any of the following descriptions is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court which may adjudge such person to be a dependent child of the court.

(a) Who is in need of proper and effective parental care or control and has no parent or guardian, or has no parent or guardian willing to exercise or capable of exercising such care or control, or has no parent or guardian exercising such care or control.

(b) Who is destitute, or who is not provided with the necessities of life, or who is not provided with a home or suitable place of abode.

(c) Who is physically dangerous to the public because of a mental or physical deficiency, disorder or abnormality.

(d) Whose home is an unfit place for him by reason of neglect, cruelty, depravity, or physical abuse of either of his parents, or of his guardian or other person in whose custody or care he is.

601 Status Offenders

(a) Any person under the age of 18 years who persistently or habitually refuses to obey the reasonable and proper orders or directions of his parents, guardian, or custodian, or who is beyond the control of such person, or who is under the age of 18 years when he violated any ordinance of any city or county of this state establishing a curfew based solely on age is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court which may adjudge such person to be a ward of the court.

(b) If a school attendance review board determines that the available public and private services are insufficient or inappropriate to correct the habitual truancy of the minor, or to correct the minor's persistent or habitual refusal to obey the reasonable and proper orders or directions of school authorities,

or if the minor fails to respond to directives of a school attendance review board or to services provided, the minor is then within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court which may adjudge such person to be a ward of the court; provided, that it is the intent of the Legislature that no minor who is adjudged a ward of the court pursuant solely to this subdivision shall be removed from the custody of the parent or guardian except during school hours.

602 Criminal Offenders

Any person who is under the age of 18 years when he violates any law of this state or of the United States or any ordinance of any city or county of this state defining crime other than ordinance establishing a curfew based solely on age, is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which may adjudge such person to be a ward of the court.

This report will use the section number when referring to a type of juvenile offender.



SONOMA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROJECT

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GENERAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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BACKGROUND

The Criminal Justice Self-Assessment Project is Sonoma County's response to recent studies by the County Grand Jury and independent consultants. The Grand Jury Report concluded that regular communications and coordination were essential to "implement and promote the orderly and efficient administration of the Criminal Justice system." The consultants recommended a comprehensive, in-depth study of the separate criminal justice agencies, both City and County, and the justice system as a whole, in order to gain a clear understanding of the criminal justice problems facing the community. The Grand Jury recommended and the justice system managers accomplished the formation of a Criminal Justice Council. The composition of the Council includes the Presiding Judges of the Superior and Municipal Courts, the Sheriff, District Attorney, Public Defender, Chief Probation Officer, County Administrator, Grand Jury Foreman, a Chief of Police, President of the Sonoma County Bar Association, a member of the Board of Supervisors, and representatives from the City Councilman's/Mayor's and City Manager's Associations. At the request of the Council, the Board of Supervisors initiated an application for and received Federal grant funds to conduct a criminal justice assessment as a basis to improve coordination, planning and system operations.

OBJECTIVES

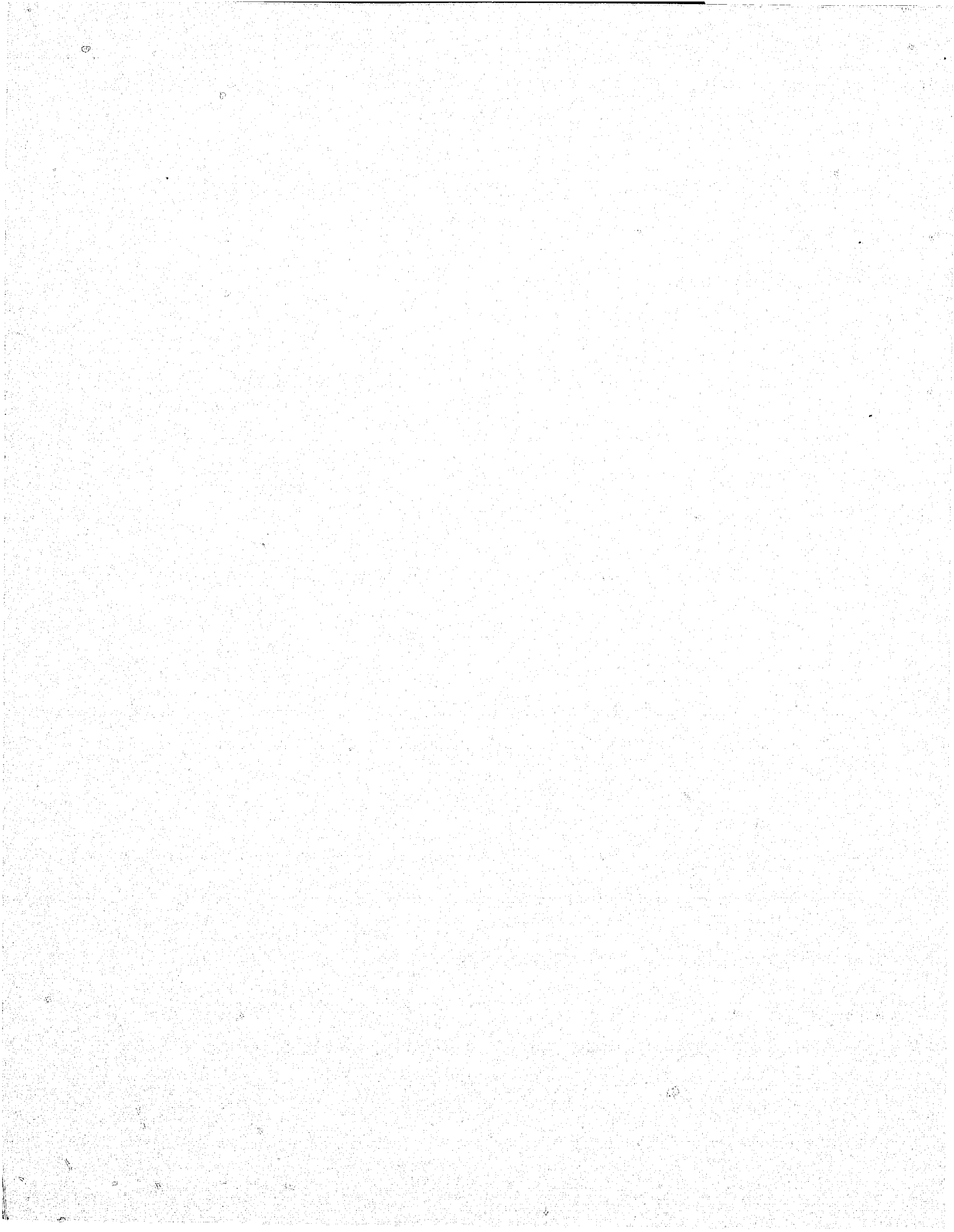
1. TO DEVELOP OBJECTIVE INFORMATION ABOUT CRIME AND THE OPERATION OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN SONOMA COUNTY
2. TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION IN APPROPRIATE FORMATS AND FORUMS TO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITY
3. TO SUPPLY TECHNICAL SUPPORT IN CLARIFYING, ESTABLISHING AND DOCUMENTING POLICIES, GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM
4. TO IMPLEMENT KEY RECOMMENDATIONS MADE AND ADOPTED TO IMPROVE COORDINATION, COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND SYSTEM OPERATION

METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the above objectives it will be necessary to: 1) analyze location, time and other factors of actual crime occurrence and social and economic characteristics of offenders in Sonoma County; 2) inventory and catalog the resources devoted to the criminal justice system, both public and private; 3) using the computer, track the flow of adult and juvenile offenders through the system from arrest through final disposition; 4) analyze those receiving supervision; 5) conduct detailed operations reviews of police response to crime events, judicial processing of suspects, and juvenile and adult correctional systems; 6) hold workshops to utilize data gathered to establish goals and priorities for future action; and 7) provide technical support to implement key recommendations.

GOALS

The problems facing Sonoma County are similar to those in other areas. It is anticipated that a model process will be developed which could be utilized by other criminal justice systems to enhance the quality of justice in our society. Only by increasing community awareness and involvement with the issues and problems dealt with by the justice agencies will permanent impact on crime and delinquency be achieved.



END