

Salvesen Mindroom
Policy Briefing

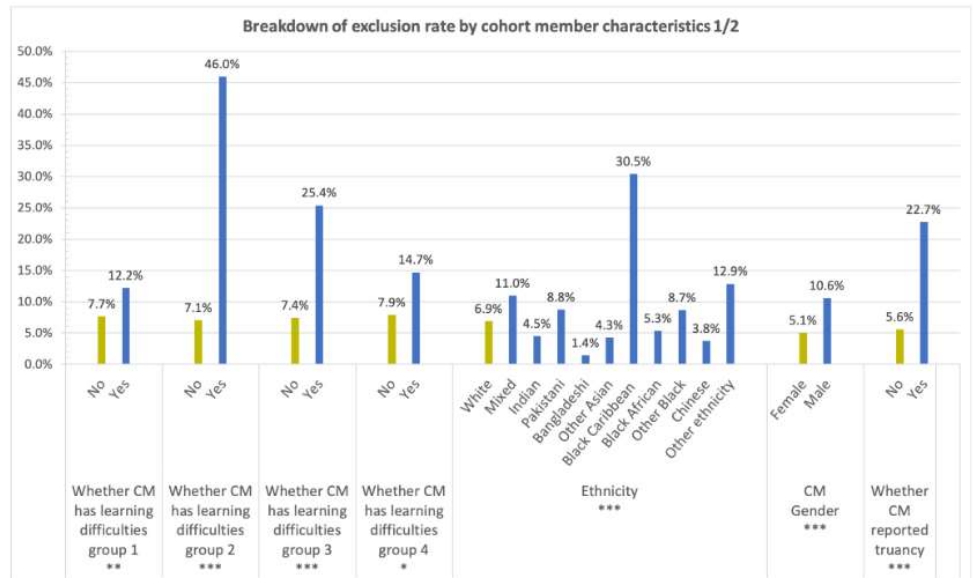
Learning difficulties and exclusion from school

What We Found

Additional support needs are associated with significantly higher rates of school exclusion

By analysing UK-wide Millennium Cohort Study¹ data, we found that young people with ADHD or behavioural problems, or with autism and Asperger’s syndrome experience significantly higher rates of exclusion than those without these conditions.

This could potentially be explained by the fact that, for example, symptoms of ADHD are often mischaracterised as persistent disruptive behaviour, according to previous research.



In addition, we found positive correlations with exclusion in relation to male gender, playing truant, drug use, police warning and arrest, higher cognitive ability and some minority ethnic backgrounds (mixed, other, Pakistani, black Caribbean). The causes of exclusion are multiple and likely to have interrelating and overlaying effects.

What We Suggest

Screening for disruptive behaviour could help to identify issues and prevent exclusion

Early intervention in the form of screening and assessment for pupils who display challenging or disruptive behaviour could well prove effective in identifying underlying issues which, if left unaddressed, can lead to exclusion.

It would be helpful to carry out a similar analysis on Scottish school pupil data. The inclusion of school-level data including staff expertise in additional support needs (ASN) would be valuable, as would applying a sampling frame focussed on pupils with ASN alone. Mixed methods research including both qualitative and quantitative data would give richer results.

What We Did

We examined how multiple factors in the Millennium Cohort data contributed to risk of exclusion

We undertook an analysis of sweep 6 of the Millennium Cohort Study, administered in 2015, when participants were 14 years old. This is a UK-wide large dataset that includes data on temporary exclusion from school as well as individual, family and school level data.

We applied a binary logistic regression model to sweep 6 of the dataset. We began by identifying 4 categories of learning difficulties within the data:

- Group 1: Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia
- Group 2: ADHD and behavioural problems
- Group 3: Autism and Asperger's Syndrome
- Group 4: Speech and developmental problems

Drawing on previous literature, we identified a range of factors that we added progressively to the model, to observe how the effect of learning difficulties on exclusion changed after taking account of these factors. These included cohort-member specific, parent and household related, and school related factors.

Why We Did It

School exclusion has multiple negative consequences for young people

At the Salvesen Mindroom Centre we hear repeatedly from families that their child with a learning difficulty has been excluded from school. This may occur through the formal process prescribed in the law, or by unlawful or 'informal' means. We wanted to understand what the predictors for exclusion might be in more detail.

The evidence to date shows that exclusion from school has negative consequences for children and young people, and may include:

- poor educational attainment and unemployment
- reduced confidence and increased anxiety
- drug use and crime
- mental and physical health issues

Scottish school pupil statistics show that the rate of exclusion for pupils with ASN is almost 5 times that of pupils with no ASN.ⁱⁱ In addition, boys are more likely to be excluded from school than girls. League tables and the pressure to perform exacerbates exclusion rates. However schools with high quality pastoral care tend to have a lower rate of exclusion.

ⁱ <https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/cls-studies/millennium-cohort-study/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/AttendanceAbsenceDatasets>

You can cite this paper as: Aitken & Wang, (2019), Learning Difficulties and Exclusion from School, Salvesen Mindroom Research Briefing, number 1.