

Presentation title:

School performance trajectories and subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system during young adulthood

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Understanding risk and protective factors for criminal offending is a key research priority to help shape crime prevention policies. We aimed to investigate how changes in school performance throughout school might be associated with subsequent offending in young adulthood. We conducted a secondary, longitudinal analysis of linked national administrative education and criminal justice records (UK). Using growth mixture modelling (GMM), we estimated school performance trajectories over three statutory testing years (School Years 2, 6 and 11). We then conducted multilevel logistic regression modelling to investigate whether membership of these school performance trajectories was associated with being cautioned or convicted for a first offence between Year 11 and age 21. A five-trajectory GMM was derived: (1) average/high-stable ($n=3,497,167$, 81%), (2) average/high-improving ($n=66,383$, 2%), (3) average-declining ($n=373,117$, 9%), (4) low-improving ($n=98,805$, 2%), (5) low-stable ($n=281,964$, 7%). Preliminary findings suggest that the average-declining group had the highest proportion of individuals who went on to be cautioned or convicted for any first offence up to age 21 (9.8%), followed by the low-stable (8.5%), low-improving (5.6%), average/high-stable (4.2%) and average/high-improving (1.5%) groups. We will also present findings for different offence types, including serious violence, and how school performance trajectories interact with other risk factors including gender, ethnicity, deprivation, being in care, and special educational needs provision. The findings suggest that changes in school performance could help to identify pupils who are struggling and in need of additional support. That support might be educational in nature, or address other problems which might be associated with declining or low school performance and also present risk for criminal offending, like family difficulties or mental health problems.