Nations apart?

Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain

Peter Mackie
with Ian Thomas

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CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Crisis

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

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Foreword

There's no such thing as a 'typical' homeless person. Everyone's story is unique. Yet regardless of who you are or how it happens, homelessness is a horrifying experience that shatters the confidence and leaves people desperate and isolated.

Everyone has different needs and experiences and any approach to tackling homelessness must take this into account. Nevertheless, there are patterns we can look at to better understand homelessness and the policies needed to put an end to it once and for all. This report sets out to do just that by providing the first ever profile of single homeless people across England, Wales and Scotland.

Drawing on interviews with nearly 500 homeless people across 16 local authorities, it shows the reasons people first become homeless and the horrific consequences for their lives. It also asks what lessons can be learnt from the approaches taken by the different countries.

Some troubling patterns emerge. It is particularly alarming that half of all homeless people first become homeless aged under-21, with the majority facing the experience again and again because they can't get the help they need.

Of course, homelessness is not just about young people. Yet we see that people who first become homeless at a young age often face a vicious cycle that leaves them vulnerable to violence, substance abuse and problems with mental and physical health. This is a tragic waste of lives. As this report shows, once someone is trapped in this cycle, it can be incredibly difficult to escape. At the same time, as people's needs become more complex, the costs to society grow.

Our findings provide a powerful insight into the causes and consequences of this cycle. We see how nearly one in four homeless people have experienced violence or abuse from family or friends, while one in five have experienced violence or abuse from a partner - rising to an appalling 61% for homeless women. We also see how nearly half of all homeless people have had problems with mental health. And the more homeless episodes someone has, the greater the impact on their lives.

At Crisis we believe that everyone deserves a second chance, regardless of what they've been through, and it makes far more sense for people to get help at an early stage before their lives spiral even further out of control.

Yet the sad reality is that homeless people who ask their councils for help are being turned away with little or no support. We see that nearly two thirds of those who had recently gone to their council received either no advice, only general advice or were referred elsewhere.

We also see differences emerging across the different parts of Britain. While governments and local authorities in, England, Wales and Scotland all need to improve the services they provide for single homeless people, it is clear that in law greater efforts have been made in Scotland to give rights to single homeless people, and in Wales legal changes will bring a renewed focus on prevention. Wherever people are in the UK, they should be able to get the help they need, and in England Crisis is calling for a review of the support single homeless people get under the law.

The independent analysis in this report provides a powerful and in many ways shocking account of how single homeless people have been failed. Politicians across Britain must do more to both prevent and end homelessness.

Jon Sparkes
Chief Executive, Crisis

Executive summary

This report details the findings from a study commissioned by Crisis to explore the experiences of single homelessness across Great Britain. The research was conducted by researchers at Cardiff University in conjunction with Opinion Research Services (ORS). For the purposes of this research, single homelessness was defined as 'homelessness amongst people of adult age without dependent children' (Jones and Pleace 2010:9).

A complex range of statutory and non-statutory interventions are now being delivered to address single homelessness across Great Britain, with variations in services likely to reflect national boundaries. There has been no systematic appraisal of the impacts of this divergence on the profile and experiences of single homeless people. Therefore, this research sought to answer two questions:

- What is the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain?
- Are there differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people and if so what does this mean for the lives of single homeless people across Great Britain?'

The study adopted a three-stage, multi-method design. The initial phase explored local authority implementation of statutory homelessness duties across Great Britain. A Freedom of Information request was used to gather this information, resulting in useable data from 207 local authorities – a coverage of 51%. Stage two of the study sought to examine experiences and perceptions of homelessness services, both from the perspectives of service users and providers. In total, 480 single homeless people completed a questionnaire across 16 local authorities and 14 key informants completed a telephone interview. Finally, Stage three of the study used in-depth interviews with 30 single homeless people in order to explore homelessness pathways.

Key findings

Whilst the study cannot claim to be entirely representative of the experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain (questionnaires were conducted in a sample of 16 local authorities), it provides strong evidence to be able to respond to the two research questions:

1. There are significant differences in the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain, with differences associated with: age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, support needs, and housing histories.
2. There are major differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people across Great Britain and these impact considerably on their experiences, enabling only some to resolve their homelessness.

The findings of this study are presented in two sections: a) the overall picture of experiences across Great Britain, and b) geographical differences in people's experiences of accessing homelessness services.

An overview of single homeless people's experiences across Great Britain

Profile of single homeless people

The majority are young single men with multiple support needs. There is a very clear trend that people face difficulties during childhood and then support needs worsen with age, particularly where homelessness is not addressed and repeat homelessness occurs. It is clear that failing to deal with homelessness early is significantly impacting upon support needs.

- Most single homeless people are male (83%), aged 21-50 (76%) with a median average age of 35, White British (81%), and of British nationality (85%), albeit a significant minority (10%) are from accession state countries.[1]

- At some point during their lives homeless people have faced: unemployment (64% of respondents), mental ill health (49%), drug dependency (48%), alcohol dependency (46%), and serving a prison sentence (41%).

- Differences in support needs reflected the extent of repeat homelessness, as well as the age group, gender, ethnicity and nationality of the person:

  > People were more likely to have multiple support needs if they had faced several homeless experiences. 56% of people who had faced five or more periods of homelessness reported five or more support needs. By contrast, 11% of people with one homeless experience reported five or more support needs.

  > The general trend is for problems to worsen with age including; mental ill-health, physical health problems, alcohol dependency, and serving a prison sentence.

  > Women are more likely to have faced mental ill health (64% of women, 46% of men), violence/abuse form a partner (61% of women, 13% of men), their children being looked after by someone else (38% of women, 9% of men), and self-harming (49% of women, 23% of men).

  > British people are more likely to have faced all types of support needs than people of other nationalities.

- Approximately four in five respondents had more than one support issue, whilst over half had five or more.

Housing histories

Homelessness generally began at a young age, often resulting from a relationship breakdown at home. Many people then faced a vicious cycle of repeated homelessness, with most having experienced rough sleeping. Significantly, the earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will face repeat homelessness.

- Nearly 50% of respondents first became homeless aged 20 or younger. The median average age was 22.

- 44% of people first became homeless from the parental/family home, with a further 21% exiting the social rented sector and 11% leaving the private rented sector.

- The main reasons why people left their accommodation during their first episode of homelessness are: a non-violent dispute (41%), a violent dispute (19%), being given notice by a landlord (15%), and discharge from an institution (12%). The percentage of people leaving accommodation as a result of a dispute within the household (violent or non-violent) then decreases after the first experience of homelessness, whereas the percentage who become homeless after leaving an institution increases.

- 10% of respondents had never lived in permanent accommodation during their adult lives and nearly 80% had slept rough. Young homeless people appear to be particularly vulnerable: 1 in 4 young people (aged under 21) have never lived in permanent housing.

1 Accession states include A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) and A2 (Bulgaria, Romania).

- Differences in the reasons for leaving accommodation reflected the age and nationality of the person:
  - > People age 21 and over are more likely to have left accommodation because their landlord has given them notice on their tenancy. By contrast, young homeless people aged under 21 are far more likely to have left accommodation because of a non-violent dispute, most probably with parents/family. People who became homeless whilst very young (under 16) were also far more likely to have left home due to a violent or abusive dispute within the household.
  - > British people are more likely to leave accommodation due to some form of dispute (violent or non-violent), whereas accession state nationals were more likely to report leaving accommodation as a result of eviction, often resulting from the rent arrears that accrued after losing employment.
- Nearly three quarters of people experienced more than one period of homelessness and more than half had faced three or more experiences.
- Differences in the extent of repeat homelessness reflect: the age a person first becomes homeless and nationality:
  - > The earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will have five or more homeless experiences.
  - > A homeless person is far less likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness if they are from an accession state country.
- Approximately one-third of people first became homeless in a different UK local authority to the one where they most recently faced homelessness. Movement between local authorities and migration to the UK tends to be motivated by fear of violence or the pursuit of new opportunities/an opportunity to resolve their own crisis.

Impacts of homelessness

People often resort to desperate measures to secure accommodation, particularly if they have faced repeat homelessness.

- A quarter of respondents had committed a crime in order to get accommodation.
- The use of hospital accident and emergency services in order to secure accommodation is common place (16% of homeless people).
- Whilst engagement in sex work (2%) and unwanted sexual partnerships (4%) are less frequently reported, it is a concern that they should be reported at all. Women appear far more likely to have taken these actions.[2]
- Significantly, people who have faced multiple homeless experiences are far more likely to have committed a crime, undertaken sex work, or attended hospital Accident & Emergency in order to secure accommodation.

Accessing assistance

Whilst most single homeless people had sought assistance from a local authority they rarely did so on the first instance of homelessness. Instead, people tried to manage, using their own networks of family and friends before finally asking for local authority help. On seeking assistance, nearly half of single homeless people received

2 Given the low number of people who reported taking these actions the association with gender is not statistically significant.

assistance which they described as helpful and for the slight majority their treatment was good. Of course, this means that for very many people assistance was unhelpful and treatment was poor.

- Approximately four in five people had approached a local authority for assistance, although interviews revealed that most had experienced three or more homeless experiences before they approached the local authority.

- Differences in the extent to which local authority assistance had been sought reflected the nationality and gender of the homeless person:

  > 42% of accession state nationals sought help compared to 84% of British nationals.

  > More than 90% of women sought local authority assistance, compared to 77% of men.

- Respondents reported that on their most recent occasion of seeking assistance they were offered: no advice (27%), a referral elsewhere (22%), or general advice (15%). Accommodation offers were received by only one third of people, who were offered either temporary (26%) or settled accommodation (6%).

- Approximately 36% of respondents found local authority assistance to be unhelpful. Approximately 30% of respondents stated the help had ended their homelessness, whilst the majority claimed their homelessness had not ended (70%). Where homelessness was not ended it was generally because no accommodation was provided or due to the actions of individuals, often where their support needs are unmet.

Nations apart: the geography of single homeless people's experiences across Great Britain

Given increasing divergence in homelessness policy since devolution it seems likely that experiences may differ between the countries of Great Britain.[3] These differences were explored and the findings are summarised in the table overleaf.

In very broad terms, the picture **in Scotland** is positive relative to the rest of Great Britain. The priority need test has been abolished and statutory homelessness data shows that the vast majority of people who seek assistance are now determined to be in priority need.[4] Moreover, the likelihood of then being offered settled accommodation is around the Great Britain average. Exploring people's experiences of accessing help in Scotland showed that people were more likely to have been offered temporary accommodation and less likely to be offered no advice. Despite these positive experiences, a slightly lower than average percentage of people claimed their homelessness had ended and a lower proportion felt they had been treated well, which is perhaps a reflection of the combined effects of increased demand for services and raised expectations.

In Wales single homeless people's experiences appear to fall just below the average for Great Britain. This may be influenced by the fact that a greater proportion of single homeless people appear to be vulnerable in Wales. For example, more people become homeless at a young age, a high proportion have multiple support needs and very many have experienced three

3 London is separated from the rest of England as evidence suggests experiences in London differ to the rest of England (Dobie et al. 2014).
4 The priority need test, which still applies in England and Wales, restricts the right to settled accommodation only to those judged to be in a priority need group. This study uses data for April 2012-March 2013, hence the priority need test was still being applied in a minority of cases. Moreover, some households will be in housing need but not categorised as homeless or threatened with homelessness –they will not receive a priority need decision.

or more homeless experiences. Statutory service provision for these individuals is mixed. Whilst single people make up a high proportion of priority need households, the likelihood of being offered settled accommodation is low when compared to England (including London) and Scotland. People's experiences of accessing local authority assistance then fall just below the average for Great Britain in terms of offers of: being accommodated temporarily, helpfulness of assistance, homelessness being ended, and being treated well.

The picture **in London** is the most concerning across Great Britain, despite an apparently less vulnerable homeless population. In London, single homeless people appear to be less entrenched: the proportion of British people is lower, fewer people have multiple support needs, only a minority of people became homeless before age 21, and fewer people face repeat homelessness. Statutory homelessness services for these individuals is very limited, with an extremely low proportion of priority need households being single, albeit those who do secure priority need status are almost as likely to be offered settled accommodation as in Scotland or the rest of England. Experiences of accessing services in London raise concern. Compared to the rest of Great Britain, people are more likely to be offered no advice, far fewer people report that assistance is helpful and fewer people feel they are treated well.

Across **the rest of England** (all parts of England excluding London), single homeless people's experiences appear to be slightly above the average for Great Britain. These experiences do not result from statutory provision as, like London, single homeless people are rarely found to be in priority need. Despite limited statutory accommodation provision, the proportion of single homeless people offered temporary accommodation is in line with the British average and the likelihood of being offered no advice is relatively low. Most significantly, above any other part of Great Britain, single homeless people were more likely to report assistance as helpful, that assistance ended homelessness, and that treatment by staff was good.

The geography of single homeless people's experiences across Great Britain

		Percentages within country				
		GB Average	**London**	**Rest of England**	**Scotland**	**Wales**
People's profiles & housing histories	British	**85**	56	90	90	89
	4 or more support needs	**55**	33	55	61	66
	Under 21 when first homeless	**48**	18	51	44	59
	3 or more homeless experiences	**56**	38	54	52	78
Statutory service characteristics	Households in priority need[5]	**54**	55	42	85	38
	Priority need households who are single	**36**	21	27	62	54
	Single homeless in priority need and offered settled accommodation[6]	**67**	61	65	64	42
People's experiences	Offered temporary accommodation	**26**	24	25	35	24
	Offered no advice	**27**	35	25	16	32
	Found the assistance helpful	**44**	14	49	44	42
	Assistance ended homelessness	**31**	11	38	26	25
	Treated well	**58**	37	64	47	57

5 The percentage in priority need and unintentionally homeless as a percentage of all decisions.
6 Settled accommodation refers to an offer of local authority or housing association accommodation, including instances where the offer is refused.

Recommendations

This research has revealed a great deal about what works and what does not in the endeavour to address single homelessness. Drawing upon this learning, several key themes emerge under which recommendations are made for national and local governments. The key themes are:

- The role of law in addressing homelessness
- Principles of effective homelessness services
- The local connection dilemma
- The importance of affordable housing supply
- Data collection and publication

The role of law in addressing homelessness

Legislation has clearly achieved positive outcomes for single homeless people in Scotland on a scale that is unlikely to be achieved by any other means. This is evidence of the need for legislative change in England and Wales.

Recommendation 1

The Westminster Government should undertake a review of the help single people get under the homelessness legislation in England

Unlike in Scotland and Wales, there has been no major reappraisal of homelessness legislation affecting England since it was first introduced. It is vital that the help single people get under the homelessness legislation in England is reviewed to ensure that all homeless people get the help they need.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government should monitor and evaluate the impacts of forthcoming homelessness legislation on the experiences of single homeless people in Wales

The Welsh Government recently reviewed its homelessness legislation and radical changes are due to commence in spring 2015. However, forthcoming changes fall short of ensuring all single homeless people have access to accommodation and support. In evaluating this new legislation, The Welsh Government should consider any shortcomings in meeting the needs of single homeless people and further legislative changes should be made where appropriate.

Principles of effective homelessness services

Analysis of the key strengths and weaknesses of local authority services reveals four principles for an excellent homelessness service and these form the basis of policy and practice recommendations.

Recommendation 3

Local authorities and national governments should focus on prevention and early intervention

Homelessness frequently occurs first at a young age and multiple homeless experiences accrue before assistance is sought. This delay is detrimental to the well-being of the individual and has social and economic costs for society.

Local authorities in all three nations are now pursuing the prevention of homelessness to some extent (forthcoming legislation in Wales is particularly notable) but prevention efforts must be more proactive in identifying and assisting people before crisis and before homelessness becomes entrenched. A fundamental shift towards early assistance of all single homeless people is required.

Recommendation 4

Local authorities should provide accommodation for all those who need it

The availability and offer of accommodation in Scotland is proving to be key to addressing homelessness for many single homeless people. Local authorities must ensure they have accommodation options available to offer single homeless people.

Recommendation 5
Local authorities should provide assistance to address people's support needs

It is well-proven that single homeless people often face complex and multiple support needs. Whilst improved prevention services might reduce the number of people seeking assistance with multiple support needs, there will continue to be a need for local authorities and their partners to ensure individuals have access to ongoing support for issues such as mental health, as well as drug and alcohol misuse. This must be provided alongside accommodation.

Recommendation 6
Local authorities must treat all homeless people with respect and empathy

It is unacceptable that 23% of single homeless people in this research felt they had been treated badly. People seeking homelessness assistance are often vulnerable and must be treated with empathy and respect.

The local connection dilemma
The research identified a clear trend of local authorities restricting services only to those with a local connection, with no consideration given to the impacts on those who are excluded.

Recommendation 7
National Governments must examine the impacts of exclusion, from both statutory and non-statutory homeless services, on the grounds of no local connection, and consider how better outcomes could be achieved for those with no connection

According to key informants, restricting services only to those with a local connection enabled some local authorities to deliver better accommodation-based services because it limited the eligible population. However, single homeless people who had faced exclusion due to a perceived lack of local connection felt strongly that this policy disadvantaged them and they generally remained within the area. This issue warrants further, more focused examination with the aim of achieving better outcomes for single homeless people.

The importance of affordable housing supply
This study focuses on experiences of homelessness services and this is where recommendations are targeted. However, the lack of affordable housing in parts of Great Britain emerged as a key structural cause of homelessness and was repeatedly referred to by key informants.

Recommendation 8
National Governments must prioritise increasing the supply of genuinely affordable housing in Great Britain

Data collection and publication
Devolution not only resulted in divergence in services for single homeless people but also in the collection and publication of data on homelessness. Only in Scotland is the national government able to provide data on single homeless people. In England and Wales, unless the person is in priority need, the household type is not reported. Without reliable data the task of monitoring policy impacts is exceptionally challenging.

Recommendation 9
The Welsh and Westminster governments should work with the Scottish Government to develop their approaches to data collection and publication in relation to single homelessness

1. Introduction

This report details the findings from a study commissioned by Crisis to explore the experiences of single homelessness across Great Britain. The research was conducted by researchers at Cardiff University in conjunction with Opinion Research Services (ORS). For the purposes of this research, single homelessness was defined as 'homelessness amongst people of adult age without dependent children' (Jones and Pleace 2010:9).

Single homelessness is a long-standing, persistent issue in Great Britain, despite the development of a complex range of statutory and non-statutory interventions to address the problem (Kenway and Palmer 2003: 2). In this introductory section we reflect briefly on how such a range of interventions has emerged, identifying what this might mean for single homeless people.

Since the inception of the UK homelessness legislation in 1977, single homeless people have largely fallen outside of the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide settled accommodation to homeless households deemed to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless. The in-out nature of the homelessness legislation means that most single homeless people are owed no meaningful support at all from their local authority.

More recently, the homelessness prevention agenda has taken hold – an agenda which operates alongside the legislation and prioritises early intervention to enable people to remain at home or find suitable alternative accommodation. In principle, homelessness prevention interventions are available to all households, including single homeless people, however studies have shown that services often focus on households likely to be in priority need, neglecting single homeless people (Dobie et al. 2014, Mackie 2014a, Mackie 2014b).

In response to the lack of statutory support and to a lesser extent the neglect under the prevention agenda, services for single homeless people have developed outside of the legislative framework and are largely delivered by the third sector, although these have also been driven and funded by central Government, such as the Rough Sleepers Initiative and No Second Night Out. Whilst these non-statutory services have undoubtedly made a great impact on the lives of single homeless people, there is ample evidence to suggest that many single homeless people are still unable to access the assistance they require (Dobie et al. 2014, Reeve 2011).

The final factor contributing to the complexity of interventions for single homeless people is devolution (Wilcox et al. 2010). Of particular significance is the legislative change in Scotland, whereby since 2003, all homeless households have been entitled to temporary accommodation and since 2012 the priority need test has been abolished, ensuring that all homeless households are entitled to settled accommodation, including single homeless people.

A complex range of statutory and non-statutory interventions are now being delivered to address single homelessness across Great Britain, with variations in services likely to reflect national boundaries. There has been no systematic appraisal of the impacts of this divergence on the profile and experiences of single homeless people. Therefore, this research sought to answer two questions:

1. What is the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain?
2. Are there differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people and if so what does this mean for the lives of single homeless people across Great Britain?'

Structure of the report

Following this introduction, the three-stage methodology is briefly discussed (Chapter 2). The findings of the research are then set out in five sections. First, the report explores the geography of statutory homelessness services for single homeless people (Chapter 3). This early chapter describes differences in the ways local authorities are delivering their statutory homelessness services. Second, the demographic characteristics of single homeless people are described (Chapter 4). Third, the housing histories chapter (Chapter 5) provides an overview of people's lifetime housing experiences. Fourth, the impacts of these homeless experiences are briefly considered (Chapter 6). The fifth findings chapter provides an important insight into people's experiences of attempting to access assistance from local authorities: it examines differences across Great Britain (Chapter 7). The final chapter of the report draws on the findings to answer the research questions before setting out a series of recommendations to improve assistance for single homeless people (Chapter 8).

2. Methods

This study adopted a three-stage, multi-method design in order to address the research questions. The initial phase of the research intended to explore implementation of statutory homelessness duties across Great Britain. Stage two of the study sought to examine homelessness services, both from the service users' perspectives and from the providers', through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Finally, stage three of the study used in-depth interviews with single homeless people in order to explore homelessness pathways. The following sections give a brief account of the methodology under each stage.

Stage one

Stage one sought to explore similarities and differences in the provision of statutory homelessness services for single homeless people. To achieve this aim anonymised homelessness caseload data were obtained directly from contacts in Scottish Government for the period April 2012-March 2013, however this form of centralised data collection is not available in England and Wales. In order to obtain homelessness administrative data for the remainder of Great Britain, Freedom of Information (FoI) requests were submitted to the remaining 376 local authorities in England and Wales.

The FoI request was designed to replicate data which were already collected in statutory returns but not for the required breakdowns necessary for this research – namely, the number of single households by type of decision and outcome. FoI's were standardised into a pro-forma which authorities were asked to complete and return. Both these steps were aimed at reducing the number of FoI's which were refused on grounds of availability of data. Of the total 376 local authorities who were sent FoI requests, useable replies were received from 175; 160 from England and 15 from Wales. In total, stage one analysis was therefore based on administrative data from 207 local authorities in Great Britain – coverage of 51%.

Homelessness administrative data were analysed in SPSS. Differences in the application of statutory homelessness duties were described by country[7] using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Services in each country were described in terms of:

i] the percentage of homeless households determined to be in priority need;[8]
ii] the percentage of priority need households who are single homeless;
iii] the percentage of homeless families in priority need who were offered settled accommodation.[9]
iv] the percentage of single homeless people in priority need who were offered settled accommodation.

Stage two

Second stage data collection were conducted using i] face-to-face questionnaires with single homeless people to explore their experiences of accessing homelessness assistance, and ii] interviews with local authority homelessness managers in order to investigate their perspectives on homelessness services in their area.

Sampling for stage two

There is no existing reliable sample frame

7 London has been separated from the rest of England for analysis purposes as evidence suggests experiences in London differ to the rest of England (Dobie et al. 2014).
8 The percentage in priority need and unintentionally homeless as a percentage of all decisions, including not homeless.
9 Settled accommodation refers to an offer of local authority or housing association accommodation, including instances where the offer is refused.

upon which local authorities can be selected to ensure a representative sample of single homeless people's experiences across Great Britain. Consequently, a framework was developed which would provide an insight into a broad range of experiences. Previous research has shown that experiences not only differ *between* countries but also *within* countries (Fitzpatrick et al. 2013, Mackie 2014b), hence a sample of authorities was sought which would account for these differences. A statistical clustering technique was used to identify groups of local authorities with similar approaches to implementing statutory homelessness duties (according to the same statutory homelessness data collected at stage one).

Five clusters or types of provision were identified across Great Britain. At least three authorities were sampled from each of the five types, resulting in 16 authorities overall.[10] Local authorities were chosen based on their conforming to the 'average' for that particular group. In securing access, where an authority was not willing to participate, an alternative was chosen which conformed to the group mean. The sampling approach also ensured sufficient representation of local authorities in the three Great Britain nations. Moreover, given evidence in previous studies to suggest experiences in London differ significantly to the rest of Great Britain, London authorities were purposively included in the sample.

Despite the rigorous sampling approach it is important to recognise that the study cannot claim to be entirely representative of the experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain (questionnaires were conducted in a sample of 16 local authorities). However, it does provide strong evidence to be able to respond to the two research questions.

Face-to-face questionnaires with single homeless people

Questionnaires were conducted face-to-face with homeless service users attending both local authority and day centre type provision. Local authority and day centre staff were generally very supportive in helping researchers to approach service users and providing a comfortable and private space for questionnaires to be conducted. The target number of questionnaires to be completed in each authority was 30,15 at both the local authority and day centre. Factors such as differences in service provision, low footfall, and in a minority of cases, the unwillingness of some authorities to participate, meant that this equal divide was not possible in all cases.

Individuals were eligible to take part in the questionnaire if they were 'single homeless', defined as not currently living with dependent children. Participants received £5 as a reimbursement for their time. In total 480 interviews were conducted by ORS researchers. The breakdowns per local authority type and per country are shown in Table 1.

The questionnaires were designed to elicit people's experiences of homelessness and their engagements with local authority service provision. Questions fell under the following broad categories: current housing, housing histories, accessing assistance, and demographic information.

Data from the questionnaires were analysed in SPSS. Simple descriptive statistics were used to explore distributions of each variable. Cross-tabulation of variables against one another, particularly demographic indicators and country, were used to statistically explore associations within the data.

10 A sixteenth authority was identified to ensure a sufficient sample size from Scotland where all local authorities conformed to one broad type of approach to service delivery.

Table 1. Face-to-face questionnaires, by local authority type and country/region

Local authority type	Country		Total
1	Wales	32	96
	Scotland	0	
	Rest of England	64	
	London	0	
2	Wales	32	92
	Scotland	0	
	Rest of England	26	
	London	34	
3	Wales	0	91
	Scotland	0	
	Rest of England	56	
	London	35	
4	Wales	0	85
	Scotland	0	
	Rest of England	85	
	London	0	
5	Wales	30	116
	Scotland	54	
	Rest of England	32	
	London	0	
		Total	480

Interviews with local authority service managers

Interviews were conducted with service managers within the same local authorities where face-to-face questionnaires were undertaken. Whilst the target number of interviews was 16, one in each authority, it was only possible to secure interviews in 14 authorities. However, as the two refusals were in different local authority types then this still provided sufficient insight from the remaining managers in those types.

Interviews were conducted via telephone and lasted approximately an hour. In areas where the local authority service managers were unwilling to support the research then day centre managers within the area were interviewed. Interviewees were asked to reflect on a broad range of issues including the treatment of single homeless people, perceptions, strengths and weaknesses of current approaches, and any recommendations for improvement.

Stage three

The final stage of data collection was conducted concurrently with the homeless questionnaires and utilised in-depth narrative interviews. This last stage of the study aimed to provide a more detailed understanding of single people's pathways into and through homelessness, specifically in relation to assistance they had received.

Homeless people were sampled during the questionnaire phase where single homeless people were asked if they would be available to take part in further in-depth interviews. The pathways which are outlined in this report therefore build upon the (quantitative) questionnaire data provided by the same participants. All names in this report are pseudonyms.

Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with single homeless people. Given the high degree of mobility, specifically amongst single homeless people (May 1997), the representativeness of the stage three sample in terms of country and local authority type was of lesser importance. That said, at least five interviews were conducted in each of the local authority types. Interviewees were given £5 as a reimbursement for contributing to this last stage of the project.

3. The geography of statutory homelessness services for single homeless people

The preliminary aim of this study was to explore similarities and differences in the provision of statutory homelessness services for single homeless people. This chapter focuses on the geography of these differences. Drawing on information gleaned from the Freedom of Information requests, local authority actions are characterised in relation to the following:

i] the percentage of homeless households determined to be in priority need;[11]
ii] the percentage of priority need households who are single homeless;
iii] the percentage of homeless families in priority need who were offered settled accommodation;[12]
iv] the percentage of single homeless people in priority need who were offered settled accommodation.

National differences in statutory homelessness services

There are significant differences between countries/regions in the provision of statutory services for single homeless people. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that a far greater proportion of people are likely to be in priority need in Scotland (85%) than anywhere else, a reflection of legislative changes which saw the abolition of the priority need test on 31st December 2012. Since this date all eligible and unintentionally homeless households have had a right to settled housing.[13] The percentage of people in priority need is low in Wales: this is likely to be because the housing options approach has been embraced far less in Wales than in England, therefore a statutory decision is more likely to be made and percentages in priority need therefore appear low.

The percentage of priority need households who are single is highest in Scotland, followed closely by Wales. This again reflects the different legislative position in Scotland. In Wales the percentage of priority need households who are single is high (54%) because homeless prison leavers have priority need status irrespective of their vulnerability. This position is markedly different to the position in England where prison leavers must prove vulnerability. It is stark that only 21% and 27% of priority need households are single homeless in London and the rest of England respectively.

For those people who are given priority need status, settled accommodation is offered to 78% of households in England (excluding London), 71% in Scotland and 63% in London, whereas the figure is significantly lower in Wales at only 56%. In all countries there is then a consistent trend that single homeless people are less likely to be offered settled accommodation than other priority need households. A further worrying trend in Wales is that only 42% of priority need single homeless people are offered settled accommodation, compared to 64% in Scotland. The relatively high figures in London and the rest of England are to be expected given that so few single homeless people are found to be in priority need.

The different legislation across Great Britain is clearly impacting on the statutory decisions made in relation to single homeless people. The broad picture is that single homeless people are likely to fare best in Scotland. Elsewhere the picture is mixed. In Wales single homeless people are more likely to be in priority need but their prospects of being

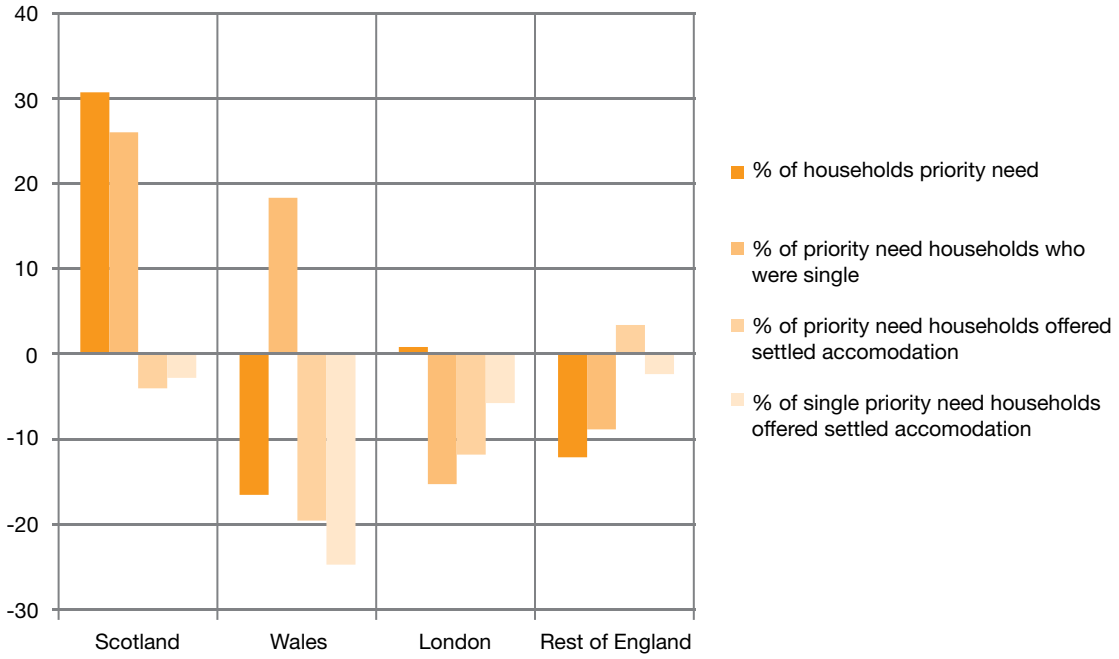
11 The percentage in priority need and unintentionally homeless as a percentage of all decisions.
12 Settled accommodation refers to an offer of local authority or housing association accommodation, including instances where the offer is refused.
13 The priority need test was abolished on this date, however Scottish Government continues to report on the number of households in priority need in order to distinguish between other decision categories (ineligible, not homeless, and intentionally homeless).

offered settled accommodation are relatively low. There are clearly some differences between authorities in London and the rest of England but generally the pattern is similar: few single homeless people will be in priority need but those who are face reasonable prospects of being offered settled accommodation.

Table 2. Average percentages for key statutory service characteristics by country/region

Country/Region	% of households determined to be in priority need	% of priority need households who were single	% of priority need households offered settled accommodation	% of single priority need households offered settled accommodation
Scotland	85	62	71	64
Wales	38	54	56	42
London	55	21	63	61
Rest of England	42	27	78	65
Average	54	36	75	67

Figure 1. Difference between Great Britain average and country/region average, by statutory service characteristic



Key findings

- The different legislative arrangements across Great Britain are clearly impacting on the statutory decisions made in relation to single homeless people.
- It appears that single homeless people are likely to fare best in Scotland.
- Outside of Scotland the picture is mixed. In Wales single homeless people are more likely to be in priority need but their prospects of being offered settled accommodation are relatively low.
- There are clearly some differences between authorities in London and the rest of England but generally the pattern is similar: few single homeless people will be in priority need but those who do fall into this category face reasonable prospects of being offered settled accommodation.

4. Profile of single homeless people

This chapter describes the characteristics of single homeless people across Great Britain. Five key characteristics are described: gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, and support needs. Key differences in the characteristics of single homeless people are explored in relation to the country/region where the person was interviewed.

Gender

Approximately 83% of single homeless people were male, a finding which echoes previous research (Reeve 2011). Unlike all other demographics, there was no link between the gender of the individual and the country where they were interviewed.

Age

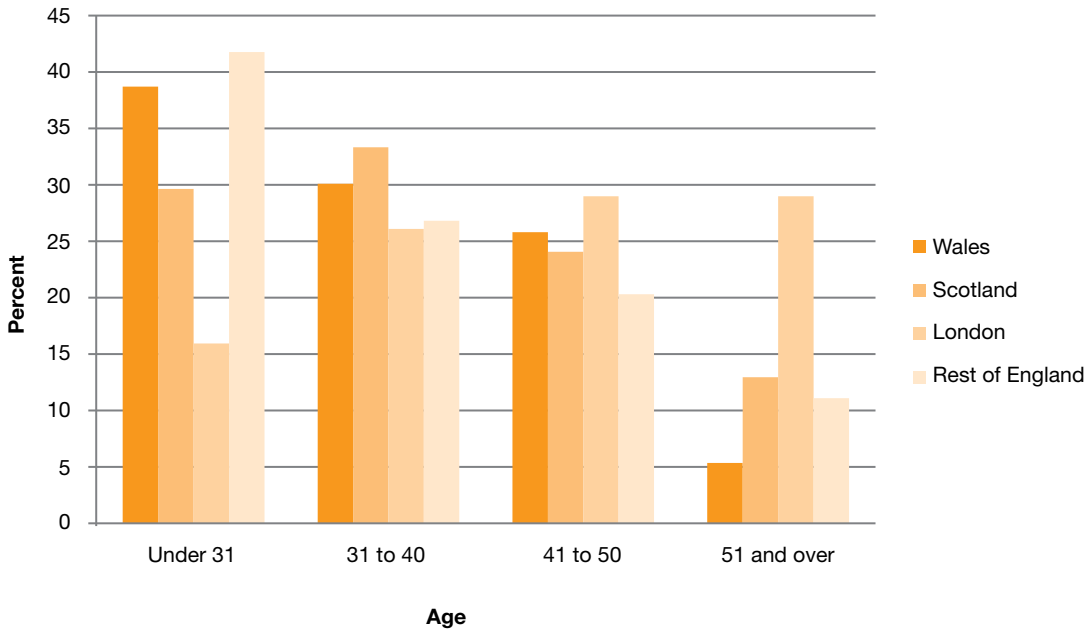
The vast majority of single homeless people (76%) are aged between 21 and 50 years (Table 3). The findings in this study very closely echo previous research which found 85% of single homeless people were aged between 21 and 50 years. The median average age of homeless people was 35.

Table 3. Age

	Frequency	Percent
Under 21	51	11
21 to 30	121	25
31 to 40	134	28
41 to 50	110	23
51 to 60	51	11
61 and over	10	2
Total	**477**	**100**

There was a statistically significant difference in the ages of single homeless people across the different countries/regions of Great Britain. Figure 2 shows that in London there was a much older single homeless population (nearly 60% are older than 40), whereas in Wales and the rest of England single homeless people were far younger (39% and 42% are 30 or younger respectively).

Figure 2. Age by country/region



Ethnicity

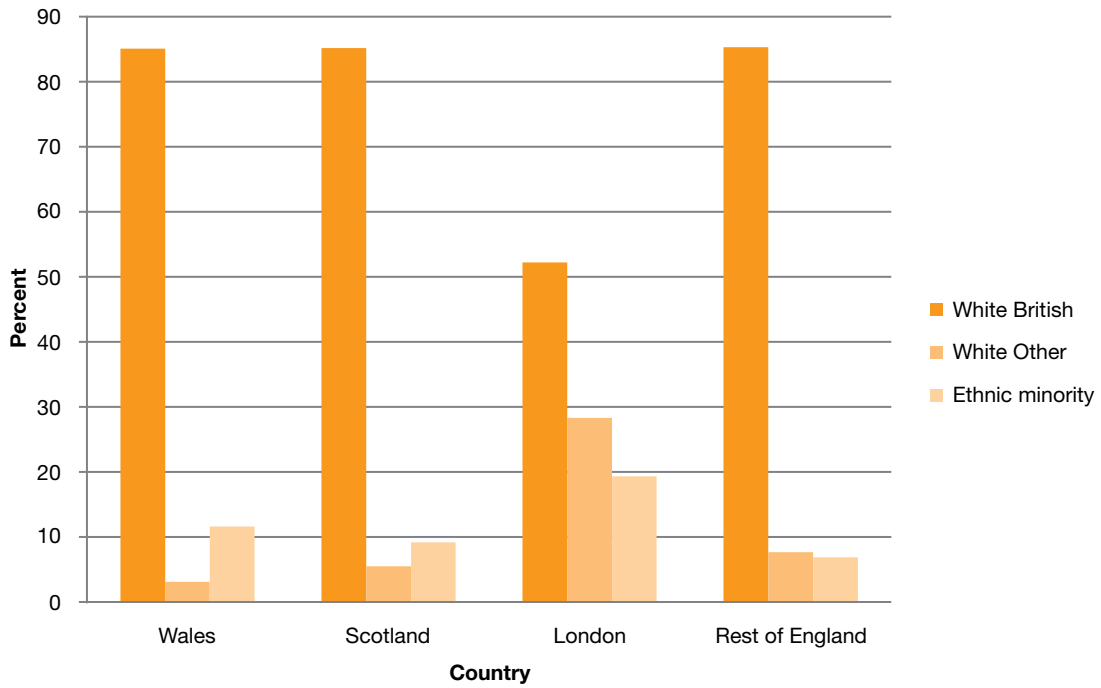
The vast majority of single homeless people were White (90%). This high proportion is likely to reflect the methodology adopted in this study, whereby homeless people were not only selected from large metropolitan areas, where the highest proportions of ethnic minorities are found. Table 4 presents the full breakdown of the ethnicity of questionnaire respondents.

The ethnicity of respondents varies between countries/regions. The most notable difference is between London and other parts of Great Britain. Figure 3 illustrates that 80% of single homeless people in London are White, which is a significantly lower proportion than in all other parts of Great Britain. This notable difference reflects the differences in ethnicity amongst the general populations.

Table 4. Ethnicity

	Frequency	Percent
White British	382	81
White Other	45	9
Mixed	12	3
Asian or Asian British	6	1
Black or Black British	20	4
Other	9	2
Total	**474**	**100**

Figure 3. Ethnicity by country/region



Nationality

Table 5 shows that most single homeless people were British (85%), whilst a significant minority (10%) were from accession state countries.[14]

Table 5. Nationality

	Frequency	Percent
British	397	85
Accession state nationals	45	10
Other European (Incl. Irish)	7	1
Other	18	4
Total	**467**	**100**

There appears to be a clear difference in the nationalities of respondents in different countries/regions. The patterns were largely the same as for ethnic minorities. Table 6 shows that in the majority of countries/regions at least 85% of homeless people were British whereas in London this was true for only 56% of people. In London more than a quarter of homeless people were accession state nationals.

Table 6. Nationality by country/region

	Percent		
	British	**Accession state**	**Other**
Wales	89	3	8
Scotland	90	4	6
London	56	27	17
Rest of England	90	9	2

Support needs

Respondents were asked to identify which of the experiences in Table 7 they had faced during their lives. Previous studies have suggested that these experiences are likely to result in a support need (Reeve 2011). Unemployment (64%), mental ill health (49%), drug dependency (48%), alcohol dependency (46%), and serving a prison sentence (41%) were the most frequently cited experiences. It is significant that the percentage of respondents claiming to have faced these experienced is much greater than in previous studies (Reeve 2011). To some extent this is likely to reflect different methodological approaches between studies, whereby in this research respondents came from a wider range of local authorities (other research has often focused heavily on larger cities). It is also possible that support needs amongst single homeless people have worsened.

14 Accession state nationals include A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland,Slovakia, Slovenia) and A2 (Bulgaria, Romania).

Table 7. Indicators of support needs

	Frequency	Percent
A significant period of unemployment during adult life	307	64
Mental ill health	233	49
Drug dependency	229	48
A physical health problem or disability	139	29
Alcohol dependency	222	46
Exclusion or suspension from school	129	27
Violence/abuse from a partner	99	21
Violence/abuse from other family members or friends	111	23
Been in local authority care	116	24
Children are being looked after by someone else	68	14
Literacy problems	67	14
Self harming	130	27
Suffered the death of a long term partner	27	6
Worked in the armed forces	14	3
Served a prison sentence	195	41

Quantifying people's experiences in this way can hide the often horrific nature of the challenges many single homeless people have faced. In-depth interviews with a sample of 30 respondents serve to illustrate and give light to the nature of some of these experiences. Interviews revealed many traumatic and challenging experiences, often with lasting impacts. They gave particular attention to: traumatic childhood experiences; offending; and domestic violence.

Very many interviewees reported having a traumatic childhood, including: periods in care, family members with alcohol and substance misuse issues or mental health issues, and death of a parent. Problems often started early in people's lives and, as the report discusses later, these problems are exacerbated as a result of homelessness.

> *'Dad got progressively worse and then was put into institutions [mental health institutions] and I was sort of, you know, left to my own devices age 14 onwards. It was at that point that I got involved with drugs and became very quickly an addict.'*
> Simon

> *'My brother killed himself when I was 10 and it sent me on a downward spiral with drugs... I was mixing with the wrong people after my parents split up but I stayed with my dad and he coped with it by drinking.'*
> Dylan

Many people had faced a prison sentence. Several interviewees had been in prison on more than one occasion and whilst prison often provided an environment and the necessary support to address issues such as substance misuse, release from prison regularly led to homelessness and very frequently caused problems to increase. This is discussed in greater detail later in the report. Calum's interview illustrates the issue of the revolving door between prison and homelessness.

> *'...for ten years I was in and out of jail... Well from 22 to up to about a year and a half ago I've been in and out of jail, sleeping rough, been on a couple of drug programmes...'*
> Calum

Violence in the family home during childhood and then later in life, domestic violence, appeared to be common experiences amongst the women interviewed in this

study. Interviewees described how violence impacted on many parts of their lives: work, leisure, education, mental and physical health, offending behaviours, and their housing circumstances. Katy's account provides an insight into the magnitude of the support needs facing many single homeless people.

> *'I was glad to get away from him more than anything when I went to prison because the thing was, I could sit here and tell you everything but I think it's better in the past. Put it this way: he tortured me. It was more mental, and that is worse. I would rather have physical abuse than psychological because it only hurts for five minutes doesn't it? When it's in your head that messes your head up big time!'*
> Katy

Differences in the support needs faced by single homeless people

There were many differences in the support needs faced by respondents in different countries/regions (Table 8). The general trend is that respondents in Wales and Scotland are more likely to have support needs.

The support needs homeless people have faced during their lifetimes are strongly associated with their age. The general trend illustrated in Table 9 is for problems to worsen with age. Issues such as mental ill-health, drug dependency, physical health problems, alcohol dependency, and serving a prison sentence all appear to be more likely problems faced by single homeless people as they get older. The major exception to this trend appears to be self-harming which is far more widely reported amongst young homeless people.

Table 10 shows that there are significant differences in the support needs faced by men and women. Overwhelmingly it appears that women are more likely to have faced mental ill health, violence/abuse form a partner, their children being looked after by someone else, and self-harming. The only issue which men face more often than women is serving a prison sentence.

There is also a very strong association between ethnicity, nationality and the support needs faced by single homeless people (Tables 11 and 12). The marked trend is that

Table 8. Percentage within country/region who indicated that they had experienced named problem*

	Percent			
	Wales	**Scotland**	**London**	**Rest of England**
A significant period of unemployment during adult life	81	70	52	60
Mental ill health	48	59	33	51
Drug dependency	61	46	39	46
Exclusion or suspension from school	20	46	19	27
Self harming	36	37	12	26
Served a prison sentence	57	46	27	37

** Support needs are only reported where there is a statistically significant difference in the findings*

in relation to all support needs, British people and particularly White British people are more likely to have faced the problems identified in Tables 11 and 12. It seems that others (e.g. accession state nationals) have become homeless without amassing such a significant range of support needs. This obviously has policy implications.

Table 9. Percentage who indicated that they had experienced named problem, by age group*

	Percent					
	Under 21	**21 to 30**	**31 to 40**	**41 to 50**	**51 to 60**	**61 +**
Mental ill health	29	50	54	58	32	40
Drug dependency	43	57	49	50	28	20
A physical health problem or disability	14	19	30	38	46	40
Alcohol dependency	29	40	47	57	54	60
Exclusion or suspension from school	31	36	30	19	12	10
Violence/abuse from a partner	16	26	22	17	12	50
Children being looked after by someone else	2	18	20	10	8	20
Self harming	41	26	27	31	10	10
Worked in the armed forces	0	3	4	2	0	30
Served a prison sentence	12	37	49	50	36	50

** Support needs are only reported where there is a statistically significant difference in the findings*

Table 10. Percentage who indicated that they had experienced named problem, by gender*

	Percent	
	Male	**Female**
Mental ill health	46	64
Violence/abuse from a partner	13	61
Children are being looked after by someone else	9	38
Self harming	23	49
Served a prison sentence	43	28

** Support needs are only reported where there is a statistically significant difference in the findings*

Table 11. Percentage who indicated that they had experienced named problem, by ethnicity*

	Percent		
	White British	**White Other**	**Ethnic minority**
Mental ill health	53	25	43
Drug dependency	54	20	30
A physical health problem or disability	32	9	26
Alcohol dependency	52	34	17
Exclusion or suspension from school	31	7	15
Violence/abuse from a partner	24	2	17
Violence/abuse from other family members or friends	26	5	22
Been in local authority care	28	7	13
Self harming	31	2	22
Served a prison sentence	46	9	30

** Support needs are only reported where there is a statistically significant difference in the findings*

Table 12. Percentage who indicated that they had experienced named problem, by nationality*

	Percent		
	British	**Accession state nationals**	**Other**
Mental ill health	53	23	29
Drug dependency	53	23	17
A physical health problem or disability	32	7	25
Alcohol dependency	50	36	17
Exclusion or suspension from school	31	2	13
Violence/abuse from a partner	23	2	13
Violence/abuse from other family members or friends	27	0	13
Been in local authority care	28	5	8
Literacy problems	16	5	4
Self harming	31	2	4
Served a prison sentence	47	9	13

* Support needs are only reported where there is a statistically significant difference in the findings

Multiple support needs

The extent to which people faced support needs varied considerably. Some individuals had faced very many challenges throughout their lives, whilst others had faced relatively few. Table 13 illustrates the extent to which people had faced multiple support needs. It shows that 4 in 5 respondents had faced more than one challenge, whilst over half of the respondents had faced 4 or more.

Table 13. Multiple support needs

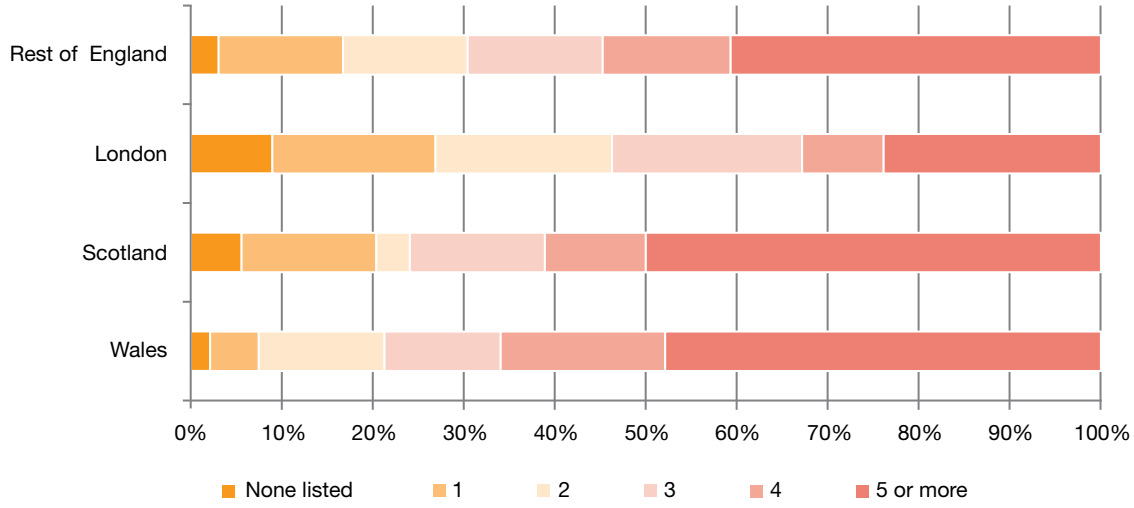
	Frequency	Percent
None listed	19	4
1	61	13
2	64	13
3	73	15
4	66	14
5 or more	195	41
Total	**478**	**100**

The extent to which people faced multiple support needs was significantly associated with:

- Country/region: Figure 4 shows that respondents in London were far less likely to have experienced multiple support needs.
- Ethnicity: White British respondents were far more likely to have faced multiple support needs than other ethnic groups. Respondents of Other White backgrounds (e.g. accession state nationals) were far less likely to have faced multiple support needs.

These differences are likely to reflect the causes of homelessness amongst these different groups and in these different locations. It is highly likely that the unique nature of the London housing market means many more people become homeless there due to a lack of affordable accommodation (e.g. without multiple support needs), whereas in other places homelessness is more likely to only occur where multiple support needs develop. Similarly, homelessness amongst accession state nationals is possibly more likely to result from loss of employment than from the development of multiple support needs.

Figure 4. Multiple support needs by country/region



This chapter ends by briefly introducing Dylan's homelessness pathway. Dylan's pathway provides a clear illustration of the ways in which multiple support needs exist prior to, and develop as a result of, homelessness. During his life he faces an abusive father, substance and alcohol abuse, repeated periods in custody, and separation from his child.

Key findings

Demographics

- Most single homeless people were male (83%), aged 21-50 (76%) with a median average age of 35, White (90%), and British (85%), albeit a significant minority (10%) were from accession state countries.

- In London there is a much older single homeless population (nearly 60% are older than 40) and a much lower percentage of British people (only 56% of single homeless people). Nearly a quarter of people were accession state nationals.

Support needs

- At some point during their lives homeless people had faced: unemployment (64% of respondents), mental ill health (49%), drug dependency (48%), alcohol dependency (46%), and serving a prison sentence (41%).

- During in-depth interviews it was clear that traumatic early childhood experiences had a significant impact on the emergence of many of these support needs. Early childhood experiences included: periods in care, family members with alcohol and substance misuse issues or mental health issues, and death of a parent.

- Differences in support needs reflected the country/region where people sought assistance and the age group, gender, ethnicity and nationality of the person:

  > People in Wales and Scotland were more likely to have support needs.

  > The general trend is for problems to worsen with age, including; mental ill-health, drug dependency, physical health problems, alcohol dependency, and serving a prison sentence.

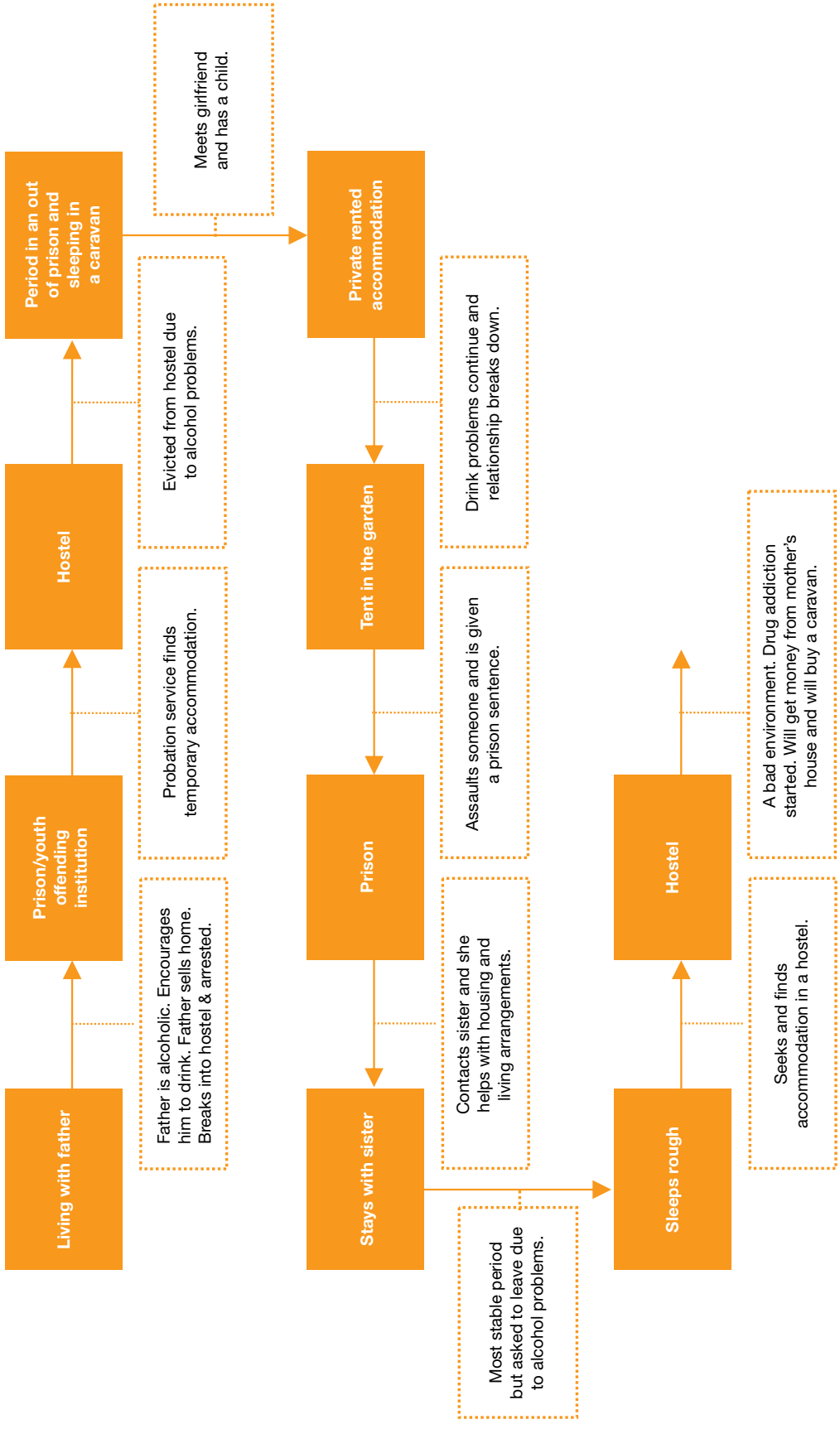
  > Women are more likely to have faced mental ill health, violence/abuse form a partner, their children being looked after by someone else, and self-harming. The only issue which men face more often than women is serving a prison sentence.

  > British people are far more likely to report all types of support needs.

Multiple support needs

- Approximately 4 in 5 respondents had faced more than one support issue, whilst over half of the respondents had faced 4 or more. This was particularly true outside London and amongst White British respondents.

Dylan's homelessness pathway



5. Housing histories

'Oh I actually have a list of homes that I've been in from age 20 – 27: I should have brought that with me! There have been about 40 different moves.'
Simon

The aim of this chapter is to document the range of housing experiences faced by single homeless people during their lives: the types of accommodation lived in; experiences of becoming homeless; the extent of repeat homelessness; and the movement/migration of single homeless people. Consideration is given to any differences in experiences according to the country/region where the person was interviewed and where it is significant, the influence of demographic characteristics is also discussed.

Types of accommodation

Respondents were asked to identify which of the permanent accommodation types listed in Table 14 that they had lived in during their adult lives. Most (64%) had lived in a parental/family home; nearly half had lived in a social rented tenancy; and nearly a third had occupied the private rented sector. Significantly, 10% of respondents had never lived in permanent accommodation during their adult lives.

Table 14. Permanent housing in adult life

	Frequency	Percent
Parental/family home	307	64
Council or housing association house/flat	211	44
House/flat rented from private landlord	150	31
Owner occupied flat/ house	21	4
Partner's home	95	20
Other (please state)	18	4
Not lived in permanent housing in adult life	47	10

Figure 5 shows the percentages of respondents who had never occupied permanent housing during their adult lives by country/region. In Wales, a relatively high percentage of single homeless people had never lived in permanent housing, whereas in Scotland this was true for fewer than 4% of people. It is possible that this difference reflects the relatively young age demographic of Welsh single homeless people as there is an inevitable and strong association between the age of the respondent and the likelihood of them having lived in permanent accommodation: younger respondents were the least likely (Table 15). The trend in Scotland is more difficult to explain but may reflect the historically larger social housing sector and the right to social housing which exists through the statutory homelessness legislation.

Table 15. Ever lived in permanent housing by age

	Row percent	
	Never lived in permanent housing	**Lived in permanent housing**
Under 21	25	75
21 to 30	13	87
31 to 40	7	93
41 to 50	5	95
51 to 60	6	94
61 and over	0	100

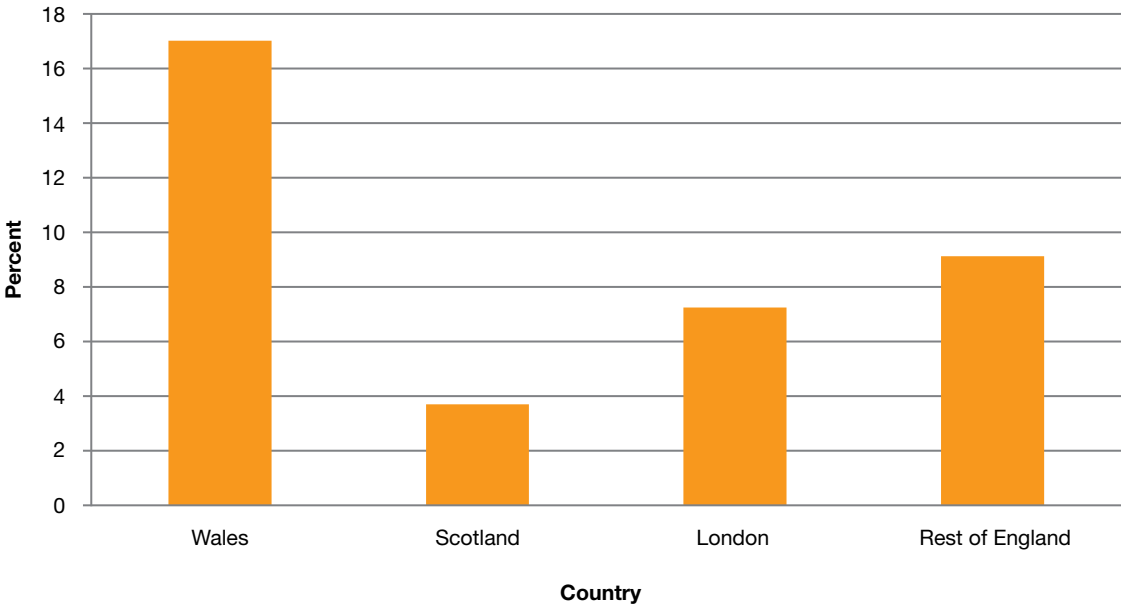
Table 16 illustrates the types of temporary accommodation respondents had lived in during their adult lives. Nearly 80% of respondents had slept rough; 65% had slept in a hostel; and nearly 50% had slept with friends temporarily. These findings are similar to those of Reeve (2011) who found 76% of her respondents had slept rough.

Table 16. Temporary housing in adult life

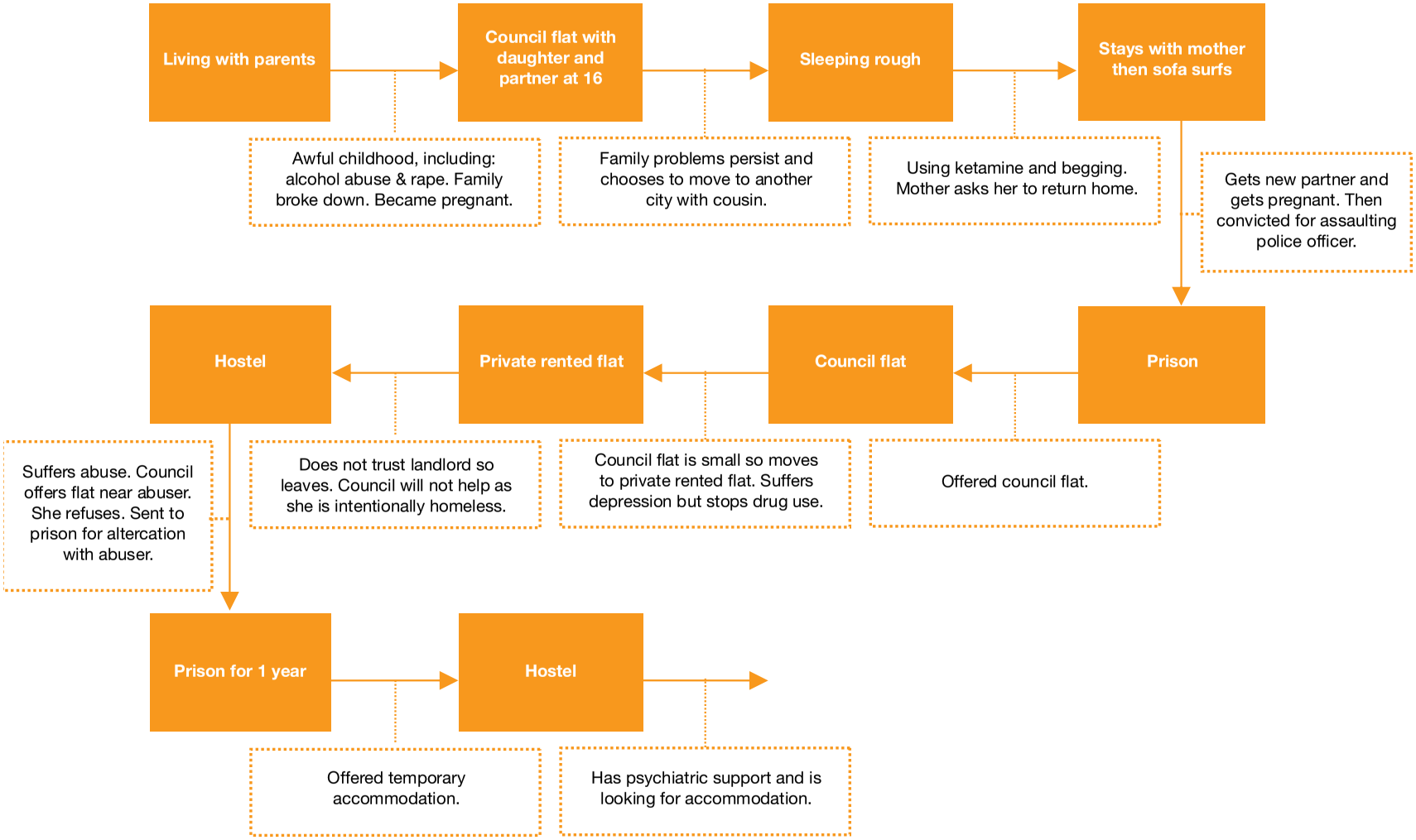
	Frequency	Percent
With family or a partner temporarily	101	21
With friends temporarily	222	46
In temporary housing arranged by council or support agency	135	28
In a B&B	156	33
In a hostel	313	65
In a refuge	74	15
In a night shelter	187	39
In a squat	110	23
Sleeping rough	378	79
Other (please state)	39	8

In-depth interviews with single homeless people illustrated the ways in which people moved between different forms of temporary and permanent accommodation during their adult lives. For example, in Jean's homelessness pathway she moved into social rented accommodation, followed by several different forms of temporary accommodation (sleeping rough, sofa surfing) and prison before a further period of permanent accommodation).

Figure 5. Never lived in permanent accommodation by country/region



Jean's homelessness pathway



Becoming homeless

In this sub-section people's experiences of becoming homeless will be explored:

- At what age did homelessness first occur?
- What type of housing was occupied prior to homelessness on the first and most recent occasions?
- What were the reasons for leaving this accommodation on the first and most recent occasions?

The age of becoming homeless

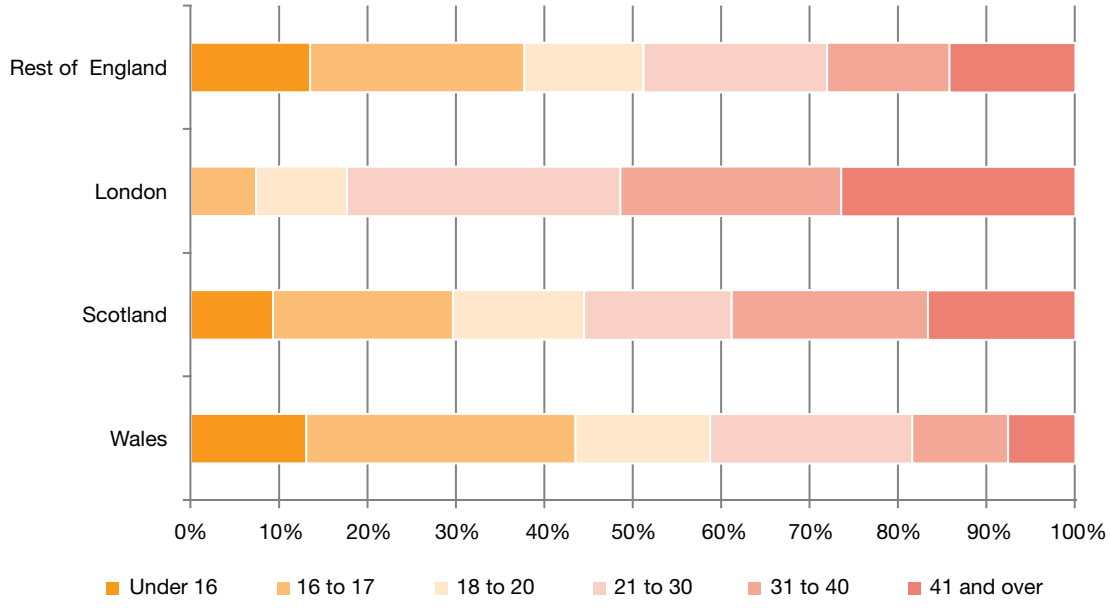
The age at which respondents first became homeless varied considerably (Table 17), although it is notable that nearly 50% of respondents first became homeless aged 20 or younger. The median average age when people first became homeless was 22.

Table 17. Age first homeless

	Frequency	Percent
Under 16	52	11
16 to 17	107	23
18 to 20	64	14
21 to 30	105	22
31 to 40	75	16
41 and over	71	15
Total	**474**	**100**

Figure 6 clearly demonstrates the differences in the age of first homeless experiences between countries/regions. Respondents in London appear to face their first experience far later in life than in other parts of Great Britain. This trend probably reflects the fact that many more single homeless people in London are not British (particularly accession state nationals), where the causes of homelessness relate to experiences later in life (e.g. job loss) as opposed to leaving the family home due to relationship breakdown.

Figure 6. Age first homeless by country/region



Housing prior to homelessness

Table 18 compares the type of housing occupied by single homeless people prior to their first and most recent homeless experiences. The only notable trend is that nearly half of all single homeless people first became homeless from the parental/family home. Far fewer people (28%) reported becoming homeless from the parental home on their most recent experience of homelessness: a reflection of the fact that most would have left home and entered some other form of temporary or permanent accommodation before homelessness recurred.

Table 18. Housing prior to first and most recent homelessness

	Homeless experience *(percent)*	
	First	**Recent**
Parental/family home	44	28
Council or HA house/flat	21	17
House/flat rented from private landlord	11	10
Owner occupied flat/house	3	1
Partner's home	5	5
Institution	8	13
Other	8	25
Total	**100**	**100**

The reasons for leaving accommodation

The reasons for leaving accommodation on the first and most recent experiences of homelessness are compared in Table 19. There appear to be two main trends. First, the percentage of people stating the reason for leaving accommodation is a dispute within the household (violent or non-violent) decreases significantly after the first experience of homelessness. This is most probably because individuals have separated from partners or left the family home and their latter experiences of homelessness therefore result from other challenges.

The second trend is the increase in people who become homeless from institutions between their first and most recent experiences. Whilst discharge from institutions (mainly prison) can be the initial cause of homelessness, it is likely that initial homeless experiences (and the associated impacts on illegal activities such as substance misuse and dealing) increase the likelihood of imprisonment or hospitalisation, hence discharge from an institution plays a greater role as a cause of repeat homelessness. The impacts of homelessness and the relationship between homelessness and crime are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Table 19. Reason for leaving accommodation on first and most recent homeless experiences

	Homeless experience *(percent)*	
	First	**Recent**
Given notice by landlord/lender (arrears)	9	8
Given notice by landlord/lender (not due to arrears)	6	10
Abandoned a tenancy - dispute with landlord	1	1
Abandoned a tenancy - rent payments too high	4	4
Housing was provided with a job which ended	1	*
Dispute within household: violent or abusive	19	11
Dispute within household: non-violent	41	21
Asked to leave by friends or family (no dispute)	4	9
Discharge from institution	12	21
Chose to leave (for independence or issues with accommodation/area)	3	6
Migrated to UK	2	*
Family member illness or death resulted in inability to remain in family home	3	*
Other (please state)	4	11

In-depth interviews provide further insight into the triggers that prompt people to leave accommodation and become homeless. Interviewees identified an incredible range of reasons, often interlinked and complex, however five key reasons frequently emerged: being asked to leave by family/ friends; relationship breakdown; loss of employment; offending; and leaving a difficult neighbourhood.

Being asked to leave by friends or family was typically, although not exclusively, associated with people's experiences of homelessness during childhood. A multitude of reasons were put forward as to why people had been asked to leave but two reasons seemed to dominate. First, substance misuse over a period of time eventually ended in parents forcing them to leave home. It is significant that interviewees described how the request/ demand that they should leave was often sudden but it was generally preceded by a lengthy period of difficulty revolving around their substance misuse. Where substance misuse was not the trigger, there was generally a relationship breakdown, often involving a step parent.

> *'So by the time I was 13 I was a heroin addict. My mum found out when I was 14 and kicked me out, she said she'd had enough, you can't blame her.... I went to a friend's place, she put me up, I was lucky on that one...'*
> Katy

> *'When I was 16 my parents couldn't live with me anymore. I left because of a family breakdown. My dad drank and there were arguments constantly.'*
> Jean

Relationship breakdown was a common trigger of homelessness amongst interviewees during adulthood. The causes of relationship breakdown are numerous and are often related to changing household circumstances eg. unemployment, birth of a child, or a health problem. The interview data suggests that it is men who are more likely to leave the family home into homelessness after a relationship breakdown, although where relationships breakdown through a violent dispute the impacts are far more likely to be felt by women. The questionnaire survey supports this finding: a violent dispute was the reason for 35% of females leaving accommodation on their first experience of homelessness, whereas this was the case for only 16% of men.

> *'We unfortunately got divorced. I left the marital home in 2011 and went to sleep on my friend's couch. It was stable and we had a mortgage before that. I was a family man with two kids and I never missed a payment or starved. When the relationship broke down I went to my friends couch.'*
> Aysi

Loss of employment was frequently accompanied by at least one other challenge in the lives of interviewees. For example, Peter's wife had a still-born child and this caused tensions in the relationship and mental health issues which ultimately resulted in him losing his job. Aarav had a car accident, following which he started drinking and as a result he was dismissed from his job. In both cases loss of employment is the final trigger of homelessness but a range of issues clearly conspire to cause homelessness in these cases.

> *'She went back to England to her family and I was in that house on my own and because my head was such a mess I stopped going to work and things like that and so I eventually got evicted.'*
> Peter

One very particular issue relating to employment is tied accommodation, whereby accommodation is provided alongside employment and should employment be ended accommodation will generally be lost too. Whilst tied accommodation did not play

a part in many people's housing histories, it did arise, particularly amongst accession state nationals, although not exclusively. This finding is supported by the questionnaire survey which showed that accession state nationals are twice as likely as British people to have to leave accommodation because it was provided with a job that ended.

Offending formed a notable part of many homeless people's lives. Interviews revealed two primary ways in which offending caused homelessness. First, people's offending caused them to have to leave home – often the family home at a young age. Liam's story provides a clear example of this, whereby he talked of getting involved with the 'wrong crowd' at age 13 and his subsequent substance misuse resulted in him leaving the family home.

> *'When I was thirteen I got in with the wrong crowd, started smoking weed – that's how it usually happens in't?... I was homeless for like four weeks... my mum was going to kick me out anyway and they [social services] managed to get me into this rehab when I was 16.'*
> Liam

The second way in which offending caused people to become homeless was their discharge from prison with nowhere suitable to stay. As a cause of homelessness this was particularly common. Interviewees frequently reported being accommodated by family members on discharge but this accommodation would rarely be sustainable and prison leavers would soon become homeless, either sofa surfing or rough sleeping.

> *'Prison didn't help me with housing so they just kicked me out on the streets. I got involved with the same mates about three weeks later and I went back to prison for 6 months. I've been out about 3 weeks now.*
> Alan

Several interviewees explained that they left their accommodation because of difficulties within their neighbourhood, often with immediate neighbours. The problems reported generally related to anti-social behaviour and threats of violence. This is a trigger of homelessness not frequently reported in other studies.

> *'[My neighbour] put cooking oil all over my door and windows and he had it in his head he was going to light it. But he didn't do it. So I went out of there.'*
> Luke

Differences in the reasons for leaving accommodation on first homeless experience

The reasons why people leave accommodation and become homeless vary to some extent according to the age when they first became homeless and nationality. All other characteristics appear to have limited impact on the reasons why a person leaves accommodation.

Table 20 demonstrates that people age 21 and over are more likely to have left accommodation because their landlord has given them notice on their tenancy. By contrast, young homeless people aged under 21 are far more likely to have left accommodation because of a non-violent dispute, most probably with parents or other family members. Perhaps the most unexpected finding is that people who became homeless under the age of 16 were far more likely to have left home due to a violent or abusive dispute within the household.

British people are more likely to leave accommodation due to some form of dispute (violent or non-violent), whereas accession state nationals are more likely to be evicted due to rent arrears or they become homeless after migrating to the UK. This finding further strengthens the argument that the experiences and needs of accession state nationals differ to those of other homeless people.

Table 20. Reason for leaving accommodation on first homeless experience, by age first homeless

	Under 16	16 to 17	18 to 20	21 to 30	31 to 40	41 and over
Given notice by landlord/lender (arrears)	2	2	5	16	11	17
Given notice by landlord/lender (not due to arrears)	0	1	5	6	15	9
Dispute within household: violent or abusive	42	19	20	15	16	11
Dispute within household: non-violent	40	62	52	32	27	31

Table 21. Reason for leaving accommodation on first homeless experience, by nationality

	British	Accession state nationals	Other
Given notice by landlord/lender (arrears)	7	20	16
Given notice by landlord/lender (not due to arrears)	5	2	16
Housing was provided with a job which ended	1	9	0
Dispute within household: violent or abusive	22	4	4
Dispute within household: non-violent	45	20	40
Asked to leave by friends or family (no dispute)	3	13	8
Migrated to UK	0	18	8

Repeat homelessness

'My homeless story is quite long – because I've had lots of it.'
Robin

If a person becomes homeless, they will frequently experience further episodes of homelessness during their adult lives. This repeat homelessness was frequently reported by survey respondents. Nearly three quarters of all respondents had experienced more than one period of homelessness (Table 22) and for more than half of respondents, homelessness appeared to be entrenched; experiencing three or more periods of homelessness during their lives (to date).

Table 22. Number of times homeless

	Frequency	Percent
1	127	27
2	83	17
3	63	13
4	37	8
5 or more	167	35
Total	**477**	**100**

Differences in the extent of repeat homelessness

The extent of repeat homelessness varies between countries/regions. It is far more likely to occur in Wales and far less likely to occur in London (Figure 7). The high frequency

of repeat homelessness in Wales is likely to reflect two main factors. First, a greater proportion of people become homeless at a young age in Wales and later in this section it is proven that the earlier a person becomes homeless the more likely they are to face repeat homelessness (Table 23). Second, this trend can be seen as a consequence of ineffective local authority services which fail to address the needs of single homeless people when they first become homeless.

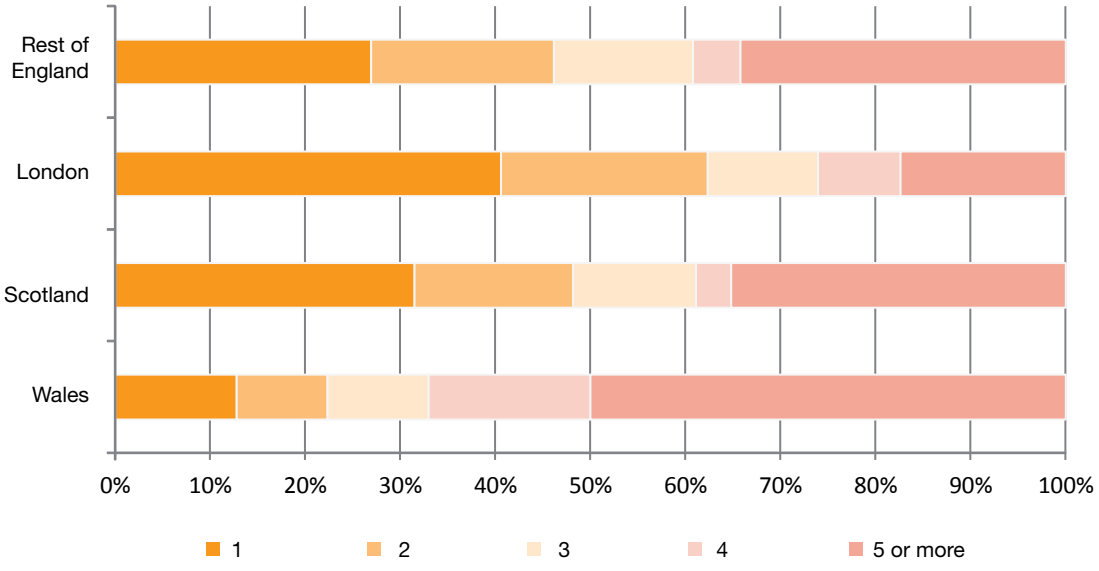
The demographics of the homeless population in London are also likely to at least partly explain levels of repeat homelessness there. In London, lower levels of support needs are reported, hence the needs of individuals are more focused on housing and are not complicated by a wide range of additional support needs that are likely to make finding and maintaining accommodation more challenging. It might have been anticipated that repeat homelessness would be lower in Scotland due to the entitlement to settled housing being extended to single homeless people, however the impact of this entitlement on repeat homelessness is not yet likely to be felt as the legislative change is relatively recent.

The likelihood of a person facing repeat homelessness is also influenced by three demographic characteristics; the age a person first becomes homeless, nationality, and levels of support needs. First, the earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will have five or more homeless experiences (Table 23). Hence, 67% of people who became homeless below the age of 16 had faced five or more homeless experiences, compared to 11% of people who became homeless aged 41 and over.

Table 23. Number of times homeless by age first homeless

	Percent				
	Number of times homeless				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5+**
Under 16	2	12	10	10	67
16 to 17	16	10	10	9	54
18 to 20	20	13	20	13	34
21 to 30	27	26	12	8	28
31 to 40	36	20	21	4	19
41 and over	57	21	7	3	11

Figure 7. Number of times homeless by country/region



Second, a homeless person is far less likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness if they are from an accession state country (Table 24). Approximately 70% had been homeless *only* once, which is much higher than the proportion of British people (21%).

Table 24. Number of times homeless by nationality

	Percent				
	Number of times homeless				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5+**
British	21	18	13	8	40
Accession state nationals	71	11	11	4	2
Other	32	16	20	8	24

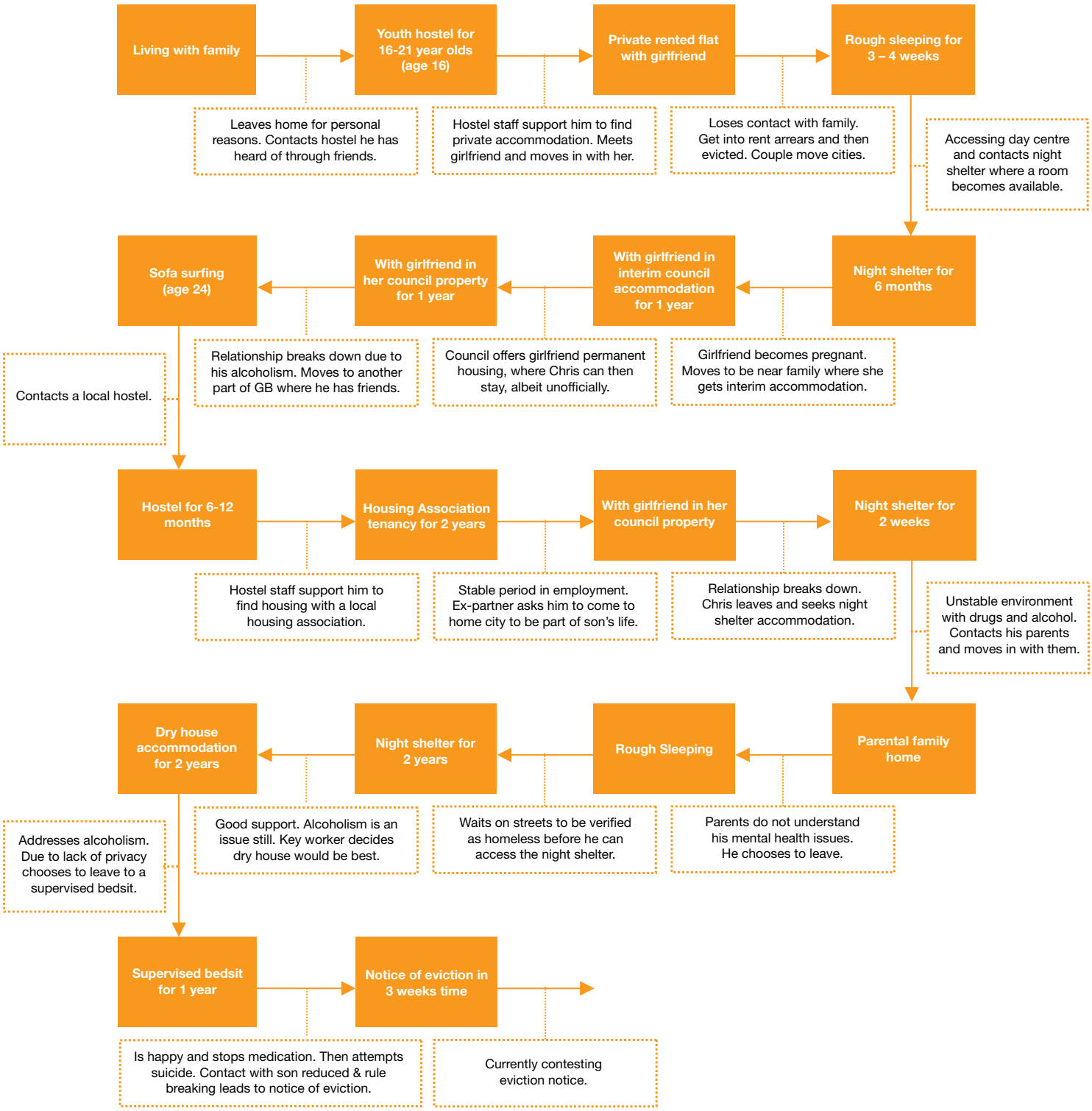
Table 25 shows that people were more likely to have multiple support needs if they had faced several homeless experiences. Nearly 70% of people with no reported support needs had faced only one period of homelessness, whereas 56% of people with five or more support needs had faced five or more periods of homelessness. This pattern suggests that where homelessness is not addressed and repeat homelessness occurs, further support needs develop.

Table 25. Number of times homeless by number of support needs

	Percent				
	Number of times homeless				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5 +**
None listed	68	16	5	0	11
1	48	20	8	8	16
2	51	16	19	5	10
3	26	22	11	14	27
4	18	27	17	8	30
5 or more	11	12	13	7	56

This sub-section ends with an illustration of Chris's homelessness pathway. It provides one example of an individual's multiple transitions in and out of homelessness.

Chris' homeless pathway



Internal migration

Homeless people are often assumed to be highly mobile (Cloke et al. 2003) and homelessness legislation and services across Great Britain appear increasingly focused on limiting provision only to those with a connection to the local area (Mackie 2014b). This final sub-section explores the extent to which single homeless people do move after becoming homeless. Moreover, the reasons for any mobility are investigated.

When asked where they first became homeless, 36% of respondents had done so in a different UK local authority and 2% had become homeless outside of the UK. Clearly a significant proportion of people become homeless and then move to another area. There is a widespread assumption that this movement is driven by a desire to access better services (eg. in major cities). Analysis of in-depth interviews with single homeless people reveals that no respondents were lured by highly supportive and attractive services, instead they tended to be pushed by fear of violence or they were seeking new opportunities/an opportunity to resolve their own crisis (Table 26).

Table 26. Main reason for leaving a local authority after becoming homeless

	Frequency
Did not move	16
Fear of violence	5
For a change/new opportunities	5
Escape financial issues	1
To return to family	1
Avoid police conviction	1
Offered accommodation elsewhere	1
Total	**30**

Interviewees who moved to escape violence had often been involved in some sort of illegal activity and the violence they faced was a response to their earlier actions. Oli explains:

> *'Where I used to live I used to... burgle people's houses, but I was only 14 so I was a mad drug addict like and I don't want to go back there like... I'm not scared, the guy who's after me isn't that hard but he'll pay people to do it, you know what I mean? I just don't want to go there I want to get out of [place name removed]. I wanted to get out of [place name removed] since I was 17.*
> Oli

Several interviewees explained that they had left an area in pursuit of new opportunities. Unlike those homeless people who fled violence, these individuals left though choice, in hope that their circumstances would improve somewhere else. Both David and Aysi's accounts illustrate this driver of internal migration:

> *'I just got fed up and wanted something different somewhere else. You think things are gonna be different somewhere else.'*
> David

> *'I left [place name removed] and came to [place name removed]. I had strained relationships with my friends because I was on their couch for a whole year and they couldn't charge me rent with my situation: the job market I was stuck in... I couldn't get a permanent position, the cost of living, it all got too stressful. I had a cousin who lived up here with his wife and two children and they asked if I wanted a change of scenery until I could find something.'*
> Aysi

Key findings

Types of accommodation

- 10% of respondents had never lived in permanent accommodation during their adult lives and nearly 80% had slept rough.

- The likelihood of a person having lived in permanent accommodation reflected the age of the individual and the country where they sought assistance.

  > Young homeless people were far less likely to have ever lived in permanent accommodation: only 75% of those under 21 had ever lived in permanent housing compared to 93% of those aged 31 to 40.

  > In Wales 17% of single homeless people had never lived in permanent housing, whereas in Scotland this was true for fewer than 4% of people. This difference possibly reflects the young age demographic of Welsh single homeless people whereas the trend in Scotland may reflect the historically larger social housing sector and the right to settled accommodation which exists through the statutory homelessness legislation.

Becoming homeless

The age of becoming homeless

- Nearly 50% of respondents first became homeless aged 20 or younger. The median average age when people first became homeless was 22.

- In London first experiences of homelessness occur later in life. This probably reflects the fact that many more single homeless people in London are not British (particularly accession state nationals), where the causes of homelessness relate to experiences later in life (e.g. job loss).

Housing prior to homelessness

- 44% of people become homeless from the parental/family home on their first experience, with a further 21% exiting the social rented sector and 11% leaving the private rented sector. The types of accommodation people exit into homelessness then vary between the first and most recent experiences of homelessness, with fewer people becoming homeless from the parental home during their most recent experience.

The reasons for leaving accommodation

- The main reasons why people left their accommodation during the first episode of homelessness were: a non-violent dispute (41%), a violent dispute (19%), being given notice by a landlord (15%), and discharge from an institution (12%). The percentage of people leaving accommodation as a result of a dispute within the household (violent or non-violent) then decreases after the first experience of homelessness, whereas the percentage who become homeless after leaving an institution increases.

- Differences in the reasons for leaving accommodation reflected the age and nationality of the person:

  > People age 21 and over are more likely to have left accommodation because their landlord has given them notice on their tenancy. By contrast, young homeless people aged under 21 are far more likely to have left accommodation because of a non-violent dispute, most probably with parents/family. People who became homeless under the age of 16 were also far more likely to have left home due to a violent or abusive dispute within the household.

> British people are more likely to leave accommodation due to some form of dispute (violent or non-violent), whereas accession state nationals are more likely to be evicted due to rent arrears or they become homeless after migrating to the UK.

Repeat homelessness

- Nearly three quarters of people experienced more than one period of homelessness and more than half had faced three or more experiences.

- Differences in the extent of repeat homelessness reflected the country/ region where assistance was sought, the age a person first becomes homeless, nationality, and levels of support needs:

  > Repeat homelessness is more likely to occur in local authorities in Wales and it is far less likely to occur in London.

  > The earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will have five or more homeless experiences.

  > A homeless person is far less likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness if they are from an accession state country.

  > People were more likely to have multiple support needs if they had faced several homeless experiences.

Internal migration

- Approximately one-third of people first became homeless in a different UK local authority to the one where they most recently faced homelessness.

- Internal migration tends to be motivated by fear of violence or the pursuit of new opportunities/an opportunity to resolve their own crisis. Those who moved to escape violence had often been involved in some sort of illegal activity and the violence they faced was a response to their earlier actions. Those who moved in pursuit of new opportunities did so through choice, in hope that their circumstances would improve somewhere else.

6. The impacts of homelessness

This brief chapter considers the major impacts of homelessness on the lives of individuals. Homelessness research often fails to disentangle cause and effect, adopting methodologies which make it difficult to identify whether homelessness was caused by a particular support need or whether homelessness preceded it. This study provides some insight into the impacts of homelessness.

Actions taken to get accommodation

Table 27 presents a summary of the actions people reported they had taken in order to get accommodation during their lives. The relationship between homelessness and crime is very clear: more than a quarter of all respondents had committed a crime in order to get accommodation. Max's story shows how people will resort to crime in order to gather the finances necessary to find accommodation. Equally, Katy explains how in Wales, where prison leavers have priority need status, she has considered committing a crime and going to prison in order to access local authority housing assistance.

> *'I can't ever get nowhere to live, so I'd start committing crime to get somewhere: you're not going to be homeless are you? You're going to resort to crime ain't ya?... I've tried everything else the right way but the council just aren't interested – they are not interested at all.... The only way to do it is you have to come across a lump of cash somehow and then you can get your £750 deposit and your month's rent and your credit check – it costs about £1,500 altogether.'*
> Max

> *'The only time they'll entertain you again (local authority homelessness services in Wales) is if you go to prison again. That's what a lot of people do in town. If they're homeless and they want somewhere to stay they'll go to prison. They'll do shoplifting or something to go to prison... I have done it.'*
> Katy

The use of hospital accident and emergency services in order to secure accommodation is also common place. These actions not only impact on the individual, they also socially and financially affect wider society. Whilst engagement in sex work and unwanted sexual partnerships are less frequently reported, it is a concern that they should be reported at all.

Table 27. Action taken to get accommodation

	Frequency	Percent
Committed a crime	119	26
Engaged in an unwanted sexual partnership	16	4
Undertaken sex work	8	2
Attended hospital A&E	70	16
Other	5	1

Differences in the actions taken to get accommodation

It was anticipated that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and nationality might influence the type of actions a person would take to get accommodation. Women do appear more likely to have engaged in an unwanted sexual partnership or undertaken sex work (10% of women, 2% of men), however this association is not statistically significant due to the low number of people reportedly taking these actions. The only significant influence on actions taken is the number of homeless experiences a person has faced. People who have faced multiple homeless experiences

are far more likely to have committed a crime, undertaken sex work, or attended hospital A&E in order to secure accommodation (Table 28). More than 50% of people who had experienced five or more periods of homelessness had committed at least one of the actions listed in Table 28, compared to just 12% of people who had experienced homelessness only once. The clear message is that failing to prevent repeat homelessness drives people to take undesirable actions to secure accommodation.

Table 28. Action taken to get accommodation by number of homeless experiences

					Percent
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5 or more**
Committed a crime	5	20	23	28	45
Undertaken sex work	0	0	0	0	4
Attended hospital A&E	8	11	23	8	21
None of these	88	73	66	69	47

Impacts on support needs

The support needs of individuals were discussed in an earlier chapter. However, it was unclear whether these needs existed prior to homeless experiences or whether they resulted from homelessness. An analysis of in-depth homelessness pathways interviews reveals when support needs arise. Often the support need did not arise until a second, third or fourth homeless experience but it was clear that these needs arose as a result of homelessness not prior to it.

Relationship breakdown is one of the most frequent causes of homelessness but it is also one of the most frequent impacts of homelessness. Generally interviewees explained that breakdown of relationships with partners acted as a cause, whereas the impacts of homelessness were more likely to be on relationships with family and friends. For example, extended periods of sofa-surfing with friends and family often caused tensions and left homeless people with limited social networks to draw upon for support.

Many homeless interviewees had committed a crime as a result of being homeless. Interviewees frequently described how crime was used to pay for day to day survival and to support substance misuse habits that had developed during homelessness. One interviewee also described how he had been a victim of crime as a result of sleeping rough.

> *'Well I started running about with the other homeless people and they were a lot older than me as well and this is where I became….well, I started shop lifting and that led me into harder drugs as well; heroin and that.'*
> Jacob

> *'I was assaulted whilst I was sleeping outside and had to go to hospital... It happened twice.'*
> Malik

Closely related to crime, are the issues of substance and alcohol misuse which were frequently reported as impacts of homelessness. There appear to be two main ways in which homelessness causes these support issues to arise. First, alcohol and drugs are resorted to as mechanisms for coping with the trauma of homelessness. Second, very many interviewees described how the assistance they were able to access caused them to interact with very vulnerable people, many of whom were using drugs and drinking alcohol to far greater extremes and this caused their own habits to either start or worsen.

> *'I'm at [name removed] hostel and the manager saw me in the doorway with a bottle of cider and asked if I wanted a place to stay. It's the worst hostel in the world; it's full of smack heads. It's all drug*

dealing and there's an outdoor brothel... I hate the life I've got now. I never had drug problems until I got here. I do have a drink problem but the drugs are worse.
Dylan

The emergence of mental health issues was a fourth frequently cited impact of homelessness. As Jacob describes, facing homelessness can impact on mental health, irrespective of whether it is the first experience or one of many.

'I went to (place name removed) and I started off sleeping on the streets there until eventually I got myself into a hostel. I was used to it but…I mean, even to this day, I ended up getting really depressed through it. You know what I mean? Because it's not something that you want to do, it's not a happy thing to happen.'
Jacob

It is clear that homelessness causes multiple problems and where homelessness is not addressed promptly the challenge of ending homelessness gets harder as the number of support needs increase. This is clear evidence to support a drive towards early intervention.

Key findings

Actions to get accommodation

- More than a quarter of all respondents had committed a crime in order to get accommodation. In-depth interviews reveal that people generally commit crimes in order to gather the finances necessary to find accommodation.

- The use of hospital accident and emergency services in order to secure accommodation is also common place (an action taken by 16% of homeless people).

- Whilst engagement in sex work (2%) and unwanted sexual partnerships (4%) are less frequently reported, it is a concern that they should be reported at all and it appears women are more likely to take these particular actions to get accommodation.

- Significantly, people who have faced multiple homeless experiences are far more likely to have committed a crime, undertaken sex work, or attended hospital A&E in order to secure accommodation. Clearly, failing to prevent repeat homelessness drives people to take undesirable actions to secure accommodation.

Impacts on support needs

- It is often unclear whether support needs existed prior to homelessness or whether they resulted from homelessness. In-depth pathways interviews were used to reveal when support needs arose.

- Homelessness frequently causes:

  > Relationship breakdown: breakdown of relationships with partners acted as a cause, whereas the impacts of homelessness were more likely to be on relationships with family and friends.

  > Criminal activity: crime was used to pay for day to day survival and to support substance misuse habits that had developed during homelessness.

  > Alcohol and substance misuse issues: alcohol and drugs are resorted to as mechanisms for coping with the trauma of homelessness. Equally, very many interviewees described how the assistance they were able to access caused them to interact with people who were using drugs and drinking alcohol and this caused their own habits to either start or worsen.

  > Mental health issues: very many interviewees described how becoming homeless had caused mental health issues.

7. Accessing assistance

This chapter investigates people's experiences of attempting to access help from local authorities across Great Britain. Differences between countries/regions will be identified and any correlation between key demographics will also be discussed. The chapter will explore:

- Whether assistance has ever been sought from a local authority
- The timing of seeking assistance
- The type of assistance offered
- The utility of local authority assistance
- Treatment by local authority staff

Seeking local authority assistance

Approximately 4 in 5 respondents had ever approached a local authority for assistance due to homelessness. Whilst the vast majority of single homeless people appear to seek local authority assistance there are significant differences amongst single homeless people, driven by the nationality and gender of the individual.

In Wales 95% of respondents had sought help from the local authority during their lives, whilst in London this was true for only 57% of respondents. This key difference is likely to reflect the different demographics of the homeless population. In particular, London has a much higher proportion of ethnic minorities and non-British nationals and the research found that only 42% of accession state nationals had sought help from a local authority (Table 29). In-depth interviews suggest that this is likely to be for two reasons: first, there is a lack of awareness of any entitlement to support and second, they tend to have faced fewer episodes of homelessness (in the next sub-section it becomes clear assistance is generally only sought after several episodes of homelessness).

Table 29. Ever sought local authority assistance, by nationality

	Row percent	
	Yes	**No**
British	84	16
Accession state nationals	42	58
Other European (Incl. Irish)	86	14
Other	89	11

The likelihood of seeking local authority assistance is also associated with gender. More than 90% of women sought assistance, compared to 77% of men.

In-depth interviews with homeless people revealed a great deal about why assistance is not always sought. For most interviewees the main reason for not seeking assistance was a lack of knowledge about where and what help could be accessed. This was particularly true for the first experience of homelessness. For individuals who did not seek assistance and had experienced multiple periods of homelessness, the reasons normally related to perceptions that they would not be offered any meaningful assistance.

> *'I'm not saying there aren't services out there, but if you haven't been homeless before you don't know they are out there.'*
> Katherine

> *'Also I owed the council rent arrears like, so I didn't bother getting in touch with them for a while. I didn't think they'd help me anyway.'*
> Calum

In-depth interviews revealed the important contribution of the No Second Night Out programme in raising awareness of services

for single homeless people in the areas where it operates[15]. Several interviewees described how they had not sought local authority assistance, instead they were approached by No Second Night Out. Proactively seeking out homeless people and offering assistance can significantly reduce the later impacts of multiple and prolonged periods of homelessness. It is important to note that whilst No Second Night Out is playing an important role in identifying homeless people for assistance, in later sections of this report it receives criticism for the nature of the support offer.

> *'I was homeless again in (place name removed) and there was a thing called No Second Night and they put me into a shared house in [place name removed] and I paid my rent there. I had my own room and I kept bidding for houses in [place name removed] and the first time I bid I got my flat and was there for over a year.'*
> David

The timing of seeking assistance

Analysis of in-depth homelessness pathways interviews provides a valuable insight into the points in time when people decide to seek assistance from a local authority. Services across Great Britain are far more centred on the prevention of homelessness than they were at the onset of devolution in 1999 (Dobie et al. 2014, Mackie 2014b) and yet Table 30 confirms that the majority of people who seek assistance will not do so when problems begin to arise and prevention might be successful, instead half of the 30 interviewees had experienced three or more homeless experiences before they approached the local authority for help.

Table 30. Number of homeless experiences before seeking local authority assistance

	Frequency
1	6
2	7
3	4
4	4
5 or more	6
Did not seek assistance	3
Total	**30**

Individuals clearly seek to resolve their own crises before help is finally sought. Most frequently, people's first actions were to call upon the support of friends and family, generally sleeping on sofas whilst trying to resolve housing and support issues. Additionally, one interviewee described how he had resorted to begging whilst sleeping rough in the hope that he would be able to earn enough money to get his life back on track.

> *'I got in touch with some friends that I went to school with and they said I could stay on their couch until the situation improves, so I ended up staying on their couch for longer than they expected; I was there for almost a year.'*
> Aysi

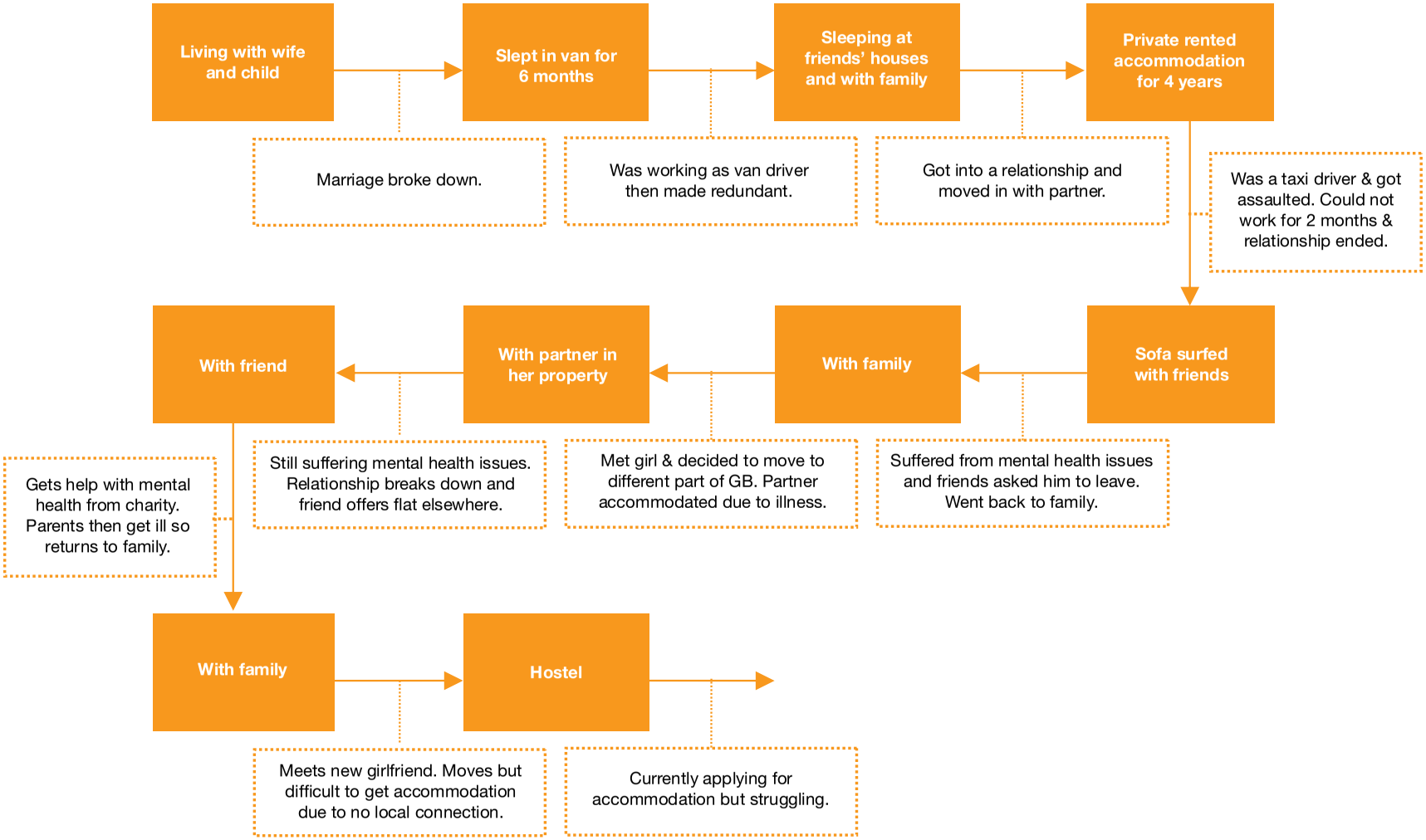
> *'I just sit with a homeless sign and people come past me and know that I'm genuine and give me change. But what I'm doing as well is once I can make enough money I'm going to get some business cards and start putting them through doors and that because I'm a painter.'*
> Peter

15 No Second Nigh Out originated in London and rolled out to all London boroughs in 2012. It has subsequently been introduced in several other English local authorities.

The prevention turn has clearly failed to reconfigure services in a way that they actively seek out vulnerable individuals and assist them before problems exacerbate. This is a major policy concern.

Dan's homelessness pathway provides a clear illustration of how people repeatedly seek to resolve housing problems themselves, taking a long time before eventually approaching a local authority. Dan resorted to sleeping in his van, sofa surfing, and returning to family before eventually asking for local authority help.

Dan's homelessness pathway



The type of assistance offered

Respondents who had recently sought assistance form a local authority were asked to identify the types of assistance they were offered. Table 31 paints a picture of very limited provision, with respondents frequently receiving only general advice (15%), no advice (27%), or a referral elsewhere (22%). Seemingly more positive offers were received by only one third of respondents, who were offered either temporary (26%) or settled accommodation (6%).

Experiences vary slightly between countries, with two main differences emerging (Table 32). First, across Scotland the percentage of respondents offered temporary accommodation increases to 35%, compared to approximately 25% of people in all other parts of Great Britain. Second, in Scotland 16% of people are offered no advice, which again compares favourably against the rest of Great Britain but particularly Wales and London where 32% and 35% of people are offered no advice respectively.

Table 31. Type of assistance offered[16]

	Frequency	Percent
Assistance to remain at home	3	*
Temporary accommodation	98	26
Council or housing association house/flat	18	5
House/flat rented from private landlord	4	1
Information about hostels or landlords in the area	34	4
General advice about finding a home	54	15
Referred elsewhere	85	22
No advice	101	27
Other	19	5

* less than 1 percent

Table 32. Type of assistance offered by country/region

	Percent			
	Wales	Scotland	London	Rest of England
Assistance to remain at home	*	*	*	1
Temporary accommodation	24	35	24	25
Council or housing association house/flat	7	5	3	4
House/flat rented from private landlord	*	*	*	2
Information about hostels or landlords in the area	14	3	5	9
General advice about finding a home	12	22	14	15
Referred elsewhere	24	22	16	23
No advice	32	16	35	25
Other	2	3	3	7

* less than 1 percent

16 Respondents could report more than one type of assistance. Percentages refer to the percentage of respondents who stated they received the named type of assistance. Therefore column percentages do not total 100.

Participants in the in-depth interviews discussed the type of assistance they were offered and it was in relation to the 'no advice' offer that they provided some elaboration. They usefully revealed the three main reasons why no assistance was offered to some. First, interviewees explained that unless they were perceived to be and could demonstrate they were extremely vulnerable they would not be offered accommodation. Interviewees found it frustrating and odd that their circumstances must deteriorate significantly before accommodation would be offered.

> *'Also the problem is that they're giving the people with the drug problems, the drink problems, the criminals more help than people who don't have problems. I was actually told by a social worker that if I could give a dirty heroine sample, or cocaine sample, or a strong Class A drug sample that they could put me into [name of accommodation removed] and they say that they can have you in there in a week and get a bed and get food because you're a 'vulnerable' person. They say that I'm not vulnerable because I don't have a habit but how does that make sense?'*
> Peter

The second reason for not being offered advice or assistance was reportedly 'intentionality'. The test of intentional homelessness is a formal part of the homelessness legislation which should only be considered once a person has been determined to be in priority need. However, this study, like others, shows that homeless people are being turned away and refused advice on the basis of previous actions.

> *'Because I went to prison I made myself 'intentionally homeless' you know. I came out and I went to the council and they would tell me: 'you made yourself homeless by going to jail like!'*
> Calum

The third reason cited by interviewees for being offered no advice was the lack of a local connection. Local authorities frequently appear to be restricting assistance to only those with a local connection to the area. Whilst this policy is affecting all types of single homeless people, it appears to be particularly pronounced amongst accession state migrants. Perhaps the most concerning of all interview comments in this regards was that made by William:

> *'I was rough sleeping under a bridge for six months until the police found me at 1am one night. They asked me what I was doing and why I was sleeping rough and why I hadn't gone to the council. I told the police I didn't know that the council could help. The police then offered to help me and took me to the council. The council told the police to f*** off. The council told the police that they weren't able to help me because I was European and not British.'*
> William

Interviewees made two further, relatively broad comments which cut across all types of assistance. First, interviewees described their dislike of the bureaucratic nature of homelessness assistance. Several interviewees described the challenge of attempting to complete multiple forms and sourcing various types of evidence.

> *'I did take all those steps and it's quite a lot of work running around, getting all these documents together, all the bureaucracy of it. It was just nightmarish... Basically I gave up in the end. I just lost the will to… you know…. it was almost like - they would never say it – but it was almost like it was their job to stop your name being put on the housing register.'*
> Mike

The second issue applied across Great Britain but particularly in Scotland. Several interviewees talked of the lack of transparency about their housing rights. They

suggested that in some local authorities, although not all, information on services available appeared to be hidden from people.

> *'Information is being hidden from people. There's information that could get people off the streets on a day to day basis and it's being fully covered up. There is help, like I could walk out of this door right now and be in a house tonight... it's all hidden and it takes this long to finally find out about it. It's not like I've been lazy and just sat on the streets, I really have actually been going out and trying my hardest to get out of this situation.'*
> Peter

The utility of local authority assistance

Respondents were asked to identify how helpful the local authority support was. There is broad variation in the extent to which respondents found the assistance helpful (Table 33). Given that only a quarter of respondents were offered any form of accommodation when they sought assistance, it is surprising that approximately 45% of respondents found the assistance to be either quite helpful or very helpful. To some extent, this is likely to reflect very low expectations about the type of assistance available.

Table 33. The utility of assistance provided

	Frequency	Percent
Very helpful	99	28
Quite helpful	58	17
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	65	19
Quite unhelpful	57	16
Very unhelpful	69	20
Total	**348**	**100**

Across Great Britain there appears to be only limited variation in the perceived helpfulness of local authority homelessness services (Table 34). The single significant difference is between London and the rest of Great Britain. People in London were far more likely to claim that assistance was unhelpful (68%). This is likely to reflect the lack of statutory provision and the finding that a greater than average percentage of people will receive no advice. This trend reflects findings of previous studies (Dobie et al. 2014).

Table 34. The utility of local authority assistance by country/region

	Row Percent		
	Helpful	**Neither helpful nor unhelpful**	**Unhelpful**
Wales	42	19	39
Scotland	44	19	36
London	14	19	68
Rest of England	49	18	33
GB Average	44	18	38

In-depth interviews provide a useful insight into the perceived utility of different types of accommodation offer. Interviewees who had received social housing felt that the assistance had been extremely useful in addressing homelessness, whereas perspectives about all other types of accommodation offer were more mixed. For some, temporary hostel accommodation had proved to be very useful in stabilising their lives and providing access to much needed support. By contrast, those with very low support needs explained that the temporary hostel accommodation they were offered was home to people with very high support needs – they felt that there was insufficient provision of low needs temporary accommodation.

> *'The hostel kept you occupied. You had courses in the morning, you were allowed to do what you like in the afternoon or they take you out for the day. They'd always do something so it was really structured. So that was a good place for me.'*
> Katy

'They then actually sent me to another place. I don't remember the name but when I got into town I found out that the place they sent me to was for alcoholics which I wasn't: I wasn't on alcohol or drugs. I couldn't tell you what it was, it was just a support place, they had no idea where I could go next, that was literally it. It's not what I needed.'
Katherine

The suitability of the private rented sector as an accommodation solution was discussed by several interviewees. Whilst the private rented sector was cited by only a minority as the type of assistance offered, the offer of general housing advice or a referral elsewhere, often focused on the private rented sector. Perspectives were mixed as to whether the PRS is a suitable housing solution for homeless people: concerns generally related to the security of the tenancy.

'The reason I want a council place is that you get a bit more security and the rent is cheap, you know. Having these private rented one's then you know in six months the landlord could come back and say, 'ah I want one of my family members to move in or I want to sell' so you know, you've got to move again.'
Max

'She rang the landlord when I was speaking to her and he had a property and two days later I went to look at it and six days later I had the keys! He took me with no rent in advance, no deposit just a guarantor, he pays the gas/water and he takes whatever housing benefit will offer. He's incredible. So yes today, me, I am 45 days clean... I'm stable, I'm clean, I'm in contact with the family, and it's good.'
Simon

Referrals/reconnections to other local authorities were rarely perceived positively by interviewees. There was broad agreement amongst interviewees that they had sought assistance in a particular local authority because that is where they were living and that is where their support networks were at that particular time of need. Hence, comments such as those by Michael were common place:

'They kicked me out because I have now been offered a rent in advance scheme in [place name 1 removed] but they haven't got a flat or anything like that... As soon as I got this offer, 'Bang! Off you go' [from the hostel]... The only borough connection I had was the loose, tenuous, connection to [place name 1 removed] and I want to stay here [place name 2 removed]. I've been confirmed rough sleeping in this Borough four or five times but they say; nah you got to pay housing Benefit for six months.'
Michael

Perhaps the most salient point to emerge from in-depth interviews on the utility of assistance was the importance of appropriate support provision. Interviewees explained that even when accommodation had been secured, the absence of prompt and sustained support had led to further housing problems. Interviewees talked of varying types of support needs not being met, from low level needs for material goods such as furniture, to higher levels needs such as substance and alcohol misuse.

'I explained the situation to the local MP and it wasn't long until we got accommodation: we got a flat. This was social housing and the flat was great but unfortunately we had no furniture or owt. We were living on the floor in sleeping bags, it was ridiculous.'
Joe

'The first few months I was getting visits from the council to see the condition of my flat and that I was getting on ok. They checked the heating, electric and gas were working. They were regular checkups. But since they've stopped I've not been paying all my rent and I'm nearly a grand behind now.'
Ashley

Where positive support provision was reported it generally related to provision by the third sector and particularly those involved in addressing substance misuse issues. Effective support provision plays an important role in ensuring sustainable housing solutions for single homeless people.

'The [organisation name removed] do a lot of help for people. They'll support by making phone calls; they help you with your drug issues; your homelessness; they know people, you know what I mean. So I see them twice a week... Right now she's trying to get me an appointment with a housing officer to get me into a house... This last year is the best year I've had since a long, long, time.'
Jacob

'Yeah I actively sought them out; well the lad I was staying with got his flat through [organisation name removed] so I found them by word of mouth. So I contacted them. I wanted to do a civil engineering degree at this point so I told them about this and they got me into one of their shared houses on the proviso that I went to uni... It was good in the sense that I was preparing myself to go to uni but it was bad in the sense that I was still on methadone.'
Simon

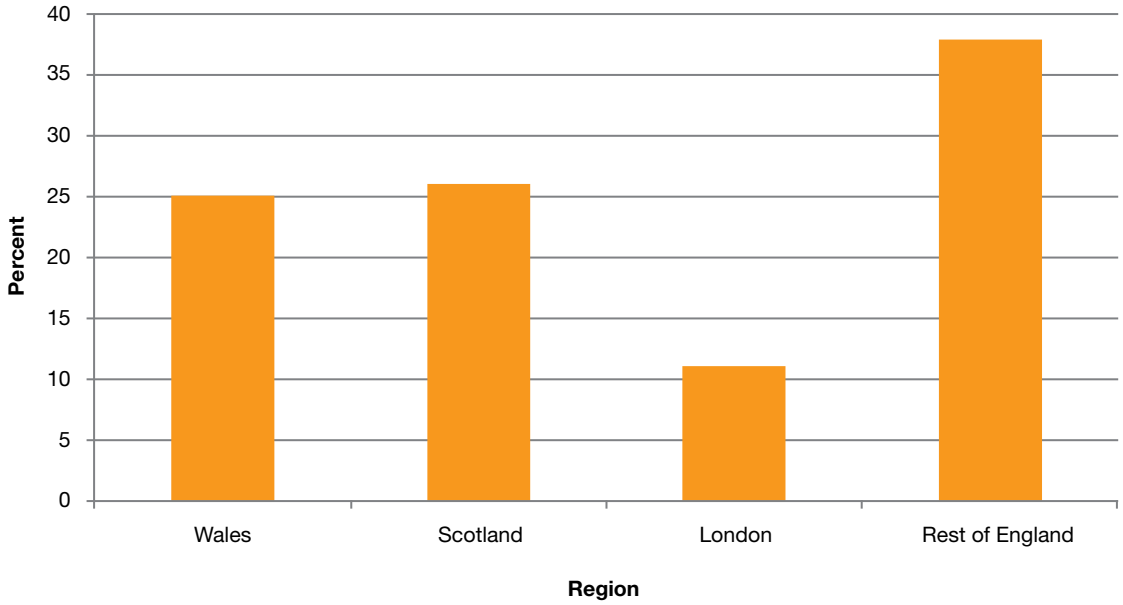
Impacts of assistance

The assistance provided by local authorities is clearly perceived to be helpful by many single homeless people, however the ultimate goal of assistance is to end homelessness. Hence, respondents were asked whether the assistance they had received had helped to achieve this goal.[17] Approximately 30% of respondents stated the help had ended their homelessness. Again, given that only a quarter of respondents were offered any form of accommodation when they sought assistance, this result is somewhat surprising.

The extent to which assistance ended homelessness for respondents varied across Great Britain. Experiences in London once again differed significantly to experiences elsewhere: only 11% of respondents in London reported that their homelessness ended after seeking assistance from the local authority (Figure 8).

17 Respondents themselves decided upon whether 'homelessness ended'. An a-priori definition was not given to respondents.

Figure 8. Homelessness ended by country/region



Having established that homelessness is not ended for the vast majority of people who seek local authority assistance, it is necessary to consider why assistance fails. In-depth interviews were analysed to reveal two main reasons (Table 35). First, and by far most significantly, the lack of provision of accommodation prevented homelessness from ending. Second, where accommodation was secured, the actions of individuals (eg. antisocial behaviour, committing a crime) often played a role in the loss of accommodation and subsequent homelessness.

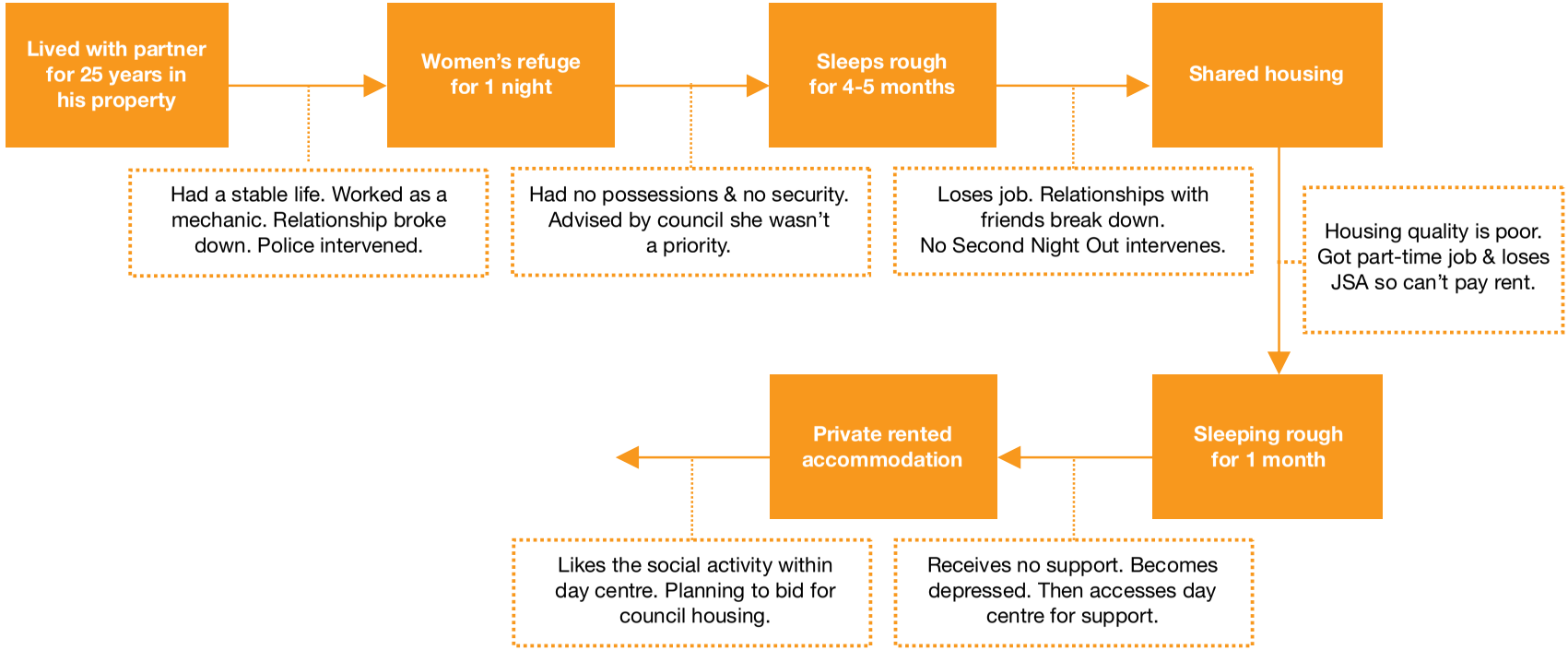
It is obvious that no local authority assistance will succeed in ending homelessness unless accommodation is secured. However, even where an individual is enabled to remain or alternative accommodation is secured, individuals may become homeless again, often due to their own actions. Individual actions that result in a tenancy failing generally relate to some form of support need. Appropriate support must be provided to ensure accommodation is sustained. Even with support, single homeless people's pathways reveal that actions such as committing a crime, anti-social behaviour, and failing to pay rent may persist and may result in further housing problems. Responses to homelessness must recognise this non-linear pathway which single homeless people take out of homelessness.

Table 35. Main reason why homelessness did not end on most recent approach to the local authority

	Frequency
No accommodation secured	16
Actions of individual	6
Unsuitable accommodation	1
Unable to return to property	1
Ended homelessness	3
Did not seek Local authority help	3
Total	**30**

Katherine's homelessness pathway provides an excellent illustration of some of the different ways in which local authority assistance fails to end homelessness. Her initial approach to a local authority resulted in no accommodation so she went on to sleep rough. After the No Second Night Out team intervened she managed to find accommodation but it was not suitable and eventually it was unaffordable so she returned to the streets.

Katherine's homelessness pathway



Treatment by local authority staff

Experiencing homelessness can have significant impacts on well-being, it can cause stigma, and it has been proven that it often takes people a long time before they will seek local authority assistance. Furthermore, research has proven that the experience of visiting a local authority for assistance adds to feelings of shame and stigma (Dobie et al. 2014). The support provided by local authorities must therefore be approachable and caring. Hence, respondents were asked to comment on how well they were treated by local authority staff.

It is reassuring that 60% of respondents felt they had been treated very well or quite well (Table 36). However, a significant minority (24%) reported being treated badly by the local authority where they sought help. Further examination of responses reveals that there are significant variations across Great Britain.

Table 36. Treatment by local authority staff

	Frequency	Percent
Very well	128	37
Quite well	80	23
Neither well nor badly	61	17
Quite badly	41	12
Very badly	39	11
Total	**349**	**100**

The manner in which local authority staff treat individuals is not inevitably associated with the type of service on offer: front-line staff might be approachable and caring and yet administering a system which offers poor accommodation outcomes. Indeed, Table 37 shows that in Scotland, where assistance is most comprehensive, respondents were slightly more likely to report treatment as bad (31%) when compared to Wales and all parts of England, except London. In London respondents were also more likely to have been treated badly (39%). The pattern in Scotland potentially results from a position where front-line staff face significant levels of service demand. Perceptions may also reflect higher expectations resulting from the new legislative framework. In London the relatively bad treatment of people seeking assistance is once again likely to reflect the challenging housing context but it also raises concerns that non-British nationals are disproportionately feeling badly treated by local authorities, given that they make up a significant proportion of the single homeless population in London.

Table 37. Treatment by local authority staff by country/region

	Percent		
	Well	**Neither well nor badly**	**Badly**
Wales	57	20	22
Scotland	47	22	31
London	37	24	39
Rest of England	64	15	22
GB Average	**58**	**18**	**24**

Key findings

Seeking assistance

- Approximately 4 in 5 respondents had approached a local authority for assistance.

- Differences in the extent to which local authority assistance had been sought reflected the country/region, as well as the nationality and gender of the homeless person:

  > In Wales 95% of respondents had sought help from the local authority, whilst in London this was true for only 57% of respondents. This key difference is likely to reflect a much higher proportion of ethnic minorities and non-British nationals in London.

  - > Only 42% of accession state nationals had sought help compared to 84% of British nationals.
  - > More than 90% of women sought local authority assistance, compared to 77% of men.

- In-depth interviews revealed that the two main reasons why assistance was not always sought were: a lack of knowledge about where and what help could be accessed, and perceptions that no meaningful assistance would be offered.
- In-depth interviews revealed the important contribution of the No Second Night Out programme in proactively raising awareness of services for single homeless people.

Timing of seeking assistance

- Half of the 30 interviewees had experienced three or more homeless experiences before they approached the local authority for help.
- Individuals clearly seek to resolve their own crises before help is finally sought. Most frequently, people's first actions were to sleep on friends' and families' sofas whilst trying to resolve housing and support issues.

Type of assistance

- Respondents reported that on their most recent occasion of seeking assistance they were offered: general advice (15%), no advice (27%), or a referral elsewhere (22%). Accommodation offers were received by only one third of respondents, who were offered either temporary (26%) or settled accommodation (6%).
- There was some variation in the type of assistance offered in different countries/regions. In Scotland the percentage of respondents offered temporary accommodation was higher and the percentage offered no advice was lower. By contrast, in Wales and London a relatively high proportion of people are offered no advice.
- Participants in the in-depth interviews elaborated on their experiences of receiving 'no advice'. They identified three reasons why no advice was sometimes given: i] they could not prove sufficient vulnerability, ii] they had (intentionally) made themselves homeless, and iii] they had no local connection.
- Interviewees also described assistance as bureaucratic and it was felt that, particularly in Scotland, there is a lack of transparency about people's housing rights.

Utility of assistance

- Approximately 45% of respondents found local authority assistance to be helpful.
- Differences in the utility of local authority assistance reflected the country/region where assistance was sought. People in London were far more likely to claim that assistance was unhelpful (68%). It is likely that this reflects the particularly challenging housing context in London.
- Interviewees provided an insight into the perceived utility of different types of accommodation offer:
  - > Social housing provision was perceived to be extremely useful.
  - > For some, temporary hostel accommodation helped stabilise their lives and provide access to support, whereas those with very low support needs felt that there was insufficient provision of low needs temporary accommodation.

> Perspectives were mixed as to whether the PRS is a suitable housing solution for homeless people: concerns generally related to the security of the tenancy.

> Referrals/reconnections to other local authorities were rarely perceived positively by interviewees.

> Interviewees explained that even when accommodation had been secured, the absence of prompt and sustained support had led to further housing problems.

Impacts of assistance

- Approximately 30% of respondents stated the help had ended their homelessness, although this was only true for 11% of respondents in London.

- Where homelessness is not ended it is generally because no accommodation was provided or due to the actions of individuals, often where their support needs are unmet.

Treatment by staff

- 60% of respondents felt they had been treated well. However, a significant minority (24%) reported being treated badly by the local authority where they sought help.

- Differences in the perceived treatment by local authority staff reflected the country/region where assistance was sought. In Scotland and London individuals were more likely to have been treated badly (31% and 39% of respondents respectively).

8. Recommendations

A complex range of statutory and non-statutory interventions are now being delivered to address single homelessness across Great Britain, and yet no systematic appraisal had previously been undertaken on the impacts of this divergence on the profile and experiences of single homeless households. This research sought to answer two questions:

- What is the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain?
- Are there differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people and if so what does this mean for the lives of single homeless people across Great Britain?'

This study provides an accurate picture of single homelessness experiences as it draws upon an extremely broad sample of homeless people: the research was conducted in local authorities as well as day centres (previous research has often recruited only in day centres) and in different types of local authority (previous research has often focussed on large cities). Whilst the study cannot claim to be entirely representative of the experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain (questionnaires were conducted in a sample of 16 local authorities), it provides strong evidence to be able to respond to the two research questions:

1. There are significant differences in the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain, with differences associated with: age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, support needs, and housing histories.
2. There are major differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people across Great Britain and these impact considerably on their experiences, enabling only some to resolve their homelessness.

This final chapter sets out recommendations for change across Great Britain.

Recommendations

This research has revealed a great deal about what works and what does not in the endeavour to address single homelessness. Drawing upon this learning, several key themes emerge under which recommendations are made for national and local governments. The key themes are:

- The role of law in addressing homelessness
- Principles of effective homelessness services
- The local connection dilemma
- The importance of affordable housing supply
- Data collection and publication

The role of law in addressing homelessness

Legislation has clearly achieved positive outcomes for single homeless people in Scotland on a scale that is unlikely to be achieved by any other means. This is evidence of the need for legislative change in England and Wales.

Recommendation 1

The Westminster Government should undertake a review of the help single people get under the homelessness legislation in England

Unlike in Scotland and Wales, there has been no major reappraisal of homelessness legislation affecting England since it was

first introduced. It is vital that the help single people get under the homelessness legislation in England is reviewed to ensure that all homeless people get the help they need.

Recommendation 2
The Welsh Government should monitor and evaluate the impacts of forthcoming homelessness legislation on the experiences of single homeless people in Wales

The Welsh Government recently reviewed its homelessness legislation and radical changes are due to commence in spring 2015. However, forthcoming changes fall short of ensuring all single homeless people have access to accommodation and support. In evaluating this new legislation, the Welsh Government should consider any shortcomings in meeting the needs of single homeless people and further legislative changes should be made where appropriate.

Principles of effective homelessness services
Analysis of the key strengths and weaknesses of local authority services reveals four principles for an excellent homelessness service and these form the basis of policy and practice recommendations.

Recommendation 3
Local authorities and national governments should focus on prevention and early intervention

Homelessness frequently occurs first at a young age and multiple homeless experiences accrue before assistance is sought. This delay is detrimental to the well-being of the individual and has social and economic costs for society.

Local authorities in all three nations are now pursuing the prevention of homelessness to some extent (forthcoming legislation in Wales is particularly notable) but prevention efforts must be more proactive in identifying and assisting people before crisis and before homelessness becomes entrenched. A fundamental shift towards early assistance of all single homeless people is required.

Recommendation 4
Local authorities should provide accommodation for all those who need it

The availability and offer of accommodation in Scotland is proving to be key to addressing homelessness for many single homeless people. Local authorities must ensure they have accommodation options available to offer single homeless people.

Recommendation 5
Local authorities should provide assistance to address people's support needs

It is well-proven that single homeless people often face complex and multiple support needs. Whilst improved prevention services might reduce the number of people seeking assistance with multiple support needs, there will continue to be a need for local authorities and their partners to ensure individuals have access to ongoing support for issues such as mental health, as well as drug and alcohol misuse. This must be provided alongside accommodation.

Recommendation 6
Local authorities must treat all homeless people with respect and empathy

It is unacceptable that 23% of single homeless people in this research felt they had been treated badly. People seeking homelessness assistance are often vulnerable and must be treated with empathy and respect.

The local connection dilemma
The research identified a clear trend of local authorities restricting services only to those with a local connection, with no consideration given to the impacts on those who are excluded.

Recommendation 7
National Governments must examine the impacts of exclusion, from both statutory and non-statutory homeless services, on the grounds of no local connection, and consider how better outcomes could be achieved for those with no connection

According to key informants, restricting services only to those with a local connection enabled some local authorities to deliver better accommodation-based services because it limited the eligible population. However, single homeless people who had faced exclusion due to a perceived lack of local connection felt strongly that this policy disadvantaged them and they generally remained within the area. This issue warrants further, more focused examination with the aim of achieving better outcomes for single homeless people.

The importance of affordable housing supply
This study focuses on experiences of homelessness services and this is where recommendations are targeted. However, the lack of affordable housing in parts of Great Britain emerged as a key structural cause of homelessness and was repeatedly referred to by key informants.

Recommendation 8
National Governments must prioritise increasing the supply of genuinely affordable housing in Great Britain

Data collection and publication
Devolution not only resulted in divergence in services for single homeless people but also in the collection and publication of data on homelessness. Only in Scotland is the national government able to provide data on single homeless people. In England and Wales, unless the person is in priority need, the household type is not reported. Without reliable data the task of monitoring policy impacts is exceptionally challenging.

Recommendation 9
The Welsh and Westminster governments should work with the Scottish Government to develop their approaches to data collection and publication in relation to single homelessness

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About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. Our purpose is to end homelessness.

Crisis helps people rebuild their lives through housing, health, education and employment services. We work with thousands of homeless people across the UK and have ambitious plans to work with many more.

We are also determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and to change the way society and government think and act towards homeless people.

Get in touch

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Homelessness ends here