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Institute of Education, University of London

Educational inequality ‘may be linked to violent crime’

Teenagers are more likely to be convicted of violent crimes and racially motivated offences if they are brought up in areas where educational achievement is very unequal, new research suggests.

The finding has emerged from a study at the Institute of Education, London, which compared pupils' maths performance at the age of 14 with local juvenile crime rates in England. Researchers found higher conviction rates for violence and racial crimes in areas where high proportions of pupils were clustered at the top and bottom of the performance range.

The study's authors also discovered that this type of educational inequality had increased among the young people they studied.

The researchers analysed the maths scores of 14-year-olds in England's 150 local education authorities in 1997, 1998, and 1999. They then compared the spread of achievement with local conviction rates when the young people were aged 15 to 17.

Dr Ricardo Sabates and his colleagues from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning found that educational inequality increased by 9 per cent between 1997 and 1999. "We believe this may be linked with an increase in the average, area-based conviction rate for violent crime from 1.8 per 1,000 to 2.2 per 1,000 for the year groups we studied," he said. "This may seem like a small rise but scaled up to the national level this equates to 222 additional juvenile convictions for violent crime." For racially motivated offences the rise was equivalent to 51 extra convictions.

"We do not know why educational inequality appears to be associated with violent crime and racially motivated offences but not with property crime," Dr Sabates added. "Nor do we know why there was a rise in educational inequality in the year groups we focused on.

"What we can say is that the increased conviction rates in educationally unequal areas cannot be explained by poverty or by lower average attainment levels. We took those factors into consideration."

The researchers say their findings underline the importance of current Government policies which not only aim to raise average attainment but to narrow the gap between high and low achievers. However, they point out that this can only be achieved if those

at the bottom of the educational attainment distribution are helped to progress at a faster rate than those above them.

“The challenge is to find acceptable interventions that promote not only greater educational equality but higher overall standards,” Dr Sabates said.

Further information from

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Notes for editors:

1. *Educational inequality and juvenile crime: an area-based analysis*, by Ricardo Sabates, Leon Feinstein and Anirudh Shingal will be published at 9am on Thursday, February 28, 2008. It will be available via the website of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning <http://www.learningbenefits.net> The study was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.
2. Key stage 3 maths scores were used in the analysis. Maths, rather than English or science, was chosen as it was the only subject for which sufficiently fine-grained data (raw scores rather than national curriculum-level-based data) were provided.
3. The researchers also looked at the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, average pupil-teacher ratios across primary and secondary schools, and unauthorised absence figures.