

observer-rated personality questionnaire with a high reliability score in both normal and mentally handicapped populations (Mann *et al*, 1981; Reid & Ballinger, 1987). As the diagnosis of personality disorder in the mentally handicapped population remains difficult and controversial, it seems important to use an observer-rated questionnaire which has a good tested reliability on mentally handicapped populations. Neither DSM-III nor DSM-III-R has that advantage. The T-L scale, however, was used by Bear & Fedio (1977) to detect the personality characters which they claimed to be specifically associated with epilepsy.

It is true, as Drs Tyrer & Moore have pointed out, that we found the epileptic patients living in the community to have a significantly higher T-L personality abnormality, particularly 'persistence and repetitive' type than those without epilepsy. However, such behaviour is not uncommon in people with a mental handicap, the numbers in each group were very small and in the context of a high number of statistical tests these few positive findings may have been obtained by chance. On the question of the protective effect of carbamazepine on maladaptive behaviour, we agree that in a cross-sectional survey it is difficult to ascertain cause and effect relationships; however to overcome that difficulty we used a carefully matched control population and compared the effect of each monopharmacy group separately to avoid contamination effect. Analysis of our data does not support their assumption that behavioural effects may have been due to the associated factors (e.g. less severe brain damage, less frequent seizures, etc.) rather than the influence of carbamazepine monopharmacy *per se*. When the combined subgroups of epileptic patients (both from hospital and from the community) with evidence of severe brain damage (e.g. those who had multiple types of seizure and also frequent seizures) were compared with their counterpart of non-epileptic adults, no significant difference in the maladaptive behaviour was observed. On the contrary, the severely mentally handicapped adults with epilepsy showed significantly less maladaptive behaviour when compared with the adults without epilepsy. Although as a group those who received monopharmacy had shown significantly less aggressive behaviour, this did not prove true for any monopharmacy group other than carbamazepine, whereas associated brain damage factors should have remained the same in all monopharmacy groups.

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SHOUMITRO DEB

Woodlands Hospital
Craigton Road
Aberdeen AB1 9PR

Ethical problems in genetic linkage studies

SIR: We were most interested to read Alexander *et al*'s contribution to the long-overdue discussion of the ethical issues and problems inherent in genetic linkage studies of psychiatric disorders (*Journal*, January 1992, **160**, 98-102). We applaud the thoughtful nature and general thrust of their approach, but feel it might be useful to share our experience in the method of making the all-important initial contact with the proband's relatives.

Dr Alexander *et al* state that family members "are often taken aback" by "the initial contact [which] is usually by telephone". While we are aware that there may well be considerable cultural differences in the way telephone communications are offered and received in different countries, such a response to an unexpected call by a member of a psychiatric research team should perhaps not come as a surprise to the caller; it is for this reason that our policy in Scotland is to make initial contact by means of a brief letter explaining in general terms the nature and purpose of our research, which is then followed up within a week by a telephone call and a request to meet personally. In this way, family members have the opportunity to think over the issues before any demands are made on them, and consider any questions they may wish to ask. In our experience the procedure may be marginally more time-consuming than a straightforward telephone call, but the extra effort is repaid in terms of less anxiety for future participants in our studies and very high degree of cooperation and goodwill in the longer term.

C. W. SHARP

M. WALKER

D. H. R. BLACKWOOD

Department of Psychiatry
The University of Edinburgh
Kennedy Tower
Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Morningside Park
Edinburgh EH10 5HF

Western psychotherapy and non-Western populations

SIR: It was interesting to read about the difficulties our Saudi Arabian colleagues experienced (*Journal*,