

Social Exclusion

Executive Summary

The relevance of social exclusion in the context of criminal offending has been considered in *R v Lewis* [2014] NSWSC 1127 and *Kentwell v R* (No 2) [2015] NSWCCA 96.

‘Social exclusion’ refers to interpersonal and group-based processes through which individuals are rejected, ignored or ostracised. Social exclusion is a profound psychosocial stressor¹ that undermines the fundamental human need to belong and causes significant physiological, cognitive, and behavioural impacts.²

‘Social exclusion’ is not a closed category. It includes experiences of racism, discrimination, betrayal, bullying, humiliation, prejudice and stigmatisation. It can be explicit (such as outward rejection of the excluded person) or subtle (such as ignoring or neglecting them). Childhood emotional abuse, often involving profound and chronic rejection by caregivers, is associated with heightened sensitivity to rejection and an increased risk of suicidal ideation.³

Research indicates that social exclusion is associated with increased aggression,⁴ risk taking and other self-defeating behaviours,⁵ impaired self-regulation,⁶ and reduced empathy.⁷ Chronic exclusion is associated with social resignation and ‘higher levels of negative emotions’,⁸ and may also create vulnerability to recruitment by extremist groups.⁹ Social exclusion and low social belonging are also associated with antisocial behaviour and contact with the criminal justice system.¹⁰ Further, imprisonment has been described as ‘a widespread form of social exclusion [which] often profoundly affects the physical and mental health of individuals’.¹¹

Certain groups — such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with ADHD, people experiencing homelessness, and asylum seekers — are more likely to experience social exclusion, and this is associated with underlying systemic inequality. For instance, the 2021 Australian Law Reform Commission Report, *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias*, found that ‘52% of Aboriginal respondents had experienced racial prejudice in the previous six months, compared to 21% of the general community’.¹²

On the other hand, as noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘good social relationships can foster health, creativity, self-esteem, job satisfaction, cooperative behaviours and encourage social mobility and crime reduction’.¹³ Effective responses to socially excluded individuals include facilitating belonging by addressing the antecedents of belonging;¹⁴ evidence-based interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) and cognitive bias modification (CBM);¹⁵ as well as community support, culturally sensitive programs, and policies addressing structural factors such as racism and economic inequality.

Notes

¹ See, eg, 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, 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; 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.

² 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; Kipling D. Williams, '[Ostracism: A Temporal Need-Threat Model](#)' (2009) 41 *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 275 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

³ 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.

⁴ Yuhong Qui 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.

⁵ 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](#)); 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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, 554 (Author Manuscript [here](#)).

⁹ 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) *The Journal of Social Psychology* 518 and Michaela Pfundmair, '[Ostracism Promotes a Terroristic Mindset](#)' (2019) 11(2) *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 134.

¹⁰ Amanda McAtamney and Anthony Morgan, *Key Issues in Antisocial Behaviour* (Research in Practice No 5, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009) 1, 2.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Australian Law Reform Commission, *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).

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Social cohesion and social connection](#) (Web page, 16 October 2025).

¹⁴ 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, 92–4.

¹⁵ See Mark W Lipsey, Nana A Landenberger and Sandra J 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; 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.