



The University of Edinburgh

Press Release

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Children referred to Hearings more likely to be convicted as adults

Young people who have had contact with the Children's Hearing system are three times more likely to be convicted as adults than those who have not according to new research by the University of Edinburgh.

Findings published today (Friday, July 27) also show that children who are excluded from school, or leave as soon as they reach sixteen, are at greater risk of gaining a criminal conviction in adulthood. Boys are particularly vulnerable.

The conclusions are part of a wider study, the *Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime*, which is tracking around 4,300 young people who transferred to secondary school in Edinburgh in 1998.

The new research suggests that young people who have been referred to the Children's Reporter on offence grounds, or made subject to compulsory measures of care, are significantly more likely to have a criminal conviction later in life than those with no history of hearings contact.

Significantly, the youngsters most likely to be convicted are amongst the most vulnerable children known to the Hearing System, with many personal, family and school related problems.

Researchers say the findings highlight the importance of addressing the welfare and educational needs of offenders in the teenage years.

Dr Lesley McAra, co-director of the Edinburgh Study, said

“This research suggests that, among other strategies, the risk of criminal conviction could be significantly reduced by devoting more resources to helping teachers tackle problem behaviour in the classroom and reducing school exclusion.

Susan McVie, co-director, said

“Reductions in convictions could also be made by improving the quality of social work services on offer within the children's hearing system. In particular, young males who offend

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in the early teenage years require to be treated first and foremost as troubled and not troublesome children.”

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Nuffield Foundation and the Scottish Executive.

For further information please contact: Joanne Morrison, Press and PR Officer, University of Edinburgh. Tel (0131) 651 4266

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The authors of the report “Criminal Justice Transitions” are Dr Lesley McAra and Mrs Susan McVie based in the School of Law at the University of Edinburgh.
2. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Nuffield Foundation and the Scottish Executive. The study aims to better understand the reasons behind offending behaviour by focusing on a whole generation of young people, rather than targeting only those who offend.
3. There were six annual sweeps of the study between 1998 and 2003, following the cohort from the age of 12 to 17. In addition, information was collected about cohort members from the records of the Children’s Hearing System (up to age 18) and the Scottish Criminal Records Office (up to age 19).
4. This report is the fourteenth in a series of Research Digests that have been published by the study team.
5. Copies of this and other Research Digests are available to download free from the study website at www.law.ed.ac.uk/cls/esytc. The study team can be contacted by emailing Edinburgh.study@ed.ac.uk or by telephoning Dr McAra on 031 650 2036 and Mrs Susan McVie on 0131 651 3782.