

Do Black and minority ethnic communities experience more homelessness?



A report has found that Black people in England are over three times more likely than white British people to experience homelessness. It was the first report on the subject since 2005, and used Understanding Society and nine other datasets to give a 'state of the nation' overview of the situation.

The findings

The report, Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK, by Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Jill McIntyre, and Sarah Johnsen, says:

- Black and minoritised ethnic communities experience disproportionate levels of homelessness
- about a third of Black people who had experienced homelessness reported previous discrimination from a social or private landlord
- the highest risk of homelessness in England is experienced by people from Black and Mixed ethnic groups, especially in London
- Asian people in England are more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness', such as living in over-crowded housing or 'doubling up' with other households

It also showed that the greater risk of homelessness faced by Black and minoritised ethnic communities can't be fully explained by economic, social, or other factors. Irrespective of employment patterns, poverty levels, housing tenure and local housing market conditions, Black and Mixed ethnicity households still have a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

Types of homelessness

The report uses four categories:

- core homelessness – rough sleeping, living in hostels/shelters, and 'sofa surfing'
- statutory homelessness – households which have applied to a local authority and been found to be eligible and homeless (or threatened with homelessness in the near future) and entitled to prevention, relief or rehousing
- hidden homelessness – those in unsuitable, inadequate or overcrowded conditions, or living in concealed or shared households
- at risk of homelessness in the near future through insecurity of tenure or financial difficulties

Different datasets shed light on each definition, including official Homelessness Statistics, local authority data, the Labour Force Survey, and Understanding Society.

Core and statutory homelessness

Using Kantar's online panel survey PUBLIC Voice, the researchers found that 28% of Black people surveyed reported having experienced core homelessness and/or applying to the council as homeless, compared to just 14% of White people.



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Black people are three and a half times as likely to experience homelessness

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Hidden homelessness

The Annual Population Survey allowed the researchers to look at concealed and sharing households. Concealed households are single adults or family groups living in someone else's household, while sharing households share parts of a dwelling with other households, such as toilet, bathroom or communal areas.

For all Black and minoritised ethnic communities, the risk of being in one of these categories was higher than it is for White households – although the risk here was greater for Asian people than it was for Black people.

Understanding Society data provided data on overcrowded and concealed households, and showed that households headed by people from Black and minoritised ethnic communities were almost five times more likely than White-headed households to live in overcrowded accommodation. Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-led households fared worst in the concealed households category, with Indian and Black-led households not far behind.

At risk

Our data also showed which groups were most at risk of becoming homeless. This includes people who can't afford their housing, but also those with any housing need, which may mean that their home is unsuitable or in poor condition.

The risk of facing affordability problems was higher, often significantly, for most Black and minoritised ethnic communities (except Indian), with particularly high risks for Pakistani and Bangladeshi as well as Black-headed households. Black and minoritised ethnic communities (including Indian) were more likely to be in any housing need than White British (or White Other).

A note on terminology: the word 'minoritised' is used here and in the report because ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities globally, and because people don't have to be in a minority to have less power.

Other findings

There were variations in homelessness risk in different parts of the country, with the greatest risks faced by Black people in London.

Indirect factors

The report found evidence that race, ethnicity and discrimination-related factors could be important, too. They could increase poverty, or the chances of renting rather than owning property – both of which increase the risk of homelessness. When the research took indirect effects into account, the relative risk of homelessness for Black and minoritised ethnic households was generally larger than when only direct effects were considered.

A Black-led household which reported discrimination, for example, but otherwise had characteristics which made it typical of the whole population, had a risk of homelessness nearly 50% greater than that of a White-led household with otherwise typical characteristics. Two-thirds of that effect came from indirect factors such as poverty and housing conditions.

Next steps

The report is the start of a three-year programme aiming to give a full statistical picture of homelessness among different ethnic communities.

Professor Glen Bramley at Heriot-Watt University said:

"This report reveals the shocking extent of disparities in homelessness risks experienced between some minoritised ethnic communities and White people living in the UK today."

Read the report

