

1. Setting the scene

Brief introduction to social exclusion and inclusion



As a starting point, here are two of the most commonly used definitions.

Social Exclusion

A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas experience a combination of *linked* circumstances. Such linked and mutually reinforcing problems can combine to create complex and fast-moving vicious cycles.

Derived from Social Exclusion Unit, *Preventing Social Exclusion*, March 2001, p.10

The definition adopted in Exeter's Social Inclusion Strategy is:

Social exclusion describes a process through which individuals and communities are denied access to economic, social political and cultural life, alienated and distanced from mainstream society.

It is evidenced by a combination of linked problems, for example, unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.

Social Inclusion

A process where the varying needs of a community, and the groups which constitute it, are recognised, prioritised and met. It is the positive management of diversity, to which all organisations should aspire.

McDonald V & Olley D, *Aspiring to inclusion: A handbook for councils and other organisation*, Suffolk County Council 2002.

To find out more about the realities behind these definitions, click on the title below to listen to an **audiovisual** overview of the cycles of disadvantage that many people face: ***Finding people behind the jargon.***

You can read a summary of circumstances that can make people more vulnerable to these cycles, below:

Groups frequently at risk of social exclusion

The list below shows some types of life experiences that can make people more at risk of social exclusion.

These are *experiences* shared by certain groups rather than a list of '*types of people*'. This stresses the point that social exclusion is about what happens to people. It is not an inevitable result of who they are. Just being vulnerable does not lead to exclusion. The exclusion comes from a combination of factors, including how vulnerable people are and the experiences they have had. It is added to when society fails to make adequate arrangements for their particular needs and circumstances.

- Disadvantage in neighbourhoods (communities of place)
- Racism and Black and Minority Ethnic isolation
- Physical disability
- Learning disability
- Unemployment
- Youth exclusion
- Poverty
- Mental health isolation
- Homelessness
- Gender inequality
- Refugee isolation
- Patterns of criminal offending and the effects of having a criminal record
- Traveller isolation
- Discrimination and isolation for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Trans people*
- Low literacy skills and social exclusion
- Single- and young-parenting
- Looked-after children leaving care
- Older age
- Caring for adult and incapacitated dependants
- Domestic violence
- Alcohol and drug addiction

* See link to [Section 8](#) for definition

We all have a very wide variety of life experiences. We may **all** find ourselves in a situation where we experience social exclusion at some point.

To find key notes about each of the life experiences listed as headings above look at [Section 8](#). These Key Notes are down to earth, helping to add a little insight into the human experience of exclusion. You may find that they help by reminding you of, or adding to, your own knowledge. They may highlight the things you would like to learn more about. You'll also find web links and references to sources of further information.

Exercise 1.1: Awareness review - how this touches on my work

In the left hand column of the table below, list people at risk of experiencing social exclusion. Think of some people who's experiences you are already very aware of, and, also think of people who's experiences you haven't yet consciously taken account of in your work .

In the right hand column, jot down ideas about how any of the examples you thought of might touch you and your work. Highlight where you've found it hard to think of examples.

| People vulnerable to social exclusion | How they might experience social exclusion |
|--|--|
| <i>EXAMPLE: People with poor sight</i> | <i>EXAMPLE: Can't read the notices in the doctor's waiting room.</i> |
| | |

How does this awareness benefit me and my role?

How does your understanding of social exclusion affect the way you work with people? Or how does it affect the services you offer? For example, you may need to remind yourself you need to speak slowly and clearly for a deaf person to lip-read – and it's not always obvious that you're speaking to someone who's hearing is limited.

Asking yourself questions will help you keep aware of what's inclusive and what's exclusive – with benefits for both you and your clients. Think about how keeping in touch with the difficult realities people face, could benefit your interaction with clients and colleagues, and strengthen your organisation: How could it help you feel better about the service you are giving? How could it increase your understanding of other people? How might it help you personally to feel more confident and more skilled? How might it broaden your experience with the potential to develop your career?

Exercise 1.2: Why I want to keep aware

In the box below jot down and decide what your personal incentives will be to use the resources on this website. You might decide it's useful to share this too with your line manager.

My incentives for using this resource:

EXAMPLE: "I want to use this resource to achieve greater understanding – and I want to highlight the areas of training and awareness raising needed for myself and my staff. I want it to help me check out the groups/ areas of work we need to focus on reaching out to."