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Social exclusion: causes, effects and solutions

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) study "Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education" (2021) highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated both our fragility and the need for interconnectedness as well as the need for urgent action to work together to ensure that every child, young person and adult has the opportunity to reach the potential of a sustainable collective future (UNESCO, 2021).

The choice of the research topic was prompted by the consequences of the social distancing caused by the measures of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the causes was- the number of people who did not want to socialise increased even after the pandemic, choosing to tend to social isolation through reducing communication significantly (Kindren, Bates, 2023). It should be acknowledged that it was after the pandemic that society began to pay particular attention to the aspect of socialising that had been taken for granted before the pandemic. Nowadays, it is not uncommon for a person to 'withdraw into themselves', cutting off all or minimal contact with society (Elbay, Kurtulmus, Arpacıoğlu, Karadere, 2020). Of course, not all such cases can be associated with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Social exclusion, which can be a consequence of social isolation, self-isolation or forced isolation, increases anger and irritability. Notably, particularly high rates of anger and hostility have been observed amongst physically isolated individuals during quarantine (Hossain, Tasnim, Sultana, Faizah, Mazumder, Zou, McKyer, Ahmed, Ma, 2020).

Social distancing is most often associated with physical distance, e.g the necessity to maintain it during the Covid-19 pandemic, furthermore avoiding contact with a person or group of people can be a cause of social exclusion as well. Often, it is the observance of physical distance that becomes a contributing factor to social exclusion, which in some cases contributes to the individual's own reluctance to contact others. The set of limiting factors of the Covid-19 virus is clearly one of the factors that has contributed to social isolation and thus social exclusion. Social isolation as a concept has been explicitly analysed in the scientific literature in the context of the pandemic, highlighting strategies to promote public mental health (Hossain, Sultana,

Purohit, 2020). In-depth study and analysis of the scientific literature confirms that it has been addressed already before the pandemic, in multiple contexts, highlighting the multidimensional nature of the concept. Humans are social beings and it is social connectedness that is crucial for the development, health and well-being of the individual and society as a whole. It must be admitted that the impact of social exclusion on human health has been little researched, but such research is essential; the consequences of social exclusion can be serious health problems which can affect both mental and physical health, e.g. anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, memory loss, etc. (Watanabe, Qin, Chen, Wu, Yu, Zhang, Li, Cao, Davies, Shi, & Liang, 2023, 38).

However, it must be recognised that the limitations of the Covid-19 virus, mainly stay-at-home, is not the only factor contributing to social isolation and social exclusion. Social exclusion has different dimensions: labour market exclusion, economic exclusion, cultural exclusion, isolation, spatial exclusion and institutional exclusion (Kronauer, 1998). The study focuses more on the dimension of isolation. It is important to recognise that the dimensions of exclusion are closely interlinked and interrelated that one individual may experience different manifestations of social exclusion, and that one dimension of exclusion may become the basis for another. The aim of the study was to analyse and describe the causes and consequences of social exclusion and to develop recommendations to reduce the presence of social exclusion in society. The research questions were: 1. How does social isolation affect social exclusion? 2. What are the consequences of social exclusion? 3. In which everyday situations can the manifestations of social exclusion be observed most often in the context of different social groups? 4. How can the presence of social exclusion in society be reduced?

The research methods used in the study were: general-theoretical (analysis of scientific literature) and empirical: empirical (survey, data processing and analysis methods (quantitative, graphical representation of data, data analysis, data selection, concentration, simplification, rephrasing, abstraction, thematic analysis) and qualitative research method - content analysis. The research objectives were: 1. To analyse the theoretical literature on aspects of social exclusion, social distance and social isolation. 2. To conduct a survey on aspects of social exclusion. 3. Formulate conclusions. 4. Develop recommendations to reduce the presence of social exclusion in society 5. Participate in the Erasmus+ project "GeCo - against COVID - overcoming social distance".

The analysis of theoretical sources reveales the need for further research on social exclusion, e.g. on the impact of social exclusion on human health as well

as the factors contributing to social exclusion. They are: changing environment, globalisation processes, changes in the nature of the labour market in the modern technological era, welfare and social policies, contemporary social phenomena, individual circumstances, etc.

Theoretical aspects of social exclusion

As early as the fourth century BC, Aristotle argued that "man is a social being!". This statement has been relevant to humanity throughout the ages. There are also people who voluntarily choose to isolate themselves. For example, the followers of the subculture hikkikomori (Japanese for "refusal to socialise"). In the context of the global lockdown on the Covid-19 pandemic, when online communication was the most common form of communication and face-to-face communication was not possible, complaints of social isolation and deteriorating mental health as a result increased. Most people have had experiences at some point in their lives where they have felt excluded by others. Almost without exception, the consequences of social exclusion for individuals and groups are negative, as one of the most basic human needs is the need to belong to a social group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Social exclusion is a broad concept based on people's inability to integrate into society, whether because of poverty, lack of education, unemployment, discrimination or other factors. A socially excluded person is unable to exercise their rights and opportunities because of barriers that prevent them from doing so, e.g., social stigma, emotional and physical abuse, etc. Social exclusion can result in difficulties in accessing sufficient income, services and goods that are essential for full functioning in society, and support in different life situations. René Lenoir was the first to highlight the concept of social exclusion in 1974, stressing that one in ten French people was outside the country's economic and social development. While the concept of social exclusion was initially analysed in the context of social cleavages, in the 21st century it has been linked to the development of globalisation processes, changes in the nature of work, employment, welfare state social policies, contemporary social phenomena and individual circumstances. Social exclusion can arise due to specific socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, discrimination and cultural aspects, etc. (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Baltic International Centre for Economic Policy Studies, Institute for Sociological Studies, 2007).

Kronauer (1998) has identified dimensions of social exclusion: labour market exclusion, economic exclusion, cultural exclusion (non-acceptance of other

values and behavioural patterns), isolation (restriction of social contacts and relationships), spatial exclusion (such as living in a particular neighbourhood) and institutional exclusion (such as lack of access to education or services). The dimensions of exclusion can be closely interlinked and the same individual may experience different dimensions of social exclusion.

Poverty and unemployment are important contributing factors to social exclusion, but social isolation has become particularly acute today (Gallie, 2004). Physical distance is one of the most important causes of social exclusion. However, Wolff, Martarelli, Schüler, Bieleke (2020) stress that looking at social exclusion only in terms of social isolation and social distance can lead to a superficial view of the negative consequences of social exclusion. It is important to assess different psychological aspects, such as the difficulty of accepting change and changing one's daily habits. Magee & Smith stress that social exclusion can be the result of power and emotional abuse. Hodgetts & Stolte (2014), in defining the concept of social exclusion, point out that it refers mainly to social bonds that involve shared beliefs, interests and values, such as experiencing a sense of familiarity (closeness and proximity) or unfamiliarity (distance and difference) between oneself and people belonging to different social, ethnic, occupational, religious groups, etc. Bottero (2004), on the other hand, in the context of social exclusion, emphasises the gap between rich and poor, while recognising that exclusion is fostered by social stratification as well as socio-economic factors, such as living in a particular neighbourhood that is both socially and economically disadvantaged (Bottero, 2004). At the same time, however, it should be recognised that social exclusion is not just a static component of cognitive acceptance, as people always have the possibility to change their connections and social relations with certain groups in different contexts.

The Bogard Social Exclusion Scale, which measures the level of belonging and contact with people from different social, racial or ethnic groups, is often used in research on the phenomenon of social exclusion, describing different individuals' interpersonal relationships, levels of dislike or liking, exclusion or indifference (Bogardus, 1933). For example, a question (rate on a 5-point scale): 'To what extent are you willing to communicate with a member of a particular race, religion, social group, etc.? This way, data on existing prejudices, stereotypes can be analysed, where it is possible to trace and infer the most discriminated people. The groups of the population most often exposed to social exclusion in are: pensioners (especially women and single pensioners); - pre-pensioners; - large families of children and single parents; -

children; - disabled persons and persons with reduced functioning; - unemployed (especially long-term unemployed); - homeless; - roma; - prisoners and persons released from prison; - victims of human trafficking; - persons addicted to psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs, toxic or other intoxicating substances); - persons with insufficient, low or inappropriate knowledge and skills for the labour market; - persons in need" (Ministry of Welfare, 2020).

Riesman, in his book The Lonely Crowd (2001), points out that social exclusion is an unexplored term, but that the most important aspect of social exclusion is the individual's own sense of exclusion, lack of communication and even complete exclusion from society. He points out that social exclusion is largely a cultural phenomenon, as living apart is a feature of the affluent middle class - for example, private homes are surrounded by fences, and socialising even among neighbours is often minimised. Riesman (2001) highlights that the most common causes of social exclusion are: - mental health problems; - particular personal characteristics; - voluntary or involuntary isolation; - excessive access to and use of technology; - economic factors; - ethnic factors (Riesman, 2001, 3-6).

Theoretical research highlights that, although the impact of social exclusion on health has been little studied, its consequences can be individual and varied, such as indifference to social processes; lack of self-regulation of emotions; an inability to accept others, which can sometimes manifest itself in emotional and even physical violence (Liberman, Sagristano, Trope, 2002); and serious health problems that can affect both mental and physical health, such as anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, memory loss, etc. (Watanabe, Qin, Chen, Wu, Yu, Zhang, Li, Cao, Davies, Shi, Liang, 2023, 38). Psychological aspects, such as difficulties in accepting change and changing one's daily routines, are becoming relevant (Magee & Smith). Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003 and Magee & Smith, 2013 highlight that voluntary or involuntary isolation can become a cause of social exclusion. Emphasising that the consequences of social exclusion are mainly manifested in a lack of trust and communication.

Nowadays, social exclusion can be a trigger for a variety of serious mental illnesses (Levina, 2017). In turn, mental health problems only worsen alienation or make reintegration into society or rehabilitation more difficult. Other research has provided evidence that people in isolation may experience psychological distress in the form of anxiety, anger, confusion and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, Rubin, 2020). According to a survey by the NGO YoungMinds

(2020), 83% of young people believe that their mental health deteriorated during COVID-19 and that one of the reasons for this was the need to implement social isolation: 28.5% of respondents had stress, 33.3% anxiety and 46.92% depression ranging from mild to very severe (YoungMinds, 2020).

The consequences of social exclusion depend on particular social group. For children and young people, the most commonly observed consequences are: - difficulties in reading, writing and mathematical skills, as well as basic skills; - early school leaving; - early entry into the labour market; - unemployment; - substance abuse; - problems with law enforcement; - poor physical and, in particular, mental health (Bynner, 1999). These consequences can also be manifested in children whose parents suffer from social exclusion (Bynner, 1999).

Theoretical perspectives on the consequences of social exclusion suggest that although the desire to socialise is a basic human need, people can have experiences in which they have felt excluded by others. The consequences of social exclusion for individuals and groups are almost always negative. The consequences of social exclusion can be indifference to social processes, lack of self-regulation of emotions, inability to accept others, which can sometimes manifest as serious health problems that can affect both mental and physical health, such as anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, memory loss, reduced self-efficacy in work and learning environments, etc. The consequences of social exclusion can differ for different social groups. They can have a very negative impact on a person's quality of life. People who suffer from social exclusion of family members can experience negative consequences.

Empirical findings

The survay (N=477) has been carried out within the research. Social exclusion was experienced by 160 out of 477 respondents. Although all social groups in the survey have experienced social exclusion, teachers (n=159) (62 teacher respondents (39% of teacher respondents)) and students (n=72) (24 student respondents (33% of student respondents)) have experienced social exclusion the most among the survey respondents, slightly fewer (31% of parent respondents) parents (n=209) have experienced social exclusion. 3 respondents who chose the answer option "other" (n=12) have experienced social exclusion. The least likely to have experienced social exclusion were schoolchildren (n=25) - 6 schoolchildren respondents said they had experienced social exclusion.

The most prevalent factors in teachers' answers about situations in which they have experienced social exclusion are the impact of the use of smart devices on communication; COVID-19 containment measures including the lack of communication, respondents' own reluctance to communicate with others. Examples of teachers' answers were: "I do not communicate outside working hours because I do not want to" (Reluctance to communicate); "Feeling and being alone" (Lack of communication); "Covid time and consequences" (Context of COVID-19 restrictive measures); "Sitting on the phone" in my presence" (Impact of the use of smart devices on communication). Some respondents have similarly highlighted isolation in the work environment. Teachers' responses highlight the role of isolation in the working environment as a factor contributing to social exclusion.

The most frequent answers given by students about situations in which they have experienced social exclusion are changes in life or changes of environment, e.g., the beginning of their studies, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 virus on their daily life, for example: 'Situations when I have to seek contact with people I do not know'; 'Change of environment and worse' (Change); 'During studies, no time for socialising. The environment, interests and therefore the circle of friends changed"; "When going to study after high school, with other classmates"(Change of environment when going to study); "When finances remain less.... When there are finances there are friends!"(Economic exclusion); "During the Covid-19 pandemic, when most of the communication was during distance, it was not allowed to leave home"(Context of the COVID-19 restrictive measures).

Parents' answers about situations in which they have experienced social exclusion most often mention the impact of social media, digital tools and the COVID-19 virus on their daily lives, but isolation is also a recurring theme - while on parental leave. Parents' answers highlight that they have experienced social exclusion "when their children are ill for long periods of time. Then we try to go out less in public so as not to get a new virus until immunity is established" (impact of COVID-19 on daily life); " People correspond formally, they don't want to meet. People are preoccupied with their egos and their lives." (The impact of social media on real life); "I don't like big companies and strangers. I prefer to spend time at home rather than outside" (Self-isolation); "Yes, when the 3rd child was born. I seemed to be left all alone, with no opportunity to socialise"; "When my first child was born I lost contact with my previous friends. The circle of contacts narrowed down to a minimum". (Isolation while on parental leave); "Evening time in the family - instead of

talking, everyone sits on smart devices and does not know how to find interesting topics for conversation"; "Digitisation replaces real communication with remote communication, as a result of which we become estranged from our loved ones" (Impact of the use of smart devices on communication).

The respondent who identifies herself as a "Childless woman" says: "I noticed it when the pandemic restrictions were lifted and I thought that now life would go back to the way it was with events and socialising, having coffee together, going shopping with my friends... In the meantime, people have developed other habits. To avoid sitting at home alone, I often attend events I want to attend alone, I don't ask anymore if anyone else wants to come, because 90% didn't want to", thus highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on the respondent's life.

From 2022 Liepaja University is a cooperation partner in the Erasmus+ project "GeCo - against COVID - overcoming social distance". The project is focused on the analysis of diverse approaches to mitigate the effects of problems caused by social distance. The project involved researchers from Latvia, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania and Slovakia. Latvia is represented by the faculty of Pedagogy and Social Work of Liepaja University and students and teachers of Liepaja Oskars Kalpaka Secondary School. The project was initiated and coordinated by the visiting professor of the University of Liepaja, PhD Ulrike Kurth (Germany). The project included systematisation of findings and development of empirical research on the experiences of diverse social groups, attitudes towards social distance.

Answering the research question "How does social distancing and isolation affect social exclusion?", it can be concluded that social exclusion can be a consequence of social isolation, self-isolation or forced isolation. It is the observance of physical distance that can be a contributing factor to social exclusion, which in some cases contributes to the individual's own reluctance to contact others. Social exclusion has different dimensions: labour market exclusion, economic exclusion, cultural exclusion, isolation, spatial exclusion and institutional exclusion. They are closely interlinked and one individual may experience different forms of social exclusion, or one dimension of exclusion may become the basis for another. Social isolation can thus become the basis for different dimensions of social exclusion.

In the context of social exclusion, it is important to assess various psychological aspects, such as individual difficulties in accepting change and changing their daily habits, specific personal characteristics, and mental health problems. The

most common causes of social exclusion are voluntary or involuntary isolation; poverty; mental health problems; difficulties in accepting change and changing daily routines; lack of shared beliefs, interests and values; social stratification; socially and economically disadvantaged environment; specific personal characteristics; and overuse of technology.

In today's changing environment, the set of factors contributing to social exclusion is changing, including developments in globalisation processes, changes in the nature of the labour market in today's technological age, welfare state and social policies, contemporary social phenomena, individual circumstances, etc.

Answering the research question "What are the consequences of social exclusion?", it can be concluded that the consequences of social exclusion differ for different social groups. They can have a very negative impact on a person's quality of life. People who suffer from social exclusion can experience negative consequences as family members. The consequences of social exclusion are: indifference to social processes, lack of self-regulation of emotions, inability to accept others, which can sometimes manifest itself emotionally, serious health problems that can affect both mental and physical health, such as anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, memory loss, reduced self-efficacy at work and in learning environments, etc.

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