

Individual Differences Across the Lifespan (ECPS5004) Assignment 2

Introduction

Social exclusion is defined as the separation of individuals and groups from mainstream society (Moffatt & Glasgow, 2009; Commins, 2004). Exclusion and rejection can happen for a variety of reasons. Rejection from individuals or a peer group or social deficits including being withdrawn or shy (Bierman, 2004; Damen et al., 2006) is among the reasons why one might feel socially excluded. Research on social exclusion is mainly crowded with studies done on adolescence. Especially with technology in this day and age, there is a lot more incentive to be up to date or fit a certain mould to not stick out from the rest, thus resulting in social isolation. Besides poverty or needing special needs, Sen (1992) emphasised that people who have been socially excluded lack “capabilities”. Such resources are related to cognitive development, success in education, overall health and social engagement. Other contextual effects such as the ever-changing landscape of labour markets would mean fewer opportunities for people with poorer education or changes in the community could also make one see themselves as socially excluded.

In Barbara’s case, she used to know the village inside and out. Teachers usually are the ones who know the most people in a given area and Barbara used to work as one before her retirement. Her students practically grew up with her as a parental figure akin to a parent. She held such a close attachment to the people in the village, often chatting with them from time to time and regularly attending a ballroom dancing club once a week with her husband. Though she teaches the children of countless families, she too has a child of her own, a son. Barbara herself was quite the traveller, often going on coach trips around the country and in Europe, especially

after her retirement. Currently, Barbara is seventy-six years old. Her husband who passed away four years ago has made her the sole owner of their home in the village. Similar to all the schoolchildren she used to teach, her son now has a home over 300 miles away from Barbara and has three beautiful children with his wife. The loss of her life partner has made her stop her dancing activities, as well as her travels since she lacks someone to travel with. Visits from friends are becoming infrequent and she increasingly feels cold and tired in the afternoon, resulting in naps and feeling warmer in bed earlier. It is as if she is left out of the village. In this case study, we will look to explain Barbara's feelings of social exclusion with potential social, emotional and cognitive outcomes, as well as introduce theories to explain them.

Potential Emotional Outcomes

Abraham Maslow first brought up the idea of a hierarchy of needs in a paper he published in 1943 called "A Theory of Human Motivation", as well as in a book titled "Motivation and Personality" (Cherry, 2024). The hierarchy of needs implies that people are driven to complete their basic needs before obtaining other more advanced needs. Maslow believed that people have a natural desire to become self-actualised, to be the best version of themselves and to achieve this goal, they must fulfil the most basic of needs before moving on to others. These basic needs include food, safety, love and self-esteem (Lester, 1983). There are five needs in total in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting from the bottom physiological needs, then safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and finally, self-actualisation. For our purposes, we will look at the love and belonging needs.

After sufficing basic needs and security and safety needs, an individual might look to complete the next need which is love and belonging needs. These needs can be accomplished with the presence of friendships, romantic relationships, family, community groups, or other social groups (Cherry, 2024). Having a close circle of family, friends, a lover and participating in book clubs or religious activities can fulfil one's needs for belongingness and avoid being lonely. From the scenario, Barbara used to be well-known in the village. With notoriety and a family of her own, we could assume that she had accomplished the need for love and belongingness, even participating in a weekly ballroom dance class. However, after the loss of her husband, Barbara is feeling more and more belonging in the community. Now living alone and with friends whom she does not meet often. Her needs for belongingness are put into question. Feeling loved and present by others is important to avoid feelings of loneliness, or in extreme cases, maybe even depression and anxiety. Niu et al. (2022) hypothesised that social exclusion had a significant impact on depression. After running a study with undergraduate students, they showed that their hypothesis is true, as an unfulfilling daily life can induce social and physical pain that could potentially result in anxiety and depression. The study gathered eight hundred participants from two public universities in China randomly through convenience sampling to complete an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaires included an adopted Chinese version of the Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents (OES-A) (Niu et al., 2016) to measure social exclusion and an adopted Chinese version of the Center of Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Wang et al., 2013) to measure depressive symptoms.

Potential Social Outcomes

In the same Niu et al. study, they also considered the mediating roles of rejection sensitivity and social self-efficacy. Rejection sensitivity refers to the fear of getting rejected and the increasing distress of going through rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Having rejection sensitivity can negatively impact people's social interactions and relationships as people who experience more rejection, or are sensitive to rejection, will expect or perceive social rejection more often. In Barbara's case, it is said that though she has the means to go travelling even after her bereavement, her close friends are unwilling to do the same as they have other needs. This could potentially affect Barbara in asking her friends the same question again as she might expect a negative response. She also might feel rejected by her son as he puts work before her. Phone calls with her son normally do not last very long as he has other work commitments to attend to and as a result, Barbara opts to wait for a phone call instead. A potential reason why she chose to do that might be because she does not want to get the feeling of rejection when her son chooses to end the call early or not to pick up at all. Back to the study, the same participants were asked to fill up two questionnaire surveys, those being a Chinese version (Li, 2007) of the Tendency to Expect Rejection Scale (Jobe, 2003) to track rejection sensitivity and a revised adopted Chinese version of the Adult Social Self-Efficacy Inventory (Fan et al., 2005) to track social self-efficacy. From the data, they found that people who are rejection-sensitive are more likely to take negative experiences for granted and gain an inappropriate response to evaluate themselves (Greening et al., 2005). This also means that their false cognitions will be reconfirmed and the chances of them being depressed increases. The same is true for individuals with low social self-efficacy.

From the scenario, it is to be deduced that Barbara started feeling lonely after her husband passed away when she was seventy-two years old. It was at this time that she withdrew herself from dancing and travelling. Her husband seemed to be the turning point when her life started to unravel. Perhaps her feelings of distress could be explained by attachment theory. Attachment theory was first developed by John Bowlby as he was finding a way to explain the acute feelings of distress when a child is separated from their primary caregivers. Bowlby (1982) explained that infants would go to great heights to prevent being separated from their parents. His explanation for this behaviour was that infants are naturally born with an attachment behavioural system. That system being the motivating factor that ends up making them have a deep and emotional bond with those who provide support and care for them. In many ways, Barbara's husband was her primary caregiver. He went to dancing lessons with her, travelling together, and even drove her places since Barbara herself does not know how to drive. An increasing number of research has shown that people are more likely to use their romantic partners as attachment figures as they grow older. According to Doherty and Feeney (2004), relationships that are 2 years or older are more likely to be full-scale attachments. Other factors including living arrangements can also facilitate such a bond (Feeny, 2004; Fraley & Davis, 1997). Mentions of her friends also came into question for travelling activities. However, those friends lack the necessary means to go or are just unwilling to travel as they have other things to attend to. A longitudinal study conducted by Umemura et al. (2017) found that people who use their romantic partners for attachment-related functions are not as likely to use their friends as attachment figures. In the same study, it was found that people tend to avoid direct attachment to friends not only due to the existence of a romantic partner but also due to the lack of positive interactions with friends. This could explain why Barbara chooses not to lean on her friends

since past attempts to get them to go on trips with her have not yielded results. The same goes for the visits she has with her older close friends being continuously infrequent. Barbara might feel as if they cannot be relied upon when she needs them as they have other attachment figures in their lives.

Potential Cognitive Outcomes

To explain Barbara's cognitive outcomes, we will look at Erikson's Stages of Development. This theory looked to explain the stages an individual might go through during their life. Compared to other theories, such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development which only focuses on childhood development, Erikson's aimed to establish a clear conflict during each stage of development from childhood up until death. There are a total of eight stages in this theory but in this study, we will look at two which are Stage 7 and Stage 8.

Stage 7 is Generativity vs. Stagnation. In this stage, adults aim to create or nurture something that will outlast them (Cherry, 2022) usually by having children or creating a change that benefits others positively. According to Malone et al. (2019), those who are successful at this stage will feel that they have contributed to the world and are being an active participant in their community while those who fail to create generativity will feel unproductive and uninvolved. Although Barbara has benefited the community in the past before as a teacher, she lacks the feeling of community currently present in the village. Perhaps since her only child and the students she once thought have moved away from the village, she is unable to witness first-hand the change she has made to the world and lacks a sense of community.

Stage 8 is Integrity vs. Despair. This is the final psychosocial stage and its focus is the way older adults look back on their life. People will reflect on the events that transpired up to this point and take into consideration what they have accomplished throughout their lives and will take solace in the face of death. The people who choose to do the opposite and still feel regret over their life accomplishments end up being fearful that their lives might end without accomplishing something meaningful to them (Cherry, 2022). As stated previously, Barbara feels left out of the village and routinely has nothing to do other than stay at home. The only company she has is a television and radio other than occasional phone calls from her son. She keeps reminiscing on the days when she was a part of the community and being seen by people. Nowadays, no one ever asks her how she's doing as she's no longer the teacher that every family knows.

In the latter parts of the scenario statement, it is mentioned that Barbara increasingly feels tired and cold as early as the afternoon. This could imply that she might be going through personal health problems, whether or not that links with social exclusion however is the question. Sacker et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on the matter recruiting over one hundred thousand individuals in forty thousand households across the UK. Wave one of data collection was to be done in 2 years and subsequent waves up until four waves were to be done. The sample of the study consisted of members who participated and are 65 or older from Wave 3 and onward. They constructed a social exclusion scale based on another study from Walsh et al. (2012) and also the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) to track health. What they found was that there is a positive relationship between poor health in Waves 1 and 2 and later social exclusion, similar to their hypothesis. They also found the opposite was true, which is that social

exclusion can be a predictor of poor health in the future. However, they did identify that use of a car, or modern technology such as a mobile phone or the internet can help older people with poor health moderate their well-being. As per the scenario statement, Barbara does use things such as a television to keep her company. If she follows what this research implies, without television or radio, Barbara could be suffering from worse health conditions and subsequent worse feelings of social exclusion.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this paper has discussed the scenario, potential outcomes and feelings of being socially excluded. In no way is this paper trying to diagnose Barbara with the information within it, it is merely just a collection of explanations and hypotheses from previous research and theories that might help us understand what Barbara is going through. As of writing, papers on social exclusion among older adults are hard to come by. In this day and age, more people are susceptible to being socially excluded thus more research on this topic is needed. Some of the research written here is not of the same demographic as Barbara, though it could provide insight into the outcomes of Barbara. Thus, some of the information provided might not be correct as some of the research was done towards a different age group, though the topic remains the same. Hopefully, in the future, more research will be done to better understand the nuance of being socially excluded among older individuals.

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