

Correspondence

Letters for publication in the Correspondence columns should be addressed to:

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THE AGE-DISTRIBUTION OF SCHIZOPHRENIA AND NEUROSIS

DEAR SIR,

Reading the recent paper by Hare, Price and Slater (*Journal*, October, 1971, vol. 119, pp. 445-8), I was interested to see that they found a similarity in age-distribution of first admissions for neurosis and schizophrenia to National Health Service psychiatric hospitals in England and Wales and suggest that this may reflect a 'similarity in their environmental precipitants'.

The picture in the Republic of Ireland, as reflected in a total of 42,445 first admissions to Irish psychiatric hospitals for 1965-1970, does not mirror the experience in England and Wales, as the accompanying figure shows.

Whereas the age-incidence curve for schizophrenia in Ireland resembles in general shape that for the same disorder in England and Wales, it is noticeable that it reaches its peak almost a decade later. The curve for neurosis, however, is quite different in that having peaked at the same age as in England and Wales it then remains on a plateau until age 60. The higher percentage figures on the Irish graph are due to the use of decennial age-groups as against quinquennial age-groups in England and Wales.

The Irish picture may be interpreted as signifying either that the environmental stresses necessary to precipitate schizophrenia and neurosis may be qualitatively different, or that if similar they must act over a longer time-period to precipitate neurosis than to precipitate schizophrenia and act longer to precipitate either illness in Ireland than in England and Wales.

The risk for first admission to hospital for both these conditions remains much higher in Ireland than in England and Wales. Thus the first admission expectancy for schizophrenia to age 55 in England and Wales was 1.47 per cent for males and 1.56 per cent for females in 1966 (a considerable increase on the figure of approximately 1 per cent for both sexes based on 1952-1960 first admission figures quoted by Slater and Cowie (1) against 4.8 per cent for males and 3.2 per cent for females in Ireland in 1970. For neurosis the discrepancies are even greater. In England and Wales in 1966 the first admission

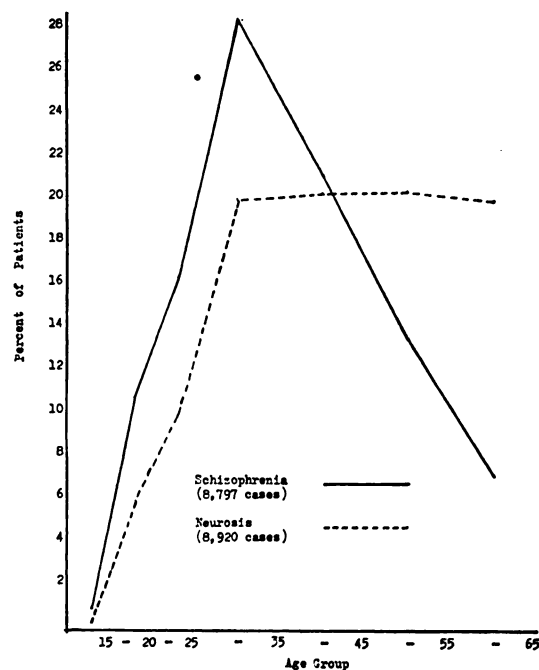


FIG. 1.

expectancy for neurosis to age 65 was 1.5 per cent for males and 2.7 per cent for females; in Ireland in 1970 the corresponding figures were 3.8 per cent and 8.4 per cent.

DERMOT WALSH.

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REFERENCE

1. SLATER, E., and COWIE, V. (1971). *The Genetics of Mental Disorders*. London: Oxford University Press.

PROBLEMS OF CLUSTER ANALYSIS

DEAR SIR,

I should like to make it clear that in my recent paper pointing out some of the problems of cluster