

How and Why Does Social Exclusion Affect Individuals?

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Abstract: This essay explores the various effects of social isolation, emphasizing its psychological, social, and economic repercussions on individuals and society. Based on extensive empirical research, this study investigates the causes of social exclusion, such as cognitive shifts, emotional turmoil, identity conflicts, and economic inequalities. The article shows that social exclusion impacts both the mental and physical health of individuals and contributes to ongoing cycles of adversity, inequality, and social instability. Social exclusion is a widespread problem that weakens community unity and democratic participation. It promotes inclusive policies and structural reforms to tackle its underlying reasons. The essay highlights the significance of comprehending the extensive effects of social exclusion to promote a fairer and more peaceful society.

Keywords: Social exclusion, isolation, social influence, individual

1. Introduction

The field of psychology encompasses a wide range of complex phenomena, and social exclusion is one such phenomenon that has garnered significant attention from researchers. Social exclusion refers to the process by which individuals or groups are systematically disadvantaged, marginalized, or isolated within a society or community [1]. It can manifest in various forms, such as economic exclusion, discrimination, ostracism, or limited access to resources and opportunities. To understand its impact on individuals, we must examine the psychological, social, and economic dimensions of social exclusion. However, some argue that social exclusion does not have a significant social impact on people. They believed that social exclusion only affects the excluded person themselves. This essay will explore how and why social exclusion affects individuals, drawing upon empirical evidence from various fields of research. Firstly, the essay will explain why social exclusion occurs from various perspectives, and secondly, this research will describe how social exclusion affects the excluded and society in different ways.

2. Why social exclusion affects individuals

There are many reasons for social exclusion. Firstly, the cognitive consequences of social exclusion are substantial such as the Cyberball experiment by Williams et al. [2]. They demonstrated that exclusion triggered cognitive changes. Individuals subjected to exclusion exhibit heightened vigilance towards social threats, leading to increased susceptibility to negative social cues. This heightened sensitivity often results in the misinterpretation of neutral or ambiguous social interactions as hostile or dismissive, perpetuating a cycle of social withdrawal. Social exclusion triggers a cascade

of negative emotional responses. Human beings are inherently social creatures, wired to seek social bonds and connections. When individuals are excluded from social groups, it can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and sadness. These emotional responses are not merely transient, they can have long-lasting impacts on mental health. Prolonged exposure to social exclusion can contribute to the development of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Secondly, social exclusion disrupts an individual's sense of identity and belonging. Being part of a social group provides people with a sense of purpose, identity, and validation. When this is stripped away, individuals may grapple with questions of self-worth and identity crisis. This identity disturbance can lead to a range of emotional and behavioral problems, as individuals struggle to find their place in society. Thirdly, social exclusion has tangible economic consequences. Many aspects of life, including employment opportunities, educational attainment, and access to healthcare, are often tied to social networks. Excluded individuals may face barriers to accessing these resources, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage and poverty. This economic impact can further exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalization.

3. How social exclusion affects individuals

3.1. Social exclusion can lead to negative behaviours

Social exclusion can often precipitate negative behavioral responses. In some cases, individuals may react to feelings of exclusion by pursuing alternative avenues for social inclusion. Unfortunately, these paths can sometimes involve engaging in risky or deviant behaviors. Such actions can further exacerbate social isolation and lead to increased stigmatization, thereby perpetuating a harmful cycle.

3.2. Social exclusion can affect mental health

One of the primary ways social exclusions affects individuals is through its detrimental impact on mental health. Numerous studies have shown a strong association between social exclusion and mental health problems. Experiences of social exclusion are strongly associated with depression. A longitudinal study by Cacioppo et al. [3] demonstrated that prolonged social isolation can lead to depressive symptoms. This is attributed to the negative impact on self-esteem and the feelings of worthlessness that often accompany exclusion. Social exclusion can also contribute to the development of anxiety disorders. A study by Alexandre [4] found that individuals who reported feeling excluded in social situations were more likely to develop social anxiety disorder. The fear of further rejection can perpetuate a vicious cycle of avoidance and anxiety. Furthermore, social exclusion can have a profound impact on an individual's self-identity and self-worth. According to Tajfel and Turner [5]'s social identity theory, individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into social groups. When individuals experience social exclusion based on their group membership, it can lead to a sense of devaluation and a diminished sense of self-worth. Empirical studies have supported this theory, demonstrating that experiences of social exclusion can erode an individual's self-esteem and identity [6].

However, Morgan [7] in his research indicated in certain situations, deliberately choosing not to engage with specific social groups or networks can be advantageous for one's mental health. This is particularly true if those groups are characterized by harmful or toxic behaviors or attitudes. Opting to distance oneself from such environments can lead to positive mental health outcomes, as it helps individuals avoid negative influences and potentially damaging interactions. This choice reflects a proactive approach to maintaining self.

3.3. Social exclusion can affect physical health

Empirical evidence also highlights the negative consequences of social exclusion on physical health. Prolonged exposure to social exclusion has been linked to increased stress levels. Social exclusion can also influence an individual's health behaviors and coping mechanisms. Research by Hawkley and Cacioppo[3] suggests that socially isolated individuals are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and poor dietary choices. These behaviors contribute to a range of physical health problems, including cardiovascular disease and obesity. In addition, social exclusion is closely intertwined with the social determinants of health, which include factors like socioeconomic status, education, and housing. Research has consistently shown that individuals who are socially excluded tend to reduce access to quality education and housing. These factors contribute significantly to health disparities and are supported by empirical data [8]. This demonstrates that social exclusion is not solely a psychological or emotional issue but can have tangible consequences for an individual's physical well-being.

3.4. Social exclusion affects economic status

The profound impact of social exclusion extends well beyond health, significantly influencing economic disparities and obstructing social mobility. A key economic consequence of social exclusion is the evident income inequality. Wilkinson and Pickett [9], in "The Spirit Level," underscore this by illustrating a robust link between income disparity and social exclusion. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced as excluded groups often have restricted access to economic opportunities, leading to lower income and a persistent poverty cycle. Discrimination in the labor market further exacerbates these economic disparities. Marginalized groups, including minorities and individuals with disabilities, frequently encounter employment barriers. The OECD [10]'s report, "Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy," sheds light on how exclusionary practices limit formal employment access, relegating individuals to precarious, low-wage jobs.

However, Beatriz & Morduch [11] study considers the impact of social exclusion on the economy from a different perspective. They argued that the exclusion of specific demographic groups from accessing financial services can result in the concentration of wealth and economic opportunities within a limited segment of society. This phenomenon tends to benefit financial institutions and individuals who enjoy more privileged access to these services. Such a scenario fosters an economic environment where financial power and opportunities are unevenly distributed, favoring those already integrated into the financial system. This dynamic not only accentuates economic disparities but also perpetuates a cycle of financial privilege and exclusion. This pattern of financial exclusion and its resultant concentration of economic advantages are critical topics for both economic analysis and policy formulation, as they have significant implications for social equity and the overall health of the economy.

3.5. Social exclusion affects education

Education plays a crucial role in facilitating economic mobility, yet access to high-quality education remains a significant barrier for individuals from marginalized communities. Supporting these findings, Sirin [12] further demonstrates that students who experience social exclusion in educational settings tend to show lower academic performance and aspirations. Such experiences have a profound and lasting impact on their socioeconomic opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

Checchi [13] in his book thought social exclusion within the realm of education, characterized by the restricted access of certain societal groups to high-quality educational resources, can result in the formation of a stratified workforce. This workforce stratification manifests as a distinct division between high-skilled and low-skilled labor. Consequently, industries and sectors that depend heavily

on a substantial workforce of low-skilled labor may derive economic benefits from this divide. Such a scenario underscores a critical socio-economic issue where educational inequity not only influences the quality of the workforce but also perpetuates a cycle of economic disparity, favoring sectors that capitalize on the availability of low-skilled labor at potentially lower wage rates. This complex interplay between educational access and workforce stratification has profound implications for both economic development and social equality.

3.6. Social exclusion affects wealth accumulation

Furthermore, the impact of social exclusion extends beyond education, significantly influencing wealth accumulation. This is starkly illustrated in the Martin [14] report on global wealth inequality, which reveals that the wealthiest 1% of the population own more wealth than the combined assets of the bottom 99%. Individuals who face social exclusion are often found within this lower percentile, a situation that carries profound economic consequences. Tackling social exclusion is not solely a social justice issue, it is an economic imperative. Effective resolution requires a collaborative approach across various sectors, aimed at ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources. Such efforts are crucial in empowering every individual to participate fully and prosper in society.

3.7. Social exclusion can lead to social isolation

Social exclusion can lead to social isolation. Additionally, social exclusion can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice. When certain groups are consistently excluded or marginalized, stereotypes about them may persist or even intensify. This can result in discrimination, further social isolation, and a reinforcing cycle of exclusion. For example, racial or ethnic minorities who experience social exclusion may face racial profiling and discrimination, which in turn can lead to more exclusion and perpetuation of negative stereotypes. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health by Berkman and Syme [15] found that social isolation is a significant risk factor for mortality. Excluded individuals often lack social support networks, increasing their vulnerability to health problems. Research conducted by Sampson and Laub [16] in the "Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control" indicates that individuals who experience social exclusion are more likely to engage in criminal activities. This can further perpetuate the cycle of marginalization. Excluded individuals may become politically disengaged, feeling that the system does not represent their interests. This phenomenon is documented in a study by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady [17] on political participation, highlighting how social exclusion can erode democratic engagement. Social exclusion also intersects with various forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. Empirical studies have consistently shown that individuals who experience discrimination based on their race, gender, or sexual orientation are more likely to face social exclusion [18]. Social exclusion also has broader societal implications. It can undermine social cohesion and trust within a community or society as a whole. When people feel excluded, they are less likely to engage in social or civic activities, which can weaken the fabric of society and hinder collective problem-solving. High levels of social exclusion can lead to social unrest and conflict, further destabilizing communities and societies.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, social exclusion stands as a pervasive and profoundly impactful phenomenon that casts its shadow across various dimensions of human existence. Empirical findings from a diverse array of research fields underscore its pernicious effects on mental well-being, self-identity, physical health, economic prospects, educational attainments, and social cohesion. The recognition and rectification

of social exclusion are not merely imperatives of social justice but also essential for the cultivation of overall well-being and equitable opportunities for every member of society.

Looking to the future, addressing social exclusion requires a multi-faceted approach that involves policy changes, societal shifts, and individual actions. Future directions in tackling social exclusion might focus on inclusive policies that ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights for all members of society, regardless of their background or circumstances. There's a growing recognition of the need for systemic changes to address the root causes of exclusion, such as poverty, discrimination, and inequality. Efforts may also concentrate on education and awareness-raising to change societal attitudes and reduce stigma and discrimination against marginalized groups. Additionally, empowering affected individuals and communities to participate actively in decision-making processes can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions. The goal is to create a more inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully and contribute to their community. In essence, addressing social exclusion is not only a moral obligation but a vital step towards creating a more equitable, harmonious, and thriving society for all.

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