

Army recruiters visit London's poorest schools most often

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Recruiters from the British Regular Army visit London's poorest schools most often, new research from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine shows.

The research looked into the amount of mainstream secondary state schools visited by the army between September 2008 and April 2009 in Greater London. It also looked at whether the proportion varied with the level of deprivation of the school students, measured using the percentage of children eligible for free school meals.

The team found that army recruiters visited 40% of schools in Greater London. Over half (51%) of the most disadvantaged fifth were visited, compared to only 29% in the middle fifth.

Although it has been claimed that such visits are not to recruit but rather to offer advice about careers in the forces, the Ministry of Defence Youth Policy states that the school visits are a "powerful tool for facilitating recruitment."

Anna Goodman, the report's co-author from London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine says: "A third of new army recruits are aged under 18 and the UK is the only country in the European Union that allows 16 year olds to enlist. By focusing on this group and disproportionately visiting the most disadvantaged schools, recruiters are engaging the social group that is potentially least able to make an informed and responsible choice about enlisting."

David Gee, independent researcher and author of a major report on military recruitment in 2008, adds: "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child puts a legal obligation on all UK public institutions to put the best interests of children first. In view of the legally binding commitments and risks that an army career involves, we believe that letting army recruiters into schools may jeopardise young people's rights and welfare, particularly as these visits are concentrated in the poorest schools."

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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