

Case Study: Barbara

A seventy-six-year-old named Barbara is an outgoing woman who socially involved herself with many other individuals. Before her retirement eleven years ago, she used to work as a primary school teacher, which made her popular amongst many families in her village area. Her family consists of a husband and a son whose husband passed away four years ago, and her son now lives with his wife away from Barbara. In addition, due to her son's busy work life, she was unable to make phone calls with him. Therefore, because of the lack of being in touch with her son and the loss of her husband, she slowly declines her normal social activities and communication with other individuals in her rural area. Thus, Barbara's situation can be viewed as social exclusion.

Social exclusion is a phenomenon that can be described as a certain group of individuals feeling uninvolved and indifferent to the entirety of society or breaking their social bonds with other individuals (Dykhoom et al, 2023; Niu et al, 2022). Social interactions are events that are not scarce to human beings. It is the biggest normality among the experiences of individuals. According to Kuczynski et al (2022), one's interactions with other individuals encourage one's well-being to regulate their emotions, as well as coping with stress that can occur from time to time. Therefore, it can be said that social interactions play a major role in how a person evolves throughout their life. For instance, in a study conducted by Santini et al (2015), human beings who have bigger diversity in their social networks tend to experience depleted rates from the state of loneliness and depression. However, if an individual does not experience interacting with other human beings as often anymore, this can refer to someone going through a phenomenon called "social exclusion". Viewing the history of social exclusion, according to O'Donnell et al (2018) the term this phenomenon originated in the 1970s in France by Socialist politicians.

When looking at this phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, social exclusion can be affected towards many different age groups. In this case study, older age groups of individuals are focused throughout the paper, more specifically an older woman named Barbara. In older people, social exclusions might be common. A research study was done by Qualter et al (2015), and results from various studies shown over 15% to 25% of older age groups tend to go through persistent stages of social or emotional isolation. Moreover, the case study will review and discuss how social exclusion may have an impact on a person, specifically an older person, and possibly have social, emotional, and cognitive effects that Barbara might go through from socially excluding herself.

Potential Social Effects

This section of the case study will examine various social outcomes of social exclusion that Barbara might likely face. One of the many possible social outcomes is loneliness which may affect Barbara when she is facing the phenomenon. According to Dahlberg et al (2022), some of the factors such as limited social networks or decreased levels of social activity and Burchardt et al (2002), stated that factors from loneliness may be an indication of social exclusion. Therefore, this outcome correlates with Barbara's situation as she stopped attending her dancing activities as it reminded her of her husband's death. As well as, her inability to contact her son due to his busy work life and fewer meetups with her friends. The feelings of loneliness can be interlinked with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as well as created by a psychologist named Abraham Maslow. Maslow's theory was based on the hierarchy of human needs and it was compulsory to fulfil those needs which were set out by the psychologist (Abraham, 1943, as cited in Trivedi, 2019).

Furthermore, Maslow's Hierarchy of needs was labelled into five levels, which are vital to fulfil from the lowest level of the pyramid to the top. The most fundamental layers of the

pyramid which refers to as “deficiency needs”, such as physical needs (lowest level), security, love, friendship and love, and esteem. According to Maslow, without meeting those deficiency needs, the individual may experience anxiety and tension. It is important to take note that these basic levels are required to be met before the person's desire for motivation (Trivedi, 2019). Here, one of the basic needs for an individual is to have a sense of love and belonging. As Barbara is experiencing social exclusion, it may be one of the factors that she is also experiencing loneliness, especially from the decreased of social connection and interactions with her close ones.

According to Singh and Misra (2019), many elderly individuals tend to go through loneliness due to a lack of close family ties, an inability to actively participate in local community activities, living alone, and other causes. Furthermore, Singh and Misra (2019) also stated that the contribution of loneliness to older people can be life-changing events, for instance, the death of a partner. The loss of relationships, such as death, can lead to feelings of emptiness and depression, which may explain the reason for Barbara’s reduced interest in doing activities and interacting. Singh and Misra provided evidence by conducting a research study based on this concept. 55 elderly people age ranging from 60-80 years old were selected and questionnaires were distributed to them personally. The findings of the study revealed that loneliness correlates with negative health effects in older people, such as depression. Furthermore, elderly women mostly go through depression from loneliness than men as they are less sociable with other people. Additionally, elderly men were found to continuously seek out new relationships. It is crucial to know that the results are limited to the participants having close ones staying with them.

Loneliness can also lead to ageism which can have an impact on elderly people who go through social exclusion. According to Shiovitz-Ezra et al (2018), the term ageism refers to negative attitudes towards elderly individuals that include discrimination, stereotypes, and

prejudices. A theory by Smart Richman and Leary (2009) proposed that individuals feel hurt when they are being rejected or discriminated against, and they may experience three things depending on which dominates, such as having aggressive or defensive urges, a desire to connect socially, and to withdraw and avoid further future. Thus, when putting into the concept of the elderly, when older adults frequently face ageism, such as discrimination or negative stereotypes, they may begin to avoid social situations to protect themselves from getting rejected again. In addition, facing ageism can lead to inclined feelings of loneliness and reduced social participation. Although the hypothesis on older adults has not been tested, there is still evidence that later backed up with this concept. A study was conducted by Rippon et al (2015) to examine cross-national differences in the perception of age discrimination from elder individuals in two countries, the United States and England. The results of the study showcased that 29.1% of American fifty-two-year-old adults and 34.8% of British respondents were reported facing discrimination against issues ranging from medical and interpersonal. Because of their age, the sample study was faced with being treated with disrespect, and threats, and received terrible medical services. Thus, the correlation between loneliness and ageism is that older people are also often targets of being socially excluded.

Potential Emotional Effects

Social exclusion can have profound emotional outcomes for older people, thus it may affect Barbara. As mentioned in the potential social effects previously, it is crucial to note that an older individual who experiences social exclusion may encounter and go through states of depression and anxiety, as stated by Heikkinen & Kauppinen (2011). As we correlate this to Barbara's situation, particularly when she lost her husband and lost interest in her frequent activities, leading to a possible experience of loneliness, it may be the reason she might socially exclude herself from interpersonal connections.

As an individual grows older, depression becomes one of the common health problems within the ageing population (Lai, 2005, cited in Tong et al, 2011). According to Saito et al (2005), the lack of emotional and social support elderly individuals receive from their close ones such as family and friends, they are bound to a higher risk of depression. Saito and colleagues conducted a research study where the results showcased older individuals ages 75 years and older have difficulty in having connections with their neighbourhood due to their ageing. As Barbara and her friends, in her village area, are at similar ages and getting older, she finds it challenging to spend time with them. In addition, many new families moved into her local area making her have a hard time connecting. These factors have a higher risk of contributing to depression in older people, especially those who live alone, like Barbara.

According to Debono and Muraven (2014), the phenomenon of social exclusion can lead to depression and loneliness, which leads to behavioural issues for example suicide. Alpert et al (1951) declared that social exclusion is one of the central reasons that cause suicide. They also pointed out that having low social support and reduced social participation indicates the phenomenon. To understand further about this issue, Wang et al (2021) released a study to explore the effect of social exclusion on suicidal ideation among the elderly in rural pension institutions and the effect of interpersonal trust. In the study, they picked out 26 nursing homes and handed out questionnaires to the elderly residents. The 1,387 out of the sample population of 1,439 elderly individuals who filled out were aged between sixty-five and seventy-five years. Consequently, the results presented that social exclusion increased the likelihood of suicidal thoughts among the elderly due to a diminished sense of belonging, which also increased the feelings of depression. According to Sun et al (2020), negative emotions from social exclusion can increase suicidal ideation in older adults. Social exclusion affects not only one's sense of belonging but also the relational value between individuals, which therefore causes a higher intensity of anxiety and leads to emotional effects on them (Baumeister et al, 2005). Wang et

al (2021) also highlighted from the study that rural elderly adults experiencing social exclusion will struggle to feel a sense of connection and satisfaction. This is because of the lack of belonging that leads to various problems to satisfy those.

Potential Cognitive Effects

Lastly, when Barbara goes through social exclusion, there is a possible chance that she can also experience cognitive consequences from the phenomenon. Memory decline is one of the cognitive effects that may potentially have an impact on Barbara. Many research studies addressed that when an individual manages their negative feelings from being socially excluded, it can use up a lot of their limited attention resources. By doing so, the attention resources would not be enough to do other cognitive tasks, for example, working memory. Therefore, there is a potential probability that social exclusion will negatively impact both abilities to store information and attention (Baumeister et al, 2002; Chester & DeWall, 2014).

Xu et al (2018) conducted a study to determine whether having poor performance working memory triggered by social exclusion causes weaker storage capacity, impaired attentional filtering ability, or both. Thirty-eight female volunteers were the population of the study. In the study conducted by Benenson et al (2013), the results implied that females are more inclined to suffer from social exclusion, which is the reason why female participants were only selected for this research. Nonetheless, there were two experiments done for the research. In experiment 1, the sample of sixteen female participants was ordered to remember the orientations of red rectangles while ignoring the green rectangles. Manipulation was included in the tests, such as the Cyberball game and the Need Threat Scale. The aim of experiment 1 was to figure out whether social exclusion affected working memory by reducing storage capacity, attention filtering, or both. The results from Experiment 1 do support the idea that social exclusion influences attentional filtering ability. It is to be noted that the study is limited

because of the failure to obtain evidence that exclusion reduces storage capacity. In Experiment 2, another thirty-six female participants were asked to remember 1-5 coloured dots and the same procedures were used throughout the test. The findings of Experiment 2 showed that people who felt excluded reached their maximum memory capacity with fewer items from the tests. Combining two experiments, both experiments provided evidence that participants who experienced social exclusion had an impairment of attentional filtering ability and reduced storage capacity. Atlas, by relating this study to socially excluded older people, this can affect their memory retention and slowly decline any new information they may experience in future events.

In Barbara's scenario, she experienced social exclusion where she felt unseen by the community of her village which both have new residents and neighbours being busy with their own family. Because of this, she may have a problem with keeping newer information and retaining memories.

Another possible outcome of social exclusion can be the reduction of cognitive abilities. According to Wu et al. (2017), elderly females have a higher risk of having cognitive impairments than elderly males. Moreover, this can mean that if Barbara experiences social exclusion, she may be at risk of reduced cognitive abilities. According to Palmer (2019), the effects of social isolation and loneliness can affect an individual's cognitive functioning. Yang et al (2018) gave evidence by conducting a study on the relationship between social exclusion and cognitive impairment. A survey was given to respondents of elderly women aged between 65 and 99 years in the Chinese population. The findings of the study underscore that older women facing social exclusion are prone to having a higher threat of cognitive impairment. It also highlights those elderly rural women face multiple challenges that increase their risk of social exclusion can lead to cognitive impairment. On top of that, the challenges they faced were deeply rooted in traditional systems. For example, rural Chinese women are largely tied

to their husband's status. After their husband passes away, their well-being often depends on their adult son since they receive limited support from social welfare services.

In Barbara's case, although her status was not tied to her husband. She was still extremely dependent towards her husband as he drove the car and took trips together. After her husband passed away, she tried to lean her dependency towards her son, which she struggled to do due to his busy work life as well as her friends who are visiting her to a lesser extent. Therefore, this made her feel lonely which can lead to social exclusion.

Strategies to Ameliorate Social Exclusion

Interventions to ameliorate social exclusion are as essential as addressing the issue itself. Strategies such as social skills training, community groups, and other categories are direct interventions that are needed to create a broader sense of social integration. These interventions include one-on-one approaches where volunteers reach out to socially isolated individuals through phone calls. For Barbara, who struggled to make social connections with people anymore, therefore, these types of direct interventions are useful to encourage her to reduce social exclusion.

Indirect interventions are another type of interventions which do not directly target social exclusion but are still able to help reduce these feelings. For instance, Barbara can join an exercise group not only to benefit her health, since she rarely does her dancing activities and leaves the house, but also to offer her a chance to socialize again. By doing this, this may reduce her feelings of loneliness, even if the main focus is on fitness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Barbara's situation exemplifies the impact of social exclusion on elderly individuals. It is crucial that this case study is not clinically diagnosing her, but is more likely to list out the potential detrimental effects of social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes from

social exclusion. Throughout the case study, these three effects were brought out and discussed on what could happen to Barbara from her situation. Moreover, Barbara's story also underscores the urgent need to address social exclusion among the elderly. Fostering interventions and promoting social engagement can help prevent negative consequences associated with social exclusion and enhance the overall well-being of older individuals. The limitation of the research in this case study was the lack of study done on older individuals. The research was mostly based on early stages of life such as adolescence. Therefore, there should be more studies specifically on elderly people.

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