



## **SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines social exclusion and marginalization experienced by vulnerable groups in society through a qualitative literature approach. The discussion focuses on how factors such as poverty, disability, age, and social identity shape unequal access to social, economic, and political participation. The findings indicate that exclusion is not a singular condition but a structured process formed by interconnected social and institutional arrangements. Marginalization limits opportunities for vulnerable groups to engage fully in education, employment, healthcare, and decision making processes. These limitations contribute to persistent inequality and reinforce social distance between dominant and disadvantaged groups. The study also highlights that social perceptions and structural arrangements jointly sustain patterns of exclusion over time. By synthesizing existing scholarly perspectives, this research provides a systematic understanding of how exclusion operates and affects participation. The study offers insights for developing more inclusive social arrangements that enable broader participation across different groups in society.

**Keywords:** social exclusion, marginalization, vulnerable groups, inequality, social participation, structural barriers, social identity.

## Introduction

The understanding of social exclusion stems from the reality that social life does not always provide equal space for all individuals to participate in various spheres of life. Social exclusion is not merely a phenomenon of income poverty, but rather a systemic failure of various social institutions to integrate individuals functionally (Silver, 2015). This is often exacerbated by conditions in dense urban environments, where underprivileged families frequently struggle to meet even the most basic needs, such as food (Mahmudah, 2021). Within evolving social structures, there are specific groups that systematically experience limited access to resources, opportunities, and social recognition. This condition does not emerge suddenly; instead, it is formed through a long process involving economic dynamics, social norms, and institutional practices that shape the patterns of intergroup relations. These patterns of social separation are even clearly visible in the territorial division or spatial planning of major cities that separate the wealthy from the poor (Fauzi, 2021). While some individuals gain broad access to education, employment, and public services, others find themselves in marginalized positions, struggling to escape such conditions. This situation creates a gap that is not only material in nature but also touches upon social and psychological dimensions that influence how individuals perceive themselves within society (Mela & Toldo, 2019). A person's feelings and behavior within a group are indeed highly influenced by how the surrounding organizational or social environment treats them (Darmawan, 2013). Therefore, social exclusion must be understood as a layered and complex condition that affects the sustainability of individual lives as well as the overall quality of social interaction.

In the development of modern society, rapid social change is often not accompanied by the readiness of all groups to adapt equally (Bombongan, 2009). Technological advances, economic globalization, and changes in occupational structures present new opportunities for some individuals, yet simultaneously widen the distance for groups with limited resources. Especially in today's digital era, the way we communicate and gather in virtual communities has changed drastically and demands a high capacity for adaptation (Darmawan, 2021). Digital transformation and the knowledge economy often create a new 'divide'

that worsens social isolation for those who lack technological literacy or adequate social capital (Helsper, 2017). The problem is that modern developments sometimes make people more self-centered, causing the sense of togetherness within society to fade (Saputra & Darmawan, 2021). Individuals living in poverty, for instance, face multi-layered barriers in accessing decent education, healthcare services, and stable employment. These conditions reinforce a cycle of inequality that is difficult to break because such limited access continues to be inherited from one generation to the next. Furthermore, uneven population migration to cities also creates new problems that threaten harmony among residents (Mardikaningsih, 2021). Rapid social change also gives rise to new standards in social life that cannot always be followed by all individuals, thereby strengthening the position of certain groups as excluded parties within the developing social structure.

Social exclusion is also closely related to the social identities attached to individuals, such as disability, age, gender, or ethnic background. These identities often become the basis for differential treatment in society, both directly and indirectly (Zubac, 2020). A clear example is that working women often bear a double burden between their careers and household affairs due to social structures that are not yet equitable (Khairi, 2021). Individuals with disabilities, for example, frequently face obstacles in accessing public facilities that are not yet fully responsive to their needs. The social stigma attached to certain identities functions as a mechanism of exclusion that limits individual accessibility to basic rights and political participation (Burchardt, 2004). This challenge becomes even more severe when ideologies emerge that excessively take pride in specific religious or ethnic groups, thereby threatening unity (Fariz, 2021). The elderly group also often experiences limitations in obtaining employment opportunities and participating in broader social activities. Additionally, social norms evolving in society can reinforce certain stereotypes that restrict the movement of individuals based on the identities they hold. In fact, long-standing local values sometimes clash with modern ways, such as when traditional communities respond to marketing strategies for environmentally friendly products (Mardikaningsih et al., 2021). Consequently, social exclusion is not only related to economic conditions

but also concerns the social constructions that shape how society treats specific individuals and groups.

In daily practice, social exclusion is often unrecognized because it has become part of long-standing social habits (Adam & Potvin, 2016). Public policies that are insensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups can reinforce this condition, especially when policy formulation is predominantly based on the perspective of the dominant group. In fact, good policy should be able to balance economic interests, the environment, and the social needs of the community (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2021). The absence of representation from marginalized groups in decision-making causes policies to often reproduce structural injustices rather than resolving them (Levitas et al., 2007). Therefore, it is crucial for the government to create policies that truly focus on improving quality of life, health, and equality for all (Issalillah, 2021). Additionally, the unequal distribution of resources further strengthens the disparity in access to various basic services. When certain groups do not have the same opportunity to voice their interests, the resulting policies tend to ignore their needs. Even within the household, the role of women is significant in deciding the use of environmentally friendly products as a form of social concern (Halizah & Nuraini, 2021). This condition demonstrates that social exclusion occurs not only at the individual level but is also related to the institutional structures that shape the patterns of power and resource distribution in society.

Marginalization as a component of social exclusion indicates a process of exclusion that takes place gradually and structurally. Individuals or groups experiencing marginalization are often placed in disadvantageous positions in various aspects of life, making it difficult to achieve welfare equal to that of other groups (Karpyak, 2020). We must remember that in the future, the human psychological condition will become increasingly complex alongside the development of technology and society (Darmawan et al., 2021). This process can occur through subtle mechanisms, such as restricting access to education or employment, or through more explicit practices, such as social discrimination. Psychologically, chronic marginalization can lower self-efficacy and create a sense of learned helplessness among vulnerable groups (Dixon & Frolova, 2011). To overcome this sense of alienation,

many people in urban areas have begun to form social networks through communities with shared hobbies or interests (Rejeki, 2021). In the long run, marginalization can cause individuals to lose self-confidence and feel alienated from their social environment. This reinforces the distance between groups with broad access and those experiencing limitations, thereby creating an increasingly unbalanced social structure.

The issues of social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups indicate an imbalance in the distribution of access to resources and opportunities that should be enjoyed collectively. When certain groups continually remain in a disadvantageous position, an accumulation of inequality occurs that affects their overall quality of life. This phenomenon is often referred to as 'cumulative disadvantage,' where one form of exclusion triggers a chain of exclusion in other areas of life (Room, 1999). This disparity is visible not only in economic aspects but also in the limitations of participating in social and political processes. This situation reveals a widening gap between groups actively involved in social life and marginalized groups, resulting in structural and ongoing problems.

Another emerging problem relates to how social identity is used as a basis for determining an individual's position in society. Categories such as disability, age, or specific social backgrounds often become factors that restrict an individual's room for maneuver in obtaining equal opportunities. When these identities are viewed as negative differentiators, individuals possessing them tend to experience unequal treatment. The perspective of intersectionality shows that individuals with layered identities, such as women with disabilities from ethnic minorities, face far more extreme risks of exclusion (Crenshaw, 2013). This condition reinforces practices of marginalization that occur continuously and form patterns of injustice that are difficult to change in a short period.

The study of social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups has strong relevance in understanding the dynamics of an ever-changing society. Current changes in economic and social structures present new challenges in ensuring that all individuals have equal access to various opportunities (Silver & Silver, 2007). When some groups are left behind in this process of change, the potential for social conflict may increase due to dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of

opportunities. The social cohesion of a nation depends heavily on the extent to which inclusive policies can reach the most marginalized groups (Taket et al., 2009). By understanding how social exclusion occurs, a clearer picture can be obtained regarding the patterns of social relations developing in society.

Furthermore, the discussion regarding vulnerable groups provides a broader understanding of how society treats individuals in disadvantageous positions. Through this study, various factors causing marginalization can be identified, as well as how these factors are interrelated in forming conditions of social exclusion. Effective social integration requires the deconstruction of structural barriers and a paradigm shift in public services to become more inclusive (Hickey & Du Toit, 2013). In conclusion, every part of society must embrace one another to create a harmonious life for everyone without exception. This understanding is essential for building awareness about the importance of creating a fairer social structure, so that every individual has the same opportunity to participate in social, economic, and political life.

This research aims to systematically examine the various factors that form social exclusion and explain how the process of marginalization affects the participation of vulnerable groups in various fields of life. This study is expected to contribute to the development of theoretical understanding regarding the relationship between social structure and inequality, and serve as a basis for formulating fairer approaches in managing social life. Additionally, this research is expected to enrich the academic literature discussing social exclusion by presenting a structured and comprehensive analysis, so it can be used as a reference in future research and in the formulation of policies that are more responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups.

## Method

This research employs a qualitative approach through a literature study aimed at systematically examining various concepts, theories, and scientific findings related to social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups. The literature study was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine various tested scientific sources, thereby producing a comprehensive and structured synthesis of knowledge. The data

collection process was carried out by searching academic books, reputable journal articles, and other scientific publications relevant to the research topic. These sources were selected based on the author's credibility, relevance to the focus of the study, and citation levels that indicate their influence in the related field of science. In qualitative research, a literature study serves as a means to understand theoretical constructions and the development of scientific thought systematically, as explained by Creswell (2014), who emphasizes the importance of integrating various sources in building a strong conceptual framework, as well as by Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2012), who outline techniques for systematic literature searching and synthesis in social research.

Data analysis in this study was conducted through content analysis techniques by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the main ideas contained in the various collected sources. Each source was critically analyzed to find patterns of thought, similarities, and differences in perspectives developing within the literature regarding social exclusion and marginalization. This process was carried out in stages, starting from data reduction and data display to drawing conclusions based on the relationships between the discovered ideas. This approach is consistent with the views of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), who emphasize the importance of a systematic analysis process in qualitative research, and is supported by Neuman (2011), who explains that a good literature study requires interpretive skills to produce a structured understanding of the issue being studied. Thus, the method used in this research is expected to produce a study that is consistent, logical, and possesses a strong scientific foundation.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Dynamics of Factors Causing Social Exclusion in Society**

Social exclusion is the result of the interaction of various interrelated factors that form a structure of inequality within society. Economic factors are one of the primary determinants influencing an individual's position in the social structure. Poverty is not merely related to income limitations but also reflects limited access to education, health, and decent job opportunities. Individuals living in these conditions tend to experience layered obstacles that reduce their ability to participate

actively in social life. These circumstances create patterns of marginalization that are difficult to overcome because the limitations experienced do not stand alone but rather reinforce one another in forming a disadvantageous social position (Karpayak, 2020). This condition is exacerbated by labor market mechanisms that often sideline individuals with low human capital, thereby trapping them in a cycle of systemic poverty (Adato et al., 2013).

In addition to economic factors, disability is one of the aspects contributing to the occurrence of social exclusion. Individuals with disabilities often face structural barriers that hinder their access to various public facilities. Limited unfriendly infrastructure and a lack of public understanding regarding special needs cause individuals with disabilities to experience difficulty in carrying out daily activities independently. These barriers are not only physical but also social, as the stigma developing in society often reinforces the distance between individuals with disabilities and their surrounding environment. Consequently, they are placed in a position that is poorly accommodated in various aspects of life. Exclusion for persons with disabilities is often rooted in the medical model, which views disability as an "individual problem" rather than a failure of society to provide an inclusive environment (Shakespeare, 2006).

Age factors also have a significant influence in shaping social exclusion. The elderly group often faces limitations in accessing job opportunities as well as participation in social activities. Declining physical conditions and public perceptions that consider the elderly group less productive narrow their room for maneuver in social life. On the other hand, younger age groups who do not yet have experience or access to resources can also experience marginalization, especially in a competitive labor market. Both these groups demonstrate that age can be a vital determinant in deciding the extent to which an individual can be involved in social and economic activities. Research shows that exclusion in old age is multidimensional, encompassing social isolation, material insecurity, and limited access to digital services in the modern era (Walsh et al., 2017).

Social identities such as gender, ethnicity, and cultural background have a strong influence in shaping the process of social exclusion because

they are attached to individuals from the beginning of life and continue to interact with the norms and values evolving in society. These norms often form unwritten standards regarding who is deemed worthy of obtaining access to resources and specific opportunities. In this situation, minority groups are frequently placed in disadvantageous positions due to deep-rooted stereotypes in daily social practices. These stereotypes are not always present in the form of overt actions but can emerge through policies, customs, and interaction patterns that indirectly limit an individual's space. Marginalized identities often experience "symbolic erasure," where their voices and contributions are not recognized in dominant public discourse (Fraser, 2000). Social identity becomes the basis for the formation of differential treatment that affects the distribution of opportunities in various fields of life, including education, employment, and social participation (Giddens, 2006).

The process of exclusion based on social identity takes place through structured and repetitive mechanisms, thereby forming patterns of inequality that are difficult to change in a short time. Individuals from certain groups often face barriers that are not directly visible, such as limited access to social networks or a lack of representation in decision-making spaces. This condition reinforces their position as excluded groups, as these limitations reduce the chances of significantly improving their social position. Furthermore, the way society constructs identity also influences how individuals perceive themselves, which can ultimately limit self-confidence and active participation in social life (Sen, 2000). The inability of individuals to access social capital through elite networks is often a major barrier to vertical mobility for minority groups (Lin, 2000). Social exclusion rooted in identity is not only related to external treatment but also concerns the process of internalization that reinforces imbalances within the social structure (Hall, 1997).

Social exclusion is also influenced by public policies that do not yet fully accommodate the needs of all community groups. When policies are designed without considering the diversity of social conditions, vulnerable groups tend not to receive equal benefits. This is evident in the uneven distribution of public services and the lack of access to social programs for certain groups. General policies often fail to reach the specific needs of vulnerable groups, thereby strengthening their position

as excluded parties within the social structure. The lack of evidence-based and participatory policy design results in "institutional blindness" toward the suffering of the most marginalized groups (Burchardt et al., 2002).

The social structure formed within society further reinforces social exclusion through mechanisms that occur repetitively (Aartsen et al., 2021). Unequal relationship patterns between dominant groups and vulnerable groups create conditions where access to resources is concentrated within specific groups. This condition reveals an uneven distribution of power, making it difficult for those in weak positions to change their circumstances. This structure persists because it is supported by social norms and institutional practices that consolidate the position of each group in society. This aligns with the theory of habitus, which explains how social structures are internalized into behaviors that perpetuate the dominance of certain classes (Bourdieu, 2019).

The interaction between these various factors shows that social exclusion cannot be understood as the result of a single cause. Poverty, disability, age, and social identity interact with each other in shaping an individual's experience in society. When these factors are present simultaneously, the level of marginalization experienced by an individual becomes increasingly complex (Adam & Potvin, 2016). The perspective of intersectionality emphasizes that the accumulation of various vulnerable identities creates unique and more severe forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 2013). This indicates that social exclusion is a dynamic process influenced by various conditions that continue to evolve in social life.

The dynamics of the factors causing social exclusion show a close relationship between social structure, public policy, and individual characteristics in forming marginalized conditions. These factors work simultaneously in creating barriers to individual participation in social, economic, and political life. Inequality in access to digital technology today has also become a new dimension in social exclusion that widens the participation gap between citizens (Helsper, 2012). Understanding these dynamics provides a clearer picture of how social exclusion is formed and why such conditions are difficult to overcome in a short time, thus requiring an approach capable of seeing the interconnections between the various factors that shape it.

## Implications of Marginalization on the Participation of Vulnerable Groups

Marginalization produces a broad impact on the ability of vulnerable groups to engage in social life. When individuals are consistently placed in a disadvantageous position, they tend to experience a decline in access to broader spaces of social interaction. This limitation forms a gap between vulnerable groups and other groups that possess greater access to resources and social networks. In such conditions, social participation is no longer an equal choice for all individuals; rather, it depends on pre-established social positions (Abrahamson, 2017). These circumstances create uneven participation patterns, where certain groups are more dominant in determining the direction of social life. This process is often exacerbated by exclusion mechanisms that make individuals feel they lack the agency to influence their surrounding environment (Levitas et al., 2007).

In the economic sphere, marginalization creates significant limitations on an individual's ability to obtain decent, stable employment that provides adequate social protection. Vulnerable groups are often found in the informal sector, characterized by low wages, income uncertainty, and an absence of social security such as health insurance and labor protection. This condition does not occur by chance; rather, it is the result of a labor market structure that tends to favor groups with better access to education, skills, and social networks. When individuals lack such capital, they tend to be pushed into less productive and high-risk jobs (Sen, 1999). This situation demonstrates that economic marginalization is not merely a matter of lacking income, but relates to limited access to opportunities that can sustainably improve one's socio-economic position (Standing, 2011). This precariat nature of work systematically prevents vulnerable groups from planning a stable future due to the lack of economic security guarantees (Kalleberg, 2009).

The economic limitations experienced by vulnerable groups reinforce a cycle of inequality that persists across generations (Sekher & Carciumaru, 2019). Low income restricts an individual's ability to access quality education and skills training, making the chances of obtaining better employment increasingly slim. This condition directly impacts the quality of life, including the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare services. Economic instability also increases

vulnerability to various social risks, such as job loss or economic crises that can worsen already limited conditions (Atkinson, 2015). In the long term, this state creates a pattern of dependency that is difficult to break because individuals lack sufficient resources to exit the situation. Marginalization in the economic field contributes greatly to maintaining recurring social inequality within society (Bourdieu, 1986). The accumulation of economic disadvantages creates structural barriers that hinder vertical social mobility for families in the lower strata (Corak, 2013).

Marginalization also impacts the political participation of vulnerable groups. Individuals in marginalized positions often face limitations in accessing information as well as spaces to voice their interests. This leads to their aspirations being underrepresented in decision-making processes. When vulnerable groups are not actively involved in the political process, the resulting policies tend not to reflect their needs. This condition strengthens the distance between groups holding power and those in weak positions, thereby creating an imbalance in the distribution of influence within society. This lack of political representation often culminates in the neglect of the basic needs of marginalized groups within national development agendas (Lister, 2007).

In daily social life, marginalization can trigger feelings of alienation that affect an individual's relationship with their environment (Baah et al., 2019). Individuals who feel unaccepted within certain social groups tend to withdraw from broader social interactions. This can reduce self-confidence and hinder an individual's ability to build productive relationships. Such feelings of alienation impact not only the individual but also social cohesion as a whole. When some members of society feel separated from social life, the quality of inter-individual relationships becomes less harmonious. Social alienation is also negatively correlated with mental health, which further weakens an individual's capacity to engage actively in the community (Phelan et al., 2010).

The impact of marginalization on education is also very significant. Vulnerable groups often face limitations in accessing quality education, due to both economic factors and a lack of social support (Vrcelj et al., 2019). This condition affects their ability to develop their potential and compete in the professional world. Uneven education reinforces social gaps because individuals who do not obtain adequate education tend to

have fewer opportunities to improve their quality of life. In the long run, this condition can strengthen patterns of marginalization that persist across generations. Educational inequality is not just a technical issue but a reflection of how the educational system fails to serve as a tool for equality (Reardon, 2018).

Marginalization further influences access to healthcare services. Vulnerable groups often face obstacles in obtaining proper healthcare, due to both cost constraints and difficult geographical access. This condition impacts their overall health quality, which ultimately affects their ability to participate in various social and economic activities. Poorly maintained health can reinforce existing limitations, creating a cycle that is hard to break. Disparities in health status between marginalized and dominant groups indicate systemic injustice within the social determinants of health (Marmot, 2005).

In broader social relations, marginalization can reinforce stereotypes and prejudice against certain groups. When vulnerable groups are continuously placed in disadvantageous positions, negative perceptions of them can grow stronger. This creates additional barriers in their efforts to integrate into society. Evolving stereotypes affect not only how other groups perceive them but also how they perceive themselves. Consequently, marginalization impacts individuals not only structurally but also psychologically. The internalization of negative stereotypes can lower individual motivation and performance through the mechanism of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Marginalization also affects the ability of vulnerable groups to build strong social networks (Vrcelj et al., 2019). Limited social networks reduce opportunities to obtain information, support, and access to various resources. In an increasingly complex society, social networks become a vital factor in determining an individual's success. When vulnerable groups lack adequate access to such networks, their chances of improving their social position become increasingly limited. This reinforces pre-existing marginalized conditions. The absence of "bridging social capital" makes it difficult for marginalized groups to secure opportunities outside their limited circles (Putnam, 2000).

Marginalization creates a wide-ranging impact on various aspects of the lives of vulnerable groups. Its influence is seen in the limitations of

social, economic, and political participation, as well as in a lower quality of life compared to other groups. This condition shows that marginalization is not merely an individual problem, but relates to the social structure that shapes the distribution of access and opportunities in society. An understanding of these implications provides a picture of the importance of efforts to create a more inclusive social system, ensuring all individuals have equal opportunities to participate in collective life. The success of social inclusion relies heavily on restructuring institutions to be capable of accommodating the diverse needs of citizens (Silver, 1994).

## Conclusion

Social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups reveal a pattern of inequality formed through the interaction of various interrelated factors, such as poverty, disability, age, and social identity. These factors create a social structure that limits individual access to resources, opportunities, and participation in social, economic, and political life. The continuous process of marginalization reinforces the position of vulnerable groups as excluded parties, thereby creating a widening gap between groups with broad access and those with limited access. This condition impacts various aspects of life, including the quality of education, health, and the ability to participate in decision-making. Thus, social exclusion is not merely an individual issue but reflects a social structure that requires serious attention in efforts to create a fairer and more equitable social life.

The findings in this study provide an understanding that social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups are closely related to how society organizes the structure of access and the distribution of resources. This understanding can serve as a basis for developing policies that are more sensitive to the needs of groups in disadvantageous positions. Furthermore, this study enriches the body of social science knowledge by providing a systematic explanation of the relationship between the factors causing social exclusion and their impact on individual participation. Practically, the results of this study can be used by stakeholders to design more inclusive programs, especially in the fields

of education, health, and economic empowerment, so that vulnerable groups have greater opportunities to be actively involved in social life.

Sustained efforts are required to reduce social exclusion through the improvement of public policies that are more responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups. Providing more equitable access to education, healthcare services, and employment opportunities is a vital step in reducing existing inequalities. In addition, increasing public awareness of the importance of accepting diversity must continue so that stereotypes and prejudices against certain groups can be minimized. Future research is expected to expand upon this study using more varied approaches, including examining best practices from various countries that have successfully reduced levels of marginalization, thereby providing more applicable recommendations for the development of social policy in the future.

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