

Centrepoint Youth Homelessness index
An estimate of youth homelessness for England

Nicholas Pleace
Suzanne Fitzpatrick

Centre for Housing Policy
University of York

September 2004

FOREWORD

At Centrepont, in our direct services we provide some 500 bed spaces a night and work with 2000 of some of Britain's most disadvantaged young people each year. Indirectly we help local organisations and partnerships develop effective strategic responses to youth homelessness - we have worked in over 90 council areas across England.

We work to help young people get out of the downward spiral of exclusion and marginalisation. Offering homeless young people a roof over their heads is just the start. We help them create social structures in their lives, which is why our work extends into areas like health, learning and jobs, helping them kick drug or alcohol dependency, develop social skills and engage in vocational training.

In order to plan our work we need an accurate picture of the scale and nature of youth homelessness. More generally, without accurate information it is very difficult for any of us – in government, voluntary or private sectors - to develop appropriate provision and effective policy. It is difficult to secure resources and judge progress.

So we commissioned this research to help us ground more accurately our thinking about the social issue we exist to respond to. It was done in collaboration with the renowned Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. The method itself was borne of a complete lack of official data quantifying the number of 16-24 year olds in England without a home. Recognising the limits of various sources of official data, the authors of this research have for the first time made informed estimates on the basis of a rigorous review of all available data – estimates which chime with Centrepont's experience, and highlight that we are responding to an issue which exceeds the equivalent of all 15-24 year olds in Plymouth.

We will be using the research to press government to encourage English local authorities to capture more detailed information on the numbers of homeless young people in their area. This is possible as well as desirable: the research report emphasises that Scottish local authorities provide more detailed information on the extent of youth homelessness than their counterparts in England. For our part we will continue to develop our tracking of youth homelessness in England.

As Chief Executive of Centrepont I commend this report to you. I trust that the data and findings contained will be fully used by service providers and all tiers of government to benefit homeless young people and the communities in which they must find a home.

Anthony Lawton
Chief Executive, Centrepont

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper is to develop a baseline estimate of the number of young people who experienced homelessness in England over the course of 2003. It provides data and estimates on:

- *the scale* of youth homelessness in England.
- *trends* within youth homelessness in England.
- *the causes* of youth homelessness in England.

'Youth' is defined for the purposes of this paper as 16-24 year olds (inclusive), and includes both young single people and families (although these different household types are separated out in the analysis wherever possible).

A young person is defined as 'homeless' *if they do not have, or are imminently going to lose, accommodation that they could reasonably be expected to occupy.* This definition potentially encompasses a wide range of groups including those sleeping rough, living in hostels, on friends' floors, in intolerable or overcrowded housing conditions, and so on. Ideally, we would have wanted to generate a complete 'prevalence' figure on all of these forms of homelessness for the year 2003 i.e. to specify the total number of young people who had experienced any of these forms of homelessness over this entire calendar year.

However, as is explained in detail below, the statistical data currently available on youth homelessness in England is extremely limited and a complete prevalence estimate for youth homelessness is not possible at present. This paper draws on a range of data sources that can be used to enumerate certain specific groups in the young homeless population for whom some data is available, namely:

- those who are 'found homeless' by local authorities;
- those rehoused as homeless by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) into supported accommodation; and
- those who sleep rough.

Moreover, even within these categories, the limited availability of data in England means that much of this paper is based on estimates derived from the more extensive data available on youth homelessness in Wales and, especially, in Scotland. The estimates provided below should therefore be treated as broad indicators rather than as precise quantifications of the extent of youth homelessness in England. More precise quantification of the scale and trends in youth homelessness in England would require very significant improvements in data collection.

One thing we have not attempted to estimate is the number of young people who are homeless at any one point in time. Such a figure would be

extremely useful in indicating the scale of demand for accommodation and other services for young homeless people on an 'average' night. However, none of the homelessness data sources currently available provide the sort of snapshot 'stock' figures required to generate such a 'point-in-time' estimate (the one exception is 'rough sleepers' counts, but these do not include an age breakdown). Thus it is not possible to even commence this exercise at present.

The paper begins with a summary of its key findings. It then explains in detail the process by which estimates were generated for the *scale* of youth homelessness amongst those subgroups (specified above) for which this is possible. The subsequent sections of the paper focus on *trends* within, and *causes* of, youth homelessness, insofar as these can be discerned from existing data sources. The final substantive section of the paper discusses why the estimates presented in this paper differ substantially from those provided by the *National Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness* in 1995.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- Data limitations mean that at present it is not possible to estimate the total prevalence of youth homelessness in England (i.e. the total number of young people experiencing homelessness over a given time period). However, it is possible, using available data, to estimate the scale of particular subgroups of the young homeless population.
- Between 36,000 to 52,000 young people are estimated to have been '*found homeless*' by local authorities in England in 2003. Such figures approach or exceed the equivalent *all* of the 15-24 year-olds living in a major city such as Plymouth.
- It can be estimated that some 13% of the young people 'found homeless' by local authorities (between 4,700 and 6,700 individuals) may have recent experience of rough sleeping.
- Young women appear to outnumber young men amongst those 'found homeless' by local authorities, particularly among 16-17 year olds.
- It is likely that several thousand young people experience homelessness without having any contact with local authorities in England each year. Some estimates of the number involved can be gained from statistics on access to RSL supported accommodation, but the data available are incomplete.
- It is not currently possible to make any kind of estimate of the scale of 'hidden' youth homelessness which is not represented in local authority or other administrative statistics.
- There is no indication, based on available data, that youth homelessness is either increasing or decreasing, year on year, within England, but data

from Scotland do suggest significant absolute increases in youth homelessness over the last decade.

- While statistical information on the causes of youth homelessness is extremely limited in England, there is a substantial body of qualitative research which indicates that youth homelessness is strongly associated with socioeconomic marginalisation, disrupted family life during childhood, and experience of the care system.
- Earlier estimates of youth homelessness appear to have been exaggerated because they were based on (even) fewer data than are now available.

THE SCALE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ENGLAND

A) Young people 'found homeless' by local authorities

Limitations in the English Data

The starting point for any serious analysis of the scale of any aspect of homelessness in England has to be the P1E data, as this is the most comprehensive national data source available on homelessness. This P1E data is based on summary returns by local authorities which records the decisions they make under the homelessness legislation¹.

The relevant category for our analysis is those households 'found homeless' by local authorities and headed by someone in the age group 16-24. Unfortunately, however, only those decisions relating to two specific groups of young people 'found homeless' by local authorities are recorded separately in these PIE returns:

- young homeless people found to be in 'priority need' because they are 16-17 year-olds; and
- young homeless people found to be in 'priority need' because they are an 18-20 year-old care leaver.

In 2003, local authorities recorded some 10,910 decisions finding young people to be homeless and in priority need because they fell into one or other

¹ Someone is eligible for assistance with rehousing in England if they are a British Citizen or habitually resident in the UK. They are 'homeless' if they have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere that it is reasonable for them to occupy. A homeless household will receive assistance from a local authority, but that household must be in 'priority need' in order to have an entitlement to be *rehoused* by that local authority. To be in priority need, a household must contain one or more dependent children, have a care or support need that makes it difficult or problematic to secure housing on their own or, in the case of a young person, be aged 16-17, or be a 18-20 year-old who was looked after, accommodated or fostered by a social services department between the ages of 16-18. Under most circumstances a household must also demonstrate that it has not deliberately made itself homeless ('intentionally' homeless) and has a local connection to the local authority to whom they are applying (with the exception of households escaping violence). See ODPM (2002) *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* London: ODPM www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=869&l=3

of these two categories. This represented some 8% of the 137,440² households accepted as homeless and in priority need in England.

This figure leaves out, of course, all of the other young households 'found homeless' by local authorities but who do not fit into either of these two specific priority need groups. As the P1E offers no means of enumerating this broader young homeless group, we must look for guidance to Scotland and Wales where age-related data is more readily available from local authorities.

The position in Scotland

The HL1 returns in Scotland provide the best single source of information on the extent of youth homelessness in the UK. These returns record details of all households that seek assistance from local authorities as homeless in Scotland. The HL1 is a better source of data on youth homelessness than the P1E in England for two reasons:

- it provides a *individual case record* for each applicant household, whereas the P1E provides only *summary returns* on the 'decisions made' by local authorities each quarter.
- it records a broader range of information on each applicant household - including age and household type – than the P1E returns in England.

The Scottish data can be drawn upon to examine those households presenting as homeless that were *headed* by a young person (including single young people, young lone parents and young couples with and without children). Other young people experience homelessness (for example, in the company of one or more of their parents) but are not usually defined as experiencing 'youth' homelessness. This convention will be followed in this paper.

All the tables and graphics below include *all* those households headed by a young person and assessed as 'homeless' by local authorities in Scotland³.

In total, 12,289 households headed by a young person were found homeless by Scottish local authorities in 2003. The highest numbers of young homeless applicants were found in the densely populated 'central belt' in Scotland, with about one third of the total number assessed as homeless by the local authorities in Glasgow and Edinburgh (4184 households). Figure 1.1 shows the numbers of households headed by a 16-24 year-old assessed as homeless by Scottish local authorities in 2003.

² Homelessness returns in England are generally incomplete, meaning that published figures almost always incorporate an element that has been estimated by ODPM statisticians.

³ All subsequent graphics and tables referring to HL1 data include all those households that were found unintentionally homeless and in priority need, those homeless but not in priority need and those households found to be intentionally homeless. Those households found 'not homeless' and those with whom contact was lost before a decision about their homelessness status was made are not included.

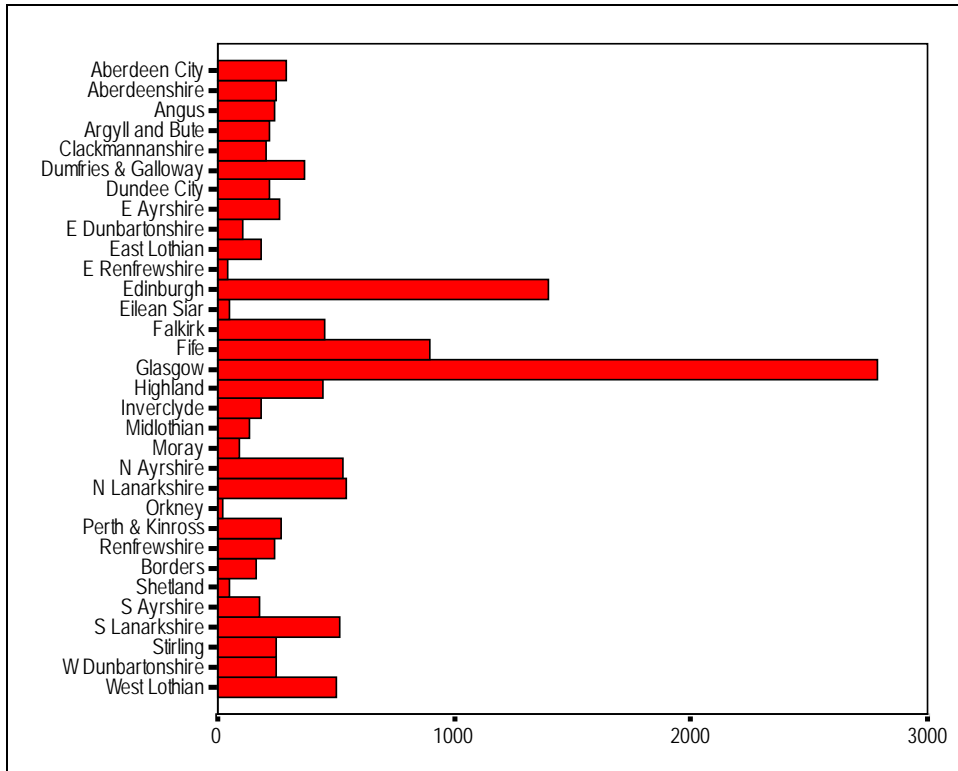


Figure 1.1 Total households headed by someone aged 16-24 found homeless by Local Authority in Scotland in 2003 Source: HL *Own analysis*

Of course, higher overall levels of homelessness (and youth homelessness) are to be expected in the most populous parts of the country. What is of greater interest, for the purposes of extrapolation to England, are patterns in the *proportion* of homeless households headed by young people across in Scotland.

In total, just over one-third (35%) of all households found homeless in Scotland in 2003 were headed by young people aged 16-24. Figure 1.2 demonstrates that 16-17 year-olds represented 7% of households found homeless, with similar figures (9% and 8%) for 18-19 and 20-21 year-olds. Those aged 22-24 represented 11% of assessments as homeless.

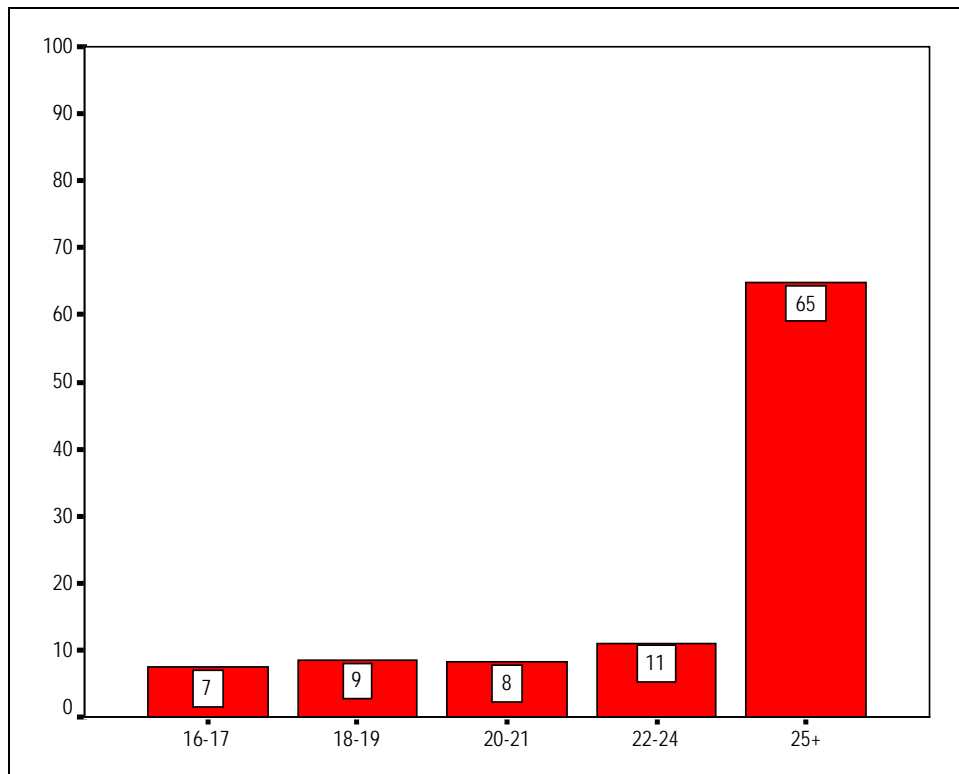


Figure 1.2 Age of main applicant in homeless households in Scotland in 2003
(Base: 35,204, Source: HL1) *own analysis*

As Figure 1.3 below shows, the proportion of households found homeless that were headed by a young person was broadly similar across Scotland. All Scottish local authorities reported that between 30-40% of the households they found homeless were headed by someone aged 16-24.

The less densely populated areas reported higher percentages of their homeless households headed by young people than did the more densely populated areas. This finding might seem counterintuitive, as it might be expected that the cities would rehouse a higher proportion of homeless young people, as well as higher overall numbers, than more rural areas. One possible explanation of this pattern might be that the major cities accept a higher proportion of lone single men aged over 25 than other areas, driving down the proportionate representation of young people (and other groups) amongst their homeless assessments.

The key overall point, however, is that the broad consistency in the proportion of homeless households accounted for by young people across Scotland allows for greater confidence in using the Scottish data to generate estimates for England than would be the case if there was wide variation between authorities.

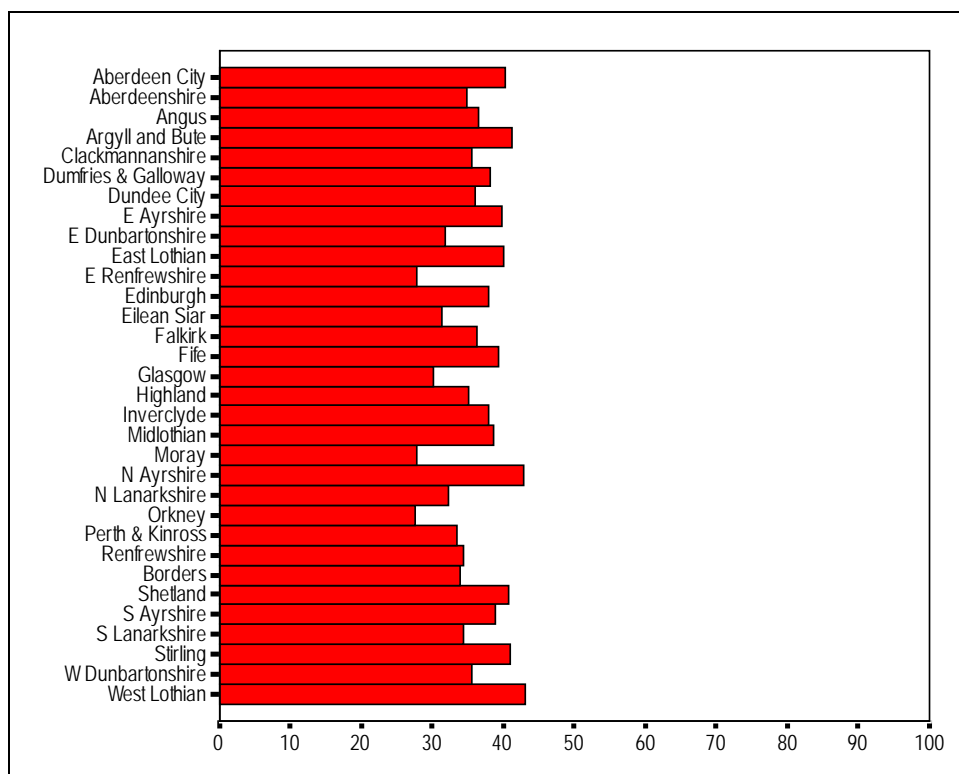


Figure 1.3 Households headed by young people as a percentage of all households found homeless in Scotland by local authority area in 2003. Source: HL1 own analysis

Table 1.1 shows the age and gender of young people who presented as homeless in Scotland during 2003. It demonstrates that, overall, young women slightly outnumbered young men among the ‘main applicants’ found homeless by Scottish local authorities. Young women formed a clear majority in the younger age ranges, with the distribution becoming even between 20-21 years, and young men representing a higher proportion of young homeless people aged between 22-24. As can be seen, among households headed by people aged over 25, the distribution shifts further in favour of men.

Table 1.1: Households headed by young people found homeless by local authorities in Scotland in 2003, by age and gender

Age	Female	Male	All
16-17	1556 (60%)	1030 (40%)	2586 (100%)
18-19	1632 (55%)	1345 (45%)	2977 (100%)
20-21	1433 (50%)	1413 (50%)	2846 (100%)
22-24	1783 (46%)	2097 (54%)	3880 (100%)
25+	9690 (43%)	12,970 (57%)	22,660 (100%)
All (base)	16,094 (46%)	18,885 (54%)	34,949 (100%)

Source: HL1 Returns (Scottish Executive) own analysis. . Percentages are rounded.

Table 1.2 provides more detailed information on the characteristics of homeless households headed by someone aged 16-24 in Scotland. Most striking here is the rapid fall in the proportion of lone young women, and the corresponding rise in the proportion of lone parent families headed by a young woman, as age rises. Young men, by contrast, were more likely to be living alone across all age groups; a tendency that increased with age. It was

unusual for homeless young people of either gender to be living as part of a couple (with or without children).

Table 1.2: Characteristics of young people presenting as main applicants in a homeless household in Scotland in 2003

Age	16-17	18-19	20-21	22-24
Lone Female	1272 (49%)	1025 (34%)	678 (24%)	641 (16%)
Lone Male	992 (38%)	1233 (41%)	1271 (45%)	1860 (48%)
Lone female with children	163 (6%)	404 (13%)	541 (19%)	890 (23%)
Lone male with children	2 (0%)	12 (0%)	14 (0%)	59 (2%)
Female in couple	106 (4%)	144 (4%)	110 (4%)	91 (2%)
Male in couple	30 (1%)	79 (3%)	90 (3%)	95 (2%)
Female heading couple with children	16 (1%)	61 (2%)	107 (4%)	163 (4%)
Male heading couple with children	7 (0%)	24 (1%)	39 (1%)	87 (2%)
Base	2588 (100%)	2982 (100%)	2850 (100%)	3886 (100%)

Source: HL1 Returns, Scottish Executive, *own analysis*. Percentages are rounded. Base: 12,332 young people (data were not available on every characteristic for every household).

The position in Wales

Recent changes to the WHO12 returns in Wales allow some analysis of the characteristics of the homeless households identified by local authorities in Wales by age and gender. Data on household composition were only collected in the last quarter of 2003, but these figures can be used to make an estimate for the whole of 2003. On this basis, we estimate that some 5,762 households headed by a young person were found homeless by Welsh local authorities in 2003, representing around 40% of total households reported as homeless in Wales over that year. Table 1.3 breaks this estimate down by age and gender and, as in Scotland, young women outnumber young men, particularly in the youngest age groups.

Table 1.3: Estimated youth homelessness in Wales, by age and gender

Age	16-17	18-24
Female	757 (68%)	2480 (53%)
Male	362 (32%)	2163 (47%)
Totals	1119 (100%)	4643 (100%)

Source: WHO12 Returns, Welsh Assembly, *own analysis*. Percentages are rounded.

Naturally, these figures must be treated with caution, as the last quarter of 2003 may not have been fully representative of the pattern of youth homelessness during the whole of that year, but it is probably quite safe to treat these figures as broadly indicative of the pattern in Wales.

Generating estimates of youth people 'found homeless' in England

In the exposition below, the Scottish rather than Welsh figures are employed as the main basis for an estimate of youth homelessness in England. This is in part because they contain a detailed breakdown by age and local authority, and in part because Scotland is a more urbanised country with a larger population than Wales, and thus more readily comparable to England. In undertaking the generation of such estimates, which might be more appropriately be referred to as 'guesstimates', it must be acknowledged that the application of Scottish data to England to produce an estimate is not without its problems. Perhaps most importantly, there is no equivalent to London in Scotland (or in Wales). London is one of the world's major cities and has a uniquely stressed housing market⁴, accounting for one quarter of English statutory homelessness on its own. London is also a 'young' city, with a large number of people in their late teens and early twenties, and it contains concentrations of extreme wealth and poverty greater than those elsewhere in the UK⁵.

There are other important differences. England possesses several cities outside London that exceed the size of those in Scotland and also has a high level of densely populated semi-rural space which might be best described as 'suburban', such as the Home Counties. There are also examples of densely populated, relatively affluent suburban areas, such as the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation, which has a population density equivalent to Glasgow, but a radically different housing market and socioeconomic profile. England's BME population accounts for 15% of all households; the equivalent figure in Scotland is only 2%. In London, an average of 60% of homeless households are headed by a person with BME origins⁶; nowhere in Scotland would come anywhere near to matching this BME representation in its homeless population. In summary, England is the most densely populated and ethnically diverse of the three countries (characteristics that are of course most prominent in London), with a population ten times that of Scotland and almost sixteen times that of Wales.

These major differences will have impacts on youth homelessness levels and the distribution of youth homelessness, but data that would allow assessment of these impacts are not currently available. While these issues must be acknowledged, it is also important to also note the great similarities between Scotland, England and Wales. The basic infrastructure, public services and role of social housing in both Wales and Scotland is comparable with England. Both countries are experiencing not dissimilar pressures within their housing markets, including both the 'hotspots' and areas in which house prices are declining, to those found in England. The findings from analysis of WHO12 and HL1 also suggest that youth homelessness is manifesting itself in similar ways in these two countries, adding weight to the possibility that these same patterns exist in youth homelessness in England.

The process that was used to develop estimates for England was as follows:

⁴ Some inner London boroughs have a population density of more than 10,000 people per sq. km. Other UK cities, such as Glasgow, Leeds, Birmingham or Greater Manchester, have densities of between 3-4,000 per sq. km.

⁵ See Dorling, D. and Thomas, B. (2004) *People and Places: A 2001 Census Atlas of the UK* Bristol: Policy Press.

⁶ The median for London is 70%, reflecting a very high presence of BME groups among homeless households in the inner boroughs, while the representation is less strong in the other boroughs. Source: P1E, 2003 *own analysis*.

- the figures for total numbers of households ‘found homeless’ by local authorities in England was extracted from the P1E and used as the basis for extrapolation (as with the Scottish and Welsh figures quoted above, this figure includes those not in priority need and those found intentionally homeless).
- Scottish authorities were grouped by population density into four sets⁷. As noted above, it was found that the most rural, least densely populated set of authorities reported the highest average percentages of homeless households headed by 16-24 year-olds (37%). In contrast, the most urban, most densely populated set of authorities reported the lowest average percentage of homeless households headed by 16-24 year-olds (26%)⁸. These two sets of authorities were then taken as the lower and upper limits of a *range*, allowing estimates to be generated for England that reflected the full range of experience in relation to youth homelessness in Scotland.
- consideration was then given to the impact that the unique characteristics of London may have on the reliability of these guesstimates

i) A ‘low’ estimate of the young people found homeless by English local authorities

The ‘low’ estimate shown in Figure 1.4, suggests an approximate figure of 36,184 homeless households in England would have been headed by a young person if youth homelessness occurred at the lowest average rates found among (the more densely populated) Scottish local authorities. These 36,000 households would represent around 26% of all the households found homeless in England in 2003. Given England’s higher population density relative to Scotland, this ‘low’ estimate may better reflect the likely position in England than the higher estimate presented below (based on rates in the less densely populated areas).

⁷ Authorities were placed in the following groups: those with less than 100 people per sq.km, those with 100-499 people per sq. km, those with 500-1999 people per sq. km and those with 2000 or more people per sq. km.

⁸ As already noted, one possible explanation for this is that the cities had higher numbers of lone men aged over 25 among their homeless households than other Scottish authorities, resulting in young people representing a relatively lower proportion of all acceptances. Work conducted on lone statutorily homeless people in England in the mid 1990s, suggested a very similar pattern (see Pleace, (1995) *Housing Single Vulnerable Homeless People* York: Centre for Housing Policy: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/hsvp.htm>)

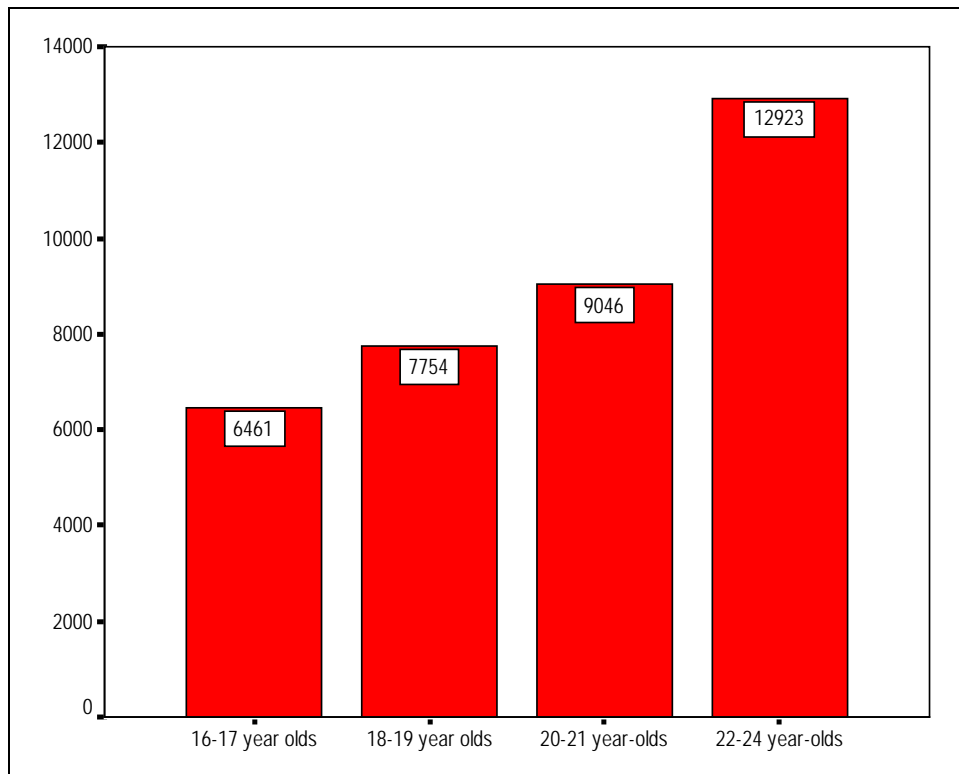


Figure 1.4 *Low estimate of the number of homeless households headed by a young person (16-24) in England⁹*

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These 36,000 households could also be assumed to have broadly similar characteristics to those in Scotland in most respects. Overall, approximately 52% of households would be headed by a young woman (18,700). Most of these young women would be living alone when 16-17 years old, but would be increasingly likely to be a lone parent as they became older. Young homeless men of all ages would be most likely to be living alone.

ii) A 'high' estimate of the young people found homeless by English local authorities

Figure 1.5 uses the highest average levels of youth homelessness reported by Scottish local authorities in their HL1 returns to generate an estimate¹⁰. This 'high' estimate reflects the average proportion of homeless household headed by a 16-24 year-old found among authorities in the less densely populated areas of Scotland. It shows the possible extent of youth homelessness if English authorities are finding young people homeless at the higher average rates found among local authorities in Scotland.

The number of households headed by a young person increases to 52,000, with substantial rises in the number of 16-17 year-olds and 22-24 year-olds. These 52,000 households would represent around 37% of all the homeless

⁹ Based on the lowest levels of youth homelessness reported in Scotland being replicated in England (based on the total households found homeless reported in P1E and lowest rates of youth homelessness reported in HL1, both 2003).

¹⁰ 9% of homeless households are assumed to be headed by a 16-17 year-old, 10% by an 18-19 year-old, 9% by a 20-21 year-old and 12% by a 22-24 year-old.

households in England during 2003, a higher figure than the average for Scotland (35%), and one which approaches the levels estimated in Wales (40%). Again, approximately 52% of households would be headed by a young woman (27,000), and lone young women would outnumber lone young men among 16-17 year-olds, before demonstrating an increasing tendency to head lone parent households from age 18 onwards.

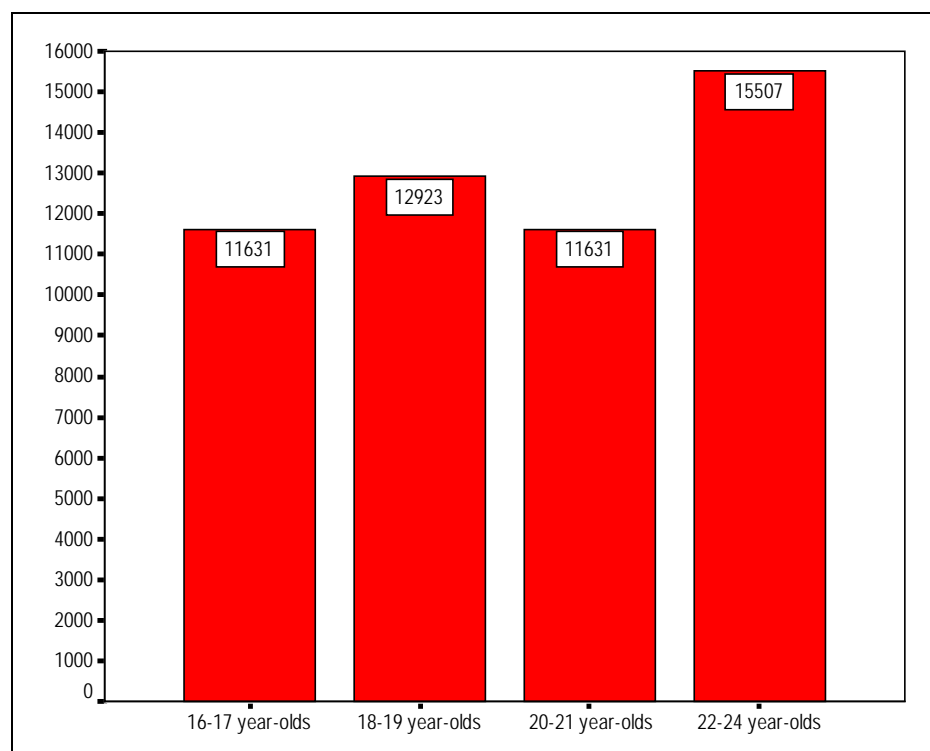


Figure 1.5 High estimate of the number of homeless households headed by a young person (16-24) in England¹¹

iii) The impact of London

The most difficult variable to estimate is the effect of London. The problem lies in the extent to which London *may* have a unique or unusual pattern of youth homelessness in comparison with the rest of England (i.e. a proportion of young people in their homeless population that is much higher or lower than elsewhere). If so, such a 'London effect' could significantly skew the figures for England upward or downward, and render extrapolations from Scotland (which has no London equivalent) less relevant.

There is no doubt that higher absolute numbers of young homeless people will be found in London than elsewhere in England. But higher total numbers of young homeless people in cities do not necessarily suggest distinct 'urban' patterns of youth homelessness. As has been seen, Glasgow and Edinburgh accounted for around one third of all the young people found homeless in Scotland in 2003, but both reported a relatively low percentage of homeless households headed by young people compared to other Scottish local authorities (see figures 1.1 and 1.3).

¹¹ Based on the highest levels of youth homelessness reported in Scotland, after authorities were grouped by population density, being replicated in England (based on the total households found homeless reported in P1E and highest rates of youth homelessness reported in HL1, both 2003).

However, this leaves the question as to whether there is a distinct ‘London effect’ in respect of youth homelessness not simply because it is ‘urban’, but because of its unique characteristics as outlined above. There is no satisfactory way in which to test whether this is in fact the case. However, one relevant piece of analysis that can be undertaken is to look at priority need acceptances of young people by different regions as a percentage of the households found homeless by local authorities in 2003. This does not constitute an actual test of the extent to which there is a London effect, but if *proportionately* more homeless households were being found to be in priority need because they contained someone aged 16-17 or an 18-20 year-old care leaver, it might be taken as some indication that youth homelessness in London was particularly pronounced.

Figure 1.6 shows the homeless households found to be in priority need because they contained a 16-17 year-old or an 18-20 year-old care leaver, by ODPM region in 2003, as a percentage of all households found homeless and in priority need. These data *suggest* that HL1 based estimates can be applied to England without particular concern that London would be misrepresented (and by extension, because of its sheer size, the figures for England as a whole seriously skewed). This is because London authorities were not reporting a much higher proportion of their decisions related to these (highly limited) categories of youth homelessness than was the case for authorities elsewhere in England.

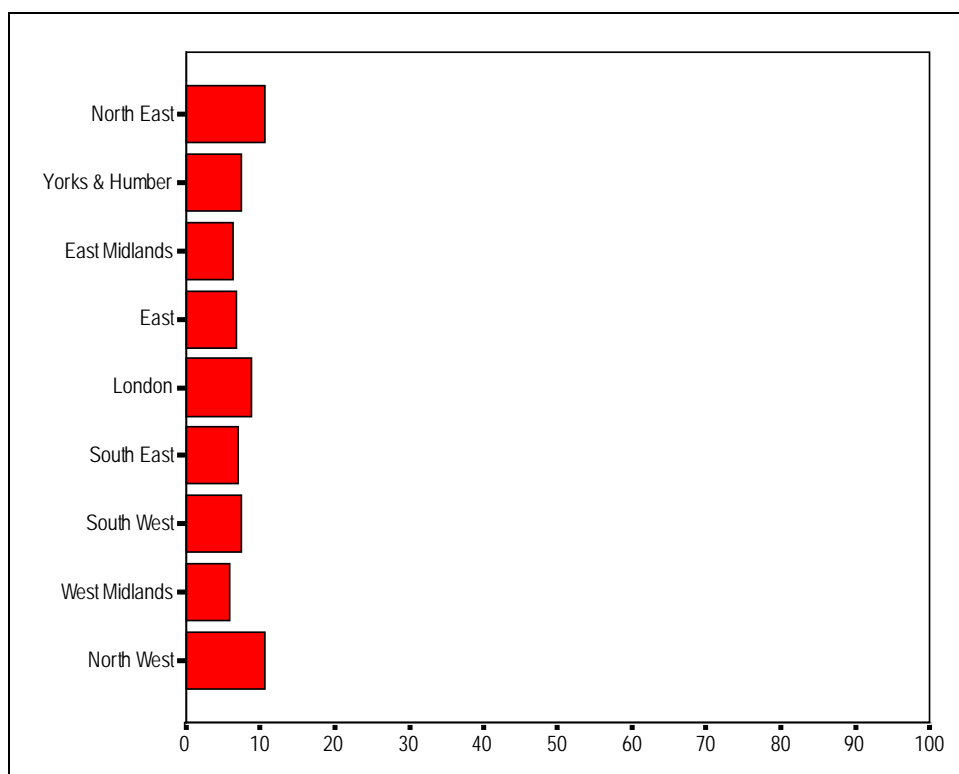


Figure 1.6 Households found homeless because they contained a 16-17 year-old or an 18-20 year old care leaver as a percentage of households found homeless by English local authorities by ODPM region¹²

¹² Source: P1E, ODPM, 2004 (data based on partially incomplete returns for 2003)

B. Young people sleeping rough

Young people sleeping rough are clearly at the very sharpest end of homelessness. Services working with rough sleepers and some research have reported an increase in the representation of young people and particularly young women since the mid 1990s¹³. At the same time, however, there is increasing evidence that the ongoing activities that began with the Rough Sleepers Initiative and continue with the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, are reducing overall levels of rough sleeping within England¹⁴.

There are some data sources that can provide indications about the numbers of young people sleeping rough. For example, the CHAIN database in London covers a range of rough sleeping services¹⁵, which in 2002 had contact with 2,761 people. These data suggested that much of the rough sleeping in London involved long term rough sleepers, who were repeat users of the services that participate in CHAIN. Young people were not particularly strongly represented among this group, with 13% of those who were contacted by these services in 2002 being aged under 24. However, this still meant that at least 382 young people were picked up by the London rough sleeper services participating in CHAIN during 2002¹⁶. Other data sources cover more restricted areas or fewer services than CHAIN, making it difficult to use them as a source from which to generate estimates. The street counts of people sleeping rough undertaken to support central Government policies do not include an age breakdown.

Fortunately, again, the HL1 data collected in Scotland can be used to give some indication of what the experience of homeless young people in relation to rough sleeping might be. These data are confined to those households approaching local authorities for assistance, but in the absence of other information, they do give some indication of the scale of rough sleeping amongst young homeless people. Table 1.4 summarises these HL1 data.

¹³ See for example: CRASH (1999) *Survey of Winter Shelters provided in London, Brighton, Bristol and Cambridge (December 1998 – March 1999)*. CRASH (2000) *Survey of Users of Winter Shelters Provided in London, Brighton, Bristol and Cambridge (December 1999 – March 2000)*. London: CRASH <http://www.crash.org.uk/>

¹⁴ Single night street counts estimated that in June 1998, there were 1,850 people sleeping rough on a single night in England, by June 2003, it was estimated that 504 people were sleeping rough in England on any single night (source: ODPM),

¹⁵ CHAIN was established in 2000 and holds information on 'verified' rough sleepers in London and the services they access. CHAIN data is provided by 66 projects run by 24 agencies and covers outreach teams, rolling shelters, hostels and resettlement teams. www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy/rough_sleeper_report2002.pdf

¹⁶ As not all rough sleeper services in London are participants in CHAIN, the database does not present a complete picture.

Table 1.4: Experience of rough sleeping among young main applicants in households found homeless in Scotland in 2003

Age	No experience of sleeping rough	Experience of sleeping rough	Base
16-17	2290 (87%)	296 (11%)	2586 (100%)
18-19	2620 (88%)	357 (12%)	2977 (100%)
20-21	2453 (86%)	393 (14%)	2846 (100%)
22-24	3328 (86%)	552 (14%)	3880 (100%)
25+	19,409 (86%)	3251 (14%)	22,660 (100%)
All	30,100 (86%)	4489 (14%)	34,949 (100%)

Source: HL1 Returns. *Own analysis* **Note:** Experience of sleeping rough refers to having slept rough in the last three months or having slept rough the night before applying to a local authority. Percentages are rounded.

Table 1.4 suggests a higher level of experience of rough sleeping than has hitherto been suspected, especially given that HL1 only asks if someone has slept rough the night before, or within the last three months (which means total experience of rough sleeping could be greater). Almost one in six homeless people, across all age ranges, were reporting recent experience of rough sleeping.

In overall terms, our own analysis of the HL1 data suggests that gender was a significant predictor of a tendency to have experienced rough sleeping in the last three months, as 6% of women and 21% of men (among all main applicants of any age) reported this experience of rough sleeping. By contrast, youth was not a predictor of having experienced rough sleeping.

If this pattern of experience of rough sleepers were replicated across England, it could mean that between 4,700 and 6,700 young people found homeless each year are sleeping rough in the three months prior to presenting as homeless (based respectively on the 'low' and 'high' estimates presented above). Although in many instances this might involve just a few nights sleeping rough, the range of dangers and risks to health associated with sleeping rough are such that anything approaching this guesstimate would be a real cause for concern.

This guesstimate is again derived from households found homeless by local authorities and not all young people who experience homelessness will necessarily approach a local authority. There will be at least some young people who experience rough sleepers who never approach a local authority for assistance, although they well may be picked up by youth homelessness services, at least within the larger towns and cities. There is at the moment no meaningful way to estimate the scale of rough sleeping by young people who do not approach local authorities for assistance.

C) Young homeless people rehoused by RSLs in supported housing

During the 1980s and 1990s, a wide range of specific services for homeless young people were developed, including daycentres, outreach, resettlement and tenancy sustainment services and a wide range of supported housing,

ranging from hostels to move-on accommodation to foyers¹⁷. Much of the supported accommodation provided for young people is funded through the Housing Corporation and through the various revenue funding streams that have now become the Supporting People programme.

The activities of the RSLs providing supported accommodation are monitored through the supported CORE database in England¹⁸. The last full year of supported CORE data available at the time of writing were those for 2003/4. Supported CORE records the new lets made by these projects, allowing a picture of the activity undertaken by foyers, hostels, move-on accommodation and a host of other supported housing services working with young homeless people to be examined. This is a useful data source because it records the characteristics of households rehoused - including age - but of course it is restricted to the RSL sector and supported accommodation. Another limitation is that it represents a record of *project activity* as distinct from a database recording *individual young homeless people*, so allowing for the possibility of double counting in the figures produced. This means that it cannot be simply assumed that the 20, 241 lettings shown in Figure 1.6 equate to 20,241 homeless young people. Nevertheless, a pattern in which many young people make use of several different projects over the course of a year seems somewhat unlikely, and it may be that supported CORE largely records unique contacts with services by single individuals.

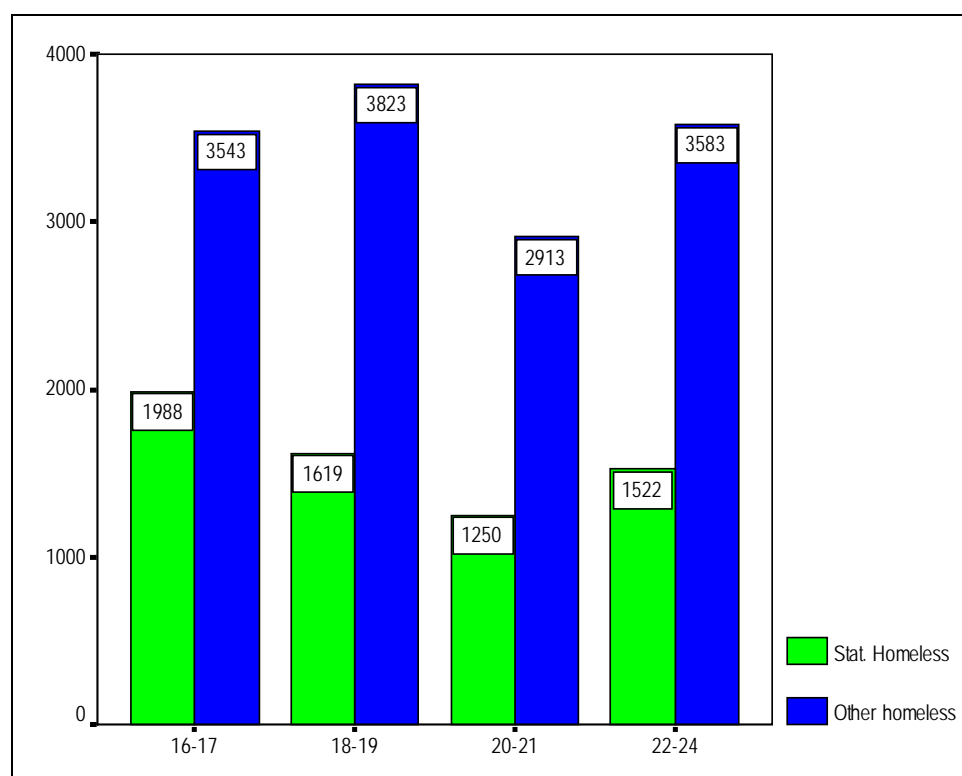


Figure 1.6 New lets (including lease agreements) made to homeless young people by supported housing projects in England during 2002/03 (Source: CORE).

¹⁷ See Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N (1999) 'Housing and Support Services for Young People' in Rugg, J (ed) *Young People Housing and Social Policy* London: Routledge.

¹⁸ CORE is an acronym for 'the Continuous Recording System' see <http://www.core.ac.uk/>

The interesting columns here are of course the blue ones (because the 'statutory homeless' should be captured in the estimates of statutory homelessness above). These figures suggest that non-statutorily homeless young people using RSL supported housing may have numbered around 13,800 during 2002/03 in England. This number cannot be simply added to the estimates of youth homelessness from data provided by local authorities - because it will include some who were found homeless but not in priority need by local authorities and who were then referred to an RSL - but it does suggest that young people experiencing homelessness who do not have contact with a local authority may number well into the thousands each year. If this deduction is correct, it would suggest that even the 'high' estimate of youth homelessness based on households found homeless by local authorities will be a considerable underestimate.

TRENDS IN YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

There is little robust information that can be examined to determine how patterns of youth homelessness in England may have changed over time, as P1E does not contain data that could be used for such an exercise

Supported CORE data are available from 1996/97 to 2002/03 and can be examined to tell us something about the patterns of youth homelessness, in terms of the lettings made to young people by supported housing services such as hostels, foyers and move-on accommodation, during that time. Table 1.5 summarises the lettings recorded to young people under supported CORE from 1996/97 to 2002/03. It should be noted that the coverage of supported CORE improved over time¹⁹, so the lower figures for 1996/97 and 1997/98 probably reflect incomplete returns.

Table 1.5: Lettings made to homeless 16-24 year olds recorded by Supported CORE by financial year

Year	Number	As % of all lettings to homeless households
1996/1997	13,828	41%
1997/1998	17,817	47%
1998/1999	21,317	48%
1999/2000	20,382	46%
2000/2001	19,558	46%
2001/2002	20,053	47%
2002/2003	20,247	47%
2003/2004	20,241	47%

Source: CORE returns *Own analysis*. Percentages are rounded.

These figures do suggest a fairly stable situation – both in absolute and proportionate terms – with regards to young homeless people's use of RSL provided supported accommodation. As they are based on all forms of supported housing covered by CORE, not just 'homelessness' projects, they should indicate any increase across supported housing as a whole. However,

¹⁹ See Pleace, N.; Ford, J.; Wilcox, S. and Burrows, R. (1999) *Lettings and Sales by Registered Social Landlords: Annual Report of the CORE data 1997/98* York: Centre for Housing Policy.

these figures cannot be seen as equivalent to accurate monitoring of levels of youth homelessness over this period, instead they cover the trends within one part of service provision for young homeless people. In addition, the essentially static picture that can be derived from supported CORE is brought into question by some findings from the Scottish HL1 data.

It is possible to track the changes in youth homelessness in Scotland over time, again using the HL1 data. The published data allow examination of all lone households headed by someone aged 16-24 and all lone parent households headed by someone aged 16-24²⁰.

The Scottish data suggest a marked increase in youth homelessness over the last decade. In 1990-91, HL1 recorded 23,400 homeless households of which 4,700 (20%) were lone 16-24 year-olds and 3,000 (13%) were lone parents aged 16-24. By 2000-2001, HL1 recorded 37,035 homeless households, of which 9,300 (25%) were lone 16-24 year-olds and 2,000 (5%) were lone parents (the reason for the declining numbers of lone young parents is not known at the time of writing). While the overall percentage of young people represented among homeless households remained similar (33% in 1990/91 and 31% in 2000/01) there had been a significant increase in the total numbers involved. These increases have been year-on-year in a continuous upward trend²¹.

The extent to which this pattern has been replicated in England is unclear, there are simply not the data with which to make an assessment or even attempt an estimate. Homelessness in Scotland has increased over the last decade and, following falls in the mid 1990s, it has started to increase again in England. The 137,000 acceptances²² made in England last year is very close to the peaks in acceptances during the late 1980s and early 1990s (the high point was 145,000 acceptances in 1991). If the pattern of youth homelessness seen in Scotland is being replicated in England, then the overall numbers of young people experiencing homelessness may have increased substantially in the last few years.

THE CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

There is a significant body of qualitative research examining the role of individual needs, characteristics and experiences in the causation of youth homelessness in the UK. Alongside the possible impacts of 'structural' factors such as local housing and labour markets, a number of individual risk factors which make some young people more vulnerable to homelessness have been identified, as well as 'triggers' or specific events that result in homelessness. These include:

- unemployment and socioeconomic marginalisation;

²⁰ These figures do not, like the estimates given in Figures 1.3 and 1.4 above, include couples without children and two parent households headed by someone aged 16-24, meaning that the overall totals are slightly lower.

²¹ See Pawson, H. (2000) *A Profile of Homelessness in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Homes.

²² An 'acceptance' is a household found homeless and in priority need by a local authority

- experience of/leaving local authority care;
- family disruption in childhood, especially after age 3;
- experience of living with a step parent, particularly for young men;
- experience of parental neglect, abuse or violence;
- strained relationships and relationship breakdown with parents and step-parents;
- reliance on insecure accommodation settings, such as staying with friends or relatives;
- being asked to leave or being thrown out of the parental home²³.

Qualitative research has consistently reported the same pattern of factors over the last decade. The causation of youth homelessness, in terms of the experiences and characteristics found among young homeless people, therefore appears relatively constant.

As this work tends to be qualitative, based on interviews with quite small numbers of young people, rather than large-scale survey research, its statistical value is limited. Also, it is not possible to relate the causes of homelessness recorded by P1E to the ages of main applicants, because as noted above information on age and households composition is not collected. Again, however, there is some information within HL1 that can be linked to the age of applicants, as is summarised in Table 1.6.

²³ See: Bruegel, I. and Smith, J. (1999) *Taking Risks: an analysis of the risks of homelessness for young people in London*, London: Safe in the City; Stein, M. and Rees, G. (2002) 'Young people leaving care and young people who go missing' in Bradshaw, J. (ed) *The Well-being of Children in the UK*, London: Save the Children; Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *Young Homeless People*, London: Macmillan; Jones, G. (1995) *Leaving Home* Open University Press: Buckingham.

Table 1.6: Main recorded reason for homelessness for households found homeless and headed by 16-24 year olds in Scotland in

2003 Reason	Number	Percentage
Parents cannot accommodate	4556	36.9
Relatives cannot accommodate	1176	9.5
Friends cannot accommodate	1120	9.1
Dispute with spouse/cohabitee: violent	703	5.7
Discharged from prison	694	5.6
Other	665	5.4
Dispute with spouse/cohabitee: non-violent	594	4.8
Lost accommodation in hostel	467	3.8
Loss of private tenancy: other	419	3.4
Fleeing non-domestic violence	274	2.2
Dispute with guardian: violent	253	2.1
Harassment: other	242	2.0
Loss of private tenancy: arrears	127	1.0
Gave up secure accommodation	112	.9
Expiry of short assured tenancy	106	.9
Unsafe to return (other reason)	91	.7
Loss of LA tenancy: arrears	87	.7
Loss of LA tenancy: other	86	.7
Loss of social rent tenancy: other	83	.7
Discharged from hospital	82	.7
Overcrowding	75	.6
Loss of service tenancy (armed forces)	61	.5
Emergency (fire)	54	.4
Loss of social rent tenancy: arrears	43	.3
Mortgage default	39	.3
Young & affect by violence: not directly	34	.3
Loss of private tenancy: anti-social behaviour	23	.2
Forced division and sale (matrimonial)	20	.2
Loss of social rent tenancy: anti-social behaviour	13	.1
Harassment: racial	13	.1
House condition (i.e. closing order)	11	.1
Loss of LA tenancy: anti-social	9	.1
Total	12332	100.0

Source: HL1 *Own analysis*.

Table 1.6 indicates the kind of pattern that would be anticipated by existing qualitative research into youth homelessness. The high numbers of young people leaving the parental home, the breakdown of informal arrangements (leaving friends who can no longer accommodate them), and the role of violence in various manifestations, are all to be expected. The figure also hints at the complexities involved in attempting to generalise about the immediate causation of youth homelessness and the factors associated with youth homelessness.

PREVIOUS ESTIMATES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

This final section of paper reflects on the differences in the estimates of youth homelessness offered above and previous estimates, particularly that generated by the *National Enquiry Into Preventing Youth Homelessness*²⁴. In

²⁴ Evans, A. (1996) *We Don't Choose to be Homeless: Report of the national enquiry into preventing youth homelessness* London: CHAR.

the mid 1990s, when the Inquiry was set up, youth homelessness was seen as a severe and growing problem and the lack of access to housing for homeless young people via the homelessness legislation was viewed as increasingly problematic²⁵. Many authorities at that time did not accept very many young people under the terms allowed in the homelessness legislation. A handful of local authorities were rehousing homeless young people in significant numbers, with just ten authorities accepting *half* of all the young people accepted as homeless during 1993²⁶. During that same year, 118 authorities (one third), accepted *no* lone young people as homeless and in priority need. Authorities could also provide accommodation to young people who were homeless, but not in priority need, at their discretion, but only one third of local authorities undertook to do this in 1993²⁷.

In this climate of increasing concern about youth homelessness, estimates produced for the *National Enquiry* suggested that 246,000 single young people had experienced homelessness during the course of a year (1995) across the UK. This estimate was based on a research finding that around one quarter of the households approaching local authorities as homeless were young people²⁸, allowing an assumption that 23% of all homeless applicants in 1995, some 85,000 people, were aged 16-25. However, it should be noted that this estimate would have included some households that were found not to be homeless, or with whom a local authority lost contact before a decision was made.

The estimate also drew on the 1990 survey of single homelessness which suggested that among homeless hostel residents aged under 25²⁹, only two-fifths had applied to a local authority as homeless. From this it was assumed that the estimated 85,000 applicants to local authorities who were 16-25, therefore represented only 'two-fifths' of the young people experiencing homelessness in 1995. From this assumption, a figure of 160,000 young people was generated to add to the estimated 85,000 approaching local authorities, a 'three-fifths' to add to the 'two-fifths' represented by the 85,000. This figure was based on findings of one survey, which was designed to understand the characteristics of single homeless people, not to enumerate them. There was no direct evidence that youth homelessness existed at these kinds of levels, nor any indication of where these 160,000 young people might be within the UK. However, this estimate was made in a context in which youth homelessness was felt to be rising as a result of restrictions in access to benefits for young people, a trend for which there was some evidence³⁰, and at a time in which robust data were very scarce.

²⁵ See Anderson, I. (1994) *Access to Housing for Low Income Single People* York: Centre for Housing Policy and Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *Young Homeless People*, London: Macmillan

²⁶ Source: P1E dataset for 1993, own analysis, the returns are not complete, the information here should be viewed as *indicative* only

²⁷ Housing some 1,800 young people through this route, compared to some 4,100 young people who were accepted as statutorily homeless in 1993. Source: P1E dataset for 1993, own analysis, the returns are not complete, the information here should be viewed as *indicative* only

²⁸ DoE (1996) *Study of Homeless Applicants* London: HMSO.

²⁹ Anderson, I.; Kemp, P.A. and Quilgars, D. (1993) *Single Homeless People* London: HMSO

³⁰ Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *Young Homeless People* Basingstoke: Macmillan

The estimates of youth homelessness offered within this paper are obviously very much lower, even taking account of the focus on England rather than the UK, but they are based on better quality evidence about the extent of youth homelessness. The available data on services for homeless young people and rough sleeping do not suggest that for every household headed by a young person found homeless by a local authority, there are another two or three young homeless households. The activity reported under supported CORE in England (Figure 1.6) and the, admittedly limited, data on rough sleeping simply do not support this contention. While there are an unknown number of young people in 'hidden homeless' situations unknown to any service providers, it is impossible at present to begin to put any figure to this.

Nevertheless, it is important to see the more modest estimated levels of youth homelessness reported in this paper in context. If one takes, for example, Plymouth, with a total population of 15-24 year-olds of 33,908 at the 2001 Census, then the low estimate of youth homelessness for England exceeds the total number of young people in Plymouth. If another example is taken, the city of York for instance, which in 2001 had a population of 181,000, the 'low' estimate of youth homelessness for England (Figure 1.4) would represent a fifth of the population of York, whilst the 'high' estimate (Figure 1.5) would represent a third. And the total number of young people in York (26,161 15-24 year-olds according to the 2001 census) represents a half of the high estimate of young people experiencing homelessness in 2003.

The estimates of youth homelessness presented in this paper can therefore be seen in terms of being equivalent to something like all the young people in a major city and several times the population of young people in a typical town. This is sufficient indication of a significant social problem, there is no need to produce exaggerated figures in order to view youth homelessness in England with concern.

CONCLUSIONS

Some previous estimates of youth homelessness in England have almost certainly been exaggerated. This was in part a result of the quality of data that were available at the time they were made. The estimates in this paper suggest that:

- annual youth homelessness, in terms of households headed by young people found homeless by local authorities in England, may involve numbers that are equivalent to all the young people aged 20-24 living in a major city, such as Birmingham;
- there is no indication, based on available data, that youth homelessness is either increasing or decreasing within England, but data from Scotland suggest a steady increase in levels of youth homelessness in that country over the past decade;
- data on young people who are homeless but who do not approach local authorities for assistance are scarce in England, but data on supported

housing suggest that these households may number into the thousands each year;

- there are no data which can be used to estimate the extent of 'hidden' homelessness among young people in England (or elsewhere in the UK);
- the numbers of young people experiencing rough sleeping, albeit sometimes for short periods, may number in the thousands.

This exercise has again illustrated the poverty of existing data on the causation, nature and extent of youth homelessness in England. Although improvements have been attempted with the main statistical data set on local authority activities in relation to homelessness, the P1E return, the continued emphasis on summary decisions, rather than recording of household characteristics as is the case in Scotland, greatly undermines the utility of these statistics for research and policy planning purposes³¹. Recent information on the prevalence of homelessness in the general population is also lacking. Poor quality statistical data are an issue across all forms of homelessness in England.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper could not have been produced without the access to the HL1 return data and the P1E return data granted by the Scottish Executive and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Neither organisation is responsible for the analysis or interpretation presented in this paper.

³¹ Recent research conducted by CHP suggests that many English authorities do actually record the basic characteristics of each homeless household they work with, including gender, ethnicity, age and household composition.