

Social exclusion monitor bulletin

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In this third bulletin we summarise the results of the social exclusion monitor, recently updated using 2010 data, and investigate the persistence of social exclusion.

Background

In 2008, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) in collaboration with the Melbourne Institute (MIAESR) commenced a research project to develop a method to measure the extent and evolution of social exclusion in Australia. In contrast to one-dimensional poverty measures such as those based on income or consumption, the social exclusion approach to disadvantage explicitly recognises the importance of multiple and interrelated factors in determining the capacity of individuals to fully participate in society.

The BSL–MIAESR measure of social exclusion draws on the capability framework proposed by Amartya Sen. Consistent with the capability approach, our measure identifies disadvantage with the accumulation of deprivation across different life domains. It uses information from seven life domains: material resources, employment, education and skills, health and disability, social connection, community and personal safety. For each domain, the individual’s level of exclusion is captured using a set of relevant indicators (see Table 1).

Data on these indicators come from the national Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. Since 2001, the HILDA survey has annually collected detailed socioeconomic data for a nationally representative sample of the Australian population.

The data are transformed into a summary measure of exclusion using a summation method where every domain is assigned the same weight and all indicators within each domain are equally weighted. Thus, our measure of social exclusion is a weighted sum of the level of exclusion in each domain. An individual’s

possible social exclusion score lies between 0 and 7, where 7 indicates the highest level of social exclusion.

Table 1 BSL–MIAESR measure of social exclusion*

Domain	Indicators
Material resources	Low income Low net worth Low consumption Financial hardship Financial status*
Employment	Jobless household Long-term unemployment Unemployment Underemployment Marginal attachment to workforce
Education and skills	Low education Low literacy Low numeracy Poor English Little work experience
Health and disability	Poor general health Poor physical health Poor mental health Long-term health condition or disability Household has disabled child
Social connection	Little social support Infrequent social activity
Community	Low neighbourhood quality Disconnection from community Low satisfaction with the neighbourhood Low membership of clubs and associations Low volunteer activity
Personal safety	Victim of violence Victim of property crime Feeling of being unsafe

*Note: Due to problems with the availability of the financial hardship indicator for 2010, a new indicator (household financial status) was added to the material resources domain. This ensured that there are at least two of the common indicators available every year in all the domains.

For further information about how we measure social exclusion, see Scutella, Wilkins and Horn (2009) and Scutella, Wilkins & Kostenko (2009).

Social exclusion in Australia: 2001–10

Prevalence

Our measure assumes that only individuals scoring above 1 experience some level of exclusion. Furthermore, people’s overall experiences of social exclusion are classified into three categories: *marginal* (scores between 1 and 2), *deep* (scores above 2), and *very deep* (scores above 3).

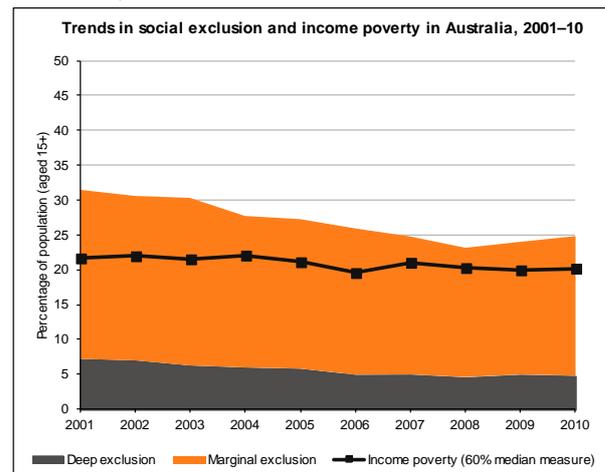
According to the latest (2010) data, almost one-quarter of Australians aged above 15 years experienced some level of exclusion that year. These comprised 20 per cent who were classified as marginally excluded and 5 per cent who were deeply excluded. Almost 1 per cent were very deeply excluded in 2010. In absolute terms, this means that about 1 million Australians experienced deep exclusion in 2010, and more than 200,000 people were very deeply excluded that year.

Trends in social exclusion over the last decade are presented in Figure 1. It shows the prevalence of marginal and deep exclusion alongside the prevalence of income poverty, from 2001 to 2010.¹ In contrast to social exclusion, there has not been a significant change in the incidence of income poverty, with the poverty rate remaining around 20 per cent for the whole period. A steady decline in social exclusion however occurred over the first 8 years with marginal exclusion at its lowest recorded level in 2008. The prevalence of marginal exclusion has been increasing since then. Thus, in 2010 the rate of marginal exclusion was 20 per cent, an increase of almost 1.5 percentage points from the 2008 rate (18.6 per cent). The impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) on employment and household income is a likely explanation for this increase.

In the period 2001–06, the rate of deep exclusion dropped from 7 to 5 per cent, and it remained fairly constant to 2010.

¹ Income poverty is here defined as having less than 60 per cent of the median income. For social exclusion, all trend graphs are derived from the common indicators that are measured in all the waves of HILDA data. Not all the indicators are collected each year.

Figure 1 Social exclusion and income poverty in Australia, 2001 to 2010

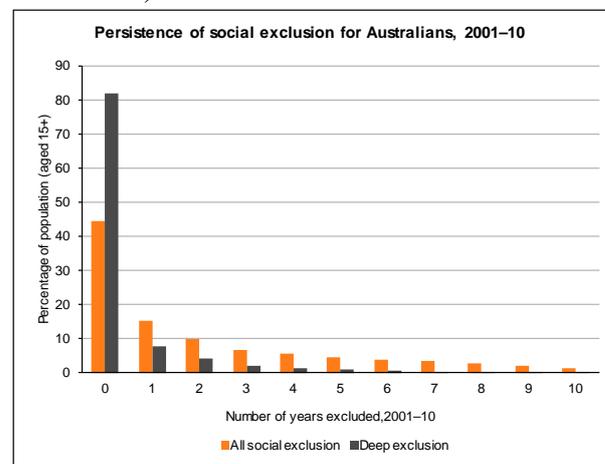


How persistent is social exclusion?

The HILDA survey interviews the same people each year. This enables examination of the extent to which social exclusion persists over time.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of people aged 15 years plus according to the number of years in which they experienced social exclusion over the 2001–10 period. Almost 55 per cent of the population were excluded in at least one year of the last decade. More than 18 per cent were deeply excluded in one or more years. Our analysis suggests that a significant proportion of the population experienced social exclusion over multiple years. Indeed, we find that almost 25 per cent of individuals were excluded in four years or more between 2001 and 2010. In the case of deep exclusion, the figures indicate that nearly 10 per cent of the population were deeply excluded in at least two years during the 2001–10 period.

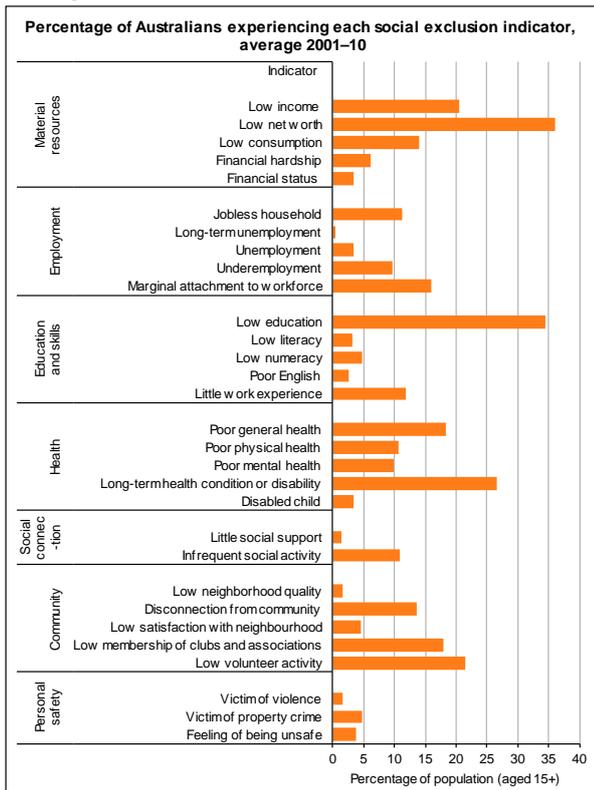
Figure 2 Persistence of social exclusion for Australians, 2001 to 2010



Indicators of exclusion

In order to better understand exclusion in Australia it is important to identify the incidence of the different indicators of social exclusion. Figure 3 shows the percentage of the population (aged 15 years or over) who experienced each of the 30 indicators of social exclusion, averaged over the period from 2001 to 2010.

Figure 3 Percentage of people aged 15 years and over experiencing each social exclusion indicator, average 2001 to 2010



Note: Not all the indicators are collected by HILDA every year, so we have reported literacy and numeracy data for 2007; low wealth (net worth) is the average of 2002, 2006 and 2010 data; low consumption is the average of 2006–10 data; low neighbourhood quality is based on data for 2001–04, 2006, 2008 and 2010; data for victims of violence and property crime are the average of 2002–10.

The most prevalent indicators, experienced by at least 20 per cent of people, are:

- low wealth
- low education
- long-term ill health or disability
- low volunteering activity
- low income.

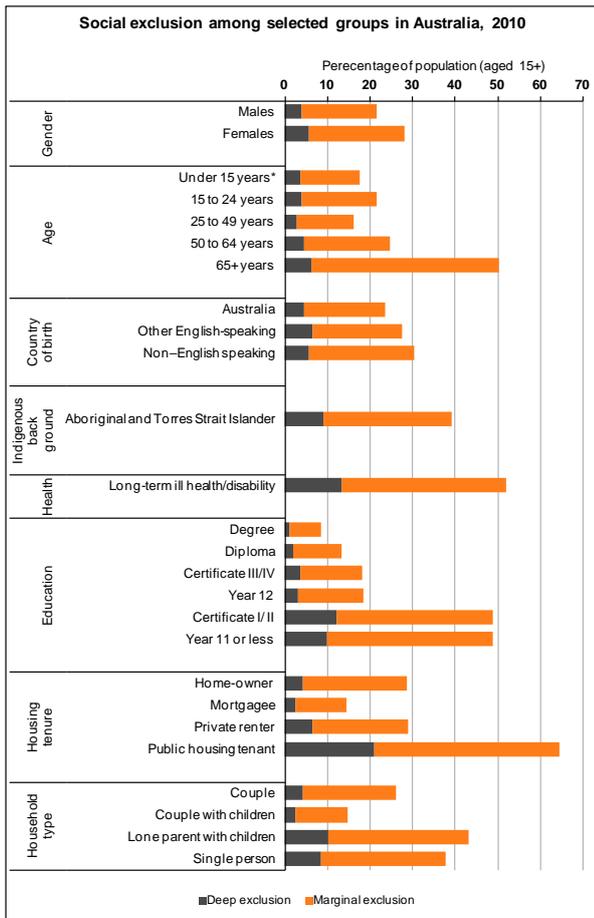
Least common of the individual indicators are long-term unemployment, lacking social support, living in a low-quality neighbourhood and being a victim of violence, each of which is experienced by less than 2 per cent of people.

Who experiences social exclusion?

There are substantial differences in the incidence of social exclusion between demographic groups. Based on the latest data (2010), Figure 4 shows that:

- The incidence of social exclusion among women was about 7 percentage points higher than among men.
- People over 65 are the age group with the highest rate of social exclusion. More than 50 per cent of this group experienced social exclusion in 2010.
- Immigrants, especially those from non-English speaking countries, are more likely to experience social exclusion than native-born Australians.
- Among Indigenous Australians, 40 per cent experience social exclusion.
- More than half of Australians who have a long-term health condition or disability experience social exclusion, and about 14 per cent are deeply excluded.
- Those with limited education are more likely to experience social exclusion. The prevalence of exclusion among those with less than Year 12 is almost as three times as high as that of those with Year 12.
- Public housing tenants experience marginal and deep social exclusion at more than twice the rate of people living elsewhere.
- About 40 per cent of single people and lone parents experience social exclusion.

Figure 4 Social exclusion among selected groups in Australia, 2010



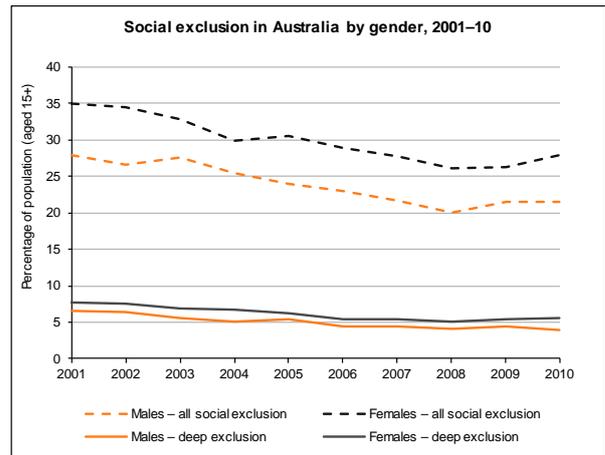
Some demographic characteristics are more associated with social exclusion than others. The following graphs show the level and trend of social exclusion for different groups of Australians for the period 2001 to 2010. Each graph shows the incidence of deep exclusion and/or of ‘all social exclusion’, which refers to the total of marginal and deep exclusion.

Age and gender

More than half of Australians aged over 65 years experience social exclusion. By gender, women are at significantly more risk of social exclusion than men.

As Figure 5 shows, the prevalence of social exclusion among women and men declined up to 2008, and it has increased for both sexes since then. The gap between men and women in this period ranged between 5 and 8 percentage points. In 2010, the prevalence of exclusion among women (28 per cent) was more than six percentage points higher than for men (21.6 per cent). The gender gap is smaller for deep exclusion. Nonetheless, more than 5.5 per cent of women were deeply excluded in 2009, compared to 4 per cent of men.

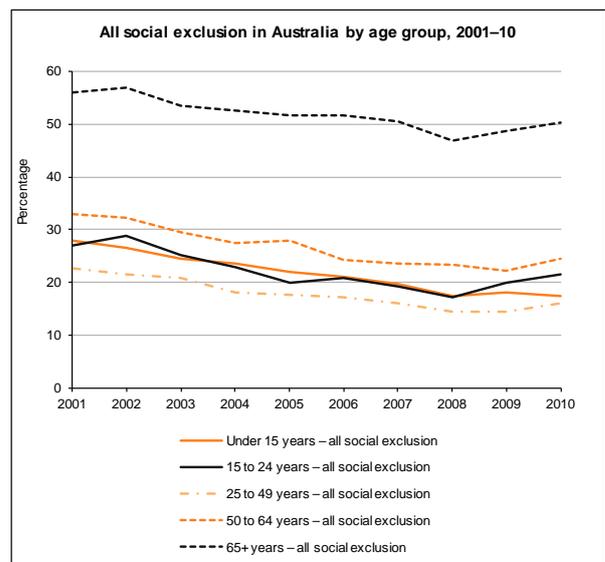
Figure 5 All social exclusion in Australia by gender, 2001 to 2010



As Figure 6 shows, people over 65 years of age experience higher levels of social exclusion than other age groups. In the last decade, the level of exclusion for this age group was above 50 per cent, compared to 20–30 per cent for other age groups.

The period 2001–08 witnessed a general decline in the prevalence of social exclusion. From 2008, however, the rate of exclusion increased for almost every group. The increase was especially large for those above 65 and for those between 15 and 24 years of age. Thus, between 2008 and 2010, the incidence of social exclusion among these groups rose by more than 3 and 4 percentage points, respectively.

Figure 6 Social exclusion in Australia by age, 2001 to 2010

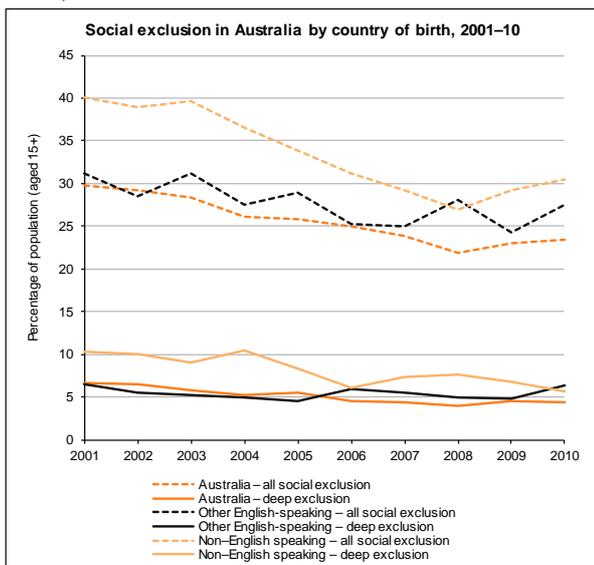


Country of birth and Indigenous background

Immigrants and people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent are particularly likely to experience social exclusion in Australia.

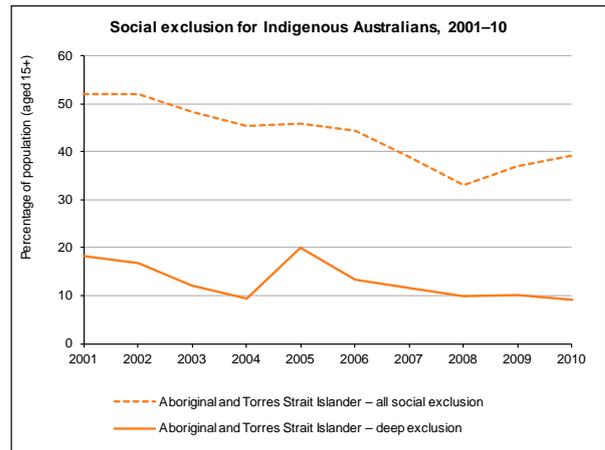
Immigrants experience higher levels of social exclusion than native-born Australians (Figure 7). The difference is particularly large for immigrants from non-English speaking countries. The rate of exclusion for this group in the past decade ranged between 29 and 40 per cent, compared to the 22 to 30 per cent observed for those born in Australia. As regards deep exclusion, between 2001 and 2005 immigrants from non-English speaking countries experienced larger rates of exclusion than other groups. However, this difference shrank in the second half of the decade. Indeed, in 2010 deep exclusion was more prevalent among immigrants from English speaking countries (6.4 per cent) than among those from non-English speaking countries (5.7 per cent).

Figure 7 Social exclusion in Australia by country of birth, 2001 to 2010



The prevalence of exclusion among Indigenous Australians was above 40 per cent for most of the period between 2001 and 2010 (Figure 8). After eight years of continuous decline, the rate of exclusion for this group started to increase after 2008, so that in 2010 almost 40 per cent of indigenous people were socially excluded. Furthermore, the proportion of Indigenous peoples who experience deep social exclusion remained fairly constant around 10 percent from 2007. Thus, more than 50,000 Indigenous Australians were deeply excluded in 2010.

Figure 8 Social exclusion of Indigenous Australians, 2001 to 2010

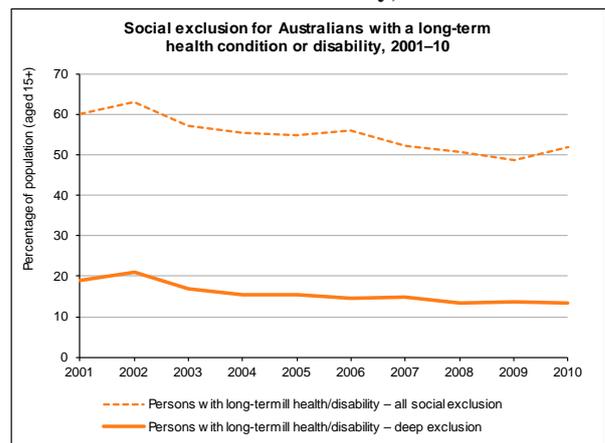


Health and education

More than one in two Australians who have a long-term health condition or disability experience social exclusion each year. Early school leavers experience social exclusion at three times the rate of those who have completed Year 12.

Having a long-term health condition or disability increases the risk of being socially excluded in Australia. Despite the downward trend in the incidence of social exclusion of the last decade (see Figure 9), in 2010 the incidence of among those who have a long-term health condition or disability was still above 50 per cent, with about 14 per cent deeply excluded.

Figure 9 Social exclusion for Australians with a long-term health condition or disability, 2001 to 2010



Individuals with low levels of education and skills are particularly likely to experience social exclusion in Australia. As Figure 10 shows, the prevalence of exclusion among those with less than Year 12 is significantly higher than among those who completed Year 12. Thus, in the period 2001–10 the prevalence of social exclusion among those who had not attained Year 12 ranged between 42 and 52 per cent. The rate of

exclusion of those with Year 12 in the same period was between 15 and 25 per cent. Similarly, those with less than Year 12 have a higher risk of experiencing deep exclusion (see Figure 11). The proportion of deeply excluded among this group was above 10 per cent for most of the last decade, which is quite high compared with the rate below 5 per cent for the rest of the groups.

Figure 10 All social exclusion in Australia by education, 2001 to 2010

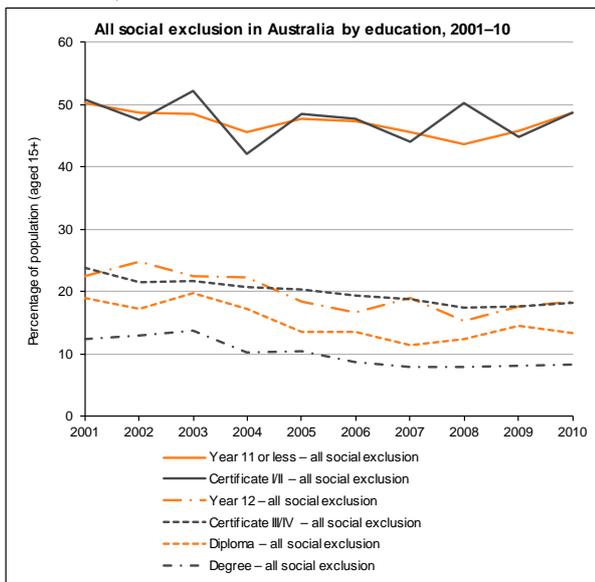
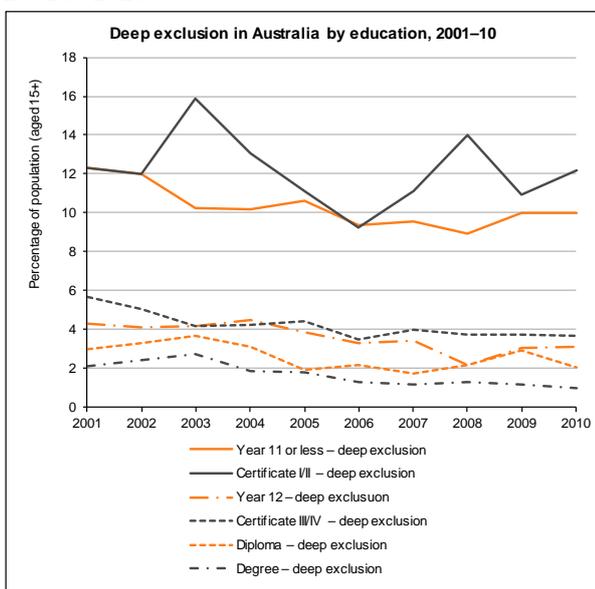


Figure 11 Deep exclusion in Australia by education, 2001 to 2010

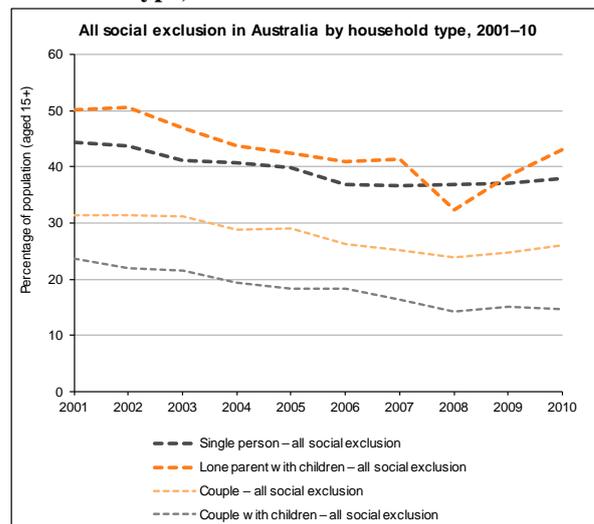


Household type and housing

Lone parents and people living in public housing are highly vulnerable to social exclusion in Australia.

The analysis by household types identifies lone-parent households and single persons as the groups most likely to experience social exclusion. As Figure 12 shows, the prevalence of exclusion among these two groups was well above that of other households for the whole decade. Interestingly, from 2001 to 2008 there was a decline in the levels of exclusion of all groups. From 2008, the incidence of exclusion increased for most of the groups. The rise was especially pronounced among lone parents, suggesting that this group was particularly affected by the GFC. Social exclusion among lone parents rose more than 10 percentage points between 2008 and 2010 (from 32 to 43 per cent).

Figure 12 All social exclusion in Australia by household type, 2001 to 2010



In relation to housing type, people living in public housing have the highest rate of social exclusion (see Figures 13 and 14). The prevalence of social exclusion for this group over the last decade ranged between 60 and 75 per cent, whereas for other groups this rate was below 35 per cent. Public housing tenants also have a higher risk of being deeply excluded. The annual prevalence of deep exclusion among those in public housing was above 20 per cent for most of the last decade compared with between 5 and 10 per cent of people in other housing situations. The proportion of people in public housing who experienced social exclusion increased after 2008, which suggests that the effects of the GFC were particularly severe for this group.

Figure 13 All social exclusion in Australia by housing type, 2001 to 2010

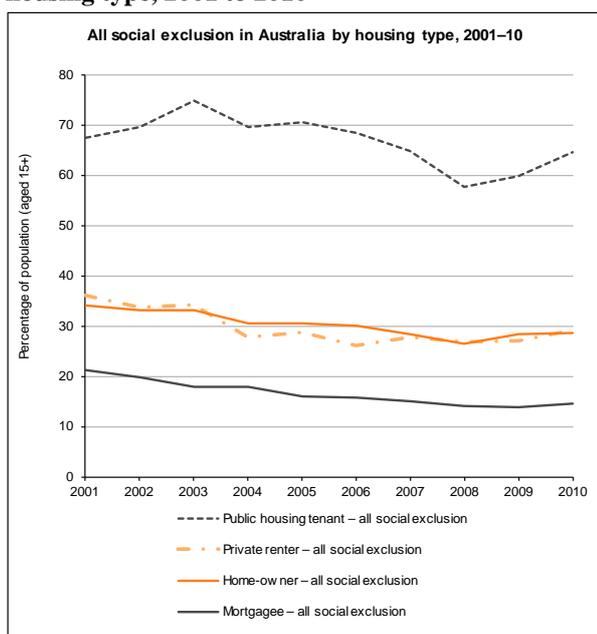
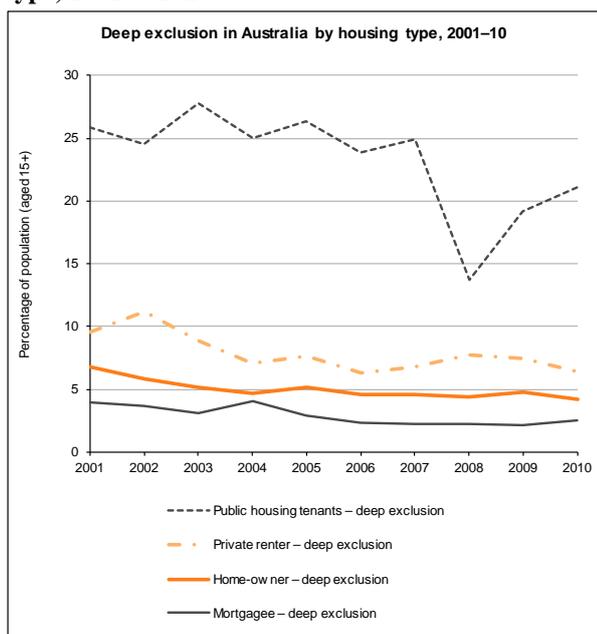


Figure 14 Deep exclusion in Australia by housing type, 2001 to 2010



Focus: How persistent is social exclusion in Australia?

In the literature of poverty it is widely accepted that the duration of poverty needs to be taken into account when determining the welfare consequences of poverty. If the severity of poverty depends on the length of the poverty episode, then it is important to identify the groups that are more likely to stay longer in poverty, as well as the factors that prevent those groups from moving out of it. Using this logic, it is therefore also important to examine the duration of people’s episodes of social exclusion.

To investigate the persistence of disadvantage we follow the *spell approach* widely used in the literature on poverty dynamics. In this approach, the persistence of disadvantage is measured using information on poverty spells, defined as consecutive periods of time over which individuals remain in poverty. Note this complements the figures on the distribution of individuals by the number of years that they are observed in poverty used so far in the social exclusion monitor (see page 2 of this bulletin).²

Spells of poverty and exclusion

We used the first ten waves of the HILDA survey to identify the spells of income poverty and social exclusion experienced by Australian people between 2001 and 2010. As Table 2 shows, our sample includes 13,061 spells of income poverty, 8,476 of exclusion and 1,974 spells of deep exclusion.

Table 2 Sample of spells derived from HILDA data for 2001–2010

	Income poverty	All exclusion	Deep exclusion
Number of spells	13,061	8,476	1,974
Individuals with:			
One spell	6,225	4,594	1,228
Two spells	2,220	1,227	247
Three or more	769	461	78
Total	9,214	6,282	1,553

Out of the 23,121 individuals aged 15 years and over included in at least one wave of the HILDA survey, 9,214 experienced an episode of income poverty and 6,282 had a spell of social exclusion. For income poverty, 6,225 of the 9,214 individuals who were poor (more than two-thirds) had only one spell of poverty; 2,220 (24 per cent) experienced two spells; and 769 (about 8 per cent) had at least three spells of poverty. In the case of social exclusion, more than 73 per cent (4,594) of those who were excluded between 2001 and 2010 had only one spell of exclusion and less than 7.5 per cent (461) experienced multiple spells.

² For a discussion of the advantages and limitations of these two approaches see Bane and Ellwood (1985).

Table 3 Composition of groups defined by the number of spells of income poverty and social exclusion

Income poverty			
Characteristic	No spell (%)	Single spell (%)	Multiple spells (%)
Male	51.1	47.8	44.8
Female	48.9	52.2	55.2
Age <35 years	55.3	44.9	34.6
Age 35–55 years	34.0	24.4	29.0
Age >55 years	10.6	30.7	36.5
Less than Year 12	38.6	58.6	58.3
Jobless household	5.9	23.7	29.4
Long-term health condition or disability	16.2	29.9	31.7
All exclusion			
Characteristic	No spell (%)	Single spell (%)	Multiple spells (%)
Male	49.8	49.8	48.6
Female	50.2	50.2	51.4
Age <35 years	56.8	46.9	30.8
Age 35–55 years	32.9	29.6	37.9
Age >55 years	10.3	23.5	31.3
Less than Year 12	34.8	58.3	55.3
Jobless household	2.5	24.7	17.7
Long-term health condition or disability	12.1	31.9	30.6
Deep exclusion			
Characteristic	No spell (%)	Single spell (%)	Multiple spells (%)
Male	50.0	47.0	45.8
Female	50.0	53.0	54.2
Age <35 years	52.1	44.9	28.6
Age 35–55 years	32.6	29.2	40.6
Age >55 years	15.3	26.0	30.8
Less than Year 12	41.4	67.4	67.2
Jobless household	7.2	39.9	50.8
Long-term health condition or disability	17.3	41.7	54.1

Note: We consider the characteristics of individuals at the time they were first included in the HILDA sample.

As Table 3 shows, women outnumbered men among those with multiple spells of poverty and social exclusion. The difference is especially significant in the case of income poverty and deep exclusion, where the proportion of women (55 per cent) is almost ten percentage points larger than that for men (44 per cent). About 45 per cent of those who experienced one spell of income poverty were below 35 years of age. In contrast, individuals above 55 years old accounted for the largest share (36 per cent) among those with multiple spells of income poverty. For social exclusion, people aged 35 to 55 made up the largest percentage among the group with multiple spells of exclusion (38 per cent) or deep exclusion (40 per cent). Lastly, among those who had multiple episodes of deep exclusion, more than half of the individuals in this group were living in a jobless household and about 54 per cent had some type of disability or long-term health condition.

Staying in or moving out of poverty

We now turn to the analysis of the survival and interval hazard functions. These two functions provide valuable insights about the time dimension of poverty and social exclusion. The survival function informs us about the probability that a poverty spell lasts beyond a specified time. Closely related to this, the hazard function describes the probability of moving out of poverty after being in poverty for a given time.

Table 4 shows the estimates of these two functions based on our sample of spells of income poverty and social exclusion. Note that since we only have annual observations of individuals' income and social exclusion, every spell lasts at least one year; so the survival probability after the first year is equal to 100. Our analysis shows considerable similarity for spells of income poverty and social exclusion. More than 64 per cent of the spells of income poverty and social exclusion persist after two years, whereas in the case of the deep exclusion the probability that a spell lasts more than two years is 58 per cent. The proportion of income poverty or social exclusion spells still in progress after the tenth year is about 27 and 24 per cent, respectively, more than 14 percentage points larger than in the case of deep exclusion (10 per cent).

Table 4 Survival and hazard functions for income poverty and social exclusion

Survival function			
Time (years)	Income poverty (%)	All exclusion (%)	Deep exclusion (%)
1	100.0	100.0	100.0
2	64.5	64.2	58.0
3	50.1	48.4	35.7
4	42.7	39.3	25.1
5	37.9	33.7	19.3
6	34.3	29.9	15.4
7	31.9	27.5	14.1
8	30.2	26.3	12.8
9	28.6	24.7	11.0
10	26.8	23.4	9.7
Interval hazard function			
Time interval (years)	Income poverty (%)	All exclusion (%)	Deep exclusion (%)
0–1	0.0	0.0	0.0
1–2	35.5	35.8	42.0
2–3	22.4	24.7	38.6
3–4	14.6	18.9	29.5
4–5	11.2	14.1	23.3
5–6	9.5	11.3	20.0
6–7	7.1	8.1	8.7
7–8	5.2	4.5	9.1
8–9	5.5	6.0	13.8
9–10	6.3	5.1	12.5

Note: Survival probabilities estimated using information on all spells including those already in progress when individuals joined the panel.

Our estimates of the hazard function indicate that the probability of moving out of poverty decreases as time in poverty lengthens. For both income poverty and social exclusion, the probability of an exit between the first and second years is about 35 per cent. Importantly, the chance of ending a spell steeply decreases after the second year. In fact, less than 12 per cent of those who are socially excluded for more than five years move out of exclusion before the end of the fifth year, and about 5 per cent of those who have a spell of more than nine years leave social exclusion before the tenth year.

Information from the survival functions can be used to estimate the expected stay for those who enter a spell of poverty. Table 5 shows the expected duration of spells for certain socioeconomic groups. The average duration of income poverty and social exclusion spells is about 4.5 years, whereas for deep exclusion the average length is slightly above 3 years.

Table 5 Expected duration of spells of income poverty and social exclusion (years)

Group	Income poverty	All exclusion	Deep exclusion
All	4.7	4.4	3.1
Male	4.5	4.5	3.1
Female	4.9	4.4	3.1
Age <35 years	3.5	4.0	3.1
Age 35–55 years	3.8	3.7	3.1
Age >55 years	6.0	5.4	2.9
Tertiary education	3.5	3.1	2.0
More than Year 12	4.1	3.7	2.5
Less than Year 12	5.4	5.1	3.3
Jobless household	5.4	5.6	3.3
Other households	4.4	3.9	2.9
Long-term health condition or disability	5.7	5.3	3.3
No long-term health condition or disability	4.1	3.7	2.3
Outright owner	5.2	4.6	2.9
Owner with mortgage	3.3	3.5	2.8
Private renter	4.1	4.5	3.0
Public housing	6.4	5.9	3.8

Note: Characteristics of individuals at the time they start the poverty spell. Expected durations estimated using information on all spells including those already in progress when individuals joined the panel.

Differences between men and women are found only for income poverty: the spells of poverty are on average longer for women than for men (4.9 versus 4.5 years). Individuals above 55 years of age experience longer spells of income poverty and social exclusion than other age groups. For instance, the average duration of an income poverty spell for individuals over 55 is 6 years, more than 2 years longer than for individuals under 55. Once they enter a spell of income poverty or social exclusion, people with less than Year 12 spend more time in poverty than other groups. Thus, the average stay in social exclusion for an individual with less than Year 12 exceeds by two years that of someone with tertiary education (5.1 versus 3.1).

Individuals living in a jobless household, people with disabilities and public housing tenants have longer stays in poverty and social exclusion than any other groups. Thus, the expected duration of the spells experienced by those with disabilities or long-term health condition is at least one year above that of people without disabilities for all the measures considered. Those in public housing have spells of income poverty and social exclusion that last on average about 6 years, between 1.5 and 2 years the duration longer than for those in other types of accommodation.

Conclusions

If successive periods of poverty make poverty more severe, then individuals' poverty experiences cannot be fully characterised without information on the duration of poverty episodes. Our examination of the time dimension of income poverty and social exclusion using longitudinal information from the HILDA survey for the period 2001–2010 found that:

- The expected duration of a spell of income poverty and social exclusion is more than 4.5 years. The expected stay in the case of deep exclusion is above 3 years.
- More than 35 per cent of the spells of income poverty and social exclusion finish before the end of the second year and about a quarter are still in progress after ten years. For deep exclusion, 42 per cent of the spells end within the first two years and less than 10 per cent last more than ten years.
- Individuals with disability or long-term health condition, people in jobless households, and public housing tenants are more likely to have particularly long episodes of disadvantage.

Sources and links

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Scutella, R, Wilkins, R & Kostenko, W 2009, *Estimates of poverty and social exclusion in Australia: a multi-dimensional approach for identifying socio-economic disadvantage* (PDF file, 1.2 MB), Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Useful links

Melbourne Institute (MIAESR):
www.melbourneinstitute.com

Australian Government's Social Inclusion program:
www.socialinclusion.gov.au

About the project

The Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges the collaboration and support of the Melbourne Institute, and particularly Roger Wilkins, Rosanna Scutella, and Hielke Buddelmeyer.

For further information

Visit the [social exclusion monitor](http://www.bsl.org.au) to keep track of the levels of social exclusion experienced by Australians based on the latest annual data.

We are happy to answer any questions about the social exclusion monitor or about social exclusion generally. Please contact us at: <research@bsl.org.au>.

For information about the Brotherhood's research on social exclusion and other topics, see our publications at <www.bsl.org.au/Publications>.

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