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IS EXCLUSION FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG? THE MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN EXCLUDED FROM SCHOOL.

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Background: In the UK there has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of children excluded from primary school over the last decade (children aged 5 to 11 years).

Objectives: The principle objective was to determine whether children excluded from primary school have more medical and mental health problems than their non-excluded peers. A secondary objective was to identify whether these children need to be targeted.

Design: non-randomised community based case-control study.

Setting: Primary schools in two English local education authorities.

Participants: 50 children excluded from primary school during a single school term and 55 school class, age and sex matched controls.

Main outcome measures: Information collected from the community, hospital and Accident and Emergency Department records.

Results: Being known to social services was identified as a risk factor for exclusion in boys (odds ratio 3.2 (95% confidence interval 1.84 - 5.65)). Significant associations in the excluded group included (p value <0.05): head injury; in-patient admissions and gastroenteritis; developmental delay; speech and language delay; behaviour problems since toddler-hood; psychiatric referral; diagnosed emotional and behavioural disorders; child protection concerns; domestic violence; and maternal stresses.

Conclusions: The study found that children excluded from primary school have significantly more medical and mental health problems than their peers. Head injury may be a risk factor for exclusion. Many of these problems may impact on the child's ability to cope in school. Closer liaison between agencies might prevent the risk or ameliorate the impact of exclusion. Larger, more detailed studies are required.

