

Psychiatrists Fear Gun Episodes Will Be Contagious

By PETER KIHSS

Psychiatrists expressed concern in interviews yesterday that violence might be becoming more legitimate in the eyes of some disturbed people alienated by government policies, and that the two gun episodes involving President Ford might prove contagious.

Dr. Perry Ottenberg, senior attending psychiatrist at the Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, said in Philadelphia that government leaders' "lack of candor, their hypocrisy, their inaccessibility, manipulation of media, prolongation of a nasty, dirty war, lack of follow-through on many social and health programs" had "created a situation where desperate individuals feel a certain legitimacy" to invoking violence.

Dr. Milton Rosenbaum, former chairman of the department of psychiatry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and now head of the Mental Health Center in Jerusalem, said that accusations of Central Intelligence Agency violence and political assassination plots

could encourage some people to react violently.

The American Psychiatric Association estimates that one of every 10 Americans at some point in life becomes sufficiently mentally disturbed to require some kind of professional attention, although only a small proportion might be violent.

Dr. Judd Marmor, president of the University of Southern California, said that the "almost kind of hero play on front pages" for the assailants could be "very seductive to other lonely, alienated, disturbed people who see an opportunity to get a place in the sun."

Like many others interviewed, he said that lack of handgun controls was "just opening ourselves to further events of this kind."

Dr. June J. Christmas, New York City's Commissioner of Mental Health, believes that the problem of violence is "increasing both in actual numbers and proportionately in our society."

She said that television por-

trays, wars and rioting made violence appear "almost commonplace." Participation of women, she added, reflects their opportunities to enter more activities.

Dr. Christmas said that she believed mental health services here were reaching perhaps only "10 to 15 per cent" of those needing them, including 5 to 10 per cent of the alcoholics and 10 per cent of the mentally retarded.

Last year, with \$225-million from state, Federal, city and private sources, she said, 350,000 to 400,000 persons were "somehow contacted." Current budget cuts to \$180-million will reduce that number to 60,000, she said.

For the last five years, the State Department of Mental Hygiene has had a project on predicting violence. Dr. Henry J. Steadman, director of mental health research, said that in 1971 this had found that the murder rate among 539 male felony defendants considered mentally incompetent was 18 times that of all men arrested for felonies statewide.

But he said that the mentally ill were more likely to get arrested than others. Order studies, he said, have indicated eight to 20 incorrect predictions for every accurate one for juvenile delinquents and forensic psychiatry, questioned the mentally ill—an error rate that, he said, would be worse for the general public.

Dr. John R. Wright, director of the department's office of forensic psychiatry, questioned what would be done about any prediction. For instance, would preventive detention be recommended?

"There aren't any good solutions, only less bad ones," he added. Historically, he said, nationwide studies indicate that homicide rates have decreased—to about 70 per cent of the 1933 high.

Dr. Louis J. West, chairman of the department of psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles, urged President Ford to take the lead against "political machismo" and cut down risky campaigning in crowds in favor of telecasts.