

What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion is a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household.

There are various understandings of social exclusion and they emphasise different aspects of this process:

- Identity: Which are the groups that are being excluded?
- Issue: What is the issue from which people are excluded (e.g. employment, education, citizenship, respect);
- The impact: The problems associated with the impact of social exclusion, (e.g. low income, poor housing, indebtedness);
- The processes: The factors that are driving exclusion; and,
- The agents and actors involved in the process of social exclusion.

Characterisation of social exclusion:

- ***Social exclusion is multidimensional*** :It includes social, political, cultural and economic dimensions, and operates at different social levels. The experience of social exclusion is unequally distributed across socio-economic and ethnic groups. For instance, most of the women face gender discrimination but the discrimination faced by a Dalit woman and those faced by general poor women is different.
- ***Social exclusion is inter-sectional:*** Social exclusion intersects with different aspects (axis) of exclusion. Important intersections to understand social exclusion are who you are (identity), what you have (resources) and where you are (geographical location). Intersectionality also means that it does not function in isolation, but acts along with many other factors. The intersectionality happens between caste, gender, religion, physical or mental disability, ethnicity etc. For example, the discrimination experienced by a Dalit Woman who also might be disabled is due to the patriarchal nature of the society and the hierarchy of caste who value able bodied persons who can work and devalue persons with disability. Hence, it can be based on geographical locations (e.g. very remote rural areas, tribal areas), various identities such as cultural, sexual, social identities (e.g. sexual minority community, Dalits, rural folk, people with disability, people living with HIV/AIDS) and based on resources (poor in general).
- ***Unequal access to resources:*** It results in a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterized by unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights which leads to health inequalities. Social discrimination is a universal phenomenon which is reflected in various forms among different people across regions. Caste, however, is a unique determinant of social

discrimination in the Indian sub-continent. There are various forms of discrimination experienced by the Dalits in different spheres and by different personnel and health is also one such area where caste-based discrimination is experienced.

What is the outcome of social exclusion in the society?

1. The affected individuals or communities or groups are prevented from participating fully in the social, economic and political life of the society they live.
2. The socially excluded persons or communities are denied of social participation, social protection, social integration and power leading to marginalisation, discrimination, oppression and exploitation of their rights as citizen and deprivation of their entitlements.
3. It increases inequality: Social exclusion increases disadvantage and disparity in resources (e.g. income or assets). It reinforces and aggravates the identity-based discrimination ('who you are') and renders them more vulnerable and powerless (e.g. The identity-based discrimination could be based on caste, ethnicity and religion or gender, disability, HIV- positive status or because the person belongs to alternative sexuality)
4. It violates the basic human rights of individuals and communities

How does the process of social exclusion take place in the society?

Social exclusion is embedded in the social, economic, political and cultural structures and institutions of the society. It is the expression of a deeply unequal society. The process of social exclusion takes place through the institutionalised form of inequality and discrimination in society.

The process of exclusion can be direct and intended result of policy or discriminatory action, for example withholding political, economic and social rights from the migrant groups or deliberate discrimination on the basis of gender, caste or age. This process can be work at different levels households, village, cities, states, nations and global level.

Discrimination, stigma and human rights: The process of social exclusion is embedded in economic, political and social structures and relationships. These processes are reinforced by cultural and symbolic processes in the society. The powerful and the dominant groups characterized by dominant social groups have a negative stereotyping of the poor. The formal devalue and undermine the cultures and voices of the less powerful communities.

The disadvantage manifested from the exclusion may function through:

- High levels of exploitation so that socially excluded groups are to be found working in the worst paid jobs in the harshest working conditions and in the most insecure and

informal sector

- Asymmetrical form of relationship between the powerful or the resourceful and the persons who feel marginalised in society
- Resort to stigmatised or less rewarding activities as occupations in the face of barriers faced by excluded groups in accessing socially recognised forms of livelihood (e.g. manual scavenging, sweepers etc.)
- In India, along with poverty and assetlessness, the destitute were characterised by 'stigmatised' identities (mentally ill, leprosy or AIDS-affected, addicts of various kinds, orphaned and abused children, the abandoned elderly and disabled), by the instability of their place in the community (many were homeless and lived on the streets) and by the demeaning nature of their livelihood activities which involve either extreme levels of exploitation by others (as in bonded labour), extreme forms of self-exploitation (the marketing of the body, as in sex work, or sale of body parts) or uncertain forms of charity (begging is commonly associated with destitution).

How is Social exclusion linked to poverty and health?

Social exclusion is multi-dimensional and is rooted in the social and structural inequality. In order to understand the linkage of social exclusion and its impact on health, we need to relate it to social determinants of health.

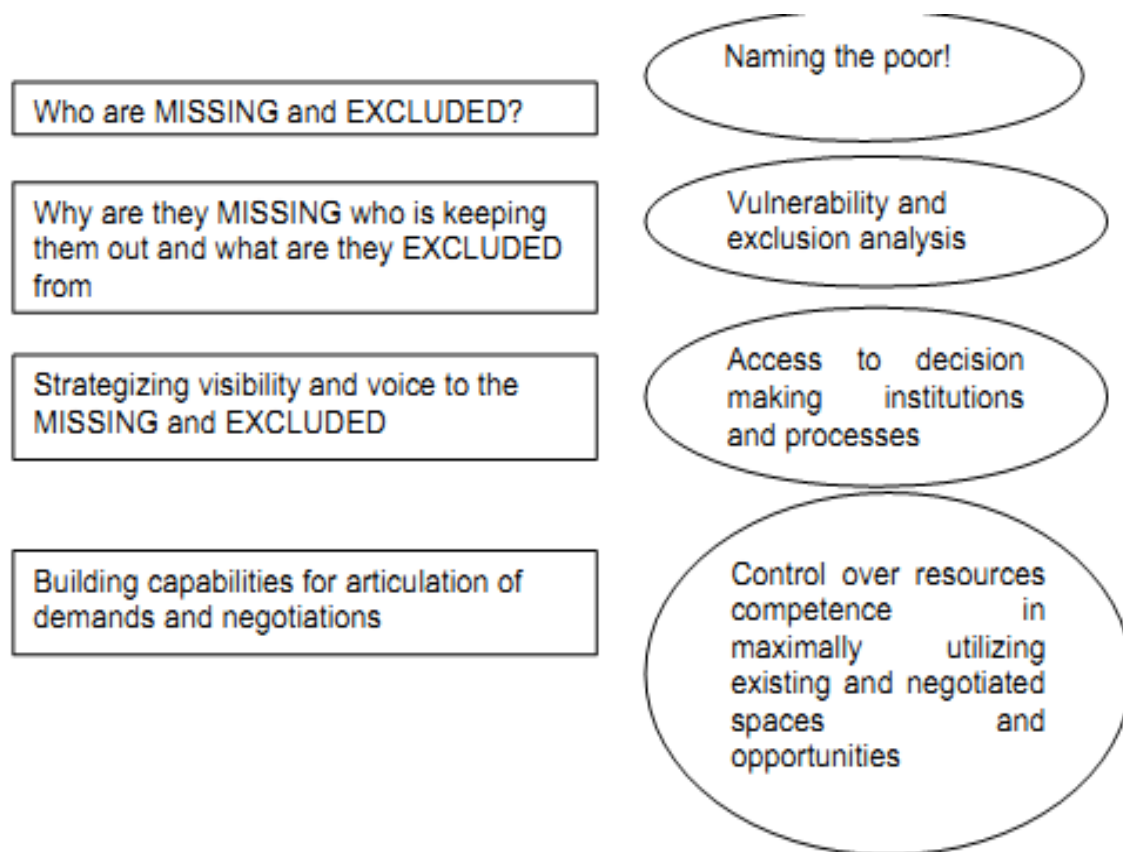
The socioeconomic and political context including the labour market, the educational system, religion and other cultural systems and political institutions, give rise to patterns of social stratification based on differential access to economic status, power and prestige (the causes of social inequities). Income levels, education, occupation status, gender, race/ethnicity and other factors are used as proxy indicators of these differential social positions.

Based on socioeconomic position individuals and groups experience differences in exposure and vulnerability to health-compromising conditions. Socioeconomic position determines the level or frequency of exposures and the level of vulnerability.

While considering the health inequality and social inequality, the focus has to be on the poorer classes and socially excluded who have a higher risk for diseases as well as higher probability from being excluded from the health services. This is essential given the higher proportion of the poor as well as socially disadvantaged, the magnitude of health problems and the epidemiological profile in the society. However, given a social determinants framework, one has to also understand the vulnerability to ill-health which may cut across different socio-economic categories.

The concept of social exclusion contributes to understanding inequalities and poverty. The cycle of social exclusion and poverty are interrelated. Due to poverty people experience different forms of discrimination and social exclusion and in turn due to the systematic forms of social exclusion poverty is perpetuated. For example: There are differences in the poverty rates of schedule caste, schedule tribes and OBCs as compared to the dominant caste or upper class population. The differences in the health status of the socially excluded communities and others are very obvious. This difference could be attributed to education, occupation, location, access to resources etc.

How can we respond to social exclusion?



- Strengthening the voice of the socially excluded groups or communities in policy and political process by making them aware about their rights and entitlement and by empowering them with knowledge and education
- A legal frame work approach to ensure that discrimination on the basis of caste, class, ethnicity, gender or religion are unacceptable within a society and this also can assure the rights of excluded groups.

- Social protection policies to address the exploitation of excluded groups, for instance, providing some kind of basic security to those working at highly exploitative informal sector.
- Through the educational system, the media, public campaigns, the civil and political rights of the excluded groups can be strengthen.
- Promoting civil society network to mobilize socially excluded groups and building alliance with other organisation will actually help and enable the excluded groups to fight for their rights and justice, enable them to influence the processes of decision-making in their society.

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