

Low Socio-Economic Status

Executive Summary

Socio-economic status ('SES') refers to the social and economic position of a given individual, or group of individuals, within the larger society.¹ Common measures of socio-economic status are associated with material markers such as income, consumption, wealth, education and employment.²

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling defines 'economic disadvantage' as when a household's disposable income (after paying tax) falls below a level considered adequate to achieve an acceptable standard of living.³ The 2019 report [Mapping Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales](#) found that 13.3% of the total NSW population (more than 888,000 people) live in poverty.⁴

Low socioeconomic status may have impacts on

- childhood development, education and employment;⁵
- health and disability;⁶
- social exclusion;⁷
- homelessness and housing instability;⁸ and
- increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system.⁹

The 2013 Senate [Inquiry into the Value of a Justice Reinvestment Approach to Criminal Justice in Australia](#) found that

criminal behaviour is closely associated with disadvantage in living standards, health, education, housing and employment, the 'failure to adequately address these issues in many urban and rural communities in Australia has ensured that people in these communities are more likely to offend and be put in prison.'¹⁰

Serious disadvantage associated with low SES is caused by a number of factors, not income alone, indicating that ongoing individual, family, and community commitment and maximising individual empowerment are integral to improved outcomes.¹¹

Evidence of low socio-economic status in sentencing proceedings has potential relevance to an assessment of moral culpability; moderating the weight to be given to general deterrence; determining the weight to be given to specific deterrence and protection of the community; and the shaping of conditions to enhance prospects of rehabilitation. It may also be relevant to other sentencing issues and principles including a finding of special circumstances.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Measures of Socioeconomic Status](#) (Catalogue No 1244.0.55.001, 22 June 2011) 1.

² Ibid 2.

³ Yogi Vidyattama, Robert Tanton and NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [Mapping Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales](#) (Report, 24 October 2019) 11.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See, eg, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Parliament of Australia, [Bridging Our Growing Divide: Inequality in Australia](#) (Report, December 2014) 70–5.

⁶ See, eg, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Australia's Health 2018](#) (Report, 2018) ch 5.1; Productivity Commission, Parliament of Australia, [Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia](#) (Staff Working Paper, July 2013); Social Determinants of Health Alliance, Submission No 43 to Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Bridging Our Growing Divide: Inequality in Australia: The Extent of Income Inequality in Australia](#) (December 2014) 5.

⁷ See, eg, Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Parliament of Australia, [A Hand Up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight against Poverty](#) (Report, 2004).

⁸ See, eg, Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Parliament of Australia, [Value of a Justice Reinvestment Approach to Criminal Justice in Australia](#) (Report, 20 June 2013) 13 [2.50]; Australian Law Reform Commission, [Social Determinants of Incarceration](#) (Report No 133, 9 January 2018) [2.65];

⁹ See, eg, Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Defining the Data Challenge for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2013](#) (Catalogue No 4529.0, 7 February 2013).

¹⁰ Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Parliament of Australia, [Value of a Justice Reinvestment Approach to Criminal Justice in Australia](#) (Report, 20 June 2013) 10.

¹¹ Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Parliament of Australia, [A Hand Up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight against Poverty](#) (Report, 2004) 442.