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0521580730 - Criminality and Violence among the Mentally Disordered: The Stockholm Project Metropolitan

Sheilagh Hodgins and Carl-Gunnar Janson

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Criminality and violence among the mentally disordered The Stockholm Project Metropolitan

In recent years it has become apparent that mentally ill people are at increased risk of committing crimes of violence. Most writing and research about crime and mental disorder has focused necessarily on the immediate problems which confront clinicians and law makers – assessing and managing the future risk of violence. In this important new book the authors attempt to step back from these immediate preoccupations and describe the criminality of the mentally ill and try to identify the complex chain of factors which cause it. As part of their analysis they examine a unique cohort composed of 15,117 persons born in Stockholm who were studied from birth to the age of thirty. While they conclude that we still do not understand exactly how and why persons with major mental disorders commit crimes, their findings make a valuable contribution to ongoing debates on mental health and criminal justice policy and practice.

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CARL-GUNNAR JANSON is Sociology Professor Emeritus at Stockholm University. In 1964 he started Project Metropolitan and is still analysing its data. He is the editor of *Seven Swedish Longitudinal Studies in Behavioral Sciences* (2000).

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Preface

This book illustrates how an investigation of a birth cohort followed for thirty years, which was designed principally as a study of inequality and social deviance, was used to examine the relation between the major mental disorders and criminality. The findings presented here, plus those found in many other publications from Project Metropolitan, demonstrate the wealth of knowledge that can only be gleaned from tracking individuals over their life-span. The present volume also illustrates how information routinely collected by governments can be de-identified and used in a cost-effective manner to study questions which have important implications for social policy and as well for advancing our understanding of human development. The results reported here also demonstrate how the data from such a project can be used to answer questions that were not even thought of at the time the project was designed. The Scandinavian tradition of supporting and maintaining longitudinal investigations of cohorts which integrate information from registers with information collected from the subjects themselves is to be praised. This tradition, now being slowly adopted elsewhere, has proven repeatedly to produce a wealth of knowledge that cannot be obtained in other ways. (See, for example, C. G. Janson (ed.), *Some Swedish Longitudinal Studies in the Behavioural Sciences*, 2000.)

The criminality of persons who suffer from major mental disorders is now a social problem confronting governments in the Western industrialised countries. The results from Project Metropolitan were the first published epidemiological data on criminality among persons who develop mental illness in the era of deinstitutionalisation. As described in this volume, they have subsequently been replicated by investigations of birth cohorts in three other countries and by numerous cross-sectional studies of samples of

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mentally ill patients and convicted offenders. In countries with relatively low crime rates, the crimes committed by the mentally ill, particularly violent crimes, represent a significant proportion of all crimes. Finding a humane way to prevent these crimes is urgent. The suffering of both the perpetrators and victims of these crimes, and of their loved ones is immeasurable. In addition to the human burden associated with these crimes, there are the financial costs to society. The findings from the Metropolitan study presented in this volume, we hope, contribute knowledge that will be useful in identifying both short- and long-term solutions.

Sheilagh Hodgins would like to thank Professor Carl-Gunnar Janson for the privilege of working on Project Metropolitan. This opportunity allowed me to study, in a scientifically valid manner, a problem that I thought was important. Collaborating with Professor Janson has been a rich learning experience. He was always generous with his time and with his knowledge and wisdom. I greatly appreciate his graciousness, willingness to debate, and integrity.

Sheilagh Hodgins would also like to thank numerous other persons who have contributed over the years to the studies described in this volume. Three students, Dr Anne Crocker, Dr Lynn Kratzer, and Dr Micheline Lapalme played key roles in studies using data from Project Metropolitan. Working with them was inspiring and a pleasure. My colleagues, Dr Gilles Côté and Dr Jean Toupin, participated in many hours of discussion on the meaning and implications of results. Their knowledge, competence, and support have always been greatly appreciated. Finally, three wonderful, patient, and talented women made sure that this volume was produced and that other manuscripts based on the Project Metropolitan arrived successfully at the publishers. Guylaine Bouchard, Sylvie Sylvestre, and Joëlle Chevrier are to be thanked for the masterful preparation of the manuscripts. The work presented in this volume was supported by grants from the Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche (Québec), the Social Sciences Research Council (Canada), and the Foundation Wenner-Grennska samfundet (Sweden).

Carl-Gunnar Janson would like to thank Professor Sheilagh Hodgins for stimulating and informative cooperation. She is to be commended for finding much more use for Project Metropolitan data than was originally intended. Belatedly, he would like to express his sincere gratitude to all members of the Project Metropolitan team who collected and coded the data and made the data ready for computer use in the first place: Ann-Marie Janson, Maria Feychting, Leif Andersson, Marie Torstensson, and Jan Andersson.

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There would have been no Project Metropolitan without the unprecedented decision by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation to support the project for the whole twenty-one year period, 1966–86, to collect and organise the data. Finally, Carl-Gunnar Janson wants to acknowledge support given by the Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research (1986–92), the Commission for Social Research (1986–90), the Foundation Wenner-Grenska samfundet (1991), the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (1991–96), the Swedish Council for Social Research (1992–95), and the Swedish Council for Humanistic and Social Sciences (1997–2002).

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Sheilagh Hodgins and Carl-Gunnar Janson