

## 2. Going deeper – What are the causes of social exclusion?



### What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion is a complex issue closely linked to poverty and low income. The term is used to show how some people are denied the opportunities and basic rights which the rest of society take for granted. The term particularly covers concern about exclusion from education, employment, access to services and social life.

Social exclusion is characterised by:

- Poor access to services or low uptake
- A perceived lack of opportunity and choice
- Low participation in the formal economy
- Poor participation in democratic and community life
- Isolation.

Social exclusion can affect whole neighbourhoods, cities and regions as well as individuals. Recently, the Government has also begun to focus on 'social cohesion' or 'community cohesion'. This means creating a society that is not fractured by racism, poverty, violence, and so on.

### Why are some people excluded?

Social exclusion is something that can happen to anyone. But some people are significantly more at risk than others. Research has found that people with certain backgrounds and experiences are disproportionately likely to experience social exclusion.

The key risk factors/ indicators of social exclusion include:

- long-term dependence on low/ inadequate income, high levels of debt
- long-term unemployment
- insecure, low paid, low quality employment
- low level of education, illiteracy and computer illiteracy
- growing up in a vulnerable family (e.g. single parent, large family, domestic violence)
- disability
- poor health
- living in an area of multiple deprivation (crime, drugs, anti-social behaviour)
- homelessness and precarious housing conditions
- immigration, ethnicity, racism and discrimination
- coming out of institutions (prisons, institutional care, mental institutions)

The most important characteristic of social exclusion is that these problems are linked and reinforce each other. They can combine to create a complex and fast-moving vicious cycle.

You might like to click below to listen to an **audiovisual** overview of the cycles of disadvantage that many people face, and the ways services can help to break these:

***Finding people behind the jargon.***

## Individual vulnerability to exclusion

Many people face a number of factors that make them vulnerable to exclusion. These factors are often inter-linked and build on each other in a complex way. This makes it difficult to tackle them effectively. The table below gives a summary of the main factors that make people vulnerable to exclusion. Many of the personal factors are things that an individual cannot change, even if they wanted to. It is these factors that are often the subject of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination make some people vulnerable to social exclusion just because of who they are.

<b>Personal factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Sexuality</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Natural abilities</li> <li>• Low self esteem</li> </ul>
<b>Social Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prejudice against particular groups</li> <li>• Individual social support (families &amp; friends)</li> <li>• Extent of an individual's social networks (wider social ties)</li> <li>• The level of "social capital" within the community (e.g. social networks, community run activities, engagement in local decision making, trust in services)</li> <li>• Poor education and skills</li> <li>• Educational attainment</li> <li>• Access to community, sporting and cultural activity</li> <li>• Level of crime and/or fear of crime</li> <li>• Access to affordable housing</li> <li>• Access to affordable goods and services</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor built environment / lack of meeting places</li> <li>• Rural isolation</li> <li>• Poor public transport</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of income relative to others</li> <li>• Money worries</li> <li>• Skill levels</li> <li>• Access to jobs</li> <li>• Employment conditions</li> <li>• Affordability of goods and services</li> <li>• Affordability of housing</li> </ul>

For some people these factors reinforce each other to create multiple layers of deprivation. This leads to persistent and repeated exclusion. For others exclusion is temporary and short-lived and disappears once the underlying problem is overcome. Individuals and communities have remarkably different levels of resilience. Some people manage to find personal and community coping-mechanisms that enable them to deal with potentially large problems without falling into exclusion.

Because of this, it is important to respond to the needs that each individual or community has identified. It's often important too to help people gain the personal confidence to express

themselves and identify their needs. It isn't useful to presume people's needs based on stereotypes. All people have the right to be treated as individuals, not just as part of a group.

The Government's Social Exclusion Unit website (Oct 2003) provides an idea of the scale of social exclusion:

- almost **ten per cent** of relevant parts of the population experience significant problems, e.g. nine per cent of all 16-18s were not in learning or work in 1997; ten per cent of young men aged 18-24 are alcohol dependent, seven per cent of men born in 1953 had served a prison sentence by the age of 46. Many of these groups have experienced more than one of these problems;
- as many as **a third** of the population or more are in some way at risk, e.g. by 1994/95 one in three children were growing up in low income households; one in three men have a criminal record by age 30;
- **a fraction of one per cent** of the relevant population is affected by the most extreme forms of multiple deprivation (e.g. becoming pregnant under 16, being excluded from school, sleeping rough).

We can also get an idea of the scale of the problem in Exeter:

- The Index of Multiple deprivation (IMD) 2000 shows there are 22,775 people - that's **over twenty percent** of Exeter's population – who are classified as income deprived. This is worse than the national average. In fact, 5.3% of Exeter's population live in the most deprived 10% of wards in England.

## Active and Passive Discrimination - barriers to inclusion

As we said earlier, just being vulnerable does not lead to exclusion. The exclusion comes from a combination of factors, including how vulnerable the people are because of their circumstances and experiences. It is added to when society fails to make adequate arrangements for their particular needs.

A good example of this is how prejudice against certain people leads to active discrimination and exclusion. For example the difficulties faced by Travellers in finding places to stop or establish bases.

A lack of awareness of the different needs of particular individuals or groups can lead to passive discrimination. So can a failure to make necessary changes to meet their needs. For example, people whose physical disabilities aren't visible face exclusion because of lack of awareness and the passive discrimination that results.

**Prejudice, lack of awareness and generalisations that can arise from both, lead to discrimination.**

We can all address active discrimination by checking out our own prejudices and challenging prejudice in the workplace. Organisations are often home to passive discrimination. This is often because they fail to make adequate provision for the varied needs of vulnerable people. Or, they may apply conditions that operate disproportionately to the disadvantage of particular groups. This can create inequalities in service provision that leads to further exclusion. We can address this too, by raising our own awareness and making changes where we find can.

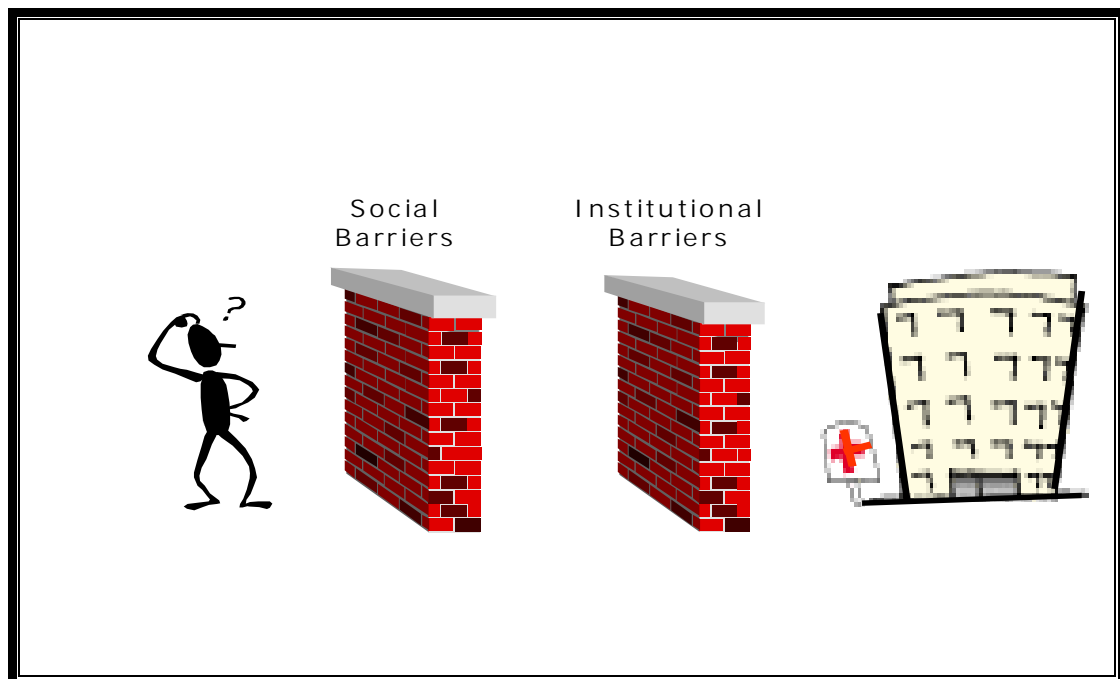
Being aware of an individual's vulnerability to exclusion is not enough. We also need to consider the social and institutional barriers that prevent them from accessing the services they need.

**Social:**

- Stigmatism and prejudice
- Racism
- Sexism
- Intolerance
- Attitude to disability

**Institutional:**

- Inflexibility of service delivery
- Reliance mostly on written medium for communication
- Poor leadership
- Lack of awareness within management and among staff
- Lack of planning
- Lack of time / capacity to meet individual needs
- Lack of resources
- Lack of involvement of client–consultation, user group feedback
- Poor employment practice



## What is the effect of exclusion?

Social exclusion has huge costs for the individuals, groups and communities that experience it. According to the Government's Social Exclusion Unit website (October 2003) these include:

- **Underachieving educational potential:** A teenager from a deprived neighbourhood is five times more likely to go to a failing school. They are also less likely to achieve good qualifications.
- **Financial loss:** Socially excluded groups are more likely to be on benefit or in low paid work. A young person who isn't working loses the opportunity to earn £143.10 for men and £128.10 for women.
- **Poor access to services:** For example in poor areas there are fewer GPs per head, fewer financial or legal services and less shops. To illustrate this, research in the mid 1990s estimated that 1.5 million households used no financial services. In one Scottish low-income housing estate flooded in the winter of 1994, 95 per cent of the tenants were not insured.
- **Stress:** Socially excluded groups usually face significantly higher levels of stress and mental health problems. This is not surprising given their risk of social isolation and the difficulties of managing on low incomes.
- **Health:** Things like poor diet, lack of opportunities for exercise and high rates of smoking can contribute to health problems.
- **Lack of hope:** Many who are socially excluded feel little hope for the future. Barriers like disability, health problems, lack of transport, or few local jobs may limit their opportunities to participate in society. This feeling may be made worse by anxieties that prospects for their children may be no better.

## What can we do about it? – Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion is the active process of eliminating social exclusion. It covers a range of initiatives and policies aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination. They aim to minimise social exclusion, maintain Social Cohesion (creating a society not fractured by racism, poverty, violence and so on) and build Social Capital (e.g. social networks community run activities, engagement in local decision making, trust in services)

In practice social inclusion works at four levels:

- Individual - promoting the inclusion of vulnerable individuals and groups
- Communities - strengthening social networks and community infrastructure
- Organisations - promoting inclusive practice & improving access to facilities & services
- Strategic - encouraging wider economic, political and cultural change

**There are a number of very practical things we can do to promote social inclusion by developing an inclusive personal work practice.**

**As an individual you can:**

- Increase your awareness of the experiences of social exclusion faced across the range of your clients and potential clients (see [Section 8](#))
- Review personal attitudes to clients to see where negative stereotypes or labelling affects your work (see [Section 3](#))
- Become more aware of clients' needs and difficulties, and work to remove the physical and psychological barriers that lie between you, by checking whether the way things are done may be affecting people's ability to use your service ([Sections 3, 4, 5 & 6](#))
- Develop a client-centered approach, focusing on the individual and their needs.
  - Respect for diversity (see [Section 5](#))
  - Active listening skills (see [Section 5, Exercise 5.1](#))
  - Effective communication skills (see [Section 5, Exercise 5.2](#))
  - Methods of helping clients to inform you and to become more active in their relationship with you (also see [Section 6, Exercise 6.3](#))
- Developing specific personal and work related skills, including:
  - Assertiveness abilities – to challenge discriminatory actions, attitudes and processes (see [Section 4, Exercises 4.2 & Section 7, Exercise 7.2](#))
  - Awareness of how power operates in relationships ([Section 4, Exercise 4.2](#))
  - Skills in evaluating what is making your service work well or poorly for clients (see [Section 6, Exercise 6.3](#))

**If you manage an organisation or steer a project, then promote social inclusion at an organisational level:****Inclusion is....**

"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." (Aspiring to Inclusion)

**and involves...**

- Recognising diversity and planning how to overcome barriers to inclusion
- Systematically looking at all areas of practice in order to identify potential barriers
- Working with client groups to identify specific barriers to access
- Promoting an inclusive culture internally within organisations, through employment and workplace practice
- Promoting the active involvement of clients / beneficiaries in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects / services.

The *Open Hearts Open Minds* resources in the sections that follow, will help you explore more ideas about how you can tackle social exclusion and promote social inclusion.