

EURO 2012 is likely to hit school exam results, study suggests

December 6 2011



Did the distraction of the 2010 World Cup Final in Soccer City, Johannesburg affect pupils' GCSE results?

(PhysOrg.com) -- School students who take their GCSEs during a major international football tournament, such as the FIFA World Cup or the UEFA European Championship, get worse exam results than they would in a football-free summer, according to an Oxford researcher.

The study was led by Dr. Robert Metcalfe of the University of Oxford, in collaboration with Professor Simon Burgess and Dr. Steven Proud of the Centre for Market and Public Organization CMPO. They analysed the GCSE records of around three and a half million school [students](#) over seven years and found that:

- [School students](#) who sat their exams in even-numbered years when

there was a big summer football event tended to put in less effort and get worse results on average than those who took their exams in years without major tournaments.

- The size of the effect on students' educational outcomes varies a great deal depending on the degree to which students reduce effort, which in turn depends on their interest in football. Obviously not everyone is.
- The average effect on specific exams taken during the tournament is about a quarter of a grade per subject. This is equivalent to half of the effect of having an ineffective teacher as opposed to an effective teacher.
- For some students, the effect is much greater. Both male and female students are affected, and students from all parts of society. But on average the results of boys and more disadvantaged students were found to be more affected.
- For the most-affected groups – boys from disadvantaged families – the effect on specific exams was found to be about a half of a grade per subject. This effect is similar to the effect of having a very ineffective teacher as opposed to a very effective teacher.

Dr. Robert Metcalfe, from Oxford University, said: "Time spent watching and talking about football is clearly time not spent studying so our findings give an indication of just how much student effort matters for achievement at GCSE. The impact of a football tournament varies according to the student's taste for football arising in turn from cultural norms and from the differential effectiveness of an hour of study on exam performance.

"Our results show that having important exams in the tournament period reduces educational attainment and we estimate much greater negative

effects for male students, students from disadvantaged families and low ability students."

To make their discovery about the impact of student effort on exam results, the researchers used the fact that every other summer there is a major international football tournament, which completely dominates the news media.

GCSE exams partially overlap with the tournament in these even-numbered years. So it is possible to compare how the same student does in exams in the period before the tournament and exams during the tournament, and then compare that difference in years when there is a tournament and years when there isn't.

The data are from the National Pupil Database, covering all state-school students in England– 93 per cent of all students – from 2002 to 2008. As pupils cannot select the year of birth, the researchers had a 'natural experiment' to demonstrate the causal impact of football tournaments on GCSE results.

More information: Read the full working paper [here](#).

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: EURO 2012 is likely to hit school exam results, study suggests (2011, December 6) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-12-euro-school-exam-results.html>

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