J Nurs Soc Stud Public Health Rehabil 1–2, 2026; DOI: 10.32725/jnss.2026.011

Review article

MOTIVATION FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS AMONG RESIDENTS OF SOCIALLY EXCLUDED LOCALITIES

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Abstract

Introduction: The study examines the motivation of residents of socially excluded localities to participate in social work interventions between 2005 and 2025, focusing on factors that support or weaken cooperation with social workers and engagement in programs.

Methods: A scoping review was conducted following the framework of Arksey and O'Malley, with a systematic search in Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo, PubMed, and Social Services Abstracts. Eighteen empirical studies and systematic reviews on social work in socially excluded localities (2005–2025) were included and synthesized using thematic analysis.

Results: Key motivational factors include relational trust, respect, and an individual approach of workers, as well as strengthening client self efficacy and community leadership. Barriers comprise long-term unemployment, debt, stigma, language and cultural differences, and digital exclusion – especially among young people. Effective interventions combine participatory planning, protective factors (resilience, sense of belonging, digital competences), and planned program adaptation that preserves core mechanisms of effectiveness.

Conclusion: Client motivation is a crucial condition for effective and sustainable social work interventions in contexts of social exclusion. This underscores the need for long-term, relationship oriented, and culturally and digitally inclusive interventions, supported by stable funding and the systematic development of community leadership.

Keywords: *Community leadership; Intervention; Motivation; Participation; Social exclusion; Social work*

INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion is a long-term and multidimensional social problem that affects individuals and entire communities on an economic, spatial, and cultural level. Social work in socially excluded localities faces an extremely challenging task – not only to respond to the immediate needs of residents, but also to support their motivation for active cooperation and lasting change. Client motivation is shown to be a key factor in the effectiveness of social interventions, influencing their success, sustainability, and impact on the quality of life.

The aim of this review is to map and synthesize current knowledge on factors and strategies that influence the motivation of residents of socially excluded localities to participate in social work interventions. The review is conceived as a scoping review, whose ambition is to identify the main directions of research in the period 2005–2025, summarize empirically validated approaches to strengthening motivation, and highlight key barriers that prevent the effective implementation of motivational strategies in this context.

At the same time, the study seeks to formulate implications for the practice of social workers and recommendations for the development of interventions aimed at increasing the motivation and participation of clients from excluded communities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted as a scoping review that follows the methodological framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2002), further refined by Levac et al. (2010) and Daudt et al. (2013). The aim was to map and synthesize existing knowledge on factors influencing motivation for participation in social work interventions among residents of socially excluded localities.

A systematic search was performed in Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo, PubMed, and Social Services Abstracts covering the period 2005–2025. The search strategy combined keywords such as "social work", "motivation", "social exclusion", "intervention", and "evidence-based practice", including their relevant synonyms (Table 1).

Inclusion criteria:
- empirical studies or systematic reviews;
- focus on social work interventions;
- population: residents of socially excluded localities;
- explicit focus on motivation or participation;
- peer-reviewed publications;
- published between 2005–2025.

Exclusion criteria:
- studies not focused on social work (e.g., healthcare-only interventions);
- theoretical papers without empirical data;
- studies focused on different populations (e.g., general population without exclusion context);
- articles without relevance to motivation or participation;
- non-peer-reviewed sources.

A total of 1,240 records were identified. After removing 340 duplicates, 900 records remained for title and abstract screening. Based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 760 records were excluded due to irrelevance. The remaining 140 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 78 were excluded (e.g., due to a lack of focus on motivation, inappropriate population, or insufficient methodological quality).

Thus, 62 studies met the inclusion criteria within the scoping review framework. From this pool, 18 studies were selected for in-depth thematic analysis, based on:
- high relevance to the research aim;
- detailed description of motivational mechanisms;
- sufficient methodological rigor;
- contribution to understanding intervention strategies.

This two-step approach is consistent with scoping review methodology, where a broader mapping phase is followed by a focused analytical synthesis.

The synthesis of findings was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Although the review covers the period 2005–2025, a higher proportion of included studies originate from recent years (2020–

Table 1 – Methodology of review research

Criterion	Specification
Type of review	Scoping review
Database	Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo, PubMed, Social Services Abstracts
Period	2005–2025
Type of studies	Empirical studies, systematic reviews
Keywords	social work, motivation, social exclusion, intervention, evidence-based practice (including translations)
Selection criteria	Studies focused on social work in socially excluded localities, only peer-reviewed articles
Number of included studies	18
Main authors	Gregory et al., 2025; Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025; Kowolová and Stanková, 2025; Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025; Strehlenert et al., 2024
Synthesis method	Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

2025). This reflects the growing research interest in motivation and participatory approaches in social work, as well as the emergence of new factors such as digital exclusion. Earlier studies (2005–2015) primarily focus on structural and socio-economic determinants, while more recent research expands the perspective to include psychological, community-based, and digital dimensions.

Although 62 studies met the scoping review inclusion criteria, only 18 studies were selected for detailed thematic analysis. This selection was based on predefined criteria emphasizing relevance to the research aim, depth of analysis, and the ability to provide detailed insights into motivational mechanisms and intervention strategies. The remaining studies contributed to mapping the breadth of the field but were not suitable for deeper analytical synthesis due to limited focus on motivation or insufficient detail (Diagram 1).

Introduction to the issue

Motivation is a crucial factor in social work with residents of socially excluded localities, influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of the intervention. The literature often discusses how extrinsic and intrinsic motivational mechanisms affect residents' willingness to cooperate (Castro and Yasui, 2017).

Social exclusion is understood here as a multi-level phenomenon, encompassing not only economic poverty, but also spatial segregation, limited access to education and healthcare, and low levels of social participation (Atkinson, 2019).

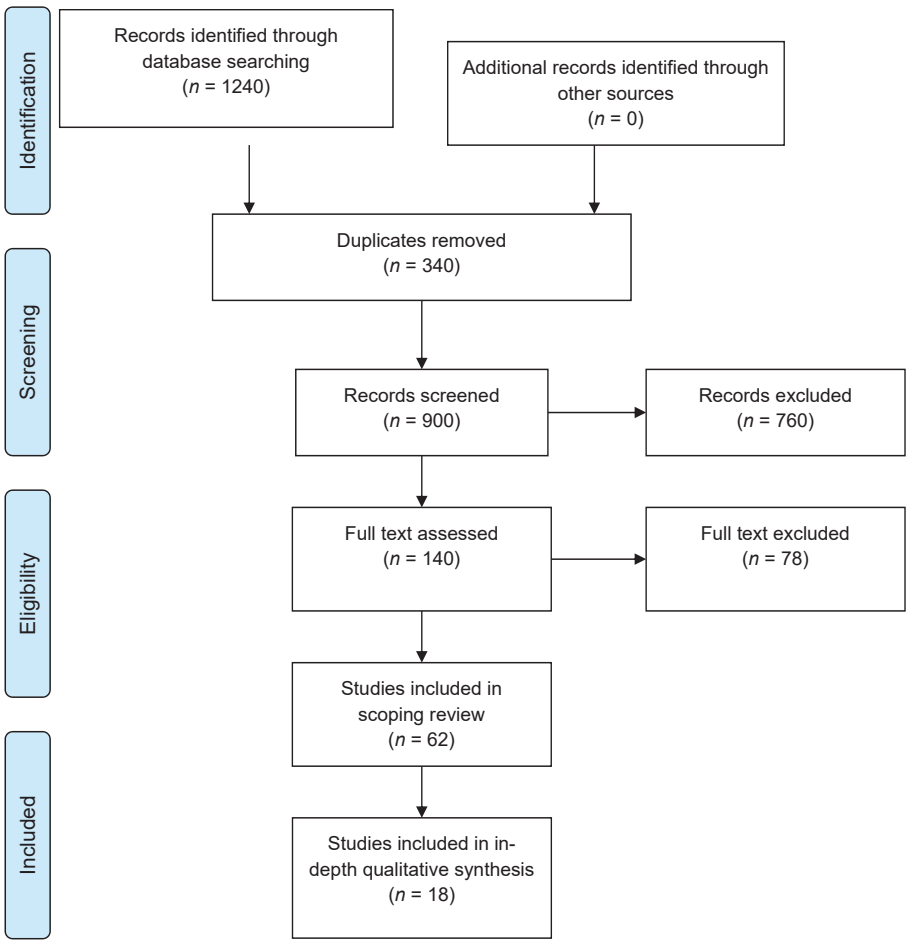


Diagram 1 – PRISMA diagram

The motivation of clients in socially excluded communities is influenced by both their experience with institutions and social work, as well as current trends and new forms of social exclusion – e.g., the digital divide (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025). Modern shifts in theory and practice emphasize the need to find new ways of empowerment, especially through community leaders who themselves come from vulnerable populations (Ballard and Montgomery, 2017; Kowolová and Stanková, 2025).

Key factors influencing motivation

Empirical data indicate that trust in the professional approach of social workers is essential for initiating collaboration (Gregory et al., 2025; Strehlenert et al., 2024). Positive relationships based on respect and empathy contribute to clients' openness to receive recommendations and actively participate in interventions (Gregory et al., 2025).

Building trust and respect is essential (Kowolová and Stanková, 2025; Strehlenert et al., 2024). However, recent research suggests that the basis of motivation should also be sought in shared, emancipated attitudes within the community, with an emphasis on the leadership of people with experience of exclusion (Kowolová and Stanková, 2025).

One of the strongest predictors of motivation is the perception of one's own ability to achieve change (self-efficacy). Interventions aimed at strengthening this feeling show higher success rates, even in the long term (Malik and Obhi, 2019). Empirical evidence confirms the key role of perceived competence, but current findings from experimental psychology show that the experience of social exclusion fundamentally reduces subjective agency and motivation for change (Park and Baumeister, 2015).

Research reflects the crucial role of socio-economic barriers: long-term unemployment, debt trap, low education level, and stigma prevent many residents from actively participating in interventions (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025). Classic barriers (poverty, unemployment, stigma) are now intertwined with new ones – e.g., digital exclusion, which limits access to support resources and participation in online services (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025).

The role of community norms is also important. Community leadership from people with experience of social exclusion has proven to be a very effective tool for strengthening motivation and trust (Kowolová and Stanková, 2025). The role of positive community norms is highlighted in studies on protective factors supporting adolescents at risk of exclusion (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025). Early intervention focused on developing resilience, along with digital literacy, plays a protective role (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025).

Effective strategies to support motivation

Research shows that the most effective programs are those that reflect the individual needs and cultural specificities of clients. Adaptation of content, language, and approaches is key (Strehlenert et al., 2024). Examples of successful adaptations are based on participatory planning with clients and the community (Castro and Yasui, 2017). New approaches build on the principle of empowerment through community leadership, where leaders with direct experience of exclusion act as a bridge between the institution and other residents (Kowolová and Stanková, 2025). Comparable conclusions are brought by Ballard and Montgomery (2017), who emphasize the importance of social recognition in community interventions.

Strehlenert et al. (2024) analyze the tension between fidelity to the original intervention model and the need for contextualization. They point out that flexibility in program design is desirable only if key mechanisms of effectiveness are not compromised.

Striking the right balance between fidelity to the original intervention model and adapting it to local conditions is one of the main challenges in social work. Fidelity is essential for maintaining the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions, but adaptation is often necessary for successful implementation in different cultural, social, or linguistic contexts (Strehlenert et al., 2024).

Modern approaches distinguish between adaptations that maintain key elements of the program (fidelity-consistent) and those that change them (fidelity-inconsistent). Research shows that planned, thoughtful adaptation

can increase effectiveness for marginalized groups if it respects the main mechanisms of action (Strehlenert et al., 2024).

In practice, it is recommended to:
- document all adaptation steps in detail;
- involve the community and workers in decision-making;
- use tools to support planning and monitoring (e.g. A-FiT tool).

Properly set adaptation contributes not only to higher acceptability of the program, but also to increased equality in access to services (Strehlenert et al., 2024).

Group reflective interventions reduce burnout and allow workers to share experiences and find innovative ways to motivate clients (Gregory et al., 2025). Shared discussion provides a space to vent frustrations and find effective methods to support client motivation.

The emphasis is on the active involvement of clients in the creation and implementation of the program. Participation supports intrinsic motivation, and leads to increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of ownership of change (Park and Baumeister, 2015). Motivational settings are also influenced by the type of social exclusion: long-term exclusions more often shift to preventive motivation ("nothing to lose"), which needs to be reflected in the design of support programs (Park and Baumeister, 2015). Group work with an emphasis on sharing and balancing experiences of exclusion helps to regain subjective agency (Gregory et al., 2025; Malik and Obhi, 2019).

Focusing on the client's positive potential (strengths instead of deficits) increases motivation and self-esteem and is a key pillar of modern interventions (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025). Protective factors such as resilience, sense of belonging, and digital skills are essential for adolescents (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025). Programs focused on adolescents (Wenting and Lijia, 2022) strengthen not only intrinsic motivation but also the willingness to engage in prosocial activities.

Challenges and barriers in working with motivation

Many studies document high workload, limited resources and high staff turnover, which reduce the possibility of long-term systematic work with motivation (Mosson et al., 2016). Capacity gaps and language and cultural barriers remain highlighted (Strehlenert et al., 2024), but with the addition of newly identified digital barriers that are becoming a key obstacle to the motivation and participation of socially excluded people in the world of digitalized services (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025).

The short-term nature of funding and the project-based nature of many interventions hinder continuous work on developing client motivation. Long-term results require stable support and relationships (Gregory et al., 2025). The project logic and short-term nature of funding represent a significant barrier to long-term client motivation in social work. Many interventions depend on short-term grants or subsidies with limited duration, which often leads to fragmentation of services, interruption of activities, and loss of relational continuity between workers and clients (Morton et al., 2021).

Morton et al. (2021) show that, in addition to funding, the sustainability of community projects is fundamentally dependent on stable resources, quality leadership, and long-term support from the local network. Key recommendations are to seek multi-year funding, plan projects with a clear logic of long-term change, and support the professionalization of organizations, including strengthening their ability to diversify resources.

Effective work is often limited by the low language skills of both workers and clients, and by insufficient knowledge of the cultural context (Strehlenert et al., 2024). The language barrier creates obstacles in communication, understanding the needs of the client, correct assessment of their situation, and setting motivational strategies (Buzungu, 2023; van Lent et al., 2025).

Research shows that language differences lead to misinterpretations, increase clients' stress levels, and can result in their feelings of isolation or reduced access to services (van Lent et al., 2025). In addition, it has long been established that minorities with limited language competence experience higher levels of social exclusion and have greater difficulty asserting their rights and needs (Beauchamp et al., 2022).

Cultural barriers also significantly affect the results of the intervention; if the social

worker is unable to recognize and respect the values, norms and specific risk or protective factors of the given environment, it is easy to lose trust and develop misunderstandings (Joo and Liu, 2021). Targeted cultural adaptation of work methods, respect for community priorities, and consistent work with one's own prejudices is therefore considered crucial in the professional literature for the success of motivation and interventions (Joo and Liu, 2021; Social Work Degree Center, 2025).

An effective strategy includes (Buzungu, 2023; Social Work Degree Center, 2025):

- using professional interpreters and translators;
- training workers in cultural competence and cultural humility;
- collaborating with community leaders and organizations;
- preparing information materials in multiple languages;
- implementing language plans within service institutions.

Insufficient consideration of these barriers leads to ineffective interventions and deepens mistrust and exclusion of target groups.

Impacts of motivation on social work outcomes

Studies show that the level of client motivation is significantly associated with program participation, lower recidivism of problem behaviors, better psychosocial functioning, and higher levels of social inclusion of residents (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025).

In addition, it is evident that increased motivation also positively affects the workers themselves – reflected, shared, and purposefully developed motivation prevents burnout and supports innovation in practice (Gregory et al., 2025). The level of motivation and protective factors is crucial for achieving long-term positive outcomes, including reduced recidivism of problem behaviors, higher sustainability of change, and better social inclusion (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025). Shared agency and community participation result in a more powerful collective approach to change (Ballard and Montgomery, 2017; Kowolová and Stanková, 2025).

Implications for practice

- Long-term partnership with clients, based on relationship and trust, is essential for the effectiveness of interventions.
- The use of participatory and strengths-based approaches supports sustainable motivation, even under challenging conditions.
- Professional supervision and reflective groups should be a standard part of worker support.
- Stable funding and support for program adaptability are key to long-term change and higher motivation of the target group.
- Strengthening community leadership, participation, and digital inclusion are essential for successfully motivating residents of excluded localities (Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025; Kowolová and Stanková, 2025).
- Programs focused on protective factors in adolescents have the potential to interrupt the intergenerational reproduction of exclusion (Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025).
- Reflective groups and a strong emphasis on agency help improve the quality of engagement in interventions (Gregory et al., 2025; Malik and Obhi, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The results of this scoping review confirm that the motivation of residents of socially excluded localities to participate in social work interventions is conditioned by complex factors that can be observed across different studies. For example, the works of Strehlenert et al. (2024) and Gregory et al. (2025) emphasize the key role of trust between the client and the social worker. These studies document that the empathetic and respectful approach of workers significantly increases the willingness of clients to respond to recommendations and actively participate in interventions.

On the contrary, Kowolová and Stanková (2025) and Ballard and Montgomery (2017) shift the debate towards community leadership as one of the most powerful variables. Leaders from among the residents of socially excluded localities represent a "bridge" between institutions and the local community,

strengthening internal agency and participation. In contrast to more traditional approaches, the above-mentioned works emphasize the crucial importance of shared experience and participatory strategies in the design of intervention programs.

A study by Mosson et al. (2016) shows that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of intervention success; the stronger the client's sense of being able to make a difference, the higher their engagement. However, Malik and Obhi (2019) and Park and Baumeister (2015) also point out the negative impacts of experienced exclusion, which reduces subjective agency and thus motivation to change. These studies highlight the need to strengthen resilience and actively involve clients in decision-making processes.

The effects of socio-economic barriers (poverty, unemployment, debt) are mentioned by Strehlenert et al. (2024), who find a correlation between the depth of exclusion and willingness to cooperate. Recently, Hartman-van der Laan et al. (2025) have drawn attention to digital exclusion as a separate factor that limits access to support services and the possibility of participation, especially among younger members of the community.

When we compare community norms and language/cultural barriers (Buzungu, 2023; Strehlenert et al., 2024), successful interventions must sensitively reflect the specifics of the local environment and approach clients in a culturally humble and linguistically accessible manner.

Protective factors – especially in adolescents – have been analyzed by Rodríguez-Negro et al. (2025). They proposed the development of resilience, digital skills, and participation to break the intergenerational transmission of exclusion.

Table 2 summarizes the main variables influencing motivation. Comparing them across studies reveals that the basis of successful practice is a combination of a respectful approach, community involvement, and targeted strengthening of clients' competencies.

Table 2 – Synthesis of the main results – factors influencing motivation

Factor type	Description / example	Study (year)
Trust in workers	Empathy, respect, professionalism	Gregory et al., 2025; Strehlenert et al., 2024
Community leadership	Leaders from disadvantaged communities	Ballard and Montgomery, 2017; Kowolová and Stanková, 2025
Self-efficacy (perceived competence)	Feeling that I can achieve change	Strehlenert et al., 2024
Socio-economic barriers	Unemployment, debt, poverty	Strehlenert et al., 2024
Digital exclusion	Limited access to online services	Hartman-van der Laan et al., 2025
Language and cultural barriers	Insufficient language skills, cultural ignorance	Buzungu, 2023; Strehlenert et al., 2024
Protective factors in adolescents	Resilience, digital literacy	Rodríguez-Negro et al., 2025

This discussion highlights the need for more connected, culturally and linguistically adapted, community-based interventions that effectively overcome barriers to motivation. Future studies are encouraged to focus on innovative methods of resilience building, digital inclusion, and participatory planning with community leaders.

Overall, the findings confirm that motivation in socially excluded contexts is not a single-factor phenomenon but rather a multidimensional construct shaped by the interaction of individual, relational, community, and structural variables. Compared to earlier studies that emphasize structural barriers, recent literature highlights the importance of agency, participation, and digital inclusion, suggesting a shift in how motivation is conceptualized and supported in contemporary social work.

CONCLUSION

The review shows that motivation for social work interventions in the context of socially excluded localities is a key factor influencing the effectiveness of assistance and the sustainability of the achieved changes. Client motivation is closely linked to trust, cultural comprehensibility, and real availability of services, as well as to the attitude of the workers themselves, their professional reflection, and support from the organizational and systemic levels.

Successful approaches are characterized by the long-term, relationship-oriented, and culturally sensitive nature of the work, which allows clients to take an active part in the process of change. At the same time, without a stable institutional and political background, it is impossible to ensure sustainable development or a balance between the needs of clients and the possibilities of workers.

Further research should focus on deepening knowledge about specific mechanisms of motivation, the relationship between individual engagement and structural barriers, and how motivational strategies can be systematically integrated into the practice of social services operating in environments of social exclusion.

Funding
Supported by the Grant Agency of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (reg. no. 144/2025/S).

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest
The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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http://doi.org/10.32725/jnss.2026.011

Submitted: 2025-11-13 • Accepted: 2026-06-10 • Prepublished online: 2026-06-11
J Nurs Soc Stud Public Health Rehabil 17/1–2: xxx–xxx • EISSN 1804-7181 • ISSN 1804-1868
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