

Social Exclusion

The relevance of social exclusion has been considered in *R v Lewis* [2014] NSWSC 1127, affirmed in *Kentwell v R (No 2)* [2015] NSWCCA 96 and more recently applied in *R v Rossi-Murray* [2019] NSWSC 482.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide courts and the profession with an overview of published research, government reports and inquiries, and academic commentary on social exclusion. The cases listed above discuss social exclusion.

This chapter refers primarily to social exclusion as discussed in the work of Professor Roy Baumeister and as applied in those cases: *R v Lewis* [2014] NSWSC 1127 [39]–[43]; *Kentwell v R (No 2)* [2015] NSWCCA 96 [89]–[94]; and *R v Rossi-Murray* [2019] NSWSC 482 [60], [62]–[67].

Introduction

- 1 Social exclusion refers to interpersonal and group-based processes through which individuals are rejected, ignored or ostracised. Because belonging is a fundamental human need,¹ social exclusion is widely understood to be a form of psychosocial stress for individuals.²
- 2 Research has found that social exclusion is associated with physiological changes in individuals,³ has far-reaching effects on cognition and behaviour, including on self-regulation, aggression and other self-defeating behaviour,⁴ and influences social information processing in various ways.⁵ Social exclusion and low social belonging are also associated with antisocial behaviour and contact with the criminal justice system.⁶ On the other hand, as noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ('AIHW'), 'good social relationships can foster health, creativity, self-esteem, job satisfaction, cooperative behaviours and encourage social mobility and crime reduction'.⁷

¹ Roy F Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation' (1995) 117(3) *Psychological Bulletin* 497 (Author Manuscript [here](#)); Kipling D. Williams, 'Ostracism: A Temporal Need-Threat Model' (2009) 41 *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 275 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

² See, eg, Yuhong Qiu et al, 'The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-control and Attribution' (2025) 234 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 2, citing David S Chester and C Nathan DeWall, 'Prefrontal Recruitment During Social Rejection Predicts Greater Subsequent Self-Regulatory Imbalance and Impairment: Neural and Longitudinal Evidence' (2014) 101 *NeuroImage* 485 (Author Manuscript [here](#)); Belinda Platt, Kathrin Cohen Kadosh and Jennifer Y F Lau, 'The Role of Peer Rejection in Adolescent Depression' (2013) 30 *Depression and Anxiety* 809, 814.

³ See, eg, Ginette C Blackhart, Lisa A Eckel and Dianne M Tice, 'Salivary Cortisol in Response to Acute Social Rejection and Acceptance by Peers' (2007) 75 *Biological Psychology* 267 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁴ Roy F Baumeister, Jean M Twenge and Christopher K Nuss, 'Effects of Social Exclusion on Cognitive Processes: Anticipated Aloneness Reduces Intelligent Thought' (2002) 83(4) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 817; Roy F Baumeister et al, 'Social Exclusion Impairs Self-Regulation' (2005) 88(4) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 589; C Nathan DeWall et al, 'Violence Restrained: Effects of Self-Regulation and Its Depletion on Aggression' (2007) 43(1) *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 62.

⁵ See, eg, Aleksi H Syrjämäki and Jari K Hietanen, 'The Effects of Social Exclusion on Processing of Social Information: A Cognitive Psychology Perspective' (2019) 58(3) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 730 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁶ Tyler F Stillman and Roy F Baumeister, 'Social Rejection Reduces Intelligent Thought and Self-Regulation' in C Nathan DeWall (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 132, 133.

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ('AIHW'), *Social Cohesion and Social Connection* (Web Article, 16 October 2025).

Terminology and Definitions

- 3 The term ‘social exclusion’ has been applied in a range of contexts and for different purposes,⁸ from social psychology and cognitive neuroscience to social policy.
- 4 In social policy settings, ‘social exclusion’ is generally used refer to the systemic dynamics of marginalisation, which often overlap, and may create barriers to full economic, social and political participation.⁹ Poverty and income equality are elements within a broader cluster of factors,* and social exclusion is understood as ‘a multidimensional phenomenon not limited to material deprivation’.¹⁰ In this context, the term is used to inform policy approaches that address these important structural and systemic issues in order to create a more inclusive and equal society.
- 5 This chapter focuses primarily on social exclusion as an interpersonal experience of thwarted or threatened belonging,¹¹ which may produce a range of physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioural effects in individuals. However, interpersonal experiences of social exclusion are not separate from systemic forms of exclusion, which may also have adverse impacts on individual wellbeing and behaviour. For instance, interpersonal racism is a recognised form of social exclusion that also operates at a systemic level.¹² Further, the interplay between structural exclusion and social exclusion is complex and likely to have compounding adverse effects at the individual level.¹³
- 6 In this chapter:
 - *Belonging* refers to a subjective feeling that a person is an integral part of their surrounding systems (family, friends, school, work, communities, cultural groups).¹⁴
 - *Social exclusion* refers to interpersonal and group-based processes which threaten or thwart a person’s fundamental need for belonging.¹⁵
 - *Chronic social exclusion* (also called pervasive social exclusion) refers to prolonged or long-term experiences of exclusion and marginalisation that persist over time rather than occurring as isolated episodes.¹⁶

⁸ Markku Jahnukainen and Tero Järvinen, ‘[Risk Factors and Survival Routes: Social Exclusion as a Life-Historical Phenomenon](#)’ (2005) 20(6) *Disability & Society* 669, 669 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁹ See, eg, Rikke Siersbaek et al, ‘[Social Exclusion and Its Impact on Health over the Life Course: A Realist Review Protocol](#)’ (2023) 6 *HRB Open Research* 34; Jennie Popay et al, *Understanding and Tackling Social Exclusion: Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health from the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network* (Report, World Health Organization, February 2008) 33, 36.

* See also Bugmy Bar Book, ‘[Low Socio-Economic Status and Poverty](#)’.

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘[Identifying Social Inclusion and Exclusion](#)’ in *Report on the World Social Situation 2016: Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development* (United Nations, 2016) ch 1, 17, cited in Rikke Siersbaek et al (n 9) 1.

¹¹ See, eg, Frode Stenseng et al, ‘[Preschool Social Exclusion, Aggression, and Cooperation: A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Need-to-Belong and the Social-Reconnection Hypothesis](#)’ (2014) 40(12) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 1637.

¹² See eg, Pat Dugeon and Roz Walker, ‘[An Urgent Call to Address Interpersonal and Structural Racism and Social Inequities in Australia](#)’ (2022) 400(10368) *The Lancet* 2014; Meena Dhanda (ed) *Oxford Intersections: Racism by Context* (Oxford University Press, online ed, 20 March 2025).

¹³ See, eg, Ruth Levitas et al, *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion* (Report, Department of Sociology and School for Social Policy, University of Bristol, January 2007).

¹⁴ Kelly-Ann Allen et al, ‘[Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research](#)’ (2021) 73(1) *Australian Journal of Psychology* 87, 88.

¹⁵ Roy F Baumeister and Mark Leary, ‘[The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation](#)’ (1995) 117 (3) *Psychological Bulletin* 497 (Author Manuscript [here](#)); Kipling D Williams, ‘[Ostracism](#)’ (2007) 58 *Annual Review of Psychology* 425.

¹⁶ Paolo Riva et al, ‘[Chronic Social Exclusion and Evidence for the Resignation Stage: An Empirical Investigation](#)’ (2017) 34(4) *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 541, 541.

- *Structural exclusion* refers to phenomena — as discussed in social policy research and related fields — such as poverty, limited access to education, barriers to stable employment, insecure housing, and restricted access to healthcare and social services.¹⁷ These are systemic forms of marginalisation, experienced by individuals and groups, which create barriers to full economic, social and political participation.¹⁸
- 7 Importantly, social *exclusion* is distinct from social *isolation*, although both have demonstrated detrimental impacts on individuals.¹⁹ Social isolation involves ‘an objective lack of connection and interaction with social networks’,²⁰ including family, friends and community.

Fundamental Human Need to Belong

- 8 Baumeister and Leary (1995) theorised that belonging is a fundamental human need, characterised by a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting, positive interpersonal relationships.²¹ Human motivation to form and maintain interpersonal bonds was long recognised,²² but their theory emphasised the *centrality* of belonging in human motivation, supported by abundant evidence elicited from their comprehensive review of hundreds of empirical studies across social, developmental, clinical, personality and health psychology:

the need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. Forming or solidifying social attachments generally produces positive emotion, whereas real, imagined, or even potential threats to social bonds generate a variety of unpleasant emotional states.²³

- 9 Baumeister and Leary also found that social deprivation is linked to adverse psychological and physical health outcomes:

Deficits in belongingness apparently lead to a variety of ill effects, consistent with the view that belongingness is a need (as opposed to merely a want). Both psychological and physical health problems are more common among people who lack social attachments. Behavioural pathologies, ranging from eating disorders to suicide, are more common among people who are unattached.²⁴

Importance of perception

- 10 In a study exploring whether different personality profiles could meaningfully impact levels of self-reported perceived ostracism, Waldeck et al (2023) suggest that the subjective perception of social exclusion and ostracism may be of greater consequence than actual (or objective) social exclusion, since a person may not necessarily ‘interpret the event [of objective exclusion] as being ostracism or vice versa’.²⁵

¹⁷ See, eg, Rikke Siersbaek et al, ‘[Social Exclusion and Its Impact on Health over the Life Course: A Realist Review Protocol](#)’ (2023) 6 *HRB Open Research* 34.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, eg, Byron R Johnson et al, ‘[Alone on the Inside: The Impact of Social Isolation and Helping Others on AOD Use and Criminal Activity](#)’ (2018) 50(4) *Youth & Society* 529 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

²⁰ Emily Stevens, Rachel Carson and Liz Wall, [Social Isolation: Factors, Dynamics and Effects of Isolation for Older People](#) (Research Snapshot, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1 February 2024), 1.

²¹ Roy F Baumeister and Mark Leary, ‘[The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation](#)’ (1995) 117 (3) *Psychological Bulletin* 497, 497-500 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

²² Ibid 497.

²³ Ibid 520.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Daniel Waldeck et al, ‘[Who Is More Likely to Feel Ostracized? A Latent Class Analysis of Personality Traits](#)’ (2023) 213 *Personality and Individual Differences* 112325, 2.

Categories of Social Exclusion

- 11 Categories of social exclusion recognised and discussed in the literature include rejection, betrayal, ostracism, racism, discrimination, bullying, humiliation, prejudice and stigmatisation. Despite being distinct negative interpersonal events, empirical studies have found that these phenomena produce similar effects on individuals.²⁶
- 12 Social exclusion events can be explicit (such as outward rejection of the excluded person) or subtle (such as ostracism, which can involve ignoring or neglect of the excluded person).²⁷ Childhood emotional abuse* is understood as a profound and chronic form of rejection, involving the betrayal of caregivers and has been shown to cause both rejection sensitivity and increased likelihood of suicidal ideation.²⁸ Where exclusion experiences occur in childhood, such as abuse or bullying, they may also be referred to as adverse childhood experiences.*
- 13 Importantly, social exclusion is not a closed category, and not everyone who experiences social exclusion or threatened belonging will experience the negative effects. Rather, social exclusion is likely to exist as a continuum²⁹ with a range of individual and systemic factors that interact as part of a dynamic process to determine the degree to which an individual suffers the negative consequences of social exclusion.³⁰

Prevalence and Trends

- 14 Trends in a wide range of experiences including social exclusion, sense of belonging, discrimination, racism, childhood abuse and bullying have been documented, but remain piecemeal.

Prevalence of social exclusion

- 15 Currently, in Australia, although some statistics relate to the prevalence of structural exclusion such as poverty,* there is no single measure for the prevalence of social exclusion.
- 16 The Scanlon–Monash Index of Social Cohesion measures social cohesion across five domains (belonging, worth, social justice and equity, participation, and acceptance and rejection) and is a potential source of population-level data on belonging and acceptance. The indexes, expressed as percentages, are constructed by aggregating responses to 17 survey questions on the Mapping

²⁶ Laura Smart Richman and Mark R Leary, '[Reactions to Discrimination, Stigmatization, Ostracism, and Other Forms of Interpersonal Rejection: A Multimotive Model](#)' (2009) 116(2) *Psychological Review* 365, 370 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

²⁷ Ibid.

* See also *Bugmy Bar* Book, '[Child Abuse and Neglect](#)'.

²⁸ See, eg, Sarah L Brown et al, '[Childhood Emotional Abuse and Suicidal Ideation Intensity: The Serial Effects of Rejection Sensitivity, Thwarted Belongingness, and Perceived Burdensomeness](#)' (2026) 392 *Journal of Affective Disorders* 120252 (Author Manuscript [here](#)); Xianliang Zheng et al, '[Why Avoidance? The impact of Childhood Emotional Abuse on Social Avoidance](#)' (2025) 13(1) *BMC Psychology* 558.

* See also *Bugmy Bar* Book, '[Impacts of Custody and Detention on Young People](#)'.

²⁹ Frode Stenseng et al, '[Preschool Social Exclusion, Aggression, and Cooperation: A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Need-to-Belong and the Social-Reconnection Hypothesis](#)' (2014) 40(12) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 1637, 1644.

³⁰ See, Kelly-Ann Allen et al, '[Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research](#)' (2021) 73(1) *Australian Journal of Psychology* 87.

* See *Bugmy Bar* Book, '[Low Socio-Economic Status and Poverty](#)'.

Social Cohesion survey. The scores are indexed to a baseline (100%) set in 2007, allowing the monitoring of social cohesion domains over time.³¹

- 17 In addition to the index itself, which provides a high-level overview of social cohesion trends over time, responses to the Mapping Social Cohesion survey provide additional insight into discrete experiences, such as sense of belonging and discrimination. The results of the 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion survey are reported by O'Donnell and colleagues (2024).³²

Trends in belonging

- 18 In 2024, the score on the 'sense of belonging' domain was indexed at 77%, one point lower than in 2023.³³ Between 2018 and 2024 there was a decrease in the sense of belonging by eight points (down from 85%).
- 19 Survey questions asked respondents about the sense of pride and belonging they have in Australia. With respect to a sense of belonging
- 47% of the population said they 'have a sense of belonging in Australia' to a great extent
 - 38% said to a moderate extent, and
 - 14% said only slightly or not at all.³⁴

Trends in discrimination

- 20 In 2024, the domain of acceptance and rejection was indexed at 63%, two points lower than in 2023 and 18 points lower than the peak recorded in 2021, during Covid-19.³⁵
- 21 The Mapping Social Cohesion survey also recorded experiences of discrimination by respondents over 12 months and found that between 2023 and 2024:
- 1 in 6 (17%) Australian adults experienced discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion
 - 1 in 3 (34%) overseas-born Australian adults from non-English speaking backgrounds experienced discrimination on the same basis.³⁶

Racism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- 22 According to statistics cited by the 2021 Australian Law Reform Commission Report, *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias*, a nationally representative biennial study conducted by Reconciliation Australia revealed that

³¹ James O'Donnell, Qing Guan and Trish Prentice, [Mapping Social Cohesion 2024](#) (Report, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, November 2024) ('Report: *Mapping Social Cohesion*') 12.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid 15.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid 19.

³⁶ Report: *Mapping Social Cohesion* (n 31) 19. See also Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Social Cohesion and Social Connection](#) (Web Article, 16 October 2025).

52% of Aboriginal respondents had experienced racial prejudice in the previous six months, compared to 21% of the general community. [Further,] thirty-six per cent reported having received verbal abuse.³⁷

- 23 Similarly, a longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by Alam et al (2026) found that 48.8% of children in the study had family experiences of racism, discrimination, or prejudice.³⁸ Importantly, the children in this study were ‘from 11 distinct locations across Australia, representing various socioeconomic statuses, rural and remote areas, and cultural groups’.³⁹
- 24 In an earlier study, in 2019, Dr Siddharth Shirodkar used an internationally recognised measure of implicit bias with a broad cross-section of the Australian population and found:
- 75% of Australians held an implicit bias against Indigenous Australians; and
 - 35% of Australians held what might be regarded as a strong implicit bias.⁴⁰

Prevalence of bullying

- 25 Drawing on data sources such as the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (‘LSAC’), the Australian Child Wellbeing Project (‘ACWP’) and the Youth Digital Participation Survey, the AIHW estimates that in 2016:
- 70% of children aged 12–13 had experienced at least 1 bullying-like behaviour in the last 12 months (160,000 children); and
 - approximately 60% of the 96,800 children who had experienced bullying-like behaviour had experienced it within the last month.⁴¹
- 26 Of the children who had experienced bullying-like behaviour in the last month:
- more than two-fifths (43%, or 41,300) had experienced this behaviour about once a week or more frequently.⁴²
- 27 According to ABS analysis of data from LSAC, in 2016:
- 17% of all children aged 12–13 experienced online bullying behaviour in the month before the survey;
 - 10% experienced only online bullying; and
 - 32% experienced online and face-to-face bullying.⁴³
- 28 The AIHW also reports that bullying is more commonly experienced by children with disability; from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; or who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual,

³⁷ Australian Law Reform Commission (‘ALRC’), *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias* (Report No 138, December 2021) 417, citing Reconciliation Australia, 2020 *Australian Reconciliation Barometer* (25 November 2020) 19 (citations omitted).

³⁸ Md Ashraf Alam et al, ‘[Adverse Childhood Experiences among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Adolescents in Australia: Role of a Family with Strong Kinship and Economic Well-Being](#)’ (2026) 250 *Public Health* 106061, 4.

³⁹ Ibid 2.

⁴⁰ Siddharth Shirodkar, ‘[Bias against Indigenous Australians: Implicit Association Test Results for Australia](#)’ (2019) 22(3–4) *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 3, 4, 11.

⁴¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (‘AIHW’), [Australia’s Children](#) (Web Report, 25 February 2022).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

trans or gender diverse, or have intersex variations.⁴⁴ According to the 2014 ACWP, 74% of children with disability experienced bullying compared with 59% of children without disability.⁴⁵

- 29 For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Alam et al (2026) reported that bullying at school was the most prevalent adverse childhood experience, with 67.4% of children experiencing school bullying.⁴⁶ The study also found that prevalence of bullying was slightly lower among children from financially stable families (63.2%).

Prevalence of childhood abuse*

- 30 According to the AIHW, about 1,200 children in Australia were the subject of substantiated abuse in care in 2021–22:

- 52% were girls and 47% were boys
- 46% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- for 32% of children, physical abuse was the most common primary type of abuse
- 29% experienced emotional abuse as the primary type of abuse.⁴⁷

Impacts

Physiological impacts

- 31 Social exclusion has a wide range of documented impacts on individuals, both immediately and in the longer term. For instance, social exclusion can cause acute and measurable physiological changes. A study by Blackhart et al (2007) found that rejected participants had greater concentrations of salivary cortisol following rejection than participants in the ‘accepted’ and control groups.⁴⁸
- 32 Studies have also found that social pain is experienced in a similar way to physical pain. In an important neuroimaging study by Eisenberger et al (2003), researchers discovered that the social pain of rejection activated the anterior cingulate cortex — the same part of the brain that is activated during physical experiences of pain — suggesting that ‘[s]ocial pain is analogous in its neurocognitive function to physical pain, alerting us when we have sustained injury to our social connections’.⁴⁹

Social pain can be relived

- 33 Another study by Chen et al (2008) found that while physical and social pain may share strong similarities, social pain is unique in its ability to be ‘easily relived, whereas physical pain is not’.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (‘AIHW’), [Australia’s Children](#) (Web Report, 25 February 2022).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Md Ashraf Alam et al, ‘[Adverse Childhood Experiences among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Adolescents in Australia: Role of a Family with Strong Kinship and Economic Well-Being](#)’ (2026) 250 *Public Health* 106061, 4.

* See also *Bugmy Bar Book*, ‘[Child Abuse and Neglect](#)’.

⁴⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (‘AIHW’), [Child Protection Australia 2021–22](#) (Web Report, 7 May 2024).

⁴⁸ Ginette C Blackhart, Lisa A Eckel and Dianne M Tice, ‘[Salivary Cortisol in Response to Acute Social Rejection and Acceptance by Peers](#)’ (2007) 75 *Biological Psychology* 267, 271 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁴⁹ Naomi I Eisenberger et al, ‘[Does Rejection Hurt? An fMRI Study of Social Exclusion](#)’ (2003) 302 (5643) *Science* 290, 292.

⁵⁰ Zhansheng Chen et al, ‘[When Hurt Will Not Heal: Exploring the Capacity to Relive Social and Physical Pain](#)’ (2008) 19(8) *Psychological Science* 789, 794.

Further, Williams and Nida note that '[e]ven recollections of short-term ostracism can retrigger the original pain associated with the event'.⁵¹

Reduced self-regulation and working memory

- 34 Capacity for self-regulation (or the ability to alter or modify one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviours to remain aligned with the standards set by their social group) is required for 'being a good member'.⁵² Consistently, research suggests that social exclusion may diminish cognitive control and impair an individual's capacity to effectively monitor and regulate behaviour. For example, Themanson et al (2014) reported that socially excluded individuals demonstrated reduced cognitive control in action-monitoring tasks, indicating diminished capacity for behavioural regulation following exclusion.⁵³
- 35 Similarly, Hawes et al (2012) found that in children, peer ostracism adversely affected cognitive processes, including attention and executive functioning, which suggests that exclusion may interfere with the cognitive resources necessary for self-regulation, decision making, and adaptive social functioning.⁵⁴ In a study examining the impact of social exclusion on working memory in adolescent girls, Fuhrmann et al (2019) revealed that experiences of exclusion were associated with impaired working memory performance and reduced cognitive functioning.⁵⁵

Anger and aggression

- 36 There is a 'substantial body of empirical research on the positive correlation between social exclusion and aggressive behaviour'.⁵⁶ Experimental studies have consistently shown that social exclusion fuels aggressive and antisocial tendencies, not only toward the source of the exclusion but also toward 'uninvolved third parties'.⁵⁷ Researchers theorise that exclusion increases hostile cognition, impairs self-regulation, and heightens sensitivity to perceived social threat, thereby increasing the likelihood of reactive or displaced aggression.⁵⁸
- 37 Williams and Nida (2011) provide a theoretical account for these findings, noting that when opportunities for re-inclusion appear limited, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviours directed toward restoring threatened needs of control and meaningful existence.⁵⁹ They observe that, in such circumstances:

⁵¹ Kipling D Williams and Steve A Nida, '[Ostracism: Consequences and Coping](#)' (2011) 20(2) *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 71, 72 (Author Manuscript [here](#)), citing Chen *ibid*.

⁵² Todd F Heatherton, '[Neuroscience of Self and Self-Regulation](#)' (2011) 62 *Annual Review of Psychology* 363, 363 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁵³ Jason R Themanson et al, '[The Effects of Social Exclusion on the ERN and the Cognitive Control of Action Monitoring](#)' (2014) 51(3) *Psychophysiology* 215.

⁵⁴ David J Hawes et al, '[The Effects of Peer Ostracism on Children's Cognitive Processes](#)' (2012) 9(5) *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 599.

⁵⁵ Delia Fuhrmann et al, '[Social Exclusion Affects Working Memory Performance in Young Adolescent Girls](#)' (2019) 40 *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience* 100718.

⁵⁶ Yuhong Qiu et al, '[The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-Control and Attribution](#)' (2025) 243 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 2.

⁵⁷ Luisa A.M. Mahr, Janet Kleber & Nilüfer Aydin, '[Not all Exclusion Is Created Equal: Effects of Physical and Social Components of Exclusion on Well-Being, Prosocial, and Antisocial Behavioral Intentions](#)' (2023) 18(1) *Social Influence* 2242617, 2, citing Jean M Twenge and Roy F Baumeister, 'Social Exclusion Increases Aggression and Self-Defeating Behaviour while Reducing Intelligent Thought and Prosocial Behavior' in Dominic Abrams, Michael A Hogg and José M Marques (eds), *The Social Psychology of Inclusion and Exclusion* (Psychology Press, 2005) 41.

⁵⁸ Kipling D Williams and Steve A Nida, '[Ostracism: Consequences and Coping](#)' (2011) 20(2) *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 71 (Author Manuscript [here](#)); Yuhong Qiu et al, '[The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-Control and Attribution](#)' (2025) 243 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 6.

⁵⁹ Williams et al (n 58) 73.

control and meaningful-existence needs are more likely to direct the coping response ... though ensuring further exclusion ... antisocial behaviors may provide a way to reestablish control over the social environment; if ostracism threatens one's sense of control, aggressive behavior is one way to restore it.⁶⁰

Decision making, self-defeating behaviour and risk taking

- 38 Experimental studies have indicated that individuals who experience ostracism are more likely to make impulsive or risky decisions, particularly in circumstances involving uncertainty or diminished social connectedness. A study by Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister (2002) found that social exclusion leads to unintentionally self-defeating behaviour.⁶¹ More specifically, across four experiments, they observed that people:

whose social ties have been threatened ... become more willing to do things that are likely to produce a bad outcome for them ... [such as] high-risk choices that offered relatively poor prospects of good outcomes. [Further] ... anticipated social exclusion led people to select fewer health-enhancing behaviors ... [and they also] procrastinated more and practiced less for an upcoming important test.⁶²

- 39 Likewise, Buelow and Wirth (2017) found that ostracised participants engaged in significantly greater risky decision-making behaviour following exclusion, suggesting that social exclusion may reduce sensitivity to potential negative consequences and impair deliberative decision-making processes.⁶³
- 40 More recent research by Newton and von Hecker (2025) found that recalling experiences of ostracism altered perceptions of risk and benefit across multiple domains, underscoring 'the complex interplay between emotional experiences and decision-making processes'.⁶⁴ Their study demonstrated that recollections of exclusion were associated with decreased perceptions of financial and health-related risks, but heightened perceptions of social risks, with these effects becoming more pronounced under time pressure conditions.⁶⁵ The authors suggested that social exclusion may alter cognitive appraisal processes and increase susceptibility to short-term or emotionally driven decision making.⁶⁶
- 41 In a study on temporal discounting, Bahrami and Borhani (2023) found that social exclusion may also increase temporal discounting ('TD') — the cognitive processes involving 'comparison of the value of immediate versus delayed rewards'.⁶⁷ Importantly, they noted that higher TD rates reflect 'a higher tendency for immediate and small rewards over delayed but larger rewards ... [while] low TD rates reflect lower impulsivity'.⁶⁸ Their study shows that social exclusion can

⁶⁰ Kipling D Williams and Steve A Nida, 'Ostracism: Consequences and Coping' (2011) 20(2) *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 71 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁶¹ Jean M Twenge, Kathleen R Catanese and Roy F Baumeister, 'Social Exclusion Causes Self-Defeating Behavior' (2002) 83(3) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 606, 613 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Melissa T Buelow and James H Wirth, 'Decisions in the Face of Known Risks: Ostracism Increases Risky Decision-Making' (2017) 69 *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 210, 215.

⁶⁴ Joseph Newton and Ulrich von Hecker, 'Pressure of the Past: How Recalling Ostracism Influences Risk and Benefit Perception' (2025) 19 *Journal of Social, Behavioural, and Health Sciences* 1, 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid 16.

⁶⁷ Radmehr Bahrami and Khatereh Borhani, 'Excluded and Myopic: Social Exclusion Increases Temporal Discounting' (2023) 18(8) *PLoS ONE* e0290175, 2, citing George F Loewenstein, 'Frames of Mind in Intertemporal Choice' (1988) 34(2) *Management Science* 200.

⁶⁸ Bahrami and Borhani (n 67) 2.

directly affect intertemporal decision-making, with excluded participants tending to discount future rewards more steeply than included participants.⁶⁹

Deviant peer connections

- 42 A study by Kornienko et al (2020) on the dynamic pathways between rejection and antisocial behaviour ('AB') in adolescents found that rejection status was associated with friendship selection, specifically:

rejected youth with low levels of AB were less likely to befriend others with similarly low levels of AB and tended to affiliate with others who had highest levels of AB ... [As a result, adolescents who are] socially excluded but not yet engaging in antisocial behavior ... [may join peer groups] in which they are likely to subsequently adopt and escalate their antisocial behavior.⁷⁰

Reduced pain responsiveness and emotional numbing

- 43 Horn-Hofmann et al (2021) found that the induction of social pessimism was associated with reduced responsiveness to pain,⁷¹ supporting earlier findings by DeWall and Baumeister (2006) that social exclusion and related psychosocial stressors may trigger a self-protective shutdown, in the form of emotional and physical numbing.⁷²
- 44 In a meta-analysis of 192 studies on social exclusion, Blackhart et al (2009) found that while exclusion consistently elicited emotional reactions, individuals often displayed emotional detachment, muted affective responses, and reductions in subjective distress over time.⁷³ Reduced empathy and prosocial behaviour
- 45 Early experimental research by DeWall and Baumeister (2006) found that, alongside increased pain tolerance and emotional numbing, socially excluded participants demonstrated reduced interpersonal empathy, suggesting that exclusion may diminish emotional responsiveness to the suffering of others.⁷⁴ More recent neuroscientific research supports these findings. In an experimental study involving 42 participants, Fan et al (2021) found that socially excluded participants demonstrated reduced empathic responses to others' pain during later-stage cognitive processing following exclusion.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Radmehr Bahrami and Khatereh Borhani, 'Excluded and Myopic: Social Exclusion Increases Temporal Discounting' (2023) 18(8) *PLoS ONE* e0290175, 9.

⁷⁰ Olga Kornienko, Thao Ha and Thomas J Dishion, 'Dynamic Pathways between Rejection and Antisocial Behavior in Peer Networks: Update and Test of Confluence Model' (2020) 32(1) *Development and Psychopathology* 175, 185 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁷¹ Claudia Horn-Hofmann et al, 'The Induction of Social Pessimism Reduces Pain Responsiveness' (2022) 22(2) *Scandinavian Journal of Pain* 374.

⁷² C Nathan DeWall and Roy F Baumeister, 'Alone but Feeling No Pain: Effects of Social Exclusion on Physical Pain Tolerance and Pain Threshold, Affective Forecasting, and Interpersonal Empathy' (2006) 91(1) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1, cited in Tyler F Stillman and Roy F Baumeister, 'Social Rejection Reduces Intelligent Thought and Self-Regulation' in C Nathan DeWall (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Exclusion* (Oxford Academic Press, 2013) 132, 135. See also Michael J Bernstein and Heather M Claypool, 'Social Exclusion and Pain Sensitivity: Why Exclusion Sometimes Hurts and Sometimes Numbs' (2012) 38(2) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 185.

⁷³ Ginette C Blackhart et al, 'Rejection Elicits Emotional Reactions but Neither Causes Immediate Distress nor Lowers Self-Esteem: A Meta-Analytic Review of 192 Studies on Social Exclusion' (2009) 13(4) *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 269.

⁷⁴ DeWall and Baumeister 'Alone but Feeling No Pain' (n 72).

⁷⁵ Min Fan et al, 'Social Exclusion Down-Regulates Pain Empathy at the Late Stage of Empathic Responses: Electrophysiological Evidence' (2021) 15 *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 634714.

46 Prosocial behaviour, being behaviour that ‘is performed to benefit others, rather than to benefit the self’⁷⁶ and ‘is a vital source of social harmony and good relationships’,⁷⁷ is impacted by social exclusion. Twenge et al (2007) noted in the results of their study that ‘[e]xclusion manipulations caused large and significant reductions in prosocial behavior’.⁷⁸

47 According to Twenge et al,

[a]cross these experiments, the clear majority of control participants helped, whereas the clear majority of socially excluded ones did not. Why? Empathy and trust were both significantly reduced by social exclusion.⁷⁹

Social resignation in people experiencing chronic social exclusion

48 Building on the work of Williams (2009),⁸⁰ subsequent research demonstrates a strong link between chronic or pervasive social exclusion and social resignation. As Smart Richman and Leary (2009) explained

[s]ome rejections are one-time affairs and, even when there is no possibility of relational rapprochement, people can usually put the episode behind them. In other cases, however, rejection occurs in an ongoing and persistent series of specific events, sometimes over a prolonged period of time. The chronic target of childhood bullying, the person who receives the cold shoulder from a family member over many years, and the immigrant who confronts pervasive negative community attitudes in the new country may experience a pattern of chronic rejection that may in extreme cases last a lifetime.⁸¹

49 Later studies by Riva et al (2017) confirmed that ‘chronic experiences of social exclusion were associated with higher levels of negative emotions’⁸² and social resignation. The researchers also tested whether ‘acute experiences of social exclusion’ could result in social resignation but found that people exposed to short-term exclusion recovered their threatened psychological needs.⁸³

50 Marinucci and Riva (2024) provide a theoretical synthesis of research of chronic social exclusion and radicalisation. Drawing on existing empirical literature, they propose that persistent exclusion may even increase vulnerability to extremist group recruitment by intensifying vulnerable people’s need for belonging and social connection.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Jean M Twenge et al, ‘[Social Exclusion Decreases Prosocial Behaviour](#)’ (2007) 92(1) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, 56.

⁷⁷ Ibid 63.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid 63.

⁸⁰ Kipling D Williams, ‘[Ostracism: A Temporal Need-Threat Model](#)’ (2009) 41 *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 275 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁸¹ Laura Smart Richman and Mark R Leary, ‘[Reactions to Discrimination, Stigmatization, Ostracism, and Other Forms of Interpersonal Rejection: A Multimotive Model](#)’ (2009) 116(2) *Psychological Review* 365, 370 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁸² Paolo Riva et al, ‘[Chronic Social Exclusion and Evidence for the Resignation Stage: An Empirical Investigation](#)’ (2017) 34(4) *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 541, 542 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁸³ Ibid 560.

⁸⁴ Marco Marinucci and Paolo Riva, ‘[Chronic Social Exclusion, Radicalization, and Extremism](#)’ in Michaela Pfundmair, Andrew H Hales and Kipling D Williams (eds), *Exclusion and Extremism: A Psychological Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2024) 263. See also Michaela Pfundmair and Geoffrey Wetherell, ‘[Ostracism Drives Group Moralization and Extreme Group Behavior](#)’ (2019) 159(5) *The Journal of Social Psychology* 518 (Author Manuscript [here](#)) and Michaela Pfundmair, ‘[Ostracism Promotes a Terroristic Mindset](#)’ (2019) 11(2) *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 134 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

Interaction with Other Vulnerabilities

- 51 Some research has also considered the interactions between experiences of social exclusion and other vulnerabilities, including mental ill health, adolescence, homelessness and asylum-seeker status.

Psychiatric disorders and mental ill health

- 52 Reinhard et al (2019) undertook a systematic review of experimental ostracism research in psychiatric disorders, including borderline personality disorder, major depressive disorder and substance use disorder (among others), and found a reciprocal relationship in which recurrent or persistent ostracism may

play a pivotal role in both the development of psychiatric disorders and the maintenance of clinical symptoms. On the other hand, psychiatric disorders may provoke ostracism (i.e. stigmatization), which can exacerbate psychopathological symptoms.⁸⁵

Adolescents

- 53 Multiple studies have found that adolescents are more vulnerable to peer rejection than adults.⁸⁶ A study by Platt and colleagues (2013) also noted a reciprocal relationship between peer rejection and depression in adolescents: rejection predicts depressive symptoms and vice versa.⁸⁷

*People experiencing homelessness**

- 54 Marinucci et al (2023) examined the psychological impacts of homelessness through two quasi-experimental studies comparing participants who were experiencing homelessness with those who were not.⁸⁸ Those experiencing homelessness reported significantly higher levels of depression, helplessness, alienation, and feelings of unworthiness, which the authors describe as the ‘resignation stage’ following chronic social exclusion. The research also identified experiences of interpersonal rejection, stigma, and exclusion as strongly associated with poorer psychological wellbeing. Importantly, perceptions of economic inequality intensified these effects by increasing homeless individuals’ awareness of their marginalised social position and exclusion from broader society.⁸⁹

Asylum seekers

- 55 Marinucci and Riva (2021) found that chronic social exclusion among asylum seekers longitudinally predicted increased resignation, including greater depression, hopelessness, alienation, and psychological withdrawal over time.⁹⁰ They reported that persistent exclusion and social isolation can have cumulative mental health consequences for highly marginalised groups.

⁸⁵ Matthias A Reinhard et al, ‘[The Vicious Cycle of Social Exclusion and Psychopathology: A Systematic Review of Experimental Ostracism Research in Psychiatric Disorders](#)’ (2020) 270(5) *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 521, 522.

* See also *Bugmy Bar* Book, ‘[Homelessness](#)’.

⁸⁶ See, eg, Belinda Platt, Kathrin Cohen Kadosh and Jennifer Y F Lau, ‘[The Role of Peer Rejection in Adolescent Depression](#)’ (2013) 30 *Depression and Anxiety* 809; George E Higgins, Nicole L Piquero and Alex R Piquero, ‘[General Strain Theory, Peer Rejection, and Delinquency/Crime](#)’ (2011) 43(4) *Youth & Society* 1272.

⁸⁷ Platt et al (n 86).

⁸⁸ Marco Marinucci et al, ‘[On the Lowest Rung of the Ladder: How Social Exclusion, Perceived Economic Inequality and Stigma Increase Homeless People’s Resignation](#)’ (2023) 62(4) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 1817.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Marco Marinucci and Paolo Riva, ‘[Surrendering to Social Emptiness: Chronic Social Exclusion Longitudinally Predicts Resignation in Asylum Seekers](#)’ (2021) 60(2) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 429 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

Together, these studies demonstrate how ongoing exclusion, stigma, and marginalisation can contribute to severe psychological distress and disengagement from society among vulnerable populations.

Link to Criminal Justice System

- 56 Researchers such as Stillman and Baumeister (2013) have noted that ‘people with relatively low levels of social belonging are more likely to commit crimes and act aggressively’.⁹¹ In 2005, Baumeister et al found that ‘socially excluded individuals exhibit increased aggression, poorer intellectual performance, a loss of prosocial behavior, and a susceptibility to self-defeating behavior patterns’.⁹² Further,

[a]t the societal level, and at multiple points in history, groups and categories of people who have felt excluded by the dominant culture have shown sadly similar patterns as reflected in high crime rates, underperformance in schools and intellectual life, withdrawal from positive contributions to the general societal good, and elevated rates of substance abuse, suicide, and other self-destructive patterns.⁹³

- 57 Many experiences of social exclusion, such as childhood abuse and school exclusion, are also social determinants of justice, meaning that they are associated with a greater likelihood of becoming justice-involved.^{94*} Further, many of the consequences of social exclusion — such as reduced empathy, diminished self-regulation, antisocial behaviour and greater affiliation with deviant peer groups — are closely linked to criminal justice involvement.⁹⁵

Impacts of Imprisonment

- 58 Imprisonment has been identified as a major disruption to fundamental human needs; Traversa et al (2025) describe imprisonment as ‘a widespread’ and ‘institutional form of chronic social exclusion’⁹⁶ which ‘threatens the four fundamental human needs for belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence’⁹⁷ and ‘often profoundly affects the physical and mental health of individuals without actually rehabilitating them’.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Tyler F Stillman and Roy F Baumeister, ‘[Social Rejection Reduces Intelligent Thought and Self-Regulation](#)’ in C Nathan DeWall (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 132, 133.

⁹² Roy F Baumeister et al, ‘[Social Exclusion Impairs Self-Regulation](#)’ (2005) 88(4) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 589, 603.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ruth McCausland and Eileen Baldry, ‘[Who Does Australia Lock Up? The Social Determinants of Justice](#)’ (2023) 12(3) *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 37.

*See also *Bugmy Bar Book* ‘[Impacts of Custody and Detention on Young People](#)’ and ‘[Interrupted School Attendance and Suspension](#)’.

⁹⁵ See, eg, Travis C Pratt and Francis T Cullen, ‘[The Empirical Status of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s General Theory of Crime: A Meta-Analysis](#)’ (2000) 38(3) *Criminology* 931; Darrick Jolliffe and David P Farrington, ‘[Empathy and Offending: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis](#)’ (2004) 9(5) *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 441; Alexander T Vazsonyi, Jakub Mikuška and Erin L Kelley, ‘[It’s Time: A Meta-Analysis on the Self-Control–Deviance Link](#)’ (2017) 48 *Journal of Criminal Justice* 48; Stacy Tzoumakis et al, ‘[Parental Offending and Children’s Conduct Problems](#)’ (2019) 571 *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* (Australian Institute of Criminology); Nathalie M Dumornay et al, ‘[Improved Emotion Regulation Following a Trauma-Informed CBT-Based Intervention Associates with Reduced Risk for Recidivism in Justice-Involved Emerging Adults](#)’ (2022) 13 *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 951429.

⁹⁶ Teresa Traversa et al, ‘[Understanding Imprisonment through the Lens of Social Exclusion: A Novel Integrative Theoretical Model](#)’ (2025) 47(5) *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 257, 258.

⁹⁷ Ibid 261.

⁹⁸ Ibid 258.

Possible Risk and Protective Factors

- 59 Owing to the ‘complex interplay between emotional experiences and decision-making processes’,⁹⁹ it is difficult to identify formal risk and protective factors for social exclusion and its associated adverse effects. Research seeking to identify mediating factors that may predict whether a person is likely to respond negatively to episodes of social exclusion remains at an early stage. However, some studies identify factors that may be associated with an increased or decreased risk of both social exclusion and its adverse effects.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

- 60 It is well established that having attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (‘ADHD’) significantly increases young person’s risk of peer rejection, as Mikami (2013) notes

It is difficult to overstate the level of social exclusion from peers that individuals with ADHD typically face. In fact, social exclusion is so extreme in magnitude that, although interpersonal difficulties are not currently part of the diagnostic criteria for ADHD, some have argued that they should be included.¹⁰⁰

Interpersonal proximity (closeness) of ostraciser

- 61 A qualitative study with a small sample size (21 staff and students at a university) conducted by Waldeck and colleagues (2015) revealed that ‘people attribute more meaning and significance to their ostracism if it has a detrimental effect on their important relationships’.¹⁰¹ However, other research indicates that exclusion by strangers can also cause distress in excluded individuals.¹⁰²

Personality, attribution style and psychological traits

- 62 Some research has started to look at factors that influence or contribute to negative outcomes associated with social exclusion. A recent exploratory study by Waldeck et al (2023) examined whether personality profiles could meaningfully influence whether an individual is more likely to feel ostracised and found that people ‘high in negative emotionality ... [and] low in extraversion ... report higher levels of perceived ostracism compared to others’.¹⁰³
- 63 Qiu et al (2025) also examined the moderating role of attribution style on the relationship between social exclusion and aggressive behaviour. The study found that attribution style — the way individuals attribute and interpret social events — ‘significantly moderated the relationship’ and that ‘under both internal and external attribution conditions, attribution mitigated the effect of social exclusion on aggressive behavior’.¹⁰⁴ For instance,

⁹⁹ Joseph Newton and Ulrich von Hecker, ‘[Pressure of the Past: How Recalling Ostracism Influences Risk and Benefit Perception](#)’ (2025) 19(1) *Journal of Social, Behavioural, and Health Sciences* 1, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Amori Yee Mikami, ‘[Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and the Challenges of Social Exclusion](#)’ in C Nathan DeWall (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 228, 229 (citations omitted).

¹⁰¹ Daniel Waldeck Ian Tyndall and Nik Chmiel, ‘[Resilience to Ostracism: A Qualitative Inquiry](#)’ (2015) 20(10) *The Qualitative Report* 1646, 1665.

¹⁰² See, eg, Kipling D Williams, Choon Hei T Cheung and Wan Choi, ‘[CyberOstracism: Effects of Being Ignored Over the Internet](#)’ (2000) 79(5) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 748.

¹⁰³ Daniel Waldeck et al, ‘[Who Is More Likely to Feel Ostracized? A Latent Class Analysis of Personality Traits](#)’ (2023) 57 *Personality and Individual Differences* 112325, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Yuhong Qiu et al, ‘[The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-Control and Attribution](#)’ (2025) 243 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 6.

hostile attribution bias influences information processing early on, particularly during the encoding stage. This bias leads individuals to interpret ambiguous cues as hostile, triggering a series of negative responses, including aggressive behavior.¹⁰⁵

- 64 Discussing cognitive vulnerabilities such as negative attributional styles in adolescence, Platt and colleagues (2013) explained negative attributional styles:

meaning that they attribute negative events, such as peer rejection to internal ('I am not a likeable person'), stable ('I have never been well-liked'), and global ('I am no good at anything') causes, and positive events, such as being invited to a party to external ('they are just being nice'), unstable ('this is just a one-off invitation'), and specific ('at least one person likes me') causes.¹⁰⁶

- 65 Other research has identified that some psychological traits may act as protective factors and explain why some people are not as profoundly impacted by social exclusion. For example, the qualitative Waldeck study (2015) found some people to be less affected:

not all people needed to use strategies to reduce the negative impact of ostracism as, for some, there was little impact. Such responses may relate to an individual's level of resilience to such phenomena... Similarly, preliminary research has suggested that people who are high in positive psychological traits such as resilience and optimism, tend to report feeling low levels of distress following ostracism in the workplace.¹⁰⁷

Rejection sensitivity and pervasive social exclusion

- 66 In a study that examined the role of two potentially mediating factors in the risk for developing depression in people who experience social exclusion, Niu et al (2023) found that the experience of being socially excluded increased the excluded individual's rejection sensitivity.¹⁰⁸ These researchers also found that social self-efficacy, or the belief that one is 'capable of initiating social contact and developing new friendships',¹⁰⁹ may decrease in response to being excluded, which increases risk for depression.¹¹⁰
- 67 More recent studies have suggested that 'feelings of social rejection can be magnified in people who have experienced traumatic childhoods, reflected by reported increases in rejection sensitivity in maltreated individuals'.¹¹¹ Where social exclusion is chronic or pervasive, as in the case of childhood abuse, individuals are at heightened risk of negative responses and outcomes.

¹⁰⁵ Yuhong Qiu et al, '[The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-Control and Attribution](#)' (2025) 243 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 8, citing Nicki R Crick and Kenneth A Dodge, '[A Review and Reformulation of Social Information-Processing Mechanisms in Children's Social Adjustment](#)' (1994) 115(1) *Psychological Bulletin* 74.

¹⁰⁶ Belinda Platt, Kathrin Cohen Kadosh and Jennifer Y F Lau, '[The Role of Peer Rejection in Adolescent Depression](#)' (2013) 30 *Depression and Anxiety* 809, 814.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Waldeck, Ian Tyndall and Nik Chmiel, '[Resilience to Ostracism: A Qualitative Inquiry](#)' (2015) 20(10) *The Qualitative Report* 1649, 1664, citing Inam Ul Haq, '[Workplace Ostracism and Job Outcomes: Moderating Effects of Psychological Capital](#)' in Valerij Dermol, Marko Smrkolj and Goran Đaković (eds), *Human Capital Without Borders: Knowledge and Learning for Quality of Life: Proceedings of the Management, Knowledge and Learning International Conference 2014* (ToKnowPress, 2014) 1309.

¹⁰⁸ Geng-feng Niu et al, '[Social Exclusion and Depression among Undergraduate Students: The Mediating Roles of Rejection Sensitivity and Social Self-Efficacy](#)' (2023) 42 *Current Psychology* 24198, 24203.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 24200.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Brenna Arledge, '[Neural Responses to Social Rejection in Rural Communities: A Cross-Sectional EEG Study of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Protective Factors](#)' (2026) 7(5) *Adversity and Resilience Science* 2, 5, citing Xianliang Zheng et al, '[Why Avoidance? The Impact of Childhood Emotional Abuse on Social Avoidance](#)' (2025) 13(1) *BMC Psychology* 558. See also Sarah L Brown et al, '[Childhood Emotional Abuse and Suicidal Ideation Intensity: The Serial Effects of Rejection Sensitivity, Thwarted Belongingness, and Perceived Burdensomeness](#)' (2026) 392 *Journal of Affective Disorders* 120252 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

Further, certain groups are more likely to experience pervasive social exclusion; they include those experiencing homelessness¹¹² and those who have been imprisoned.¹¹³

Access to social supports

- 68 A qualitative study by Waldeck et al (2015) found that social supports were ‘useful for participants in assisting with the reflection process following their ostracism’¹¹⁴ and that ‘without such social support, some participants highlighted how this would have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing by maintaining the pain and not allowing alternative interpretations’.¹¹⁵ Further research similarly suggests that social support may operate as a protective factor against the adverse effects of social exclusion. For example, in a review of the ostracism literature, Liu et al (2025) observed that supportive social relationships can buffer the psychological harms associated with exclusion and promote resilience, belonging, and emotional wellbeing.¹¹⁶
- 69 Research by Cochran (2014) concerning the impact of visitation while incarcerated revealed that ‘prisoners who were visited early in their prison term and who were visited consistently were significantly less likely to recidivate than prisoners who were never visited’,¹¹⁷ findings which ‘provide further support for the idea that social networks are important for re-entry and that contact during prison may be particularly salient’.¹¹⁸

Protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- 70 Alam et al (2026), investigating the impact of protective factors on adverse childhood experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, found that the two strongest protective factors against the adverse impact of family experiences of racism, discrimination or prejudice were strong family/kinship connections and household financial stability (economic wellbeing).¹¹⁹ In particular, strong family connections were associated with a significantly lower odds of experiencing four or more adverse childhood experiences.¹²⁰
- 71 These findings align with the well-established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing, which conceptualises connection to family and kinship as one of the seven domains of wellbeing.¹²¹

¹¹² Marco Marinucci et al, ‘[On the Lowest Rung of the Ladder: How Social Exclusion, Perceived Economic Inequality and Stigma Increase Homeless People’s resignation](#)’ (2023) 62(4) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 1817.

¹¹³ Teresa Traversa et al, ‘[Understanding Imprisonment through the Lens of Social Exclusion: A Novel Integrative Theoretical Model](#)’ (2025) 47(5) *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 257.

¹¹⁴ Daniel Waldeck, Ian Tyndall and Nik Chmiel, ‘[Resilience to Ostracism: A Qualitative Inquiry](#)’ (2015) 20(10) *The Qualitative Report* 1646, 1664.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Dongying Liu et al, ‘[The Relationship Between Social Support and Ostracism Among College Students: The Mediating Role of Social Connectedness and the Moderating Role of Flourishing](#)’ (2025) 15(9) *Behavioral Sciences* 1198.

¹¹⁷ Joshua C Cochran, ‘[Breaches in the Wall: Imprisonment, Social Support, and Recidivism](#)’ (2014) 51(2) *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 200, 218 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Md Ashraf Alam et al, ‘[Adverse Childhood Experiences among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Adolescents in Australia: Role of a Family with Strong Kinship and Economic Well-Being](#)’ (2026) 250 *Public Health* 106061, 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid 4–5.

¹²¹ Graham Gee et al, ‘[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing](#)’ in Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy and Roz Walker (eds), *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2nd ed, 2014) ch 4, 55, 57.

Responding to Social Exclusion

72 As a form of stress that violates the fundamental human need to belong,¹²² social exclusion has the potential to create measurable psychological and physiological dysfunction, highlighting the need for ways to restore belonging and address exclusion.

Integrative framework of belonging

73 Allen et al's (2021) integrative framework of belonging provides a model for understanding, assessing and fostering belonging.¹²³ It organises the antecedents of belonging into four interrelated components: competencies, opportunities, perceptions and motivations. Each component is a potential focus for intervention among adults, subject to individual needs and contextual factors:

- *belonging competencies* encompass social and emotional skills necessary for relationship formation and maintenance, including communication abilities, conflict resolution and emotional regulation;¹²⁴
- *belonging opportunities* describe access to safe, stable environments where positive relationships can develop. This includes mentorship programs, supportive groups and pathways to community participation;¹²⁵
- *belonging perceptions* involve subjective experiences of acceptance, social value and self-efficacy and reduced stigma;¹²⁶
- *belonging motivations* represent the inner drive to seek prosocial opportunities to belong.¹²⁷

Evidence-based interventions for treatment and prevention

74 Effective intervention is likely to require targeting of all four belonging dimensions through evidence-based approaches that address both treatment of existing offenders and prevention of initial or future offending. Research by Stuart and Taylor (2021) shows that stronger community ties and social connectedness reduce crime through prosocial norms, with a notable reduction in murder rates and other violent crimes.¹²⁸ The same study also noted that responses to crime that disrupt social networks, such as incarceration, have negative consequences.¹²⁹

75 Treatment interventions that address competencies and perceptions include cognitive behavioural therapy ('CBT'), which builds interpersonal problem-solving skills, emotional regulation and perspective-taking abilities.¹³⁰ Lipsey and Landenberger's meta-analysis found that 'best

¹²² Roy F Baumeister and Mark R Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation' (1995) 117(3) *Psychological Bulletin* 497 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

¹²³ Kelly-Ann Allen et al, 'Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research' (2021) 73(1) *Australian Journal of Psychology* 87.

¹²⁴ Ibid 92.

¹²⁵ Ibid 92–3.

¹²⁶ Ibid 94.

¹²⁷ Ibid 93–4.

¹²⁸ Brian A Stuart and Evan J Taylor, 'The Effect of Social Connectedness on Crime: Evidence from the Great Migration' (2021) 103(1) *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 18, 18.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Mark W Lipsey, Nana A Landenberger and Sandra Jo Wilson, 'Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Criminal Offenders' (2007) 3(1) *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 1; David B Wilson, Leana A Bouffard and Doris L MacKenzie, 'A Quantitative Review of Structured, Group-Oriented, Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Offenders' (2005) 32(2) *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 172 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

practice' CBT programmes were associated with a 52% reduction in recidivism relative to control groups among adult offender populations.¹³¹

- 76 Studies specific to social exclusion also note the potential of treatment interventions. For example, in their study on the mediating role of attribution style on aggression in socially excluded people, Qiu et al (2025) note that, although attribution bias is considered a relatively stable personality trait, interventions addressing an individual's attribution style may be effective in reducing aggressive behaviour in a socially excluded individual:

individuals can deal with social exclusion from a non-hostile perspective by learning positive attribution methods, thus reducing the occurrence of aggression. At the social support level, counselors and therapists may utilize professional psychological interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or situational simulation training, to help the excluded prevent and reduce the occurrence of conflict and aggressive behavior.¹³²

- 77 Other interventions of potential benefit identified in the literature include interpersonal psychotherapy ('IPT'), which targets an individual's interpersonal difficulties specifically,¹³³ and cognitive bias modification ('CBM').¹³⁴ CBM can target both interpretative biases ('CBM-I') and attentional biases ('CBM-A').¹³⁵
- 78 Community-level belonging may be enhanced through programs and approaches that foster collective efficacy and pro-social belonging opportunities; Allen et al (2021) suggest that '[c]ommunities and organisations can employ inclusive belonging principles that may improve the experience of belonging for people, particularly vulnerable to rejection and prone to social isolation and loneliness'.¹³⁶ Other research indicates that bolstering community ties may reduce 'intimate crimes' (those involving a close personal link between offender and victim) and drug offences by creating tighter-knit communities with stronger informal control mechanisms.¹³⁷
- 79 Restorative justice conferencing and related practices may support perceptions of belonging by providing a forum in which people who have offended can acknowledge and seek to repair harm, rebuild relationships where appropriate, and work towards reintegration.¹³⁸ Further, these approaches may assist in disrupting negative subjective experiences and perceptions of self and others which reduce motivation to connect with others.¹³⁹

¹³¹ Mark W Lipsey and Nana A Landenberger, 'The Positive Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Offenders: A Meta-Analysis of Factors Associated with Effective Treatment' (2005) 1(4) *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 451, 469.

¹³² Yuhong Qiu et al, 'The Impact of Social Exclusion on Aggressive Behavior: The Role of Self-Control and Attribution' (2025) 243 *Personality and Individual Differences* 113231, 8 (citations omitted).

¹³³ Belinda Platt, Kathrin Cohen Kadosh and Jennifer Y F Lau, 'The Role of Peer Rejection in Adolescent Depression' (2013) 30 *Depression and Anxiety* 809, 816.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ See further ibid 816.

¹³⁶ Kelly-Ann Allen et al, 'Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research' (2021) 73(1) *Australian Journal of Psychology* 87.

¹³⁷ Magdalena Domínguez and Daniel Montolio, 'Bolstering Community Ties as a Mean of Reducing Crime' (2021) 191 *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 916.

¹³⁸ See, eg, Lawrence W Sherman and Heather Strang, *Restorative Justice: The Evidence* (The Smith Institute, 2007); John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹³⁹ Allen et al (n 136) 94.

- 80 For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, belonging interventions require careful consideration of cultural identity, kinship and Country.¹⁴⁰ Culturally led healing programs that reconnect individuals with Elders, traditional practices and Country address all four dimensions through cultural revitalisation and affirmation of Indigenous identity.¹⁴¹

Attending to social exclusion and its structural drivers

- 81 Racism is a form of interpersonal social exclusion that has been linked to several adverse outcomes and inequalities. Priest et al (2024) analysed existing datasets on Aboriginal children (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and the Study of Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children). Using causal mediation analysis, they estimated that eliminating interpersonal racism through targeted policy interventions could reduce inequalities in children's mental health and sleep problems by 25–42%.¹⁴² This finding underscores the potential importance of sustained, targeted action against interpersonal racism and other forms of social exclusion.
- 82 Some recent exploratory studies of factors that may aid in reducing the impact of social exclusion suggest that policy measures aimed at structural disadvantage and exclusion may be effective at the individual level: discussing their research on social exclusion and people experiencing homelessness, Riva et al (2026) point to 'the importance of understanding how broader societal factors, such as economic inequality, intersect with personal experiences of exclusion to accelerate the process toward resignation'.¹⁴³ Further, 'interventions addressing both social and economic factors may be necessary to prevent the detrimental outcomes associated with chronic social exclusion'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Graham Gee et al, '[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing](#)' in Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy and Roz Walker (eds), *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing: Principles and Practice* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2nd ed, 2014) 55, 57; Pat Dudgeon et al, '[Effective Strategies to Strengthen the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#)' (Issues Paper No 12, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, 2014).

¹⁴¹ Tom Calma, Pat Dudgeon and Abigail Bray, '[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health](#)' (2017) 52(4) *Australian Psychologist* 255.

¹⁴² Naomi Priest et al, '[To What Extent Could Eliminating Racial Discrimination Reduce Inequalities in Mental Health and Sleep Problems among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children? A Causal Mediation Study](#)' (2024) 51 *The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific* 101196. See also Lowitja Institute, *Racism and the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: The Need for Targeted Policy Interventions to Protect the Health and Wellbeing of Our Future Generations* (Policy Position Paper, January 2026).

¹⁴³ Paolo Riva et al, '[Updating the Temporal Need-Threat Model of Ostracism: Challenges and Future Directions](#)' (2026) 166(1) *The Journal of Social Psychology* 26, 30, citing Marco Marinucci et al (2023) '[On the Lowest rung of the Ladder: How Social Exclusion, Perceived Economic Inequality and Stigma Increase Homeless People's Resignation](#)' (2023) 62(4) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 1817.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*