



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Causes of Homelessness Amongst Ethnic Minority Populations

Research

Published September 2005



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister
Creating sustainable communities

Causes of Homelessness Amongst Ethnic Minority Populations

Research

Published September 2005

Report proposed by:
Dr Marie-Claude Gervais and Hamid Rehman
September 2005
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the local authority officials and people working in the voluntary sector who gave their precious time to speak with us. They all provided invaluable information and practical support. Through them, we reached many of the homeless households who generously agreed to take part in the study and to allow us access to sometimes deeply painful experiences.

Finally, we are grateful to the skilful researchers and interpreters who worked with us to elicit the rich data on which the study depends. Nasreen Ali and Carl McLean deserve a special mention in this respect.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Web site: www.odpm.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2005.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

For any other use of this material, please write to HMSO Licensing, St Clements House,
2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ. Fax: 01603 723000 or e-mail: licensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Further copies of this publication are available from:

ODPM Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 0870 1227 236
Fax: 0870 1226 237
Textphone: 0870 1207 405
E-mail: odpm@twoten.press.net

Website: www.odpm.gov.uk

September 2005

Product code: 05 HHS 03321

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Statutory homelessness in ethnic minority populations

- Ethnic minority households are around three times more likely to become statutorily homeless than are the majority White population. In every region in England, ethnic minority households are over-represented amongst those accepted as homeless by local housing authorities.
- There are marked differences in the rates of statutory homelessness between the various ethnic minority groups, with people of Black African and Black Caribbean origins being twice as likely to be accepted as homeless as people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins. The reasons behind these greater rates of homelessness and the differences between communities are not well understood.
- The ODPM commissioned this research to find out more about the causes of statutory homelessness amongst ethnic minority households with a view to producing guidance on the most appropriate interventions for the different groups.

Research method

- The research had four main components:
 - a literature review on the causes of homelessness among ethnic minority communities
 - interviews with 82 ethnic minority homeless households
 - interviews with 30 local authority homelessness service providers
 - interviews with 43 voluntary and charitable organisations working with ethnic minority homeless households
- Fieldwork was conducted in nine different local authority areas in England between March–August 2003. The areas were selected on the basis of their geographical location, large concentration of ethnic minority communities, and number of ethnic minority homelessness applications, as determined by data collected by local authorities and collated by ODPM (P1E forms). The specific ethnic minority groups included in this study were Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Africans, Black Caribbeans, the Irish and refugees from different national origins.

Findings

Main causes of statutory homelessness in the ethnic minority population

- Findings from the literature review indicate that all the ethnic minority communities experience social exclusion, poverty, discrimination (SEU, 2000). These factors reduce their housing options. This largely accounts for the comparatively high rates of statutory homelessness found in all ethnic minority groups, as the latter have fewer resources to cope when personal or financial difficulties arise.
- In the empirical study, some causes of homelessness were found across all communities. Pregnancy was a common cause for being accepted by local authorities as being in priority need where it had led to family disputes, overcrowding and parents or relatives being no longer willing or able to accommodate. Relationship breakdowns, sometimes linked to domestic violence, also pushed many women and children into homelessness. Being forced to leave private rented accommodation also caused many families to become homeless, especially in London, where private landlords wanted to capitalise on escalating house prices by selling their properties or renting them at a higher price. These key common causes, however, affected the various ethnic minority communities differently.
- Amongst South Asians, domestic violence, forced marriages and family disputes were the main causes of homelessness amongst single female-headed households. The most common cause of homelessness amongst South Asian couples with children was being forced by private landlords to leave their accommodation. Overcrowding was a common housing need; many South Asian households lived in large three-generational households before becoming homeless.
- Amongst the Black Caribbeans, many young, single women became homeless when pregnancy led to family disputes, overcrowding and family and friends no longer being able to accommodate them. Homelessness due to multiple and complex problems related to child abuse, time in care, drug abuse, school exclusion, crime and mental health problems was also present. Other less common causes included being forced to leave private rented accommodation, domestic violence, and financial difficulties leading to rent arrears.
- The Black African population is extremely diverse and no clear and distinctive pattern emerged with respect to their reasons for homelessness. The main problems identified were associated with pregnancy, family tensions and relationship breakdowns (often linked to difficulties in adapting to a new cultural environment) and overcrowding.
- In the Irish population, the main causes of statutory homelessness were domestic violence and financial difficulties. Interviews with voluntary organisations pointed to substantial needs amongst single, older, vulnerable men who do not approach local authorities for help but who are strongly represented amongst residents of hostels for single homeless people.

-
- Amongst refugees, the termination of NASS accommodation when asylum seekers are granted leave to remain was the biggest cause of homelessness. In some local authorities located in asylum seekers dispersal areas, loss of NASS accommodation was an important cause of homelessness overall. Other issues affecting refugees were racial discrimination and harassment; difficulty communicating in English; lack of knowledge of services; unrecognised physical, mental and emotional needs; and social isolation and insecurity.

Unrecorded homelessness

- Previous studies and interviews with local authorities and with voluntary organisations suggest that unrecorded homelessness (defined here as the number of households who would be eligible and in priority need under the homelessness legislation¹ but do not approach their council for support) is a bigger problem amongst ethnic minority groups than in the general population, as they may be less likely to approach their local authority for help.

Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

- Knowledge of statutory homelessness services varied across the ethnic minority communities. Most groups had either basic or poor knowledge of services. The exception was Black Caribbean respondents, many of whom had a good knowledge of services.

Pathways through services

- Pathways through services were extremely varied. They were related to both familiarity with provisions and to causes of homelessness. In this sample, much use was made of informal support networks, but comparatively little use was made of community groups and religious organisations (except amongst the Irish and refugees).

Experiences of statutory homelessness services

- Experiences with statutory services were generally poor. The main areas of complaints related to poor customer service, including the negative attitudes of frontline staff, the bureaucratic nature of services, lack of consistency in advice, poor information about the progress of applications, and being frequently moved between temporary accommodation (usually at short notice and without explanation).
- With the exception of Irish households, very few ethnic minority homeless households complained of direct discrimination.

¹ Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002.

Local authority homelessness provisions

- Local authorities lacked a strategic approach to meeting the needs of ethnic minority homeless households. Local authorities did not have a systematic, coherent and evidence-based understanding of the causes of ethnic minority homelessness and of the best ways of preventing, reducing or alleviating it. Despite much willingness in some local authorities as well as many isolated initiatives, officials generally recognised that little effort had been made at targeting these groups and that significant numbers of vulnerable ethnic minority households were not accessing services.

Recommendations

- The following recommendations, detailed in the report, would have a beneficial impact on all ethnic minority homeless households. Local authorities should:
 - profile the local ethnic minority population
 - map existing ethnic minority resources
 - assess future trends in ethnic minority population and needs
 - treat ethnic monitoring as compulsory and ensure consistency of monitoring practices across partner organisations
 - make strategic use of monitoring data
 - develop partnerships with the ethnic minority voluntary sector
 - build capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector
 - consult and involve ethnic minority service users in service planning
 - consider ways of reaching out to the ethnic minority communities
 - make information available in the main ethnic minority languages
 - improve all aspects of customer services
 - put in place flexible cross-authority working arrangements
 - consider the implementation of Choice-Based Lettings
 - accommodate ethnic minority households sensitively
 - assist ethnic minority homeless households in settling into their temporary and permanent accommodation
- The report also includes a number of recommendations likely to have a disproportionately positive impact on ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Some of the recommendations apply to all ethnic minority groups; others are more likely to benefit specific ethnic minority communities or sections within the communities.
- A separate guidance document has been produced in conjunction with this research, expanding on the steps authorities could take to tackle homelessness effectively amongst ethnic minority groups.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0.	INTRODUCTION	11
1.1.	The policy context	11
1.2.	The Research: Understanding the causes of ethnic minority homelessness	12
1.3.	Research method	17
1.4.	Structure of the report	18
2.0.	HOMELESSNESS IN THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES	19
2.1.	National profile of South Asian Communities	19
2.2.	Causes of homelessness	21
2.3.	Knowledge of statutory homelessness services	29
2.4.	Pathways through services	31
2.5.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	32
2.6.	Conclusions	35
3.0.	HOMELESSNESS IN THE BLACK CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY	37
3.1.	National profile of the Black Caribbean Community	37
3.2.	Causes of homelessness	38
3.3.	Knowledge of statutory homelessness services	42
3.4.	Pathways through services	44
3.5.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	44
3.6.	Conclusions	47
4.0.	HOMELESSNESS IN THE BLACK AFRICAN POPULATION	48
4.1.	Introduction	48
4.2.	National profile of the Black African population	48
4.3.	Causes of homelessness	49
4.4.	Knowledge of statutory homelessness services	54
4.5.	Pathways through services	55
4.6.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	55
4.7.	Conclusions	57
5.0.	HOMELESSNESS IN THE IRISH COMMUNITY	58
5.1.	National profile of the Irish community ¹	58
5.2.	Causes of homelessness	59
5.3.	Knowledge of statutory homelessness services	64
5.4.	Pathways through services	64
5.5.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	66
5.6.	Conclusions	69

6.0.	HOMELESSNESS IN THE REFUGEE POPULATION	70
6.1.	National profile of the refugee population	70
6.2.	Causes of homelessness	71
6.3.	Unrecorded homelessness and housing need	76
6.4.	Pathways through services	78
6.5.	Experiences of statutory homelessness services	79
6.6.	Conclusions	80
7.0.	LOCAL AUTHORITY HOMELESSNESS PROVISIONS FOR ETHNIC MINORITY CLIENTS	81
7.1.	Introduction	81
7.2.	Organisational cultures and approaches to homelessness	81
7.3.	Variations in approaches to ethnic minority homelessness	86
7.4.	Conclusions	93
8.0.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	95
8.1.	Conclusions	95
8.2.	Recommendations	100
APPENDIX 1:	Homeless households in priority need accepted by local authorities, by Government Office region and ethnic group	109
APPENDIX 2:	Methodology	110
APPENDIX 3:	Ethnic group categories used in the 2001 census	118
REFERENCES		119

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The policy context

There is a growing recognition amongst policy makers that homelessness is an outcome of social exclusion. New policy developments seek to address the social, economic and personal problems that can lead to homelessness. They focus on the most vulnerable groups in society, many of whom are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The Government's commitment to tackling the underlying causes of homelessness was outlined in the report entitled "More than a Roof" produced in March 2002 by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The report spells out the changes in approach needed to challenge homelessness successfully. These include scoping the problem, compiling research and statistics more effectively, analysing the causes of homelessness, and identifying new approaches to both prevent and respond to homelessness. The report concludes that housing provision alone is not enough to tackle homelessness, and that local authorities and communities as a whole need to develop new ways of dealing with the problem.

The Homelessness Act 2002 also attests to the Government's commitment to address the causes of homelessness and to help the most vulnerable in society. A key change in approach arising from the Homelessness Act is the increased emphasis on activities and services aimed at the prevention of homelessness. The Homelessness Act shifts the emphasis away from a crisis management and reactive approach, to a more strategic, proactive and preventative approach to homelessness. Specifically, the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to develop strategies to prevent homelessness, ensure the provision of suitable accommodation and support for people who are and may become homeless, and provide free advice, information and assistance for anyone in their area. Homelessness strategies should address the needs of all categories of homeless people, whether they are in priority need or not, families with children, couples or single people, intentionally or unintentionally homeless, vulnerable or not.

When exercising their functions relating to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, local authorities must ensure that their policies and procedures do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on grounds of race, ethnicity, sex or disability. Authorities must comply with statutory requirements relating to equal opportunities and relevant codes of practice, and should consider adopting a formal equal opportunities policy relating to all aspects of their homelessness service, to ensure equality of treatment to all applicants. Given the over-representation of ethnic minority people amongst those who present as homeless, homelessness strategies should develop a systematic approach to the delivery of culturally competent services that are responsive to the various needs of a diverse community. There is scope for considerable improvement of homelessness services for ethnic minority groups in this new legislative framework.

Moreover, as part of its commitment to meet the housing needs of ethnic minority communities, the Government has recently produced an "Action Plan" (DTLR, 2002) which

brings together a range of specific initiatives and actions designed to ensure that the diverse housing needs of the different ethnic minority and refugee groups in this country are better recognised, understood and addressed. The Action Plan includes proposals to tackle the causes of social exclusion, outlines the role of Best Value reviews in monitoring and driving up performance both by local authorities and by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), suggests ways of addressing potential discrimination in the process of allocations and in homelessness services more generally, and aims to mainstream ethnic minority issues in all appropriate aspects of service provision.

1.2. The Research: Understanding the causes of ethnic minority homelessness

1.2.1. The ethnic minority population in the UK¹

● Population size

At the time of the latest Census (2001), the size of the ethnic minority population was 4.6 million or 7.9% of the total population of the United Kingdom. Indians were the largest group, followed by Pakistanis, those of mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black Caribbeans and Black Africans.

Table 1: Size of the ethnic minority population

Ethnic group	Population size (000s)	% of total population
White	54,154	92.1
Mixed	677	1.2
Asian or Asian British	2,331	3.0
Indian	1,053	1.8
Pakistani	747	1.3
Bangladeshi	283	0.5
Other Asian	248	0.4
Black or Black British	1,148	1.0
Black Caribbean	566	1.0
Black African	485	0.8
Black Other	976	0.2
Chinese	247	0.4
Other	231	0.4
All ethnic minorities	4,635	7.9
Total population	58,789	100

Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

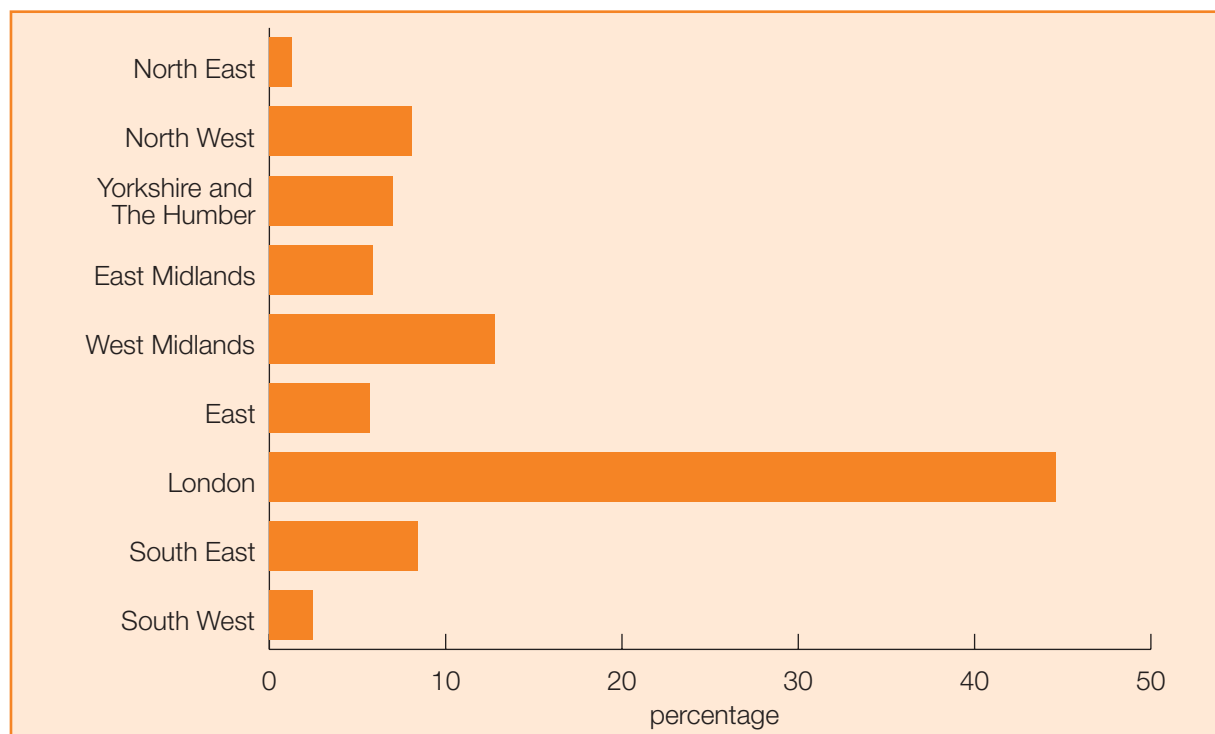
The Irish community comprises some 642,000 people and makes up 1.2% of the population of England and Wales (Census 2001).

¹ The current study focuses on the main ethnic minority groups, but also includes the Irish and refugee populations. However, in this introduction, we draw exclusively on national data sets, many of which do not offer readily comparable information between these latter two groups and the main ethnic minority communities. More information can be found in relevant chapters about the particular circumstances of each community.

● Regional distribution

The ethnic minority population is largely concentrated in a few geographical areas and in the large urban centres. Nearly half (45%) of the total ethnic minority population lives in the London region, where they comprise 29% of all residents. After London, the second largest ethnic minority population is found in the West Midlands (13%), followed by the South East (8%), the North West (8%), and Yorkshire and the Humber (7%). There are also significant differences in the regional distribution of the different ethnic groups.

Figure 1: Regional distribution of the ethnic minority population



Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

● Household size and composition

Each ethnic minority community has its own distinct household size and composition. While Black Caribbean and White households are of identical size at 2.3 people per household, all other ethnic minority communities tend to have larger families. Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian households are the largest, followed by Black Africans (Labour Force Survey, 2002).

Table 2: Household size, by ethnic group of head of household

Ethnic group	Average household size (number of people)
White	2.3
Mixed	2.4
Indian	3.3
Pakistani	4.2
Bangladeshi	4.7
Other Asian	3.1
Black Caribbean	2.3
Black African	2.9
Other Black	2.3
Chinese	2.9
Other	2.6
All ethnic groups	2.4

Source: Labour Force Survey, Spring 2002

In terms of household composition, South Asian people are significantly less likely to live alone than people from other ethnic minority backgrounds or from the White population. Some 90% of all South Asian families with children live as couples (with or without other family members) and few are lone parents. South Asian households are also the most likely to live in three-generational households. By contrast, 54% of Black Caribbean families with dependent children and 46% of Black African families with dependent children are lone parents. In the White population, some three-quarters of families with dependent children are couples and the remainder are lone parents.

Table 3: Families with dependent children, by ethnic group

Ethnic group	Couples (%)	Lone parents (%)
White	77	23
Mixed	39	61
Indian	91	9
Pakistani	85	15
Bangladeshi	89	11
Other Asian	90	10
Black Caribbean	46	54
Black African	54	46
Other Black	38	62
Chinese	79	21
Other	80	20
All families	77	23

Source: Labour Force Survey, Spring 2002, Office for National Statistics

● Housing tenure

Housing tenure patterns vary widely between different ethnic minority groups. The Labour Force Survey (2004) indicates that Indians (74%) are the most likely to own their own homes (either outright or with a mortgage), followed by Whites (73%), Pakistanis (66%), Black Caribbeans (47%), Bangladeshis (36%) and Black Africans (27%). Indians, Pakistanis and Whites are the least likely to live in council rented accommodation, while Bangladeshis are the most likely to do so. Nearly a quarter of all Black African households rent in the private sector. These various patterns are mainly due to a combination of financial considerations, cultural norms in relation to home ownership, and the length/patterns of settlement in England. They are likely to impact on housing and homelessness-related needs in the ethnic minority communities.

Table 4: Housing tenure in England, by ethnic group (2004) (%)

Ethnic group	Own outright	Own with mortgage	Rent from social sector	Rent privately
White	32	41	18	10
Black Caribbean	12	35	44	8
Black African	4	23	50	24
Indian	24	50	10	15
Pakistani	23	43	18	16
Bangladeshi	9	27	52	12
Mixed	9	35	37	18
Other	11	31	28	30

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2004, Office for National Statistics

● Economic circumstances

Despite some pockets of relative prosperity, the ethnic minority population is more likely to be unemployed or to live on a low income than the general population. This makes them more vulnerable to social exclusion generally and to homelessness in particular. Table 5 shows the differential rates of unemployment in the economically active population by ethnic groups, but also reveals how gendered unemployment patterns are in the various communities.

Table 5: Unemployment rates, by ethnic group and sex

Ethnic group	Men (aged 16-64) (%)	Women (aged 16-59) (%)
White	5	4
Mixed	14	11
Indian	7	7
Pakistani	16	16
Bangladeshi	20	24
Other Asian	12	9
Black Caribbean	14	9
Black African	15	13
Other ²	11	9

Source: Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey, 2001/02, Office for National Statistics

Bangladeshis have the highest rates of unemployment, with 20% of men and 24% of women being unemployed. This compares to 5% for men and 4% for women in the White population. Pakistanis are the next highest with 16%. Unemployment rates amongst Black Caribbeans and Black Africans are also significantly higher than in the White population. The Indian population is the only group amongst the ethnic minority populations in which unemployment rates are similar to the White population.

Ethnic minority households are also much more likely than White households to live on a low income, especially after housing costs have been deducted. Housing costs indeed make a more considerable dent in the finances of ethnic minority households than of White people, except in the case of Indians. Nearly half of the Black African population and more than two-thirds of Bangladeshis live in poverty.

Table 6: Households on low income, by ethnic group of head of household

Ethnic group	Before housing costs (%)	After housing costs (%)
White	16	21
Indian	26	30
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	59	68
Black Caribbean	19	31
Black Non Caribbean	28	49
Other	26	36

Source: Households Below Average Income, Family Resources Survey, 2000/01, DWP

To conclude, in relation to many of the factors likely to increase the risk of housing needs and homelessness, most ethnic minority communities fare less well than the general population. Each community also has its own distinctive patterns and must be understood in its own terms. Local authorities need to take account of this specificity as they devise their Homelessness Strategies, to ensure that they address the particular needs of each community.

1.2.2. Ethnic minority homelessness

Successfully preventing and responding to homelessness requires a good understanding of the risk factors that predispose individuals and families to homelessness, as well as a solid grasp of the triggers that can prompt particular episodes of homelessness.

While the knowledge base is expanding on the causes of homelessness in the general population (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000; Randall & Brown, 1999), very little is known about the reasons why ethnic minority people in particular experience homelessness (but see: Carter, 1998; Davies *et al*, 1996; Julianne, 1998; Sodhi *et al*, 2001; Somerville *et al*, 2002). This gap is particularly problematic given that ethnic minority people are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.

Recent data (see Appendix 1) based on the P1E statistical returns completed by local authorities and collated by the ODPM indicate that people of ethnic minority backgrounds are around three times more likely to become statutory homeless than are the majority White population. Indeed, while people ethnic minority households accounted for approximately 7% of the UK population in 2001, they represented 21% of the households accepted as homeless by local authorities in 2004-05. In every region in England, the proportion of homeless ethnic minority households is greater than its regional proportion.

The ODPM data also highlight marked differences in the rates of statutory homelessness between the various ethnic minority groups, with people of Black African and African-Caribbean origins being twice as likely to be accepted as homeless (10%) as people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins (5%). The reasons behind these greater rates of homelessness and the differences between communities are not well understood.

The ODPM commissioned this research to find out more about the causes of statutory homelessness amongst households from different ethnic minority communities, with a view to providing best practice guidance on the most appropriate interventions for different ethnic minority groups.

1.3. Research method

Given the subtlety and sensitivity required to understand the complex chain of events and circumstances that lead someone into homelessness, a qualitative approach was preferred. The research was designed to find out about the personal stories, experiences and difficulties of ethnic minority homeless people first-hand, but also combined their accounts with the perspectives of the statutory and voluntary service providers who work to meet the needs of homeless households.

The research had four main components:

- a literature review on the causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities
- interviews with 82 ethnic minority homeless households
- interviews with 30 local authority homelessness service providers
- interviews with 43 voluntary and charitable organisations working with ethnic minority homeless households

Interviews with all three categories of respondents (ethnic minority homeless households, statutory and voluntary service providers) were conducted in nine different local authority areas in England between March–August 2003. The nine local authorities were selected on the basis of their geographical location, large concentration of ethnic minority communities, and number of ethnic minority homelessness applications, as determined by P1E data.

The specific ethnic minority groups included in this study were Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Africans, Black Caribbeans, the Irish and refugees. Within this ethnic breakdown, particular homeless households were selected to cover a range of household sizes and composition, types of accommodation, and recorded causes of homelessness. As far as possible, men and women of different generations, religions, degrees of “vulnerability”, and levels of acculturation in British society were recruited. All the interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the respondents, either through experienced ethnic minority social researchers or, especially in the case of refugees, through qualified interpreters.

The definition of homelessness adopted was that set out in the Housing Act 1996 (sections 175-178), as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002.

Although the sample of ethnic minority households was constructed to reflect patterns identified in the literature, the findings cannot be interpreted as being statistically representative of all ethnic minority homeless households in England.

A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in Appendix 2.

1.4. Structure of the report

The report is organised in two main sections. The first section comprises Chapters 2 to 6. It presents the main results of the qualitative study in each of the ethnic minority communities and amongst refugees. For each group, the chapters provide:

- a national profile of the community
- the main causes for homelessness
- the level of knowledge of existing statutory homelessness provisions
- the pathways through services
- the experiences of statutory services

The second section presents a qualitative description of the variations existing across local authorities in their approaches to homelessness generally, as well as their provisions specifically for ethnic minority people. The emphasis is firmly placed on those dimensions likely to impact on the prevalence of homelessness amongst the ethnic minority populations, as well as on the quality of services they receive. The final chapter provides conclusions and recommendations.

2.0. HOMELESSNESS IN THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES

2.1. National profile of South Asian Communities

The South Asian communities in the UK comprise mainly of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

2.1.1. *The Indian community*

The Indian community is the largest and most diverse of the South Asian groups. With 1,053,000 individuals, it makes up 1.8% of the total UK population and 22.7% of the ethnic minority population (Census 2001). Most Indians arrived in the UK either from the Indian sub-continent or from East Africa (mainly Kenya and Uganda).

Economically, Indians are the most successfully established of the three South Asian communities. The level of economic activity (defined as those who either have a job or are looking for one) is 79% for Indian men and 62% for Indian women. This compares to 85% for men and 74% for women in the White population. Unemployment rates are also the lowest of all ethnic minority communities, at 7% for both men and women (Labour Force Survey, 2001) and are only slightly above those found in the White population. However, 26% of Indian households live on a low income (defined as having 60% of the median disposable income) before housing costs are deducted and this rises to 30% after housing costs (Family Resource Survey, 2000). Thus, despite relative prosperity in the community as a whole, there remains widespread poverty amongst the Indian population.

South Asians have larger families than the White population. The average size of the Indian household is 3.3, which compares to 2.3 in the White population. The importance of the family endures and is manifest in the fact that 91% of Indian couples have dependent children and only 9% of Indians are lone parents (Labour Force Survey, 2002). Moreover, while only 2.5% of White people lived in three-generational households at the time of the 1991 census, 17.5% of Indian people did so (Murphy, 1996).

The housing tenure most common amongst Indians is to own their property, either outright (24%) or with a mortgage (50%). In fact, a slightly higher percentage of Indians than of White people own their own homes. Only 15% of Indian people rent privately and 10% rent from the social sector (Labour Force Survey, 2004). This pattern of housing tenure is exceptional amongst ethnic minority groups and may partly insulate Indian people from the threat of homelessness.

Culturally, the UK Indian population is extremely diverse. For instance, 45% are Hindus, 29% of Sikhs, 13% are Muslims and 5% are Christians (Census 2001); and depending on their area of origins, Indian people may speak Hindi, Gujarati or Punjabi (Health Education Authority, 1994).

2.1.2. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities

The Pakistani community is the second largest South Asian group. With 747,000 individuals, it makes up 1.3% of the total UK population and 16.1% of the ethnic minority population. The Bangladeshi community counts 283,000 people, which amounts to 0.5% of the UK population and 6.1% of the ethnic minority population (Census 2001).

The Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are both severely impoverished. The rates of economic activity are of 73% for Pakistani men and 69% for Bangladeshi men, and of 28% for Pakistani women and 22% for Bangladeshi women. This compares to 85% for men and 74% for women in the White population. This gendered pattern reflects traditional cultural norms, lack of educational achievements and limited fluency, especially in the older sections of the community. Unemployment rates are also high in these two communities: 16% of both Pakistani men and women are unemployed, while 20% of Bangladeshi men and 24% of Bangladeshi women are unemployed (Labour Force Survey, 2001). This compares to unemployment rates of 5% for men and 4% for women in the general population. Moreover, 59% of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis live on a low income before housing costs are deducted and this rises to 68% after housing costs are taken into account (Family Resource Survey, 2000). The equivalent figures in the general population are 16% and 21% respectively. Thus, poverty is the norm rather than the exception in both of these communities.

These two communities have the largest households of all the main ethnic minority groups in the UK. The average size of Pakistani and Bangladeshi households is 4.2 and 4.7 respectively, which is roughly twice the size of the average White household (2.3). Again, we find a pattern of family life similar to that of Indians, with 85% of Pakistani and 89% of Bangladeshi couples having dependent children and only 15% of Pakistanis and 11% of Bangladeshis being lone parents (Labour Force Survey, 2002). Moreover, 11.2% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people lived in three-generational households at the time of the 1991 census (Murphy, 1996). It is important to note, however, that the complex households arrangements reported in the 1991 Census are likely to change and to become less common as material, housing, educational standards rise (Walker & Ahmed, 1994).

There are very significant differences between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities with respect to their housing tenure. Pakistanis are much more likely to own their property, either outright (23%) or with a mortgage (43%) than are Bangladeshis, amongst whom only 9% own their property outright and 27% own it with a mortgage. Fewer Pakistanis are found renting from the social (18%) sectors than Bangladeshis, amongst whom 52% rent from the social sector. A slightly higher proportion of Pakistanis rent privately (16%) than Bangladeshis (12%) (Labour Force Survey, 2004).

Culturally, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the UK are somewhat different. They speak different languages (Punjabi, Urdu and Mirpuri in the case of Pakistanis, and Bengali and Sylheti in the case of Bangladeshis) (Health Education Authority, 1994) and originate from different areas. However, these communities also have much in common. Most notably, the vast majority (92%) of both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are Muslims.

Finally, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are the most likely to experience racism. According to the British Crime Survey (2000), the rate of racially motivated crimes found in these two groups is 4.2%, which compares to 2.2% for Black people.

In 2004/05, there were 6,570 Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi households accepted by local authorities as statutory homeless and in priority need in England. The majority of them lived in London (2,820) and the West Midlands (1,190). Together, they represented 5% of the total acceptances.

2.2. Causes of homelessness

The main causes of homelessness amongst our interviewees from the South Asian communities were found to be domestic violence, young women having to leave home because of family disputes, and families being forced to leave their private rented accommodation. This reflects the main causes identified in the literature. It also echoes the views of statutory and South Asian voluntary service providers.

2.2.1. Domestic violence

Physical, sexual, emotional or financial violence, or threats of violence from known persons was the most common reason for the relationship breakdowns that led to homelessness in the South Asian communities. Domestic violence in the South Asian communities assumed two main forms:

- Violence from the husband and his extended family toward the wife
- Violence from parents towards their daughter
- Violence from the husband and his extended family toward the wife

In this study, 11 out of the 29 South Asian households became homeless because of domestic violence at the hands of their spouse and/or extended family. Of these, the majority (6) were Pakistanis, four (4) were Indians, and one (1) was Bangladeshi. Most households comprised young women with children. Some of the women had arrived in the UK quite recently, spoke little or no English and led their life in near complete isolation from mainstream society; others were born and raised in England.

Despite some important differences between the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in England, all three South Asian groups share broad cultural assumptions that impact on the particular form domestic violence assumes in these communities, as well as on the ways in which people seek outside help.

In all three South Asian communities, there seems to be a greater cultural tolerance of what, for contemporary western agencies, would constitute domestic violence.

“[An Asian] woman being expected to do all the house work, a woman having restrictions on their clothing, being isolated in certain sense, not being able to see any men, being prevented from working and being obliged to satisfy her husband sexually, that’s acceptable to some Asian women because that’s how they’ve been brought up culturally. They wouldn’t define that as domestic violence, and that’s important to realise because if you ask them, they wouldn’t say they were being abused. It would take a lot for them to think that they are being abused.” (Voluntary organisation)

“When South Asian women go through the violence, they think it’s normal and I’m supposed to put up with it. They can’t even label it. They may feel it’s not right, but they can’t be sure it’s not right because it’s a taboo subject.” (Voluntary organisation)

This greater tolerance of domestic violence is underpinned by a number of cultural assumptions. First, traditional gender roles continue to prevail in some sections of these communities. In many cases, women remain largely confined to the domestic sphere and are sometimes perceived as having less “worth” than men because they are temporary members of their families.

“Asian women are brought up being taught they are second compared to the men of the house. They are going to be married off and become part of someone else’s family, so they’re always second-class citizens. I think, deep down, this justifies a lot of the abuse they get.” (Voluntary organisation)

“Especially in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, they have a very hierarchical system and they afford much more patronage to the male members of the households.” (Voluntary organisation)

“In our culture, once a woman is married she belongs to her husband’s family, she’s only a temporary member of the family that she’s born into, so she expects to have limitations put on her by her husband and his family.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“[My husband’s] brothers and his mother used to watch when he hit me and punched me... because at the end of the day, I’m not their relative. I’m just a person who’s marrying into the family.” (Indian homeless household)

Second, and although this is changing in the younger generation, the extended family continues to be central to personal and social life in all South Asian cultures. It is normal for a young bride to come and live with her husband’s extended family, which may include his parents, some of his siblings and their children. This cultural norm, together with widespread poverty and negative images of social housing, accounts for the high levels of overcrowding found amongst the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in England. In her new house, the wife of the son will be expected to look after the wider family. This expectation sometimes leads to severe abuse and violence, not only from the wife’s husband, but from her in-laws.

“At home, I would be doing things for everybody, cooking, cleaning, for everybody. They never let me go out. But one day, my brother-in-law did something to me... He raped me. He tied me to the sofa in the front room and he raped me, in front of my four year-old daughter.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“We get a lot of girls from big families living in a home with the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, etc. We have women who have been physically, mentally and sexually abused by other members of the family as well.” (Voluntary organisation)

A third cultural factor which shapes how domestic violence takes place and how victims seek help is the importance of ‘family honour’. Family honour relates to the standing of the family within the South Asian community. Any public disclosure of wrong doings by family members tarnishes the family’s reputation.

“The general philosophy is that a girl is the family honour and a boy is there to protect the family honour, so if a girl does something, i.e. could be having sex outside marriage, having an affair, being seen with a boy, speaking out all the time, stuff like that, then that’s being dishonourable to the family and it affects the whole family, including the extended family which plays an important part within our cultures.” (Voluntary organisation)

Traditional Asian values around privacy and family and community honour encourage the down-playing and hiding of serious family problems, including domestic violence but also drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness. These values make it particularly difficult for women to seek help outside the home, in effect forcing them to tolerate greater violence for longer.

“You’ve got a huge barrier: the actual stigma of women speaking out because it’s always seen as a community issue. The community and the family should deal with domestic violence, not outside agencies. So women are stuck and they suffer in silence.” (Voluntary organisation)

The majority of the South Asian women interviewed left abusive relations only when the violence became too severe and life threatening, or when the violence became directed towards their children.

“My husband strangled me for nearly two minutes. I was sure I would die. That’s when I thought no, I can’t take any more of this. But then, I thought I’ll compromise, I have nowhere else to go. But when they [the extended family] started abusing my children, they started hitting them and beating them up, I could not take that.” (Indian homeless household)

“I was on the verge of suiciding myself because I did not want to go back to my parents to give them a heart attack.” (Indian homeless household)

“I had no one to turn to. I did not want my own family to find out and be dishonoured, disgraced by me. Everyone would have blamed them because they arranged the marriage as well, so it looks bad on them.” (Pakistani homeless household)

The dangers of the family and community putting pressure on victims to keep problems at home out of the public domain were highlighted time and again by voluntary organisations and refuges working with women fleeing domestic violence. Some related it to high rates of self-harm and suicide amongst young South Asian women and pointed to research claiming that South Asian women are at greater risk of being killed after they leave the violent relationship than while in it.

It is worth highlighting however that extended families can be very supportive and that informal networks can and do protect many South Asian women from becoming homeless. The protective role of the family with respect to homelessness can be inferred partly from the fact that no one in the sample became homeless because their parents were no longer able or willing to accommodate them (nationally the main reason for homelessness), unless this was tied to recurrent family disputes.

- **Parental violence and forced marriages**

It is not uncommon for South Asian girls who are still living in their parents' home, especially in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, to be subjected to extremely tight controls over most aspects of their everyday life. The controls can affect the way they dress, the way they look, who they can speak to, when and where they can venture out. Physical violence may occur when children contradict their parents' expectations. This form of violence is mainly found amongst the second generation, i.e. amongst those who are "in-between" two cultures. Thus, while the parents were themselves socialised in traditional Asian cultures and espoused the norms and values associated with them, their children who are raised in England often attempt to combine elements of both cultures and to adopt a more western lifestyle. This can sometimes lead to serious family problems.

"We have had a lot of problems at home, with religion and things ... [My sister and I] didn't pray, we weren't active Muslims and that hurt my mum a lot, because it was difficult and we didn't dress very traditional, I did not wear the headscarf, the whole black gown and we wore make-up and things... I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't be here [homeless] if I had kept to my culture cos my mum wouldn't have kicked me out"
(Bangladeshi homeless household)

One form of parental control and abuse is forcing daughters to marry a spouse of the parents' choice without their consent or even knowledge. This is very different from the traditional practice of arranging marriages, which involves no element of coercion and is often desired by the bride-to-be herself. Voluntary sector organisations and refuges have noted a significant increase over the past few years in the number of young South Asian women who are leaving homes because they are abused by their parents and forced into marriages they do not want. The increase is related to the cultural and generational clashes discussed above.

"The domestic violence and physical abuse come from forced marriages. Forced marriage is a very big issue within the Asian community for the younger generation... All the Asian girls we have in the refuge at the moment are fleeing forced marriages."
(Voluntary organisation)

“My parents just told me I would marry this guy. I did not know anything about him, his name, where he’s from, what he does, who he is... Apparently it had been all set up for many years, from Pakistan, and I never knew about it... I just packed my bags and I left in the middle of the night, but it’s really hard to disappear from the Asian community so you’re always scared they’re going to find you, they will send someone after you.”
(Pakistani homeless household)

Refusing to marry the parents’ chosen spouse may be interpreted as a serious challenge to their authority. It may also jeopardise the parents’ economic, social and political position within the community as marriages are often used as part of a broader bargaining process between families. In different ways, such refusal poses a threat to family honour and may lead to tragic consequences for the girl.

Voluntary sector organisations also comment on the help many of these women need while they are still in abusive and potentially dangerous situations. Many do outreach work, public education, organise information meetings in doctors’ surgeries and primary schools, and put posters and helpline numbers in public places to reach out to women who are at risk of domestic violence from their parents.

2.2.2. Being told to leave by private landlords

In the sample, the most common cause of homelessness amongst South Asian families where both parents are present was being told to leave by private landlords. Families were forced into homelessness as their private landlords wanted to repossess their accommodation, either for their own use, to rent at a higher price, or to sell the property. All such cases were found in London, probably due to the rise in the housing market and the lack of affordable housing in the capital. In fact, service providers in the North of England had come across very few such cases. Most of the South Asian cases of homelessness there were the result of domestic violence.

“I lived in this house for several years. This house condition wasn’t very good, but still I decided to stay because I had no other alternative. Eight months ago, the landlord sent a letter and he wanted to raise the rent from £600 a month to near £2000. Of course, we can’t afford that so he said you leave house. He wanted the house for his own use and wanted to do some alteration. So then I have no other choice. They take proceedings against me.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“[The landlord] told me that he wants to give the property to his son. I think the landlord wanted to sell the property to make more money. They sent us a letter from the court and everything.” (Indian homeless household)

“[The landlord] said to me I want my house back. I’ve got my own family and I can get even more money than that. I can’t argue with him. It’s his own property. Then he gave me a Court Order then Bailiff also, so I became homeless.” (Pakistani homeless household)

None of these cases were linked to rent arrears. The tenants had been keeping up with their payments until the rents were suddenly and substantially increased.

In the above cases, the accommodation the tenants had to leave was in a poor condition, but this was tolerated because the rent was affordable. However, in a few cases, the rented property was in such a bad state (with serious disrepair, damp, insects or vermin) that the tenants requested improvements to their property. When this happened, landlords took action to force the tenants out.

“The reason I became homeless is that I had told my landlord that I wanted the house improved. At the time there were insects coming out of the kitchen floor. The floor was cracking and my children’s feet would also get stuck in them. The toilet water would also come into the kitchen when we flushed. I reported it to the health officer who then wrote to the landlord. He didn’t like it and he gave me a notice to leave. I had been living there for five years.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“I’m telling you: Never complain about rising damp everywhere and broken windows. You’ll get kicked out. That’s what happened to me.” (Indian homeless household)

Voluntary and charitable organisations confirmed the frequency with which such evictions by unscrupulous landlords happen. They suggested that this kind of evictions affect Bangladeshi and refugee households more often than the White population or other ethnic groups.

“You’ve got a lot of private rented accommodations that are just awful. People come in and say we’ve got insects, we’ve got mice and rats. And you look in the room and there’s cockroaches all over the floors, mice walking on the back of sofas and, I mean, you would not believe some of the place I go to... Fire safety, banisters, lights shaking, no smoke alarms, doors that are boarded up. You have a real battle to get the landlord to put things right. You slap an order on the landlord to do it, they still don’t do it, so environmental health carry out the work and give the big bill to the landlord. But then people are homeless and they still have to be rehoused.” (Voluntary organisation)

It remained unclear, in the interviews with both ethnic minority homeless households and voluntary organisations, whether the greater occurrence of evictions in these communities was an outcome of discrimination or harassment on the part of the landlord, or whether it is mainly due to the fact that heavy reliance on the private rented sector in the Bangladeshi and refugee groups made them more vulnerable to such evictions.

2.2.3. Mental health difficulties

Mental health problems were common amongst South Asian women in our sample. Some suffered from clinical depression, harmed themselves intentionally and even attempted suicide prior to becoming homeless, but in none of the cases mental illness was in itself the cause of homelessness. From these women’s accounts, their disturbed psychological state owed mainly to feelings of powerlessness, guilt and shame linked to stressful and sometimes abusive domestic situations.

“I was depressed. I was so depressed [showing her burned hands] that I did this with a light. I also take his cigarettes to hurt myself. I started cutting myself and things. Sometimes, I just want to die.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“Everyday, I would just sit down and cry and pray to God that I’m going to die. I couldn’t think of a way out. I kept thinking what’s wrong with me? What did I do to deserve this family [in-laws]?” (Indian homeless household)

The women generally reported an improvement in their psychological state after they left home and found refuge in appropriate organisations.

“I have no regrets about leaving my mother’s home because I feel so much better now. I don’t sleep all day. I don’t have suicidal thoughts any more. I am thinking about finding a job and stuff.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“I can think about the future now.” (Indian homeless household)

2.2.4. Parents, relatives or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate

A considerable number of South Asian subjects in the study approached their local authority’s homelessness services because their parents or relatives were no longer able or willing to accommodate them. The patterns underlying this common “cause” were extremely varied. One elderly Indian woman became homeless when her daughter and son-in-law, with whom she was living, divorced. She was left having to fend for herself because her daughter could not afford to support her. As a consequence, the family became isolated from the community, both because of the divorce and because of the inability of the daughter to look after her mother, something that South Asians are expected to do.

In some cases, tensions between parents and children made it difficult for all involved to continue living together.

“Me and my mum had a very big argument and she asked me to leave the family home. So I said fine, if you feel like that, then I will go.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

In most cases, however, relatives and friends have acted as a safety net against homelessness for weeks and months but are no longer able to continue to provide accommodation, either because of lack of space, because of the economic cost involved in having additional people in the house, or because tensions have arisen between the relatives or friends. In such cases, it may be more adequate to think of the loss of accommodation not so much as the cause of homelessness but as one step along the path of becoming homeless.

Pregnancy and family tensions

It is worth singling out the role of pregnancy and related family disputes as the factors leading to family or friends no longer being willing to accommodate. Currently, teenage pregnancy and lone motherhood are uncommon amongst the South Asian communities. When teenage pregnancy or lone motherhood do occur, however, they are likely to lead to homelessness because the family's reaction to the pregnancy is very likely to be negative and to result in the mother-to-be having to leave the parental home. This happened to one Bangladeshi girl in the sample.

"I fell pregnant when I was 17. I was living with my parents and my mum wasn't very happy. I'm an Asian girl, you don't have sex... My mum was dead set on me having an abortion... We did not even tell me dad until the day I picked up my stuff and left because he would have killed me. When he found out, after that he never spoke to me again. He just disowned me basically. No one was allowed to speak about me in front of him. If he saw a letter posted to my home, he would just rip it up and chuck it away and pretend I never existed. He would tell people he had only two daughters. It's been very hard." (Bangladeshi homeless household)

"Honour plays a massive part. There was a girl murdered in Bradford and her mum and brother murdered her, and that was an honour killing, and when both mother and the son were sentenced to life, the mother stood up in that dock and she said I am so proud of myself cos my honour is still intact, and that's all that she cared about. She had just murdered her pregnant daughter." (Voluntary organisation)

Again, the notion of "family honour" comes into play, as sexual relations outside of marriage are prohibited on cultural and religious grounds.

Overcrowding

Again, although only two subjects in the study stated overcrowding as the immediate cause of their homelessness, it is worth highlighting the role of overcrowding in explaining why some South Asian households may no longer be able to accommodate relatives or friends. Given the importance of the family and of the wider community in all three South Asian cultures, under normal circumstances, many South Asian people would attempt to house a relative undergoing temporary financial or domestic difficulties.

However, in many cases, there simply is no slack at all as families live in overcrowded or poor conditions. The households are extended vertically and horizontally, often including three generations under one roof.

"I became homeless because the house was overcrowded. I still lived in my parents' house with my sisters, brothers, sister-in-law, my mum, her brother because he's not well... We were nine people, nine people in four bedrooms but two really small size, single people. So when I was single it was OK but now I'm married and I have my son, it's not OK." (Pakistani homeless household)

South Asian households often described similarly overcrowded situations. Such living arrangements owe only in part to cultural norms. The norms are changing in this respect and greater numbers of households would want to have their own private family space.

“We all live at home together, in a three bedroom house. My mum, my brother with his wife and two kids, my two sisters and me. The house was pretty squashed. It was very overcrowded, or so I felt and I don’t think it was nice, cos I used to feel embarrassed a lot. I felt embarrassed about the fact that we had to live like this, it just felt like a squat, you know?” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“I think ten years, or even five years ago, it was OK to live in an extended family where you maybe even have three or four generations. It’s no longer acceptable. It’s becoming increasingly no longer acceptable across all [South Asian] groups... we are seeing some very strong evidence of family tensions, of intergenerational splits, you know, with young families no longer wanting to live with their grand-mother or their parents.” (Voluntary organisation)

The current study confirms this. Many South Asian subjects wanted to move out and create their own nuclear household. However, unemployment, poverty, shortages of larger properties and negative images of social housing, together with fear of discrimination in both social and private rented housing, kept many in severely overcrowded conditions. This situation is likely to change and to lead to an increase in homeless applications from the South Asian communities, as parents decide they are no longer willing or able to accommodate their grown-up children or other relatives.

To conclude, a significant number of South Asian households in our sample became homelessness when parents or relatives were no longer willing or able to accommodate them. However, this only happened because of family tensions, some of which related to pregnancy outside of marriage and others to overcrowding.

2.3. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

As a general rule, knowledge of both statutory and voluntary services was poor across all South Asian groups interviewed. However, there were considerable variations across age groups and generations of migrants. Younger respondents and those who had been born and raised in England tended to have some basic knowledge of welfare provisions. Thus the young women who fled forced marriages or recurrent family disputes were more likely to be familiar with both statutory and voluntary service provisions.

“We’ve got two cases now of forced marriages where the girls came here straight away. It’s word of mouth as well, through family and friends, they get to know what’s available.” (Voluntary organisation)

By contrast, amongst the elderly and those recently arrived from the Indian sub-continent, knowledge of services was extremely limited. In fact, many lacked the most basic daily living skills. Not speaking English and sometimes leading their lives in near complete isolation from

mainstream society, some women had never held money in their hands, did not know how to use a public telephone or how to use public transport. This was most common amongst victims of domestic violence and the elderly.

“I don’t know where to go. I am so lost. I think there’s no one to help me. I don’t know about this refuge for us Asian women.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“At the moment in our two refuges, none of the women speak English except one. They all have a language problem. They’re quite recently arrived in the UK as well so they don’t know much at all about how things work here. I mean really quite basic stuff like sorting out bills, taking the bus, finding your way across the city. They’ve never really mingled with people from other cultures as well so they’re totally scared to go out.” (Voluntary organisation)

This lack of knowledge may well result in “hidden” housing need or homelessness which, according to the research literature as well as to statutory and voluntary service providers, characterise all three South Asian groups.

“A lot of older people, even if they are being bullied in the house by the daughter-in-law, or the son, whatever, will put up with it because they don’t know what their rights are.” (Voluntary organisation)

“There’s a vast number of South Asian people who have not come forward for social housing, even though they are in tremendous need of it. They don’t even know they should go and apply for social housing.” (Voluntary organisation)

However, the relatively low rates of statutory homelessness amongst the South Asian communities also owe to cultural preferences for home owning, to negative images of social housing, to a fear of being located away from one’s own community and family, and to the threat of racial harassment.

“That’s another thing with Asian people is to own your own home. You don’t go to the Council unless you’re desperate cos then you’ll be looked down upon.” (Voluntary organisation)

“People coming from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are afraid to go to the council. They are afraid of where are they going to put you? What estates do you go on and what harassment you’re going to face? So they would rather stay in overcrowded situations where they know they are safe than be put in areas where they may face racism and where their children will face racism.” (Voluntary organisation)

Moreover, because few South Asian people live in social rented accommodation, there is little positive informal knowledge circulating in the community to help those who would need guidance through the system. Whatever informal knowledge does circulate tends to be negative and to further reinforce the view of the Council as a distant place offering poor services to South Asians.

“Well, if people can’t communicate in English, they just wouldn’t go there. They tend to feel that local authority can’t really help, because they look around in their community and all they hear is stories of the council not helping their people. They’re also afraid of racism, of being attack by young White thugs, you know, cos these stories do do the rounds.” (Voluntary organisation)

Although most of the quotations above refer to social housing in general rather than to homelessness services specifically, it is reasonable to infer that the similar barriers prevent South Asians from approaching both services. Indeed, as discussed in the chapter on local authority provisions, statutory services have made few concerted attempts to reach out to the South Asian communities. This partly explains the lack of knowledge of local authority services in the more traditional sections of the South Asian communities.

2.4. Pathways through services

The pathways through services vary according to the knowledge people have of existing statutory and voluntary services, and to their reasons for homelessness.

For women experiencing domestic violence, the most common pathways were to call the Police, to contact their GP, to call domestic violence helplines, to approach their children’s school or to approach relatives and friends for support. Staying with family or friends was not the first option because of the importance of preserving the family’s honour. Moreover, some South Asian women arrived here for marriage and did not have their own family with them. For girls escaping forced marriages, the most common pathways were to contact domestic violence helplines or to self-refer to a specialist refuge.

There was a broad consensus amongst South Asian victims of domestic violence or parental abuse as well as amongst the voluntary sector that community groups and religious institutions were not useful resources in relation to these problems. They were assumed to be too conservative in their outlook and to be too knowledgeable about the family to be able to serve the best interests of the victim.

“I have two community leaders come to me and they said you have got this girl here. I said yes, the girl is with us. She’s come asking for help. And he says well, this is just a little family issue, nothing happened. I said I’m sorry, the girl is covered in blue marks on her legs, stomach, back, on the hands. I said they haven’t come from a little squabble, they’ve come from a violent attack on this woman.” (Voluntary organisation)

The pathways for those forced to leave their private accommodation included trying to secure another tenancy in the private rented sector, staying with relatives and friends, and approaching homelessness services when the households first received their notice to quit. Usually, South Asian households contacted their council on the advice of their landlords. In nearly all cases, the statutory response was to advise the families to contact them again when they had actually become roofless and, only then, to place them in temporary accommodation.

“I didn’t have any knowledge at all about the homeless services until I’d spoken to some other people in the Council office. They said if you receive an eviction you come to us and we’ll see what we can do. So when I ended up in the cold, I went in the local Service Centre and they refer me to the Homeless (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“My landlord told me, she said the best thing is to get advice from the Housing place. The housing department advised me to wait for the court order and then approach the homeless section. (Indian homeless household)

“Before when the Bailiff was coming about, I got the date. It was a week before that I went to the Council. I was interviewed and they said to me on 19, that is your deadline, go to the Homeless Department. I was explained everything. So just waited, waited until the time came. So on 19th November 2002, at 11.30, that was the deadline and that means I should be out from that house. So we went to the Homeless services” (Pakistani homeless household)

This “crisis management” type of response to evictions was recognised and widely condemned by the voluntary sector for its failure to take a more preventative and proactive approach and to seek to accommodate those at risk of homelessness prior to them actually losing their homes. It is also identified by the ODPM as bad practice. The Code of Guidance (section 9.15) indeed stipulates that housing authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure that accommodation does not cease to be available.

2.5. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

Of all the communities interviewed in the study, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were the groups most likely to be generally satisfied with their encounters with statutory homelessness services. Nearly two-thirds of the South Asian respondents stated that they were happy with the information they were given by their councils. The majority also felt that it had been quite easy for them both to understand what homelessness officers were trying to explain and to communicate their own circumstances and needs to local authority staff. In the main, they had found local authority staff helpful and friendly, and they were satisfied with the way their local authority had treated their application overall. Interviews generated relatively little information about the specific aspects of people’s dealings with homelessness officers.

Given the information provided by most South Asian voluntary organisations, the fact that many South Asian households do not speak English fluently, as well as the admission by most local authorities that they do little to cater to the specific needs of South Asian homeless households, these results are surprising.

One may only hypothesize as to the reasons for these findings. It may be that South Asians are particularly ill-informed about their rights and therefore feel grateful for whatever they receive. This is commented upon by the voluntary sector.

“An explanation for why people appear to be more satisfied with the system is that expectations are low and it’s also ingrained in the Asian culture, you know, that if somebody gives you something, then you should be grateful and you don’t challenge. If you look at levels of complaints, registering dissatisfaction, whether it’s repairs or a whole variety of things, people from South Asian communities tend to be less vociferous. Maybe it’s also because they are less articulate, less aware of the procedures to complain, or afraid that they will be bereft of whatever they’ve got... You visit some of these households and it’s horrendous but people still tell you it’s a darn sight better than it was back home, where I didn’t have electricity, I didn’t have this, I didn’t have that. So I think that attitude is ingrained in the culture. It’s not a reflection of their actual conditions or their needs.” (Voluntary sector)

It may also be because a large number of South Asian households were homeless due to domestic violence and were accommodated by Asian refuges run by the voluntary sector, where the quality of care was generally very good.

Indeed, the greatest discontent was found amongst families evicted by their private landlords. These large families were left without support, had no knowledge of where they would be temporarily accommodated, were often placed in far off places away from their employment and their children’s schools, were put in unsuitable places, and were regularly shifted from one place to another with no prior notice. This resulted in serious difficulties for the families.

“They gave us 2 rooms in a bed and breakfast. We were there for two months. That was hell for the children. It was difficult to get the children’s beds in the rooms because they were so small. I had to buy food from outside because we couldn’t cook. There were no cooking facilities. That was a totally new area for us as well. We knew nothing about it. It was difficult to find schools for the children. Nobody ever helped us. We had to find out everything for ourselves... Then they sent us to another place where the hostel people were harassing us and my wife and children were totally scared.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“She said the only accommodation I can offer you is in Southend. I was really shocked. I tried to explain how can I go so far with all my children but she wasn’t very helping, she said, no, it’s your choice, you take it or leave it. So I come in the conclusion that I have no other choice, so I decided, yes I’ll take it. The children have been out of school for two months now... I lost my job because I couldn’t travel back to London everyday.” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“They put our family [a couple with four children] in a four bedroom house. The next day, they sent another family with four children to our house and said that they will stay with you. A family of four was just brought into the house and we didn’t know anything about it. How can we accommodate another family in this house, I said? They said no, this is not a house, this is a hotel. I said how is this a hotel? Is it written anywhere that this is a hotel? They said no, this is a hotel.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“They gave me an address in Enfield. Now I have my wife and four children with me with all my luggage. You can imagine that with four children you need quite a bit of luggage...Although it was far, it was a house, so we went to Enfield and we stayed there for four months. Then they gave me notice to leave on that day. Outside it was raining. I said why are you moving me now? They said we need to bring you back into our borough. I said you are ruining my children’s lives. They have just started school, are feeling a little settled. Why are you doing this? They said no, you have to move. You have to leave by 3 o’clock. Here’s the address. Pick up your keys. When I got to the building, I found there was no electricity. There is no bedding. The fridge is not working. The beds are broken with the springs sticking out. I was in shock. God what can I do? The whole place was in a mess. The curtains had fallen down or were stuck with tape. Anyway I bring my children. They get very upset: Dad, where are we going to sleep? We spent the night using the clothes we had as bedding. It was October and very cold. I don’t know how we survived the night. My children are British. They have a British passport. Sometime I think we are not sitting in Britain.” (Pakistani homeless household)

The few families who had been advised to find another private rented property also encountered many problems. Either the properties were essentially uninhabitable or private landlords would not want to rent to Council referrals for fear that housing benefits would not be paid or would be insufficient to cover the rental price.

“They told me to find a house and we will pay the deposit. A property agent found a house that the Council was prepared to pay for. But when I saw the house it was so bad, it was worse than the one I was leaving. There was no cooker, no fridge, the floors were bad. The windows were broken. I didn’t want to take the chance of moving in and then ask the landlord to fix things and then maybe the landlord would again ask me to leave. I said can you get it fixed before I move in? But they wouldn’t.” (Pakistani homeless household)

“The landlords just don’t want to rent to the Council. I don’t know why? Maybe the Council doesn’t pay rent properly?” (Bangladeshi homeless household)

“When we got to the house it was terrible. The toilet and bathroom was not working and the beds and bedding were old and stinking. I went straightaway to the Council and told them that no one can sleep in them let alone children. They said they will send someone but they couldn’t say when. I was going absolutely crazy with worry wondering where will my children sleep. I had a breakdown.” (Pakistani homeless household)

There is a clear shortage of large properties and this affects South Asian families disproportionately because of their larger household size. It is also the case that housing shortages in London make it more difficult for some boroughs not to resort to “out of borough” placements, even though providers know that these should be avoided as far as possible. Nevertheless, the statutory response seems unsatisfactory. In the accounts presented here, little effort is made to work jointly with private landlords, to find accommodation before South Asian people actually present as homeless, to settle people into their new environment, to improve the conditions of their accommodation, or to keep tenants informed of the

progress of their application. It is impossible to determine the role discrimination may play in such situations. The evidence from interviews suggests little direct discrimination and prejudice specifically targeted at South Asian households. Rather, it points to institutional discrimination, to the extent that the housing needs of larger households (many of whom are South Asian) may not be catered for as well as they should, thereby resulting in poorer services for these populations. For cultural reasons, this may not be picked up by “satisfaction surveys”, but it is clear that some aspects of statutory homelessness services are deficient and that these may impact more powerfully on larger households and on those living in London.

2.6. Conclusions

Despite relative prosperity in some sections of the South Asian communities, these remain some of the most impoverished of all ethnic minority groups. They also have typically larger households, which forces them into unsuitable, overcrowded housing and makes them more vulnerable to potential homelessness. Yet relatively few South Asian households actually present as homeless to local authorities.

Domestic violence, forced marriages and family disputes were the main causes of homelessness amongst female-headed South Asian households (with or without children). The particular patterns which domestic violence and family disputes assume in the South Asian communities differ from those in the general population, with the extended family sometimes being involved in the abuse and with parents to daughters abuse being relatively common (especially when young women were becoming pregnant or in cases of forced marriages). The extent of the violence experienced by South Asian women seems to confirm that they tend to stay longer in severely abusive situations than do most White women. This is mainly because:

- there is greater cultural tolerance of domestic violence in some parts of these communities
- the women do not know the support and protection structures available to them
- the women are financially and socially dependant on their spouse
- they do not want to shame their family and community
- they themselves fear being stigmatised and being able to cope on their own

The most common cause of homelessness amongst South Asian couples with children was being forced by private landlords to leave their accommodation. This was common in London because landlords wanted to capitalise on escalating property prices. In some cases, the private accommodation was unfit for human habitation, but landlords refused to carry out repairs when requested to do so either by tenants or by environmental health officers. They would then evict the families.

Overcrowding was a very common contributing factor to homelessness, but it was rarely the main cause. Many South Asian homeless households lived in three-generational households before becoming homeless. However, these living arrangements are likely to become less

common as material, housing and educational standards rise and cultural norms change. This is likely to lead to an increase in statutory homelessness amongst the South Asian community, as parents decide they are no longer willing or able to accommodate their grown-up children or other relatives.

Knowledge of statutory homelessness services was basic amongst those born and raised in England, but limited or inexistent amongst recently arrived migrants and the elderly. Together with linguistic barriers, negative images of social housing, fear of racial harassment, and a general perception that local authorities do not help the South Asian communities, this might account for the low rate of statutory homelessness found in these groups.

Pathways through services were related both to familiarity with provisions and to causes of homelessness. In cases of domestic violence, pathways to services most commonly included contacting the police, GPs, domestic violence helplines, staying with friends and relatives far from the husband's residence and going directly to a refuge. Community groups and religious organisations were practically never used because of fear over confidentiality and because women assumed they had a conservative agenda. Very few women approached their council as a first port of call. In cases where families were forced to leave their homes, pathways included trying to secure another tenancy in the private rented sector, staying with relatives and friends, and approaching homelessness services when the households first received their notice to quit.

The experiences with statutory homelessness services described by South Asians reveal poor practices. Although the majority declared themselves satisfied with the services they received, this was mainly the case in relation to domestic violence. Indeed, satisfaction with provisions in specialist refuges was high and people reported improvement in their psychological health. By contrast, families forced to leave their homes reported a serious lack of prevention work, widespread dissatisfaction with their temporary accommodation(s), poor communication with their council, uncaring attitudes amongst staff and lack of support when settling into their new environment.

3.0. HOMELESSNESS IN THE BLACK CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

3.1. National profile of the Black Caribbean Community

The Black Caribbean population has grown very little over the past three decades. It now counts 566,000 people, which corresponds to 1.0% of the total UK population and 12.2% of the ethnic minority population (Census, 2001). Most Black Caribbeans originally came from Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad, but since 1984, the majority of the Caribbean ethnic population has been British born. In fact, there are hardly any Caribbean-born people amongst those aged under 20 (Peach, 1996).

The Black Caribbean population has a high rate of participation in the labour market. Three-quarters of Black Caribbean men (77%) and women (72%) are economically active, which is slightly below the rate found in the White population (Labour Force Survey, 2001). However, Black Caribbean men are three times more likely to be unemployed (14%) than White men (5%), while Black Caribbean women are twice more likely to be unemployed (9%) than White women (4%) (Labour Force Survey, 2001). Moreover, Black Caribbean men are much more likely to be employed in manual jobs than are women, whose occupational structure is similar to that of White women. As with all the main ethnic minority groups in the UK, a greater number of Black Caribbean people than White people live in households on a low income: 19% of Black Caribbeans do so before housing costs are deducted, and this rises to 31% after housing costs are calculated (Family Resource Survey, 2000). The comparative rates in the White population are 16% and 21%.

The average size of Black Caribbean households is identical to that of White households, at 2.3, but there are distinctive features in terms of family structure. Like Black African households, Black Caribbean households are very likely to be single female-headed. Indeed, more than half (54%) of Black Caribbean families consist of lone parents (mainly mothers) with dependent children, which compare to 23% in the White population (Labour Force Survey, 2002). Unlike South Asians, Black Caribbean people rarely live in inter-generational households (Murphy, 1996), although complex family patterns are often found due to multiple relationships.

Black Caribbean housing tenure is similar to that found amongst the Black African population but distinguished from that of the White, Indian and Pakistani tenure patterns by its heavy concentration in the social rented sector: 44% of Black Caribbeans rent from the social sector, and 8% rent privately. Only 12% own their property outright and a further 35% own it with a mortgage (Labour Force Survey, 2004).

Culturally, the Black Caribbean community draws on a number of traditions and experiences, some distinct to the Caribbean Islands, some related to the history of British colonisation (including the English language and a strong Christian faith), and some linked to the rediscovery of an African and slave past as well as to the experience of racism and discrimination in the UK (Parekh, 2000).

In 2004/05, there were 12,430 Black Caribbean and Black African households (the figures are not available separately for each community) accepted by local authorities as statutory homeless and in priority need in England. The majority of them lived in London (8,500) and the West Midlands (1,160). Together, they represented 10% of the total acceptances.

3.2. Causes of homelessness

Homelessness in the Black Caribbean community, as in all other ethnic minority groups, is largely an outcome of social exclusion. Those who work closely with the Black Caribbean population found it less important to discuss either the personal or the cultural factors that might contribute to homelessness, than to emphasise the common experiences of poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, discrimination and hopelessness. However, there are also causes or triggers to homelessness that are more commonly found in, or specific to, this community.

3.2.1. *Pregnancy causing family breakdown*

In line with national data on the high proportion of single female-headed households, the study found that many young Black Caribbean women were made homeless by parents, relatives or friends who were no longer willing or able to accommodate them when they became pregnant. This was by far the single most common cause of homelessness in this community, a point made by those working with the Black Caribbean community.

“A lot of African Caribbean women are single parents. A lot of them get into trouble with their parents because of them not wanting their daughters to go down the same roads of having children at a young age because it’s quite rife amongst the African Caribbean. So there are a lot of young mothers and that creates conflicts with parents. Many end up homeless as a result.” (Voluntary organisation)

As the young women became pregnant, many had to leave the family home. Especially in the case of very young mothers, parents often disapproved of their daughter’s pregnancy, which led to conflicts and, in some cases, to the young mother having to leave the parental home.

“Well, I got pregnant quite young, I was 16 and my mother wasn’t very happy, obviously she was upset and everything and she didn’t want me to live with her anymore, so she threw me out.” (Homeless household)

“When I got pregnant my dad said I couldn’t live at home anymore cos there was not enough space for a baby, can’t live in a house with a baby so I had to move out. My dad was upset about the baby. He didn’t want a baby in the house. I know he didn’t want a baby in the house so I was better off finding somewhere for myself to live.” (Homeless household)

Sometimes, despite much willingness to help, the parents of the new mother realised that it was not possible to live in a three-generation households with a very young baby.

“Well I got pregnant and at that time I was living at my mum’s house. But cos she works full time, she wasn’t getting enough rest with the baby crying and being sick all the time, so she said I would have to move out.” (Homeless household)

“I just think she [the baby] was stressing everybody out. We was all pulling our hair out because she was quite a difficult baby. So it was better to leave.” (Homeless household)

The difficulties in keeping the mother and her child in the family home were also linked to overcrowding. The parents’ properties were simply too small to accommodate a new child and became overcrowded.

“Where I lived, at my mum’s, I had no room, I was living in a box room where there was just no room for me and my baby. The room was that small, the cot couldn’t even squeeze in there.” (Homeless household)

“My mum’s house was too overcrowded. My mum has four kids and she has a two-bedroom house, and they [the housing association] haven’t moved her, so I couldn’t stay. It’s only a two-bedroom and she’s got two young boys, the old sister she’s just moved out now cos she’s got two boys of her own, so there’s no space for me. I was sleeping in a single room on a bunk bed, but I was eight months pregnant. I knew I had to move out. My mum didn’t even have to tell me. I couldn’t bring up my daughter in that squashed little space.” (Homeless household)

Thus, although some of these new mothers presented to local authorities reporting either family disputes, parents, relatives or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate, or overcrowding, the underlying reason for their homelessness was pregnancy.

3.2.2. Multiple and complex problems

There were some cases of multiple and complex problems resulting in chronically chaotic lifestyles and repeat homelessness amongst Black Caribbean households. These included both single vulnerable people without dependents and families. In the study, this is the only ethnic minority community in which such problems were found.

A number of interviewees had had a painful childhood marred by abuse. Some had been abandoned by their parents as the latter needed to look after children from other relations, had their own problems with drug or alcohol, or were at work trying to make a living for the family.

“I was never happy at home. My father had a terrible temper, he used to whale me with a strap this long and thick, in solid leather, and that’s one of the reasons I ended up homeless because I had to run away from home for my own sanity. My old man was either giving the greater part of his love to his other three children from this other woman, or neglecting us totally, or beating us up, or he was just preoccupied with making money and never around.” (Homeless household)

“I’ve had it hard, difficult, I’ve suffered, from being a child through to now, all kind of abuse at home and outside, and I’ve come through so far, but all of this [dealing with homelessness services] is causing stress, stress in my life, stress in my marriage, stress I’m sure my children see it and I just really want to try and get some help. But I struggle with the anxiety and the depression, with trying to fight the drug, trying to keep on the straight and narrow.” (Homeless household)

“I have spent time in care. That’s when my mum left and I lived with my dad when I was about seven till I was about nine. You see, my mum had alcohol problems and it just got out of hand. So my auntie wanted to look after us but there was six of us so she couldn’t. She had her own daughter to look after so she couldn’t look after us. She had to do something so she ended up having to phone Social Services.” (Homeless household)

“Because my mum physically abused me when I was younger, I’ve been in care since I was nine years old until I’m 21. My mum, she’s not right in the head... When I went to school with bruises, the school phoned Social Services. I ran away to the police but there was nothing they could do cos there was limits until 1989, that when the Children’s Act came in and I went into care. My mum broke my neck and they thought it was a big thing so they took me and my sisters. They were afraid because my brother also died with suffocation and it was my mum.” (Homeless household)

The inherent problems associated with absent or abusive parents, school exclusions, drug misuse, crime, mental health difficulties and time in institutions (any or a combination of time in local authority care, psychiatric hospitals or prisons) cohered and led to chronic difficulties in coping with everyday life. This, in turn, led to regular episodes of homelessness, prompted by different factors linked to lack of daily living skills and lack of basic psychological, social and economic stability. Those with such complex, interrelated and deep-seated problems needed extensive support, but very few felt they were receiving it at the time of the interviews.

3.2.3. Being told to leave by private landlords

A cause of homelessness that seems to be becoming more frequent was private landlords wanting their properties back and forcing tenants to leave. The reasons were not clear but seemed related to the booming property market and the appeal of higher rental and sale prices, as well as to “unscrupulous” landlords trying to get rid of tenants complaining of disrepair. Although it may sometimes be necessary for landlords to empty their properties temporarily in order to be able to carry out the repairs, interviews with either voluntary organisations or homeless households did not suggest that this was a factor in most cases.

More problems related to what tenants called “evictions” were reported in London but cases were found in many local authority areas. As this representative of a Black-led housing association in the Midlands said:

“I’m seeing a lot of private landlords wanting their properties back. I don’t know if it’s because of the property boom and then they’re wanting to sell them. We don’t know why they’re suddenly saying we want our property back. You know, people are living in their properties and there is no other problem.” (Voluntary organisation)

Such repossession of properties by landlords caused homelessness in a number of Black Caribbean households in the study.

“While I was in hospital, my landlord got a possession order on my flat so that meant that when I got out I didn’t have anywhere else to go.” (Homeless household)

“I called Environmental Health and that’s a naughty thing to do to private landlords cos it just gets their back up. So then that’s when the possession order came in. I mean I wasn’t aware that I had a short hold tenancy which means that after you have been there for six months, the landlord can just say I want my property back and that’s it. But I’d been there for eight years with no problem before so I thought I had more rights.” (Homeless household)

3.2.4. Domestic violence

There were two cases of domestic violence in the sample. One case was aggravated by the fact that the victim’s White husband was abusing drugs and had mental health difficulties.

“Well I had my permanent place before. It was a two-bedroom place. And I married this guy but we split up because of the violence he was doing to me. I did have to leave that place and give that place to him and I came down here and I was put in a hostel. I don’t know what sort of drugs he was taking but all of a sudden he just became violent, starting to beat and fight almost every day and I got so scared of him. I always got to go to hospital. He’d smoke something and it would knock him out, but he would spit on the floor, he was getting sick on the floor. He used to piss on the carpet. I think he was crazy.” (Homeless household)

It is unclear from this small sample whether the extent and form of domestic violence in the Black Caribbean community differ from those in the White population.

3.2.5. Financial difficulties

Financial difficulties linked to unemployment were also found in the Black Caribbean community. Even those who had jobs were living on a low income, had very limited savings and, indeed, some debts. In this context, becoming unemployed easily triggered homelessness.

“I was living down in Manor Park. My partner was working. Things was all right then. He was working and he was the sole provider for us. Then Ford laid off quite a good many people and closed down so that really put us right into difficulty. He got laid off and so the money was tight because I wasn’t working... On top of that, they were putting the

rent up without notifying us we were in arrears because they are putting it up, not notifying you of it. So then they give a choice where either we leave the property or go to court. We left the property because I didn't know otherwise because their solicitor was constantly writing and we was under pressure." (Homeless household)

Homelessness due to rent or mortgage arrears, however, is thought to be relatively rare in the Black Caribbean community, according to voluntary groups. In their experience, those who are housed tend to be able to maintain their home.

"I don't see many cases of homelessness because of arrears. It's their basic lack of money and housing options that bring them to our door." (Voluntary organisation)

The main problem is with getting accommodation outside the social rented sector in the first place. According to voluntary organisations, the reasons for this are complex. They have to do with a cycle of deprivation that includes poor educational achievements or school exclusion, difficulties in finding or sustaining employment, inability to afford a home and discrimination across a range of institutions.

"The greatest thing is probably the economic status in the Black African-Caribbean communities... It stems back to the education system as well and all the kind of discrimination that people might face there... No education, no job, no home and so the cycle will go on... So I think homelessness is very much an outcome of all that, of social exclusion in general." (Voluntary organisation)

"For a lot of people, owning or even renting private in London is not going to be an option... So it's quite simple why Black people are three to four times more likely to be homeless than White people: discrimination, poverty and lack of affordable housing." (Voluntary organisation)

Thus, when personal difficulties arise, they are more likely to result in homelessness because people have fewer resources to cope with critical life events.

3.3. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

Amongst most ethnic minority communities, lack of knowledge of statutory services constitutes a major barrier to the take-up of services. This was not found to be the case in the Black Caribbean community. Their knowledge of services was good, allowing people to make full use of the services available to them. This level of familiarity is linked to a number of factors:

- Black Caribbeans are a longer-established community in the UK. Most interviewees were second-generation, British-born people
- A large proportion of Black Caribbeans rent in the social sector. The community has therefore acquired a good informal knowledge of services

-
- There are no major language barriers

Such factors, together with the issue of social exclusion and other factors described above, are likely to account for the large numbers of Black Caribbean households that are statutorily homeless.

The familiarity of Black Caribbean people with statutory housing and homelessness provisions is evidenced by the fact that several interviewees had already applied to be on the Council's housing list before becoming statutorily homeless and in 'priority need'. Moreover, the majority of Black Caribbean households interviewed had either been raised in council or housing association accommodation themselves or knew many people who had. They were surrounded by relatives and friends with first-hand experience of housing and homelessness services and, as a result, were familiar with existing provisions.

"Where I lived with my dad was on an estate. Almost everyone I know lives on an estate anyway. When your turn comes, you kind of know what to do." (Homeless household)

"I know where the office is. You are in this country long enough to know where they are." (Homeless household)

Knowledge of statutory homelessness services had an impact on the pathways to services, with most approaching their council directly and early on, after short spells of staying with relatives and friends. Moreover, it allowed potentially homeless people to put their case clearly to local authorities, resulting in a better chance of getting accepted as statutorily homeless and of being helped by their council.

"When my mum said I should leave, I went straight to the council and informed them I was homeless. I thought I should try and get the ball rolling because some of my friends told me that, one of my friends actually is still in temporary accommodation and her daughter's two years old now and she is still waiting for her permanent. So she told me to start getting a report and get things moving." (Homeless household)

"I thought if I stayed at my auntie's, it would take longer for me to get a place cos they always know that I'm at my auntie's. That's what they do. They argue, well, if she can look after you for two weeks, why can't she do it an extra week, an extra month, and you end up getting nothing. I know cos my auntie said that to me. She's been on the council forever so she just knows what they're like." (Homeless household)

The fact that Black Caribbean people speak English as their first language also means that they have fewer problems explaining their situation to homelessness services staff, and that they understand better the information and advice which is given to them. However, such knowledge and experience does not mean that everyone is fully familiar with their rights and knows how to go about seeking help.

“I didn’t know what my rights were till after. My rights were that I should not leave the property. I should have stayed there. Even though I couldn’t afford the rent, I shouldn’t have left it because I had the children. The homeless place, when I went to them, they told me the children were priority so I should not have left there.” (Homeless household)

Knowing about services and how to access them does not solve all problems either. As voluntary organisations made clear, the big issue facing the Black Caribbean community now is not how to access homelessness services, but how to avoid homelessness and move on to better economic, social and housing options.

“Because of its experience of exclusion in the past, at least the African Caribbean community is at an advantage because they know better how the system works. But what they now need to know is how to move with the system, not so you get the most out of the system, but so that you develop and improve, because otherwise you get caught in the vicious circle of just using the system and the system keeps you there. What they haven’t developed is how to get out, or to develop from here. They continue to be stuck in a rut.” (Voluntary organisation)

3.4. Pathways through services

Given the level of familiarity with statutory services discussed above, most Black Caribbean people approached their councils directly when faced with the threat of homelessness. Some stayed in their parents’ home or with relatives or friends for a short period, but in the main, access to local authority services was straightforward. No one we spoke to had approached Black Caribbean community groups or faith organisations for help and support.

3.5. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

Despite good knowledge of housing and homelessness services and ability to communicate in English, Black Caribbean homeless households were amongst the most dissatisfied with their contact with statutory homelessness services (along with Black African and Irish people). Their discontent centred on a number of key issues (many of which are also raised by other minority ethnic groups), which are summed up in the following statement:

“I think that they should give you better advice and not just try to get rid of you by passing you on to someone else who won’t help anyway. And also I think they should have a bit more compassion. They should offer something which is liveable, where you’re not frightened, where you can have a happy family life and be able to get back on your own two feet. That’s what I think. Not just see you as a number and give you places that are not fit for people, or talk to you like you are a criminal.” (Homeless household)

In our interviews, there was no indication that racial discrimination played a role in the dissatisfaction with statutory homelessness services.

- **The bureaucratic nature of services**

A very common set of complaints concerned the bureaucratic nature of homelessness services. Many commented on such issues as the frustration of “being lost in a big bureaucracy”, of being “passed around”, of feeling “like a number”, of endless “form filling”, of “not being listened to”, of not knowing what is expected of them or when they can expect to obtain information about their accommodation. A voluntary group representative similarly described homelessness services as “an obstacle course”.

Black Caribbean homeless households complained in particular about the difficulties they experienced in trying to just get hold of their caseworker and in obtaining adequate information about the progress of their application.

“We’ve got our caseworker, she doesn’t even want to take your call, or make an appointment.” (Homeless household)

“They need to have one person dealing with your case. They have so many people dealing with you it’s hard to find out who’s who.” (Homeless household)

“I left umpteen messages, with him and other people there. But they never get back to you. It’s just maddening cos you can’t report problems, you can’t find out about the progress of your application. They don’t understand what it’s like for us.” (Homeless household)

The bureaucratic nature of services resulted in much frustration. Coupled with the lack of transparency in the eligibility criteria and decision-making process, this generated a sense of powerlessness, with people no longer knowing how to communicate their circumstances to homelessness services and, indeed, what kind of information is required of them for their application to progress.

“We don’t even know what they want. If they said more papers, we could produce that. I mean we’re not illegal here, I was born here, so whatever they want is no problem to produce, but we don’t even know what they want. What do you want from me?” (Homeless household)

- **The lack of consistency in advice, information and support provided**

Black Caribbean households also complained that the advice, information and support they got were fundamentally dependent on “luck”.

“All you get is their personal opinion. It’s not standard to everybody. You never know what you’re gonna get.” (Homeless household)

“One housing officer will say something to you, the next housing officer will say something else to you, the next one, you know, it’s like they’re all misleading you in one way or the other and you just don’t know where you stand.” (Homeless household)

“It depends on the homelessness officer, and the caseworker, and the person running the hostel or the accommodation. I mean you can be lucky but another person can never get helped.” (Homeless household)

Such comments may be related to objectively poor treatment, to higher expectations, or to the fact that Black Caribbean respondents are more likely to be aware of the circumstances of other people in their community and of the help they received. In other words, they are able to compare the quality of services they got, something members of other communities are rarely able to do.

● **The poor quality of customer service**

Many Black Caribbean respondents were dissatisfied with the treatment they received from front line staff. Suspicion about the truthfulness of their homelessness application was a major source of resentment. While homelessness officers have to ensure that applicants have a legitimate entitlement to accommodation and require evidence in support of claims made by applicants, respondents in our sample felt that the ways in which interviews were carried out lacked sensitivity. Applicants often complained that they were made to feel as if they were fraudulent.

“They are thinking, well you are making yourself homeless. No one would like to make themselves homeless just like this now. Well there are people who are not paying their rents deliberately but there are genuine people who just cannot afford, sometimes you can afford it and there are times things just go wrong. But they don’t believe that somehow.” (Homeless household)

“They talk to you like you’re a criminal. They make you feel rotten.” (Homeless household)

“They ask lots of personal questions, things that I think are none of their business. It’s like they are trying to catch you out.” (Homeless household)

Another issue was the lack of support which people already in temporary accommodation received from their council when they lodged complaints about the state of their property.

“We was made to feel difficult, like we’re difficult, or trouble-makers, or something when we were reporting problems with the flat. But I mean it’s their job to repair stuff so we can live in it.” (Homeless household)

“They [the Council] need to give tenants environmental health numbers, complaints numbers, harassment numbers, whatever. I mean the Council’s supposed to be willing and ready to help. They should have a leaflet or whatever of useful numbers. It’s in their interest because we can bring in the environmental health people and let them know their housing is in bad condition. We inform them, but they don’t want to make the improvements. They don’t want to help. [The Council] is supposed to be more willing to see that if a place is detrimental to the health of the baby of the family, they’re supposed to be more willing to give you more help and more powers to tell the Council that this is a health hazard, health risk.” (Homeless household)

It is worth emphasising again that the complaints about staff attitudes did not include racial discrimination. The latter was discussed in broad terms but no one in our sample gave any examples of discrimination they had personally suffered.

3.6. Conclusions

Black Caribbean homeless households in the study were largely British-born (second and third generation). They experienced severe social exclusion and were often raised on council estates, in families dependant on the state for their income and housing. The most common cause of homelessness in the Black Caribbean sample was pregnancy leading to family tensions and overcrowding, forcing young mothers to leave the homes of their parents, relatives or friends. This reflects the large numbers of female-headed households in the Black Caribbean population as a whole. Uniquely in the ethnic minority population, we also found in the Black Caribbean community many cases where homelessness was due to multiple and complex problems related to child abuse, time in care, drug abuse, crime and mental health problems. This combination of problems cohered and generated difficulties in coping with everyday life. It often led to repeat homelessness. Other less common causes included being forced to leave private rented accommodation when landlords wanted their properties back, domestic violence, and financial difficulties leading to rent arrears.

In terms of knowledge of statutory homelessness services, the Black Caribbean community stands out for its familiarity with, and ability to access, available provisions. This is linked to a number of factors, including the fact that Black Caribbean people are a longer-established community in the UK and that most interviewees were British-born people; the fact that a large proportion of Black Caribbeans rent in the social sector and that the community has therefore acquired a good informal knowledge of services; and the fact that there are no major language barriers in this community. This, rather than need alone, may explain why a greater proportion of potentially homeless households in this community are accepted as statutorily homeless compared to other ethnic minority groups. The good knowledge of statutory provisions also explains the unique pathway found in this community, whereby most households approached their council, sometimes after short periods of staying with relatives or friends, and made little use of alternative resources.

Experiences of services, however, were often negative. Concerns centred on the following issues: the bureaucratic nature of services; the lack of consistency in advice, information and support provided; and the poor customer service offered to applicants. No Black Caribbean households reported personal experiences of discrimination from councils.

4.0. HOMELESSNESS IN THE BLACK AFRICAN POPULATION

4.1. Introduction

To speak of a Black African “community” is somewhat misleading given the heterogeneous nature of the Black African population in the UK. With more than 50 countries from which people can potentially originate, a range of economic, social and cultural backgrounds, different reasons for migrating and length of settlement in the UK, and different languages, dialects and religions, Black Africans are a highly diverse group of people (see Elam & Chinouya, 2000).

The sample reflects the diversity of the Black African population in England. The households interviewed came from a range of countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Somalia, Angola, Sierra Leone and Zaire. Out of the 14 households surveyed, 12 were headed by individuals who were born in Africa but lived in the UK for many years and spoke English. Although some Black African homeless households originally entered the country as refugees, they did not consider themselves as refugees any longer and had no plans to settle back in their country of origin.

4.2. National profile of the Black African population

The Black African population has more than doubled in size over the past decade. It now counts 485,000 individuals, making up 0.8% of the total UK population and 10.5% of the ethnic minority population (Census, 2001). Most Black Africans have come from West African Commonwealth countries (Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia and Sierra Leone), although the East African population (mainly from Somalia and Ethiopia) is also growing. The majority of Black Africans in the UK live in the Greater London area.

Economically, the profile of Black Africans is quite complex. In terms of economic activity, 72% of Black African men and 56% of women are either in a job or seeking a job. Unemployment rates are three times higher amongst Black Africans than in the White population: 15% of Black African men and 13% of women are unemployed (Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey, 2001). Moreover, 28% of Black Africans live on low incomes (defined as having 60% of the median disposable income) before housing costs are deducted and this rises to 49% after housing costs¹ (Family Resource Survey, 2000). In other words, one in two Black African households lives in poverty, compared to one in five (21%) in the general population. Thus, despite pockets of relative prosperity, there remains widespread poverty amongst the Black African population.

In terms of household size and composition, Black Africans have larger households than the White population, with an average size of 2.9. Amongst the Black African population, lone parenthood is extremely common: 46% of lone parents have dependent children, exactly double the rate found in the general population (Labour Force Survey, 2002). Very few Black African people live in three-generational households (Murphy, 1996).

¹ In fact, the Family Resource Survey uses the category “Black non Caribbean” to collect and analyse its data, rather than “Black African”. For the purposes of this research, however, we have treated the two as identical.

The housing tenure most common amongst Black Africans is to rent from the social sector: 50% rent from the social sector while 24% rent privately. Only 4% own their property outright and a further 23% own it with a mortgage (Labour Force Survey, 2004). By comparison, in the White population, most people own their own homes, either outright (32%) or with a mortgage (41%), while 18% rent from the social sector and 10% rent privately.

In 2004/05, there were 12,430 Black Caribbean and Black African households (the figures are not available separately for each community) accepted by local authorities as statutory homeless and in priority need in England. The majority of them lived in London (8,500) and the West Midlands (1,160). Together, they represented 10% of the total acceptances.

4.3. Causes of homelessness

The majority of the Black African households interviewed were single, female-headed households in which the head of household was either pregnant or already had one or more children. In this group, the main causes of homelessness were relatives no longer able or willing to accommodate and/or family disputes (generally linked to pregnancy or overcrowding) and relationship breakdowns (sometimes associated with domestic violence). The remaining households were couples with children. In this group, the main reason for homelessness was landlords wanting their property back and forcing their tenants out.

4.3.1. *Pregnancy, family disputes and overcrowding*

A number of single, female-headed households became homeless when they became pregnant. In three of these cases, the mothers were born and brought up in the UK, were expecting their first child and had been living with parents or relatives when they first found out that they were pregnant. The pregnancy generated family disputes and overcrowding, and the young women were forced to leave their permanent accommodation.

“When I got pregnant, I was living with my mum and dad but they got very upset... They couldn’t believe I had done that to them. There was no way I could stay. There wouldn’t have been enough space for me and the baby anyway.” (Zairian homeless household)

“It just became hell in the house. My parents were on my back all the time. They called me every possible name, they just were so angry with me that I had to go.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

“Well my cousin that I was living with gave me, gave the Council 28 days to find me a place... The thing is that I was a couple of months pregnant and she was worrying that she couldn’t handle it, so she told me to leave really.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

A similar situation was found with another Ghanaian woman who had only lived in the UK for six years and had been staying with a relative since her arrival. This lone mother was a student in her early thirties and she already had a child. Her latest pregnancy generated no particular family tension but it did bring about overcrowding and forced her to approach the Council’s homelessness services for help.

“I got pregnant with my son [second child] and my relatives, there was just not enough room. We, me and my daughter, were living in a really, really small room anyway and we couldn’t have put a baby in there. And my relatives we were staying at also said we would have to move when the baby’s born.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

The two other cases were very similar. Both involved young Somali women who had first arrived in the UK as refugees. They had lost or left their parents in Somalia and had been staying with relatives since their arrival in the UK, 8 and 13 years ago respectively. Having been brought up in England, they found themselves at odds with the traditional culture espoused by their carers and eventually left home.

“My mum is dead and my dad is back home somewhere. I was living in a Council house with my aunt. We used to fight. She used to hit me and I used to hit her back. When I got to the age of 16, I thought no I can’t take this anymore so I left.” (Somalian homeless household)

“I’ve lived here nearly 14 years. I came from Somalia because of the fighting. I came as a refugee. My auntie was here. She then came to Somalia and brought me and her daughter here. I didn’t have any of my family here... I didn’t want to live with my auntie, I wanted to live by myself. I was 20 years old. I wanted my independence. I was arguing all the time with my auntie and her children. We just looked at things very differently, so I moved.” (Somalian homeless household)

In both cases, when the young women first left home, they stayed either with friends or in a succession of hostels and bed & breakfast accommodations until they became pregnant and, subsequently, were accepted by a local authority as unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

“When they [the Council] found out I was pregnant, they put me in a unit for families.” (Somalian homeless household)

“I was going from one place to another until I got pregnant. They finally listened to me and got me this [temporary accommodation].” (Somalian homeless household)

Although neither of these subjects emphasised specific cultural norms that may have contributed to their causes of homelessness, staff from a Somali voluntary organisation suggested that lone motherhood is uncommon and deemed shameful in the Somali population.

“I think most Somali people don’t really think of themselves as Black African at all, to tell the truth. I mean technically they are because they are Black and they are from Africa, but Somali culture has much more to do with Arabic or Asian cultures than with Black African cultures. Islam, Sunni Islam is a big factor in that difference.... It would be viewed very, very poorly for a young, unmarried Somali girl, just like for a Pakistani or Bangladeshi girl, to have a child outside of wedlock. It might happen with the younger ones that were raised here, but that just couldn’t happen in Somalia.” (Voluntary organisation)

4.3.2. Relationship breakdowns

Some households became homeless as a result of marital breakdowns. Although it is impossible to determine precisely the importance of cultural factors in such breakdowns, clashes linked to gender roles are contributing factors. This is highlighted by Black African homeless households as well as by community groups.

Community organisations described migration to the UK as a difficult process. Settlement in England often led to strained economic situations and to a change in gender roles and expectations as men did not always find the employment necessary to sustain their traditional social position as breadwinners, and as some women's economic and social position improved.

“There is a change in the balance of power that creates a lot of strife for people, in the first generation certainly. I think most Black African men are kind of used to go out to work and to look after the family financially. But they can't do that so easily here, I mean unemployment is quite high for men, so a lot suffer from depression, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem and they struggle to keep their status in the community... Here, women have as much access to the welfare system as men so that tips the balance in their favour, you know? Plus, they [women] are exposed to very different ways. They want their men to change. That creates problems. We see quite a lot of that around.” (Voluntary organisation)

Two cases of relationship breakdowns amongst Nigerian couples illustrate these points. In both instances, the men had resided in the UK and brought their wives over from Nigeria after marriage. The husbands expected their wives to play a traditional role.

“The women look at things differently here. Back home a man is supposed to take a lead in the house. The culture here is that if you are not happy with the man, just put him on the street and forget them.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“Back home the man goes to the farm and the woman cooks. But we understand that things are changing. Like here if my wife doesn't have time to cook then I will cook, but if she has time then she should cook.” (Nigerian homeless household)

Conflicts of expectations led to domestic disputes and, eventually, to relationship breakdowns. In one case, the woman fled; in the other, the woman forced the man to leave.

“The reason why I'm here is due to domestic problems. My husband used to abuse me verbally. He would say that I don't do this, I don't do that, that I should do this, I should walk this way, I should cook this. I'm fed up, and usually he goes out and come in at any time, or at times go for two or three days, I don't know where he is, so I can't condone all this.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“We were quarrelling every day and night. It was really bad. In the end, she said: ‘I can't cope with you anymore’. She threw me out.” (Nigerian homeless household)

All the Black African subjects who became homeless due to relationship breakdowns shared the view that their marriage would have survived if they had been in their own country or if they had had their community around them in the UK. Family, friends and the wider community, they argued, would have provided the couple with some support and would not have allowed “unacceptable” behaviours to take place.

“Well I was thinking of going home. I was thinking that if I had my people around me, all this would not happen to me... At home, people maybe can warn him or tell him, don’t do this, don’t do that. But when there is nobody with me, there is nobody to report to, so I don’t know.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“If we had family here, it would have made a big difference. Even if they don’t interfere, fear of what the parents will say, the parents’ reaction would have forced her [the wife] to pipe down a little bit.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“Back home if you have difficulties, the families will speak to the person and find out what is wrong. If they find that the wife or husband is wrong, they will go to their family and speak with them. But here if there is a little misunderstanding and the husband does a little wrong, people say to the wife ‘why do you stay with him?’” (Nigerian homeless household)

“Maybe if I have someone who knows Nigeria, there are so many tribes and so many cultures, maybe if I have people around me that are Nigerians within my tribe or my culture, maybe if I explained to them, maybe some of them have been experiencing this type of problem. But I don’t know anybody to speak to so maybe I don’t do the right thing.” (Nigerian homeless household)

What is regarded as support for the couple may also be interpreted as a strong taboo against separation or divorce in some Black African cultures, in particular those in which Christianity or Islam play a central moral role. A conservative attitude to marriage sometimes makes it difficult for couples experiencing difficulties to disclose their problems.

“You can’t help thinking about going back when there are big problems... No one would help me. I would have to put up with him and his abuse and his violence... My family would not take me back. I would be alone. People would look down on me.” (Angolan homeless household)

“I was thinking of going back to Nigeria because I would want to have my parents around me. But actually they wouldn’t like that situation because they don’t even know my situation now, because in Nigeria, in my country, in my culture, once you are married, you are not allowed to come back home. They tell you there’s no room for you again because you left your parents so you have to be with your husband. It would look bad on them if I went back.” (Nigerian homeless household)

Thus, in the case of the first generation migrants who have come to the UK following marriage, there may be no possibility of going back to their country of origins, even if they would wish to do so. The stigma attached to a failed relationship would condemn the women to social isolation. The same stigma may also be keeping a number of Black African women now living in the UK from seeking help from specialist agencies and statutory homelessness services.

4.3.3. Being told to leave by private landlords and overcrowding

Three households had to leave their privately rented room due to overcrowding. This situation is not uncommon according to community groups, as there is some considerable movement of family members to and from Africa.

“I wouldn’t say that living in an extended family is as common as in the South Asian groups, but it’s definitely one way of making ends meet when people first arrive and they don’t have jobs and no money and they have young children that need looking after. They just have to squeeze together, whether they like it or not.” (Voluntary organisation)

“A lot of Black African people, they first come as refugees. So what happens is that after a while, they get some of their family brought over to stay with them... Their place becomes too small for everybody to live in there but they can’t afford to pay more also because the African communities are mainly based in London and it’s so expensive to live in London. So they become homeless because they can’t afford to rent or buy a bigger place.” (Voluntary organisation)

Thus, when relatives arrive, already cramped living conditions can easily become intolerable. In the sample, one woman from Sierra Leone had originally come to the UK three years before as a refugee. She had been privately renting a single room but when her husband and two children joined her, the landlady asked them to leave because the room had become severely overcrowded.

“I would have loved to have stayed where I was but when my husband and two children came my landlady had three bedrooms and she had two kids and she said she cannot accommodate us anymore. I said I have nowhere to go and she said you have to go to the Homeless Person’s place.” (Sierra Leone homeless household)

The other cases involved a Nigerian and a Ghanaian family. In both instances, they had also been living in a single room rented privately. When the landlords brought over their relatives or had children of their own, they asked their tenants to leave. The families became homeless.

“Me and my wife and baby were living in one room in a house. The landlord’s wife then had twins and his father also came so it got very crowded in the house. He asked us to leave and he gave us a letter which we showed to the Homeless Person’s Unit.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“The owner told me his children are coming back and I have to move out. He didn’t tell me when. He just started repairing the house for them and there was no electricity or gas or water and I was pregnant and it was not good for me so I had to move out.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

In the last two cases, therefore, it is the overcrowding in houses in which the families rented rooms that caused the households to become homeless.

The three cases of evictions due to overcrowding involved families living in London boroughs where housing authorities were under severe pressures because of shortages of social housing in a context of rising demand (largely fuelled by higher property prices in the private sector). Homelessness services were therefore particularly reluctant to accept applicants as statutorily homeless. However, the situation faced by applicants was not helped by the fact that they were told by their councils to stay in their accommodation until they would get evicted and to approach them only when they would become roofless.

“There was a woman in this morning, she’s been in the same private rented accommodation for many years, a Somali woman, we know that the landlord served a Section 21 on her. She’s been to the council, the council said wait until he takes legal action. He’s gone to court, he’s got a date to get her out. And all she’s told is wait, wait until you get evicted. Then obviously they’ll put her in temporary accommodation or hostel accommodation and then she’ll have to wait there until something comes up. But the whole idea of preventing homelessness, I mean it may be policy but it’s not part of the culture of the Council. They tell you to wait until you’re out on the streets and then they may help. They need to be far more proactive in trying to identify properties for people whilst they’re still in their homes.” (Voluntary organisation)

The Government’s statutory Code of Guidance on homelessness advises local authorities against this approach and advocates a range of options to prevent applicants from losing their current home.

4.4. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

Knowledge of housing and homelessness services was variable. Some, particularly those recently arrived, had very little knowledge of services.

“I had absolutely no idea where to go. I just went to the Council, I explained myself, that I came from London and I don’t have anywhere to stay so they said, maybe I know somebody, I said no, because I don’t know anybody here. So they took me to a bed and breakfast.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“I was going through estate agents and asking people individually about places to stay until somebody said to me: ‘Listen, you being pregnant, you would get priority.’ Somebody had to tell that because I am pregnant, I can get priority. I wouldn’t have thought to approach them.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

Others, especially those long established in England, were quite knowledgeable and, indeed, some were already on their Council's housing register before they became homeless.

"My name was on the Council list because I had applied for a council flat. So I was thinking by the time I have the baby I will get my council flat. That is what I was thinking. I didn't know that I can't get it until I have the baby." (Ghanaian homeless household)

"When I was single for a long time I had registered with the Council for a flat. They said I was not priority so I have to wait." (Nigerian homeless household)

4.5. Pathways through services

The pathways through services were extremely varied. They changed as a function of people's knowledge of statutory and voluntary services, of their reasons for homelessness, and of their generation or length of stay in England. Generally, first generation migrants had poor knowledge of services. They tended to rely on informal support structures. However, in cases of evictions or marital breakdowns, people would sometimes approach the Council directly, either because they had no one to support them, because they were embarrassed to draw on their relatives and friends for support, or because they were advised by landlords to contact statutory services.

"The landlady said to me that I have to go to homeless persons place." (Sierra Leone homeless household)

Amongst the more established sections of the community, where homelessness due to family disputes and pregnancy were more common, young women would generally approach their council after a period of staying with relatives and friends.

"I was staying in other people's houses. Today I'll sleep there, today I'll sleep there. I was staying at friends and everyone else's friends. I had to sleep on people's couches." (Ghanaian homeless household)

In the sample, little use was made of the voluntary sector or of faith institutions, although many reported that Christianity or Islam played an important role in their lives.

4.6. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

As in most other groups, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the quality of homelessness services amongst Black African households. The criticism centred mainly on the poor quality of customer service and on the bureaucratic nature of homelessness services.

4.6.1 Poor customer service

With respect to customer service, two main issues dominated the discourses of Black African households: the lack of compassion or care, and the distrust shown to them.

“She (housing officer) made me cry. She said: ‘Oh you’re a student, you don’t qualify for anything’ and she was basically mean. She even said to me: Well, when I was a student, I got pregnant, but I didn’t run to the council.’ They’re trained to deter you, to stop you from becoming homeless. They don’t want you there, it’s clear.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

“Some people are good but some people are really bad – my God they are bad. They say: ‘You have to take this. If you don’t take it, you get nothing. It’s your choice. I don’t have time, I have to see other people’.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“If I had a family here, I would have gone to them because the way they treated me, it was terrible.” (Nigerian homeless household)

“They’ve dumped us here. It is awful conditions and they don’t know or care. The lady came to see me and said: ‘You should be happy you have a room’. I said: ‘Excuse me. I am living in one room with my husband and two children, which is exactly what I left behind and became homeless for.’ She said I was lucky to have a room. They just don’t care.” (Sierra Leone homeless household)

Some reported feeling interrogated, being made to feel like criminals, and being seen as abusers of the welfare state.

“She was really asking me a lot of questions and really hard questions and trying to find out whether you’ve made yourself homeless on purpose. I was sitting there thinking God, I’m in Court.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

“It’s like we’re criminals or something. They treat us as some scroungers. They’d rather send you back home, but there’s no back home for us. This is it.” (Somalian homeless household)

Again, no Black African household in the sample explicitly referred to racial discrimination. Dissatisfaction would therefore seem to owe more to issues of poor customer care that are affecting all applicants than to any specific disadvantage linked to ethnicity, race or culture.

4.6.2. The bureaucratic nature of services

With respect to the bureaucratic nature of services, the main complaints focused on the delays in being seen by frontline staff, on the difficulties experienced in getting hold of caseworkers and on the lack of information provided about applications and the progress of individual cases.

“I have to chase them and I was calling them every time, every two weeks, I would phone, leave messages, and she never gets them or whether she gets them and she doesn’t reply, I don’t know. It was a matter of going in there, sitting there all day, only for her to tell you: ‘It’s still not ready, none of it is ready and we’ll let you know’.” (Ghanaian homeless household)

“I have no idea what they are doing or how long I have to wait.” (Angolan homeless household)

“You’re just kept in the dark about one of the most important things in your life: where you’re gonna live. They tell you nothing about the areas they search into, how they make decisions.” (Nigerian homeless household)

Lack of transparency and lack of regular update on the progress of applications generate much dissatisfaction with the services. Applicants need to be given some explanation of the criteria on the basis of which various aspects of homelessness decisions are made. Such information would go a long way towards alleviating concerns and frustration with services.

4.7. Conclusions

The Black African population is extremely diverse. Given the range of experiences and backgrounds characteristic of the Black African sample, no clear and distinctive cultural pattern emerged with respect to their reasons for becoming homeless and their use of homelessness service provisions. Although there may well be important differences between specific national communities (e.g. Somalians, Ghanaians, Nigerians), the sample was too small to identify these. Further research would be needed to explore in greater depth cultural differences between the various Black African groups.

The main causes identified in the sample were parents, relatives or friends asking interviewees to leave following pregnancy, relationship breakdowns and overcrowding. Becoming pregnant was more common amongst those established in England and was associated with single motherhood. This is in line with the national data on high rates of female-headed households amongst Black Africans. Pregnancies sometimes led to family disputes and to mothers having to leave their home. Amongst those more recently arrived, there were more cases of relationship breakdowns and overcrowding. The breakdowns were partly linked to the difficulties of adapting in a new environment. Indeed, for those migrants who were raised in collectivist cultures characterised by clearly demarcated traditional gender roles, extensive family and social networks, hierarchical social relations, and strong religious beliefs, life in England sometimes led to marital strains, as men lose some of their hold on their family. Such tensions led to family disputes and, in turn, to homelessness. The problems were compounded by the lack of support experienced by couples. Overcrowding was linked to the arrival of relatives from African countries or to the birth of children. It sometimes led to landlords evicting their tenants because there was not enough room in the house to accommodate the new arrivals.

Knowledge and pathways through services were varied. They changed as a function of people’s knowledge of statutory and voluntary services, of their reasons for homelessness, of their generation and length of stay in England. Households in the study did report using community groups and religious institutions as resources to deal with potential homelessness. Experiences of statutory homelessness services were generally negative with two dominant problems emerging: poor customer service and the bureaucratic nature of services. Discrimination in statutory services did not appear to be a problem for the interviewees.

5.0. HOMELESSNESS IN THE IRISH COMMUNITY

5.1. National profile of the Irish community¹

Profiling the Irish community as an ethnic minority group in the UK is both a contentious and complicated task. Contentious because assumptions about ethnicity suggest that only non-White people can experience discrimination and therefore that Irish people are not really a political, social, economic and ethnic minority. Complicated because little is known about the Irish community in the UK. Their specific living conditions and experiences are only just beginning to emerge since there was no clear provision to record Irish ethnicity in the 1991 Census. The latter used country of birth as a surrogate to assess ethnicity, which means that only first generation migrants were included. The data from the 2001 Census, which does record the ethnicity of Irish people in the UK and will make it possible to determine the experience of second and third generation migrants, as well as to make comparisons with other ethnic minority groups, are not yet available. Some data have been released for England and Wales, but little in relation to any of the variables likely to impact on homelessness.

The Irish community comprises some 642,000 people and makes up 1.2% of the population of England and Wales (Census 2001). The majority originate from the Irish Republic and the remainder from Northern Ireland. While most ethnic minority groups tend to have a younger age profile than the White population, a distinctive feature of the Irish population is the large number of people in the older age groups. This reflects the large-scale economic migration of the 1950s. In terms of their geographical distribution, like all ethnic minority groups, the Irish have always settled in major conurbations, but recent migrants are particularly concentrated in London. Within London, many Irish people are concentrated within the most deprived boroughs.

Economically, the Irish have a high rate of participation in the labour market, but they remain heavily concentrated in certain occupational sectors, reflecting historical gaps in the British labour market. For women, these are mainly nursing, domestic and catering work. For men, these are mainly skilled construction work and industrial work. The situation is slowly changing however, as more young men and women now occupy professional and managerial positions. Unemployment is higher among Irish men than in the general population, but roughly similar amongst Irish and other White women. While recent data are not available on the number of Irish households living on low incomes, a number of economic indicators converge to show that the standards of living of Irish households are much lower than average and close to those of Black Caribbean households (see section 3.1.).

There are now some 357,000 Irish households in England and Wales. The household and family structures of Irish households are distinctive: only 12% of Irish households are married couples with dependent children and 5% are lone parents with dependent children (2001 Census). Moreover, a very large proportion of Irish households contain either single people or groups of unrelated people, reflecting lower marriage rates in all age groups and many lone pensioners. However, Irish families are also more likely to contain more than five members than in the general population.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the information contained in this section is derived from Hickman & Walker, 1997.

With respect to housing tenure, nationally, 27% of Irish-born people own their property outright and 33% own it with a mortgage, while 11% rent privately and 26% rent from the social sector. In the general population, 28% own their property outright and 43% own it with a mortgage, while 9% rent privately and 20% rent from the social sector (2001 Census). The relatively high proportion of owner occupation (60%) partly reflects the top-heavy age structure of the Irish community, with many households established for long enough to have paid off their mortgage. However in London, where property prices are higher, fewer Irish people own their property and many more rely on renting, either privately or from the social sector.

Finally, there is little robust information about the extent of the discrimination faced by Irish people because their specific experiences are not monitored. No national data source provides information on the incidence of racially motivated crime in the Irish community and only a minority of local authorities and housing associations monitor the experiences of Irish people as a distinct group. However, the exclusion of the Irish from access to scarce public resources such as housing is strongly emphasised by all Irish welfare and advice agencies in the country (Cope, 2001; Hickman & Walter, 1997; Randall & Brown, 1997).

5.2. Causes of homelessness

The life conditions of Irish people vary a great deal according to their generation and the time when they migrated to England. According to Irish housing associations and voluntary organisations, the group of clients with the greatest needs are still older single men who came to England in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in search of work. These men live in isolation and, despite severe poverty and acute physical and mental health needs, are often not accessing mainstream services.

“In the older Irish population, you’ll find that a lot of the people who came to Britain, things haven’t worked out as well as they would have liked. These were mainly older men that came to work as labourers. They were always on the move because they followed the work, so they would all stay in grotty places, usually with other Irish workers. They never had anything permanent. They’ve ended up in very poor quality accommodation or sleeping rough and turned to alcohol. If they had accommodation, they would often lose it as a result of mental health or alcohol problems. Many of them live on the streets and only get picked up by outreach services.” (Voluntary organisation)

Men with such experiences were not found in this study. According to the literature review and to interviews with the voluntary sector, this is both because older Irish men with physical and mental health problems are unlikely to access services and because statutory homelessness services do not always recognise their vulnerability (Cope, 2001; Randall & Brown, 1997).

Amongst the homeless Irish people interviewed, the main causes of homelessness were domestic violence and financial difficulties. The prevalence of these causes in the statutory homeless Irish population as a whole was confirmed by agencies working with the Irish community.

5.2.1. Domestic violence

Half of the Irish homeless households interviewed became homeless because of domestic violence. This seems to reflect a broad trend identified by voluntary organisations.

“We’re getting a lot more middle-aged women fleeing domestic violence coming through our doors.” (Voluntary organisation)

“There’s also an issue with domestic violence. Again, traditionally the Irish religion is Catholicism so there’s this pressure of keeping the family together at all costs and staying together through thick and thin, and we get quite a few women coming through our door now, in fact more and more who, for many years, were living in abusive relationships. They should have left 20 years ago but they’ve stayed because there’s a huge stigma in Ireland. They’re viewed as a failure for having let the name of the family down if they leave a marriage. But it’s happening more and more.” (Voluntary organisation)

These descriptions found echoes in the experiences of Irish women who left violent relationships, taking their children with them. For instance,

“Originally I was with my husband and then I became a victim of domestic violence so I had to leave the flat. My husband had threatened to abduct my son and so we had to move.” (Homeless household)

“I had a hard life, a very abusive life. I was raped in my marriage, I was abused, I was kicked about like I was dirt. My husband was no good. I had to go to hospital, I was seven months pregnant and he battered me, you know, and the baby. I nearly lost my child then and he made me have an abortion. He had me get rid of the baby when I was seven months pregnant. That’s how horrible he was.... He would tear my hair out and try to set fire to me and burn me. But I went back to him because I had no choice. What else could I do? No money, with seven children, no job... ” (Homeless household)

Two of the four women victims of domestic violence were made repeatedly homeless by the abuse. Unable to leave permanently (for economic, cultural, practical and emotional reasons), they would go from refuges to hostels, back to home for a while, and then find themselves again in temporary accommodation. Interviews with Irish voluntary organisations confirmed that repeat homelessness is very common in cases of domestic violence in the Irish community².

“If you look at it really, I haven’t just been homeless seven years. I’ve been homeless all my life because in my marriage, I had to go into refuges, I had to go into hostels with my children. I was in a lot of places. I have been homeless 22 times, a lot of it because of domestic violence.” (Homeless household)

“It’s the third time that I leave him. Sometimes I felt ashamed because I should leave for good. Sometimes I thought I was good to be trying to keep the family together and to give the children a normal life.” (Homeless household)

2 This is not exclusively the case in the Irish community, as repeat homelessness is also a feature of many White and Black women’s experience of domestic violence. However, it does seem to contrast with the experiences of South Asian women. Our data indicate that the latter do not return to their partners with the same frequency.

The fear of being placed in temporary accommodation and of the disruption this would cause to the children seems to have kept some of Irish women in abusive relationships for longer.

“I didn’t want [the children] to be in the kind of accommodation that they’re in now. I wanted to keep them in their school, in their neighbourhood.”(Homeless household)

Placements in inappropriate, unsafe and insecure accommodation also left them feeling at the mercy of their abusers. Some homeless Irish families fled their temporary accommodation (and therefore became homeless again) to escape threats from violent partners.

“A couple of times I was on the run cos I was so scared of my partner. But [the Council] had kept me in the area. They could have put me in another borough. I was so afraid my husband would be able to find me.” (Homeless household)

“I had to move because my husband was banging at the door at three or four o’clock in the morning saying I want to see my son and the Council refused to move me to another temporary accommodation and in the end I was so terrified I just up and left cos I was really, really scared.” (Homeless household)

The available evidence suggests that domestic violence is a key cause of homelessness amongst Irish families.

5.2.2. Financial difficulties, rent arrears and landlords forcing tenants to leave

A number of Irish families became homeless because of financial difficulties. The reasons for their financial difficulties varied. They included loss of employment, increase in private rents, and bureaucratic problems in the management of housing benefits. In each situation, this led to rent arrears and, eventually, to evictions.

One Irish family became homeless when the head of household lost his job due to a serious, long-term injury and failed to obtain benefits because his wife was working part-time.

“I was living in a three bedroom house and I was out of work for two years with a back injury, a serious back injury. And I applied for benefits which I was turned down for because my wife worked part time, like it was only three and a quarter hours a day that’s all she was doing, which was under just roughly about 15 to 16 hours a week. That’s how the rent arrears came up, that’s why we got evicted in the end.” (Homeless household)

Despite having agreed arrangements to pay off the arrears with some officers in the Housing Department, the provisional agreement was eventually turned down and left this man with no option but to leave the property.

“I made an arrangement to pay the arrears off at £10 per week which the rent department accepted and then the housing officer said that they wanted the property back. Then I approached them again and suggested I was gonna pay them £50 a fortnight out of my jobseekers allowance to pay off the arrears and re-house us as soon as possible. But they wouldn't accept that either. They wouldn't entertain it in any way whatsoever... She [the housing officer] says we won't re-house you until the debt is completely cleared... There's no way that I can pay off £3,500 me being unemployed at the moment. There's no way that I can actually pay of the arrears in one go. It's as simple as that and that's basically what they're waiting for... The truth is they're so short of properties that they didn't want to sort the problem out. They just wanted the property back.”(Homeless household)

In another case, a private landlord had increased the rent to a level no longer affordable by the household, and then evicted the family for non-payment of rent. According to Irish voluntary groups, this situation is getting more and more frequent in London because of the rise in the property market.

“What you find also is that housing benefits are not covering the full cost because of the rise of the rental market in London. So people get into arrears quite easily. We've seen quite a few people like that lately.” (Voluntary organisation)

“Another thing with families is they could have been evicted from somewhere. That happens quite a lot with families. They're just not able to pay their rent cos the prices have gone up so much.” (Voluntary organisation)

The inability to pay the increased rent is due to housing benefit being insufficient to cover the full rental price, which leads to monthly arrears. However, this may be compounded by delays in obtaining housing benefit. This mother of two often found herself borrowing from as wide a variety of sources as possible pending receipt of her housing benefit but did not manage to borrow sufficiently before she eventually got evicted for arrears.

“We went into bed and breakfast as a result of the landlord wanting possession of his property back. The reason for that is because the housing benefit aspect of it wasn't sorted out properly... Each time there has been a problem with housing benefit my way of resolving it was borrowing money from somewhere, anywhere, or to take a job on the side and work all the hours that God could give while claiming income support and pay the rent that way, to make sure that we didn't have to keep moving every six months. But on this occasion, I had borrowed every single available place I could to keep us in accommodation. There was just nowhere else I could go, so that's how we ended up in the situation of going into bed and breakfast... By the time they actually paid the housing benefit I had already moved out. The possession proceedings had already been taken. I was already gone. I had been evicted by the bailiffs.” (Homeless household)

5.2.3. *Return from abroad*

One household became homeless after returning from Ireland where they had gone to look after an elderly relative. When they realised that they would not be able to get social rented housing in Ireland, the family came back to England.

“Before we went back to Ireland we were living in a Council house. I was ten years in it and then I went back to Ireland... I would’ve stayed in Ireland but we couldn’t get a house to live in. They told me straight I wasn’t going to get a house. So I came back because I knew they wouldn’t let you sleep on the street here. You might have to wait and wait but I knew that we would get a place in the long run. That’s why I came back.” (Homeless household)

Again, interviews with the Irish voluntary sector confirmed that homelessness resulting from moving from one area to another, or from Ireland to England, was not uncommon amongst the Irish population and, especially, in the travellers community.

“You find that because there is population of travellers amongst the Irish, so they move around and they’re more likely to become homeless as a result. Some try to go back to Ireland, sometimes to see relatives or because they think they can resettle there, but things don’t work out and they come back.” (Voluntary organisation)

“The thing is, because Ireland and the UK are so close geographically, you find that homelessness is very much tied up to what goes on in both countries. Like over the past 10 years, you had the Celtic tiger basically, Ireland was prospering, so more people from here went back there and fewer Irish people came to England. Now the situation in Ireland is less good so the reverse trend could well be happening. There’s a lot of back and forth between the two.” (Voluntary organisation)

5.2.4. *Accommodation tied to employment*

Finally, there was also a case where a mother lost the accommodation tied to her job working in a pub. There is no way of assessing how common such a situation may be in the Irish community. No voluntary organisations interviewed mentioned this as a cause of homelessness, so it may be a rare occurrence.

“I have run pubs for the years and with that comes tied accommodation. I became homeless when I was sacked because I wouldn’t endure sexual harassment by his assistant manager on a Polish member of staff that I had. I stood up for the Polish girl and I lost my job and my house in one go.” (Homeless person)

5.2.5. Repeat homelessness

A particular feature of the Irish community is the prevalence of repeat homelessness. The recurrence of homelessness was consistently highlighted by the Irish voluntary sector as well. Whether this is due to domestic violence, to financial difficulties, to short-hold tenancies, to landlords evicting tenants that request improvements to their accommodation, to mental illness, to alcohol problems or to racial harassment in housing, it is clear that many Irish people become repeatedly homeless. This highlights the fact that households need to be provided with appropriate support and advice in order to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

5.3. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

Many statutory homeless Irish households were aware of the system of housing provisions and of existing homelessness services. Having been homeless themselves on a number of occasions, knowing other Irish people who were either living in housing associations or council accommodation, and having had sustained dealings with both statutory and voluntary service providers, they were familiar with services.

“Well I was quite lucky that I had my sister because she has been through this.”
(Homeless household)

“I knew because every now and again I go into places like Citizens Advice Bureaux or One Stop Shops, and I read up on what the latest stuff is in the area about whatever it is. So just through reading about the different facilities available in ... that I knew that if you were facing eviction, this is where you went to gain accommodation.”
(Homeless household)

However, organisations working on behalf of the Irish community reported that their clients were “simply not aware of their rights”, that they did not get help when they were clearly “vulnerable” and should “definitely be deemed in priority need”, that they were getting evicted when they did not need to be. Some said that “unlawful decisions” were being made regularly by councils but remained unchallenged by Irish people until the latter approached them for advice, information and support.

5.4. Pathways through services

The pathways through homelessness services were very specific, with a large proportion of households having sought the help of Irish voluntary organisations. Indeed, the Irish community was the only one where the voluntary sector played a crucial role as advisors, information providers and advocates on behalf of clients. According to representatives of the Irish voluntary sector, a large proportion of Irish people simply don’t access mainstream services.

“A big issue with the Irish is that they just traditionally don’t access services. There is again this kind of feeling of not wanting to trouble anybody, or feeling that they won’t be treated seriously, or that they don’t deserve it. They feel that it’s best that they’ll live with

their problems rather than accessing what is out there. So there's a lot of work needed in making Irish people more aware of their rights and entitlements. We're talking about people who've been here for years contributing, you know." (Voluntary organisation)

Instead, Irish people tend to favour their "own people" and to turn to the local community groups.

"So most of them will come through an Irish organisation, a voluntary group. They don't often feel comfortable approaching the council, they don't know their rights, they just stumble across Irish organisations for a number of different needs and then someone there picks up on their housing or homelessness problems and they get referred." (Voluntary organisation)

"You'll find a lot of our clients don't approach local authorities because they've either had a bad experience in the past, they don't know their rights, they find the big official building off-putting, etc. They just feel so much more comfortable with other Irish people. They feel understood and respected. That's what they tell us anyway." (Voluntary organisation)

This reliance on the Irish voluntary sector may well be an outcome of the fact that the data collection for this community took place in a single borough where the Irish voluntary sector seemed extremely organised and proficient. The depth of knowledge about the Irish community and the expertise about the homelessness legislation were exemplary. Nevertheless, it was striking to hear from the subjects how extensively they had made use of the Irish voluntary sector, and how satisfied they were of their dealings with Irish organisations.

"Four people in Homeless Housing Office tried to put me off. I can understand why they do because the demand for housing in London is enormous, but if I hadn't been able to ring my support worker [community group] and their solicitor, I don't know what I would have done. I know for sure I would be on the streets now." (Homeless household)

"Well they [Irish community group] knew the rules and regulations and they knew where to send you and they knew how to help you out. They would say no, this is your entitlement and you're entitled to this and this and this because I wouldn't have known. I mean it is an area of expertise. When you have problems in housing unless you know the rules and regulations, you just don't know where to turn." (Homeless household)

"They've been there for me and my kids. They gave us advice. They phoned up people for me. They made sure I got myself sorted out with my rent every month because you get into housing benefit situations and it's hard for me, I cannot cope with that... If I have a problem with anything, I ring them up and they say to me, come down tomorrow, straightaway they will act on the situation for me." (Homeless household)

The emotional support was as much appreciated as the technical or legal expertise. For people threatened with homelessness and going through serious financial and emotional crises, finding someone who "listens", "makes you feel normal again" and "treats you like a human being" is as precious as practical help.

“First of all, they make you feel welcome. They ask you about your money, what’s going on and problems and then you explain and straightaway they can pick up from there. They sit you down, talk to you, just like you’re family. So at the end of the day without them I’d be lost. They give you a place to go to, to be relaxed and to feel that they’re at home. I mean, that’s everything in life, someone to be there for you.”
(Homeless household)

The data suggest that this unique pathway through services is largely explained by the general dissatisfaction Irish people feel in relation to mainstream services and, in particular, by their widespread experience of discrimination (see below). Both factors probably account for the tendency of Irish people to turn to their own community for help.

5.5. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

Irish people stand out for their dissatisfaction with statutory homelessness services. Seven out of eight people interviewed were generally dissatisfied with the information and advice they received from their Council, despite having no particular problems either understanding the information given to them or communicating their own circumstances to homelessness officers. They found staff unhelpful and unfriendly. Criticisms centred on the following issues:

- **Poor information and advice**

Much of the discontent expressed by Irish households centred on the poverty of information and advice they received from statutory homelessness services. Many felt that the information given was inappropriate and, in some cases, unlawful.

“The people that deal with your enquiries should know what they’re talking about but they don’t, and they will tell you something that can be blatantly untrue or unlawful. Now I get them to write down everything they say. Sure enough there will come an occasion when you will be able to use that. That’s how I was able to win two different cases against them. (Homeless household)

“They are the most incompetent, obtuse people I have seen in my life. I haven’t got words to describe them.” (Homeless household)

“Half of them don’t even know what they’re talking about. They tell you every story under the sun to get rid of you. You only find out what you’re entitled to when you come to places like [this community group]. (Homeless household)

They also felt that the advice, information and help they received were dictated by economic and housing considerations amongst Council staff rather than by their own needs.

“They learn what the party line is, or the borough’s line is, and they hand it out to whoever comes in, regardless of their circumstances.” (Homeless household)

- **Poor customer service**

Another important source of frustration and discontent was the attitude of housing officers. They were thought to be rude, dismissive, and to lack basic compassion. Recurrent expressions used to describe their attitude were “they don’t care”, “they don’t want to know”.

“Some were extremely nice, helpful and very sympathetic. I’ve dealt with others up there that I wouldn’t put them in a barn or looking after an animal, they are so ignorant and rude, unhelpful, uncouth. They definitely do not understand what customer service is. That just completely escapes them.” (Homeless household)

“When you go up there, you are completely degraded and that’s how they make you feel. You are less than human and I don’t think anybody has the right to do that to anybody regardless of nationality, creed, colour, they have no right.” (Homeless household)

“The system is absolutely diabolical and the way that they’re treating people and they just tramp them into the ground. They don’t care, they don’t want to know.” (Homeless household)

The dissatisfaction with services may be partly due to the fact that all interviews with Irish homeless households took place in one London borough – a local authority operating under severe housing constraints – whose services were also criticised by other ethnic minority homeless households.

- **Discrimination**

Of all the ethnic minority communities (excluding refugees) investigated in this study, the Irish reported the greatest amount of discrimination, both in society in general and in housing and homelessness services in particular.

Nearly every interviewee discussed at length instances of discrimination they had suffered since arriving in England. Stereotypes of Irish people as uneducated, alcoholic people engaged in terrorist activities had been, and continued to be, invoked in relation to them.

“You are seen as either a potential terrorist, or somebody who had no education, or somebody that was likely to hang out on a street corner drinking. That is the general sort of attitude. It’s changed to the extent that people don’t say it so much, but the same thoughts are still there. If you are ever in a situation where people are being nasty to you for whatever reason it is, they’ll still drag up those things, you know. Who have you bombed recently? Or go and have another pint. Or we’re called a paddy wag and so on.” (Homeless household)

“I was standing in a queue and I was called a murdering bitch. I was totally flummoxed. My mum told me that in the 50’s over here when she came over there were signs in the window saying no Irish, no blacks, no darks and people are doing the same thing to that now. They are just not putting the signs up.” (Homeless household)

In fact, one Irish homeless family was forced to vacate a temporary accommodation because of racial harassment.

“We got temporary accommodation but we had to be moved out of that cos I was being racially harassed by a young group that was upstairs.” (Homeless household)

Such discrimination was also experienced in housing and homelessness services, with applicants sometimes being openly insulted because of their ethnic/national origin.

“I told them once, I was so angry with them, I went I’m Irish, I am a human being and you should be there to help me instead of treating me like a dog.” (Homeless household)

“I was actually called an Irish bitch by one of the Housing people. A Black person called me an Irish bitch.” (Homeless household)

“One of them actually told me to go back to Northern Ireland... He was saying that I was intentionally homeless because I had left my country like seven, eight years before, but that’s just plain untrue. They can’t say that.” (Homeless household)

Organisations working with Irish people all reported that statutory services in general had very limited understanding of Irish culture and little knowledge about the specific needs of Irish people. They also mentioned that travellers in particular were suffering extremely high levels of discrimination.

“You can imagine, if the Irish in general are suffering, what it’s like for the travelling community. They are a forgotten community, you know, in terms of accessing education, health, all services really. They’re treated like they’re completely horrible people and they’re completely discriminated against. It’s quite a complex issue for them because their needs are slightly different but because they choose to live in a certain way that’s developed over many, many years and centuries, you know, it’s gone through family after family but it’s not recognised and it’s certainly not catered for.” (Voluntary organisation)

Despite widespread experiences of discrimination and anti-Irish harassment, it was often difficult for victims to report any instance of racial discrimination to relevant organisations because of the latter’s assumption that racism can only be targeted at people whose skin colour is not white.

“A lot of people don’t recognise the fact that the Irish are still suffering a lot of discrimination, anti-Irish harassment. The vast majority of Irish people have a white face, you know, and racism was always thought about as a black and white issue, so it’s hard to convince people that the Irish may be suffering from racial discrimination and harassment.... We’re still battling with some boroughs just to have them recognise that they have a large Irish population living in their borough.” (Voluntary organisation)

“A lot of Irish people are frightened to come forward because they don’t think it’s going to be taken seriously. They assume that if they report racist issues, like someone calling them a f***ing Paddy or whatever, that they’d ignore them and tell them, you know, that is just how people view the Irish here, just live with it.” (Homeless household)

“Well you see, a black person can stand in front of you and say you are discriminating against me because of my colour, but being Irish it’s harder for the discrimination to be proved because we’re the same colour. The White person stands in front of me and is discriminating against me. I can’t say it’s because of my colour. It’s because of my accent, it’s because of where I come from, of what they perceive as my beliefs.” (Homeless household)

5.6. Conclusions

Relatively little is known about the Irish community in England. However, existing data show that this community experiences widespread social exclusion, poverty and discrimination. According to Irish voluntary organisations, the greatest needs are to be found amongst older, single men who migrated to England some decades ago in search of work. These men have multiple needs and are highly vulnerable.

The main causes of statutory homelessness uncovered in the Irish population were domestic violence and financial difficulties. Together, these accounted for three-quarters of the cases of homelessness in the sample. The cultural and economic factors that had kept many Irish women and children in abusive domestic situations are beginning to lose their hold, as less conservative social norms and greater prosperity enable more Irish women to leave. Financial difficulties linked to unemployment, low income, increases in private rents, long-term illness and problems with housing benefit were also common, leading to rent arrears and, eventually, to evictions by either social or private landlords.

According to the Irish voluntary sector, despite relative familiarity with the statutory sector, Irish people do not access homelessness services. Instead, they rely extensively on the voluntary sector. Indeed, the research found that a large proportion of households had sought the advice and support of Irish voluntary organisations. This pathway through services is unique to the Irish community. It is partly linked to the exceptional quality of voluntary sector services in the local authority area investigated. But it is also the result of some general dissatisfaction with the council’s homelessness services and of the widespread discrimination experienced by Irish people. Indeed, of all the ethnic minority groups interviewed in the study, Irish people were the most likely to be dissatisfied with statutory homelessness services. Seven of eight people interviewed were unhappy with the services they received from their Council, despite having no particular problems either understanding the information given to them or communicating their own circumstances to homelessness officers. They reported many instances of poor information and advice, of poor customer service and of discriminatory treatment.

6.0. HOMELESSNESS IN THE REFUGEE POPULATION

6.1. National profile of the refugee population

Defining the refugee¹ population for research purposes is fraught with difficulties. Refugees come from a range of different countries. The main nationalities of refugees at any point in time change quickly in response to shifting international relations and domestic crises abroad. The ethnic group of most refugees, when recorded for monitoring purposes, often reveals little about people's culture and life circumstances. Moreover, there is no objective criterion to determine when one ceases to be a refugee and joins the ranks of the more established ethnic minority populations. Therefore, the economic and social position, experiences and needs of refugees remain largely unknown.

While there is no comprehensive information on the number of refugees living in the UK, data on asylum seekers published by the Home Office give some indication about the number and origins of those who have been accepted in the past and those who will eventually become refugees. Overall, the number of applications for asylum have declined significantly from nearly 86,000 in 2002 to around 34,000 in 2004 (see Table 7).

The composition and profile of the refugee population inevitably changes rapidly. Over recent years, large groups of refugees have come from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, China, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Somalia, Zimbabwe and the Indian sub-continent, reflecting unrest in these regions. The main countries from which applications were received in the first quarter of 2005 are listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Top ten applicant nationalities (First quarter, 2005)

Nationalities	First Quarter 2005
Iran	850
Iraq	525
Somalia	495
China	430
Dem. Rep. of Congo	335
Pakistan	320
India	310
Afghanistan	285
Sudan	275
Eritrea	265
Other nationalities	2,930
Total	7,015

Note: Data may not sum due to rounding

Source: Home Office

1 *Asylum seekers* are people who have fled their home country and applied for asylum in another, while *refugees* are people who, in accordance with the definition laid out in the 1951 Geneva Convention, have proved a well-founded fear of persecution and have been given indefinite leave to remain in the country. Thus, asylum seekers whose asylum claims are successful are accepted as refugees and are granted indefinite or exceptional leave to remain.

Although those who are deemed destitute are provided with accommodation and/or subsistence by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) while their application is being processed, it is clear that the economic situation of refugees is largely dependent on the resources they bring with them as they migrate. For many, this can mean severe poverty. Asylum seekers are normally prevented by law from seeking employment for the first six months of their stay in the UK and they receive 70% of the Income Support to which other families are entitled. A recent survey of organisations working with asylum seekers established that a large proportion of asylum seekers experience hunger, cannot afford to buy clothes or shoes, and are not able to maintain good health (Oxfam & Refugee Council, 2002). This suggests that asylum seekers live in greater poverty than the general population and are more likely to be in a situation of near complete economic dependency on the state when they eventually become accepted as refugees (Garvie, 2001).

In a number of small scale studies, researchers (Barclay *et al*, 2003; Garvie, 2001; Zetter & Pearl, 1999) have repeatedly emphasized a number of themes in relation to the life conditions of refugees in the UK: the diversity of the refugee population in terms of its ethnic cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, skills, experiences and aspirations; the fact that all refugees have left their country, their home, their family and friends, the security of a world which they knew and understood; the psychological scars left on many refugees by oppression, torture, imprisonment, rape and other traumatic experiences; the negative media and public response to their presence in the UK; the common experiences created by the dispersal system operated by NASS; and the widespread difficulties many refugees face in accessing social, health and housing services.

6.2. Causes of homelessness

6.2.1. Loss of NASS accommodation

The single most common trigger of statutory homelessness amongst refugees was the loss of NASS accommodation and/or support upon being granted leave to remain: 14 out of 16 refugee households in the sample became homeless when they lost their NASS accommodation. The following accounts are representative of the experiences described by refugees.

“We are from Iraq. We are homeless. We had NASS accommodation in Middlesbrough but then we got allowance to stay in the UK so we should leave there straight away because another organisation now look after us. We have nowhere to go. We come south, it's better. They say we should apply to the house council and we were put in a bed and breakfast. Then we move here in the hostel. We are waiting for another temporary accommodation.” (Iraqi refugee homeless household)

“We got a letter and we have to leave NASS. They give refugee status but take everything away. We think we can live better now but problems just start because we don't know where to go and we have no money and no jobs. My English is not good enough to get job. They say we can have council house for a little time and they put us here.” (Somali refugee homeless household)

Local authorities and other organisations working with refugees confirmed that loss of NASS is the main cause of homelessness amongst refugees.

“With refugees, the big issue is housing and homelessness. The number one cause of homelessness is NASS. That’s the big one.” (Local authority)

“In some areas, that’s becoming the biggest cause of homelessness, people being turned down at the end of the NASS system. Local authorities have got to look at that and think how can they work with NASS to prevent that happening.” (Voluntary organisation)

“Generally, homelessness is always exacerbated and is often caused by a crisis, by some crisis in someone’s life... In the case of refugees, the crisis is suddenly being just thrown out of NASS and suddenly being on your own with no resources to cope.” (Voluntary organisation)

Although they are entitled to 28 days notice to leave NASS accommodation, many refugees complained that they were given much less time. This is a cause of great distress amongst refugees and concern in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

“They say we have 28 days but it’s a lie. We are just kicked out [of NASS] after 8 days. Their papers, their letters are mixed up and we don’t know what is happening to us. How you supposed to find a place in a week? How you supposed to get your life ok in a week? Then of course we are homeless.” (Sierra Leone refugee household)

“I mean giving someone 28 days to resettlement, it’s an impossible task, you know? And when I say 28 days, our biggest problem is that it’s not really 28 days. It can be as little as seven days. This happens quite a lot.” (Local authority)

Most other known risk factors and triggers of homelessness (apart from mental health problems, racial harassment and, broadly speaking, social exclusion) seem largely absent from the experiences of refugees.

“With the refugee populations, there is poverty and unemployment. Some have disabilities and mental health difficulties. There is a lot of racial harassment as well, but by far, by far the main cause of homelessness has to do with their status as refugees. It’s more the status that’s affecting these people in terms of homelessness. The core problem is obtaining of the refugee status with nothing to fall back on.” (Voluntary organisation)

The statutory and voluntary sectors were unanimous in their criticism of both the dispersal policy operated by NASS and the many administrative problems NASS encountered in the planning and delivery of its services (see also CAB, 2002; Robinson *et al*, 2003). They argued that the system was structurally flawed for a number of reasons:

- **The separation of services for the general and the asylum-seeking populations**

Many were critical of the dual system in operation. Discontent centred on the fact that separate provisions made it difficult for asylum seekers to get familiar with mainstream social and welfare provisions.

“I’d say the biggest reason is that there’s now a completely different social system for people who are asylum seekers... Since homeless refugees or homeless asylum seekers have been taken out of the mainstream system and been subject to NASS, it’s made it near impossible for them to become autonomous.” (Voluntary organisation)

- **The all encompassing nature of NASS provisions**

NASS is perceived as a total institution exercising control over every aspect of asylum seekers’ lives, thereby ill-preparing them for life after NASS, when they are accepted as refugees and granted leave to remain.

“NASS is so institutionalised. You have no choice over where you’re housed, over who you share your house with. Everything is provided for you, all your utility bills are paid, you don’t have to arrange those kinds of things and you’re just put in this system that’s very disempowering. You’re in this completely separate system and you’re very unlikely to understand how British systems and housing provision and welfare provision work anyway and then all of a sudden, often within the space of literally days, you’re being evicted from that system and you’ve suddenly got to understand how the mainstream system works. That’s just totally unrealistic.” (Voluntary organisation)

Despite these concerns, many interviewees felt that the extent of refugee homelessness could be reduced and the experience of homelessness improved if basic administrative problems were recognised and addressed. The problems most frequently mentioned pertained to the lack of transitional arrangements for refugees leaving NASS and entering mainstream welfare and housing provisions.

- **The lack of transitional arrangements**

Those working with refugees consistently argued that asylum seekers were not informed of their entitlements and of the social welfare system until they were accepted as refugees, when, they felt, it was often too late.

“The problem is that the termination of NASS is not systematic, not structured. It depends whether one is lucky enough to get wind of the existence of certain service providers and where they are located, and then one has the initiative and the capability to make things work. The management of the transitional phase is absolutely crucial. How it is handled can provide most of the answers to the question of refugee homelessness.” (Voluntary organisation)

“The big problem is that they [the Government] start thinking about people’s integration once people are recognised as refugees... So there is no planning at all, no forward thinking given to how people are going to cope after NASS.” (Voluntary organisation)

“The transition, the lack of move on advice is one of the big gaps. It’s not just individual agencies. There is no coordination to help people make that transition and actually integrate successfully.” (Local authority)

All interviews with relevant subjects stressed the importance of putting in place better transitional arrangements, including detailed information packages about local, regional and national services (e.g. health, housing, educational, employment, cultural, legal) likely to be used by refugees, and a systematic and comprehensive “exit interview” as refugees leave their NASS accommodation which would assess any unmet support needs.

● **Administrative problems**

Both the refugees themselves and those working on their behalf are critical of the ways in which NASS is administered. Problems ranged from “never being able to get hold of NASS people”, to poor casework where “you have to repeat your story again and again because no one seems to remember what you already told them ten times”.

Following the termination of NASS accommodation, there also seemed to be frequent delays in obtaining National Insurance numbers. This implied delays in getting a range of benefits that are reliant on having a proper National Insurance number.

“We have got a problem with child benefit. We applied for child benefit, with my wife’s name, in February I think. Two weeks ago we heard that, cos she hasn’t got National Insurance Number, that’s why we can’t get benefits. But the problem is that, we have got another problem because the Home Office made a mistake with the date on a letter. My solicitor said it’s very important, it is a very important document to show the social security to get the national insurance number. She [the solicitor] has written a letter to the Home Office to ask. They are going to send but this is just a simple thing, it is not difficult, but she says it will take Home Office months. So we have no money for the child.” (Iraqi refugee homeless household)

Since the interviews for this research were completed, many of the issues outlined above are now being addressed through SUNRISE (Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services) – the key delivery mechanism for the Home Office refugee integration strategy that was launched in March 2005.

6.2.2. Racial harassment

One refugee household was made homeless because of sustained racial harassment in the permanent council accommodation in which they lived.

“Other tenants were threatening us. They broke our windows and stole our things. My son got punched in the head. That’s when we decided we had to go. We were so afraid. We did not want to go out, we could not do our shopping... The Council were very good. They found another place for us.” (Somali refugee homeless household)

Although racial harassment was the cause of homelessness in only one case in this study, it is a common experience amongst asylum seekers and refugees.

“We were happy we could stay in UK, but we didn’t expect how bad some people can be to refugees. We expected tolerance... I think it [harassment] continues because nobody does anything against it.” (Iraqi refugee homeless household)

“Sometimes, there’s actually some young men, they throw bricks, they broke the window and I am afraid a little bit in this area. Not everybody, but some people don’t want refugees near them.” (Somali refugee homeless household)

“[I was robbed twice. It happens to all the people there. Sometimes teenagers are breaking into houses, mostly refugees and asylum seekers houses. They did it to an Angolan friend of mine last week. Somalis get it all the time. They [the teenagers] see that a cooker or a sofa, you know, stuff, came into the house and they come and take it. I’ve seen the same two guys more than four times. I have been to the police but they say I mustn’t talk about it, I mustn’t show that I know them otherwise they might do something wrong to me... but [the police] didn’t do anything to them.” (Zimbabwean refugee homeless household)

Such virulent racial harassment and violence were only found against refugees. In this small sample, the Somali population seemed to be the object of the most sustained racist campaign of all the refugee groups.

It is worth noting that many refugees spontaneously discussed the poor quality of response they had from service providers (mainly the Council and the police) when they contacted them, as well as the fact that they did not approach them because they thought they would either be ineffectual or that any complaints would jeopardise their future accommodation.

6.2.3. Mental illness

Mental illness is known to affect a large proportion of refugees (Carey Wood *et al*, 1995; Karmi, 1998; Silove *et al*, 1997), both as a result of the traumatic experiences in their country of origins and because of the hostile reception, stresses, and lack of care and social support which they encounter in the UK.

None of the refugee households in the sample became homeless because of their mental health difficulties. Yet, many had undergone extremely traumatic experiences, such as rape, torture and the assassination of immediate family members for their political views. Many needed extensive support to deal with these issues, but they did not always acknowledge their needs in that respect. In this context, it is particularly important that local authorities

should be extremely sensitive and proactive in assessing the “vulnerability” of refugees. Voluntary sector organisations recurrently argue that many refugees are falling through the net, despite serious mental health needs (see below).

6.3. Unrecorded homelessness and housing need

The issue of “hidden” or unrecorded homelessness and housing need has been regularly highlighted in the literature on homelessness amongst ethnic minorities (Hendessi *et al*, 1995; Julienne, 1998; Pleace & Quilgars, 1996; Sodhi *et al*, 2001). This literature suggests that there are a number of reasons why some ethnic minority homeless households do not approach their council for help. Organisations working with refugees confirmed this.

“The way the system works, I think, contributes to more hidden homelessness, in the sense that these chaps then go underground rather than being dispersed to an area where they don’t know anybody and they fear being attacked. They would rather just disappear from the books and never be seen again.” (Voluntary organisation)

“There are huge numbers [of refugees], we believe, who are disappearing into their communities, going underground.” (Voluntary organisation)

According to both statutory and voluntary service providers, the main factors accounting for the large scale of hidden homelessness and housing need amongst refugees are:

- **Lack of awareness of refugee-specific experiences in statutory services**

Refugee organisations argued that many refugee households who would be entitled to housing on grounds of “vulnerability” due to mental health difficulties are “falling through the net”. There is an urgent need for greater recognition of the mental health difficulties and needs, as well as the political experiences and cultural backgrounds, of refugees. This can determine their housing outcome.

“There are lots of mental health issues, of course. But these people they don’t want to tell their stories again, because some are pretty horrific. And local authorities are very nonchalant about it. They think they only provide housing and they shouldn’t pry into people’s lives. We don’t need to know that they’ve been tortured for years, or the detail of that torture. I mean, if you don’t ask people that information, they won’t give it you, but that changes their entitlements completely because of their vulnerability. Local authorities should look much more carefully into the vulnerability of refugees.” (Voluntary organisation)

“It’s important to get across to refugees how the system works and that they should disclose traumas they have gone through or support needs they might have because if you are a childless person, it can make a difference to whether you’re actually offered housing, and secondly it should make a difference to the sort of housing that you’re given.” (Voluntary organisation)

- **Preference for own services**

Refugees themselves also express a preference for refugee and community-specific services. For cultural, religious and linguistic reasons, as well as for the wealth of informal information that may circulate through the refugee “grapevine”, they often prefer to turn to their own community for advice, information and support.

“When it comes to refugees, there’s a lot of hidden homelessness. They don’t want to go into a hostel, you see because people have different cultures and religion, and going into a hostel sometimes is not something that they want, they don’t want to live in that environment. They don’t know who they’re going to live with. They would rather sleep on their mate’s floor.” (Local authority)

“[Refugees] don’t always have good English and they are a bit fearful here, so they’re drawn to their own communities. So they miss out on a lot of what would be available to White English people, even if they might have greater needs.” (Voluntary organisation)

- **Fear of racial harassment in social and private rented housing**

The tendency to stay close to one’s community is exacerbated by the widespread experience of racial harassment both in NASS accommodation and in wider society. This breeds a fear of both social and private rented housing which decreases the likelihood of refugees approaching their council. They tend to stay with relatives, friends or community members for as long as possible.

“You have to understand what these people have been through. Now, a lot of them don’t want anything to do with the mainstream. They would rather stay in overcrowded, squalid conditions and sleep on the floor of the front room with people they know, than risk being beaten up by teenage thugs.” (Voluntary organisation)

- **Lack of knowledge of the system**

As is the case with most recent migrants, refugees have very limited knowledge of the workings of the British social, welfare and housing system. This, coupled with limited English in many cases, means that many refugees do not approach statutory services.

“When I got my [refugee] status, I did not know anything about finding my own place. I just knew I had to get out of NASS accommodation and go to the city council and look for accommodation, and when I went there they offered homeless accommodation so I took it.” (Zimbabwean refugee homeless household)

“Some know an awful lot about the British system but the overriding thing is that most people aren’t aware of how our system works and they need to be informed much earlier on. So there may be a lot of refugees that are statutory homeless but there are an awful lot more who should be recognised and provided for but aren’t.” (Local authority)

“Refugees have been kept in the dark about the system for as long as they were in NASS... Many that have a very legitimate claim will never get what they’re entitled to because they don’t know about the system here. So there is a lot of homelessness we don’t know about with refugees.” (Voluntary organisation)

- **Fear of officialdom**

Finally, refugee organisations stressed that their clients tend to be particularly wary of officialdom because of negative experiences encountered in their country of origin. This attitude transposes to the UK context and stops many from approaching officials (local authorities, the police, etc) or from disclosing personal information to them.

“A lot of people have a real fear or wariness about approaching anyone who might be related to the government because in a lot of countries a government official is someone who’s not to be trusted and who might use what you’re telling them, you know, to your disadvantage. So for some refugees it’s very difficult and in some cases even traumatic to approach the local council because there’s just this in-built wariness. So that’s another thing that is particular to refugees that means there may be more hidden homelessness there.” (Voluntary organisation)

6.4. Pathways through services

The pathways through services are related to:

- the quality of informal social support networks
- the advice refugees received while still in NASS accommodation
- the approach adopted by local authorities with respect to priority need and vulnerability (see section 7.2.4.)
- the issues discussed above in relation to unrecorded homelessness (section 6.3.)
- the range and quality of voluntary sector provisions in the local area

Most of the refugees we interviewed went straight to a local council when their NASS accommodation was withdrawn and did not rely on informal social support network for their accommodation. In that respect, their experiences may not be typical of the wider refugee population, many of whom (as discussed in section 6.3.) do not access statutory services and stay with family and friends to avoid being on the streets. In our sample, the refugees had been advised to contact their local council while they were still in NASS accommodation.

Refugees also tended to use other services in parallel with the statutory sector. Refugee and community organisations and, in the case of Muslims, mosques were frequently used to gather useful informal information and advice, as well as to retrieve a sense of community. This pattern was recognised by many service providers.

“We’re not getting as many refugees through our advice centres, even in the dispersal areas. People tend to go to refugee community organisations. That’s certainly what I’d do if I was a refugee. I’d go to my local English club or whatever where I felt I could trust the people, I could understand what they were telling me in my own cultural way, understand what the pitfalls are, pass on to me all the things, the information that’s not written down anywhere but it’s worth knowing. For refugees in particular, trust is a very big issue so I think they’d rather go to their own community.” (Voluntary organisation)

“Most refugees now are Muslims. We get people from Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan, Somalia so they turn to their mosques as well. The mosques are a very good help for refugees. They open their doors. They do it by individuals, so it’s not planned at a more strategic level, but they do look after asylum seekers and refugees.” (Voluntary organisation)

6.5. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

In general, refugees did not express many criticisms of their council’s homelessness services. Some refugee households found their local authorities supportive and helpful, and felt generally grateful for the care they received.

“I did not have any problem with the Council. I’m OK with papers. I keep my papers and files all by dates so I’m OK.” (Zimbabwean refugee homeless household)

“My son’s nursery called me and asked me, you know, we need to know your real address and this and that. So I went to Housing Options, I phoned them, I asked them, when am I going to get my accommodation? And they said all the time you have to have enough points, and I said but I’ve collected my points, I should have all my points. Why are you subtracting my points? They said, oh there was a technical fault, computer fault. So their technical fault has affected me for quite some time. If I didn’t come and ask them, I would still be last on their list... But I talked to the supervisor and he was quite understanding, you know, and he said, OK we’ll do something about it.” (Zimbabwean refugee homeless household)

“They [council staff] do listen. I mean there are other people so you can’t get 100% of their attention, but they do listen.” (Kosovan refugee homeless household)

There were clear examples of good practice and sustained support given to refugees in two local authorities. This made a very significant difference in the refugees’ experiences, with some blossoming in the care of statutory service providers.

“I am happy with the Council. They were good to me. I am ok living here. They are very good here. There’s a crèche for the children and a toy and book library... There is a breakfast club so that children have a good diet and they offer babysitting for two hours in the afternoon so we can go out and sort things out for the family... My social worker does everything for me. She helped with registering the children in school, with showing me the way around the city... She registered me with a GP and the GP referred me to mental health services. I didn’t know that I needed that before I went there. But now I don’t how I would have coped without it.” (Zimbabwean refugee homeless household)

Others were dissatisfied with most aspects of their dealings with the council, including the size, location and condition of their accommodation, the time they spent in their temporary accommodation, their communications with the council, the lack of support they received, etc. In some cases, they were also left with very serious unmet needs.

6.6. Conclusions

The vast majority of refugee households became homeless because of the sudden withdrawal of NASS support and/or accommodation when they were granted leave to remain. In local authorities located in dispersal areas, this was one of the main causes of homelessness overall. The statutory and voluntary sectors were unanimous in their criticism of the policy operated by NASS and of many administrative problems in the planning and delivery of statutory services for refugees. They argued that the system was structurally flawed for a number of reasons, including the separation of services for the general and the asylum-seeking populations; the all-encompassing nature of NASS provisions; the lack of transitional arrangements; and administrative issues such as problems with obtaining National Insurance numbers and the 28 day “period of grace”. Racial harassment and mental problems were also found to be part and parcel of the daily lives of many refugee households, but they were rarely the cause of their homelessness. Other known risk factors for homelessness were absent in the sample.

The statutory and voluntary sectors also highlighted the scale of unrecorded homelessness in the refugee populations. This, they argued, is due to a number of factors, including: the lack of awareness amongst local authority staff of the vulnerability of refugees; fear of racial harassment in social and private rented housing; lack of knowledge of the system of statutory provisions; and fear of officialdom amongst many refugees.

The pathways through services were related to: the advice refugees received while still in NASS accommodation; the approach adopted by local authorities to priority need and vulnerability; the issues discussed in relation to unrecorded homelessness; and the range and quality of voluntary sector provisions in the local area. But the study also shows that refugees tend to draw on many resources, such as refugee and community organisations, friends and relatives, and, in the case of Muslims, mosques.

Accounts of experiences with statutory homelessness services point to the radical difference good or bad provisions can make to the lives of homeless households. In some local authorities, refugees received excellent services and extensive support. In others, they were placed in unsuitable accommodation and left unsupported, sometimes despite serious unmet needs. It was also clear that, as most recent migrant communities, refugees felt generally grateful for the help they received and did not report difficulties. This should not be taken to indicate that there are no problems. In particular, local authorities need to be aware of, and proactive in relation to, the potential vulnerability of many refugee applicants.

7.0. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOMELESSNESS PROVISIONS FOR ETHNIC MINORITY CLIENTS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an analytical account of the homelessness services provided by nine local authorities. The aim of this chapter is to give a qualitative description of the variations existing across local authorities in their approaches to homelessness generally, as well as their provisions specifically for ethnic minority people. The emphasis is firmly placed on those dimensions likely to impact on the prevalence of homelessness amongst the ethnic minority populations as well as on the quality of services they receive.

It is worth reiterating here that the local authority areas in which the research took place tended to be large urban centres where there is a significant ethnic minority population. Many of those are located in NASS dispersal areas where the incoming refugee population has generated new and pressing needs. They are also areas in which shortages of affordable housing are frequent and, in some cases, have reached a critical level. These factors exert important pressures on both the supply and the demand for housing and homelessness services.

We should also stress that the interviews were conducted relatively soon after the introduction of the new homelessness legislation, before many local authorities had actually completed their Homelessness Strategies. The fieldwork also took place in the few months immediately following the implementation of the new Supporting People programme. Both factors impinge on the views and experiences reported by local authorities staff. Progress can be expected with the completion of the Homelessness Strategies and when Supporting People is more firmly established and running. The findings reported here therefore have to be understood in context.

7.2. Organisational cultures and approaches to homelessness

In this section, we discuss a number of dimensions along which local authorities can be differentiated. The discussion is descriptive and concerns general homelessness service provisions, rather than services specifically for ethnic minority people. It highlights relevant aspects of the organisational cultures of the nine local authorities participating in the study.

7.2.1. *Conceptions of homelessness*

There were two main conceptions of homelessness underpinning the services provided by local authorities. These largely implicit conceptions were deeply engrained and shaped most aspects of service planning and delivery.

Some local authorities saw homelessness as a housing problem and focused nearly exclusively on their “main accommodation duty” at the expense of advice and information services. They assumed that the role of statutory homelessness services is essentially to

provide people who are already homeless and eligible under the law with a secure and minimally adequate housing space. Tackling homelessness here remains a reactive activity. Local authorities that adopted this perspective were prone to argue that there was little they could do as long as the housing market, and in particular the supply of affordable social housing, remained unchanged.

“We just don’t have time to sit down with people and say, could we negotiate with your landlord? Have you applied for all the benefits that you need? Have you tried mediation with your neighbours? We’re trying to introduce all these things at the point of access but we first need to sort out the bricks and mortar.”

Other local authorities conceived of homelessness in much broader terms, in the spirit of the 2002 Homelessness Act and of recent Government policy (DETR, 2001b; DTLR, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). Local authorities that adopted this perspective were more likely to provide substantial information and advice to all applicants, even those who are not entitled to social housing. They were also more likely to engage in multi-agency work and to try to implement “joined-up” services focused on the total needs of homeless people.

“When people present, we make an interim assessment about whether they’re roofless or not. If they’re roofless, we operate a system where we interview people the same day. If they’re not roofless, we go through all sorts of options with them. We discuss mediation, housing benefits, relations with their landlords or their neighbours, we refer them to other agencies that might help, all sorts of stuff and then we operate a ‘homeless at home’ system... We think that’s a more efficient system because it deals with the situation before it gets to be a crisis and also we’re not using our temporary accommodation, which is expensive. We hold them in their current place, we try to do that for no longer than 28 days, until we can sort out some permanent housing.”

7.2.2. Homelessness services: Social services or business

In many ways, the views of service providers on access were linked to their perception of homelessness services either as social services or as business services. Those who felt that they were providing a social service were more concerned with ensuring the welfare of the applicants.

“I would say that you need to think, first and foremost, that you are providing a social service, rather than running a business. That’s the key to offering good service.”

“I think the most important thing is having a team who have a commitment to meeting people’s needs rather than being administrators whose main objective is to meet the Council’s own overall economic interests. There are too many people, particularly higher up in the hierarchy, who see their job as meeting the objectives of the local authority without regard to the legislation and without thinking about what people actually need.”

In many local authorities, concerns about limited resources meant that staff at all levels in the organisation's hierarchy developed a "culture of disbelief" in relation to applicants. This approach was widely evidenced in interviews with local authority staff. Interviews with ethnic minority homeless households also indicated that such views permeated services and impacted on their experiences.

7.2.3. Interpretation of the Homelessness Act

The organisational culture of each council had consequences in relation to their interpretation of the homelessness legislation. There were considerable variations across the nine local authorities in the ways in which they understood and applied the Act and the Code of Guidance. This state of affairs was recognised by all local authorities.

"It's a question of interpretation, basically, and every local authority has its own constraints and its own views on that. I mean 'priority need', it would be very easy to say anybody at risk of rough sleeping is in priority need because they're clearly vulnerable... Where do you draw the line? And how much do you draw the line based on actual need and how much based on what your statutory homeless services can pay for?"

When there is such scope for interpretation, there is also a danger that institutionally discriminatory biases can come into play. The following discussion highlights some of the ways in which discretion in the interpretation of the legislation may have implications for ethnic minority and refugee people.

a) Eligibility

Some local authorities adopted a very broad interpretation of the law in relation to most criteria for entitlement to accommodation. They described their own approach to eligibility, vulnerability and priority need as "liberal", "lenient" and "open-minded". More commonly, local authorities implicitly adopted a different stance on eligibility in relation to certain communities and to certain causes of homelessness. For instance, the fieldwork (interviews with ethnic minority households together with observations in a range of temporary accommodations) showed that the statutory response to domestic violence and forced marriages in the South Asian communities was generally good. Most women who approached their council alleging domestic violence were deemed eligible provided they signed a declaration. Moreover, domestic violence provisions were in the main geared towards meeting the holistic needs of abused women and children and women in refuges generally expressed greater satisfaction with provisions than in most other types of temporary accommodation. By contrast, prevention and response to those leaving institutional settings or with mental health needs were weaker.

Finally, there was much disquiet and confusion around the entitlements of "secondary migrants" or "EU nationals", i.e. those who first entered another European country as refugees and then migrated to the UK. Some local authorities had faced a sudden surge in applications from EU nationals and had devised their own local response to this situation. This response, as they freely admitted, was largely based on personal opinion and interpretation and therefore highly variable across local authorities. It was clear that local authorities needed further guidance on how to deal with these populations.

b) Priority need and vulnerability

The position adopted in relation to the priority need categories and to vulnerability in general was also highly variable. This was mostly manifest with respect to the refugee population. Some local authorities assumed that nearly all refugees were, by definition, vulnerable and in priority need.

“Yeah, we don’t dig too far into priority need. We tend to take the view that if someone is fleeing persecution from their home country then that, and they’re in another where they don’t have support networks, they don’t speak the language, we tend to just accept that those people are vulnerable.”

Others took no account of the fact that applicants were former asylum seekers in their homelessness decisions. This situation was widely deplored by community groups working with refugees. They argued that there is considerable vulnerability (physical and mental health problems) in these populations that is unrecognised and uncatered for. This is both because refugees themselves are often unwilling to disclose painful information that could however impact on their homelessness decision, and because local authorities are often unaware of the specific experiences of refugees and therefore fail to inquire into their potential needs.

c) Local connection

There was also a range of different interpretations of local connection, especially in relation to first generation migrants and refugees. Most discussions of local connection concerned whether refugees had to remain in their dispersal area when granted leave to remain, or whether they were allowed to approach any local authority’s homelessness services.

“A lot of local authorities have been quite stringent about local connection. They would just send people back to where they came from, especially refugees. But there was a ruling that NASS accommodation was not really an accommodation of choice, so you don’t really have a local connection to the area in which you were dispersed and you can go wherever you want in the country. But the culture of the local authorities has not always changed in line with the case law.”

Some local authorities have always disregarded the criterion of local connection in making their homelessness decisions. They took a position of principle against local connection, arguing that this could easily be discriminatory.

“We never implemented the case law directives on local connection which now, thankfully, have been overturned... They were asking us to be more rigid in terms of local connection and in terms of vulnerability with refugees. They wanted us to be more rigid, to erect some barriers up to people actually accessing services. But we’re of the opinion that no, we don’t want to do that. We think that could be institutionally racist and that it doesn’t fit the corporate mission of the Council, which is to allow everyone to enjoy the city. It may well have an effect on people in bed & breakfast, but we want our services to be driven by good practice for everyone, not just by targets.”

d) Intentionality

Perhaps the most difficult criterion to implement is that of intentionality. Most local authority staff interviewed felt it was nearly impossible to “make decisions on intentional homelessness stick”, to be “consistent”, to “avoid going to court over that”. They also recognised that the very ambiguity of the notion of intentionality created space for “personal opinions”, “value judgements” and “prejudices” to display themselves.

“With people that have serious drugs problems and are dealing and are into prostitution, which happens quite a lot in Black areas, it’s a hard one. Or with alcohol, you know... On the one hand, you could argue well, you knew what you were doing, but you could also say these are victims who actually have no real control over what’s going on. We need more guidance and staff training on intentionality because racist views, and personal opinions generally, can come in there very easily.”

“The first few Somali families that arrived were predominantly single-parent, female-led households. They were claiming that they were fleeing Holland because of domestic violence. But my view is that they are intentionally homeless. So the address from which they were homeless, or possibly not homeless, would be the permanent tenancies that they’d given up in other European countries. We should be finding out if it’s possible to send them back there.”

Despite such scope for interpretation, many local authorities felt that they had to start invoking the criterion of intentionality more often and more systematically.

7.2.4. Multi-agency working

As the Code of Guidance (ODPM, 2002) makes clear, the needs of some homeless people go much wider than accommodation and may call on the resources of a number of agencies other than the housing authority, such as social services departments, health authorities, education authorities, environmental health departments, voluntary sector organisations, prison and probations services and other referral agencies to produce a satisfactory outcome.

Some of the housing authorities interviewed had a strong culture of working in partnership. They argued at length for the merits of working together with other agencies at all stages of service planning and delivery of homelessness services. They felt that multi-agency working was extremely useful both at the strategic level and in delivering comprehensive and sensitive casework. They worked with a very broad range of partners (including representatives of the statutory, voluntary and private sectors as well as service users), had established fora for agencies to meet on a regular basis, had detailed protocols on how to work with other agencies. In fact, the extent to which housing authorities worked well in partnership with others was perhaps the most reliable measure of “good practice” in general, both from the objective standpoint of the researchers and from the perspective of the service providers themselves. Yet, not all local authorities were seriously engaged in multi-agency working. This has particularly negative consequences in relation to ethnic minority groups, as will be discussed below (see section 7.3.3.).

7.3. Variations in approaches to ethnic minority homelessness

7.3.1. *Knowledge and awareness of the specific needs of ethnic minority homeless households*

The level of knowledge and awareness of the specific needs of the local ethnic minority homeless population varied considerably across local authorities. Some could not identify any issues that might be particular to ethnic minority groups and in fact did not believe there may be anything specific to them.

“I don’t think there are particular patterns amongst ethnic minority people. I can’t see what these would be. It’s not been brought to my attention certainly.”

“In my experience, there’s not much difference at all between BME and White people. We provide a generic service.”

“The proportion of BME homeless people is pretty much the same as in the local population in general, so I think there’s no problem with them accessing services and being treated unfairly here.”

In most cases, however, local authority interviewees could identify at least some of the following issues in relation to the experiences and needs of ethnic minority communities: linguistic and communications problems and their impact on access; dietary needs linked to religious beliefs; the need for larger properties in South Asian groups; overcrowding and poor living conditions in South Asian and refugee households; preferences for certain geographical areas; problems following release from NASS accommodation for refugees; domestic violence and forced marriages amongst South Asian women; fear of discrimination and racial harassment; and the issue of unrecorded homelessness in all ethnic minority and refugee groups.

Such elements of information came mainly from anecdotal evidence rather than research. They did not cohere into a comprehensive understanding of ethnic minority homelessness and needs, but led to a widespread acknowledgement that local authorities were doing very little to meet the specific needs of ethnic minority homeless households and that they needed guidance on this issue.

“I don’t think we’ve targeted the BME stuff, to be honest. What we have are general services that we try to make sure that they cater for others as well, you know, for all comers. We do use things like translators, that kind of thing. But in terms of targeting, I just don’t think we’ve done it.”

“In terms of BME groups, I don’t know but I would imagine that we need to improve in all areas of our work.”

“We like to think that we are delivering a comprehensive service, but maybe it’s not meeting the needs of a large group of clients. Maybe the BMEs are left out. We should hold our hands up and say actually we don’t know a lot about BME homelessness. We recognise that the single homeless strategy was probably colour blind. We need guidance on that.”

Importantly, the level of awareness of ethnic minority homelessness was neither correlated to the size of local ethnic minority populations nor to the extent of statutory ethnic minority homelessness. Thus, local authorities with a large ethnic minority population were not always more aware of ethnic minority issues and did not necessarily have more developed services for ethnic minority households. They did, however, have a more diverse workforce, especially at front line level.

The key drivers of commitment to better ethnic minority services were: the overall organisational culture of particular local authorities (as discussed in detail above); the role of individual “leaders” personally dedicated to championing ethnic minority integration; the introduction of performance indicators and rewards for racial equality; and, in one case, mounting racial tension in the city having prompted the local authority to address exclusion and discrimination in housing. For instance:

“The more positive attitude we have here is down to... an individual who worked in the council who really did drive it through, made the links with all the external agencies, set up forums where people could meet, did the research and presented the case to the council and told the funders about the need for supported housing, for larger properties, for BME hostel provision, for multi-lingual advice services. I think it’s down to personalities, to people who’ve got the conviction and the motivation.”

“We’re going to push it through and look at how every aspect of our planning, provisions and delivery impacts on black and minority ethnic people. This should be integrated in all our thinking, not just as a little add on at the end of the planning process, not just as an after-thought, or to tick a box and claim you’ve done it. You have to take ownership and be prepared to implement the changes.”

“The Best Value review has been useful in identifying the need to consult more widely. And the Race Equality Scheme has highlighted issues for us. I mean these external drivers do force you to focus and to get down to it... The Homelessness Strategy does not have a legislative requirement for us to do an equalities assessment. Maybe that’s a missed opportunity.”

One local authority which had developed a coherent and strategic approach to ethnic minority homelessness had developed it in response to civil disturbances. With respect to housing, the discontent centred on the allocations process and the concentration of ethnic minority households in the poorest and most run-down areas of the city. The Council responded by introducing “choice-based lettings” (CBL) to eliminate the biases linked to the assumptions made by housing officers about the residential preferences of ethnic minority applicants.

“Before CBL was introduced, Asian people would go into a housing office and say, I’m interested in a three bed property. Probably with the best intentions, staff may not recommend to them places where there is no existing Asian community. So that was narrowing their frame of reference and their choices because they didn’t know about the whole range of properties available and about other areas that they might actually be interested to go to. With CBL, it’s all there that information, people can register and browse, they can see everything and make their own choices. People can decide to go somewhere where they wouldn’t have dreamed of before, because they simply didn’t know about it... “[Our choice-based lettings system] has been brilliant in terms of getting BME people on the waiting list and it has increased lettings into social housing, previously it was abysmal amongst the South Asian communities.”

The same Council also commissioned research to determine the barriers preventing the local ethnic minority population from accessing social rented housing. They advertised their services in local community centres and through Asian radio stations and newspapers, and translated information about their services in a range of languages. They developed supported housing and hostels for Asian clients. They are planning “cluster lettings” so that Asian families can move as a small group in traditionally White areas in relative safety and without losing their social and cultural networks.

To conclude, there was again much variation in the awareness and commitment to ethnic minority homelessness across local authorities. In this small sample, the empirical differences were partly related to the level of housing stress, with acute shortages in social housing having a detrimental impact on the quality of homelessness services (including advice and information). The differences were not linked to the size and composition of their ethnic minority population, nor to the extent of ethnic minority homelessness locally. Perhaps the main driver of good service was the personal commitment of individuals, which eventually filters through the entire organisation and shapes its culture, but external drivers, such as Best Value Reviews and the Race Equality Scheme, also played an important role in highlighting problems and priorities. To overcome the current variability and the reliance on individual dedication or on critical social unrest to bring about improvement, local authorities need to develop a strategic approach to meeting the needs of ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

7.3.2. Monitoring of ethnic minority homelessness

Ethnic monitoring is key to ensuring that homelessness services are provided equitably and that they are appropriate to the needs of all segments of the population. Ethnic monitoring helps identify gaps in service provisions and target resources in the most efficient and fair way possible. It provides a rational, evidence-based justification for the planning and delivery of services. By highlighting areas of possible discrimination, as well as by providing effective protection against unfounded allegations of racism, ethnic monitoring can also help local authorities avoid legal challenges. Yet, interviews with local authority staff revealed that in most areas the monitoring of services was ineffective, for a number of reasons.

a) Ethnic categories on P1E forms

The P1E forms completed by local authorities seek information on the self-declared ethnicity of homeless applicants. Authorities are expected to complete all sections of the P1E return, including the section on ethnicity which is on the first page.

ODPM have changed the P1E form and since April 2004 local authorities have been encouraged to provide a full breakdown based on the 16 Census (2001) categories where this is possible, or at least continue to distinguish the four main racial groupings (White, Black, Asian and Other) as was previously collected on the return.

There is also a need to tailor the ethnic categories to suit the specific characteristics of the local ethnic minority and refugee communities. Local authorities should also bear in mind that monitoring categories should be expanded according to local needs, provided they can be collapsed back into the recommended categories (See Appendix 3). Depending on the local population, it may be worth collecting information on the language the applicants feel most comfortable in (including any need for interpretation) and on their religion.

For those local authorities in which NASS disperses refugees, there is a clear case for recording, at least, the “country of birth” of refugees, in addition to their ethnicity. More detailed information can also be entered according to the information needs of particular councils. One good model is outlined below:

“For refugees, we use country of birth as well as ethnicity, which is a lot more detailed. Ethnicity is too generic. Then we have their first language. That’s crucial in terms of helping us develop our services to meet their needs. We also have their Home Office decision and the date they were granted leave to remain, we know where their NASS accommodation was and then their family composition. With that, it builds up quite a complex picture of where people come from and what their needs might be.... It allows me to argue for refugee workers speaking Kurdish. It allows me to identify that I have enough work for two full-time people. You can plan your services basically.”

b) Recognition of the need for ethnic monitoring

The majority of local authorities in the sample routinely collected information on ethnicity and found it necessary to do so. But not everyone was convinced of the value of ethnic monitoring for their particular local authority. Even in the areas with some of the largest ethnic minority population in England, many didn’t see the point of refining the list given on P1E forms. The assumption that the Council treated everybody fairly and did not have a racist culture was also invoked to justify poor ethnic record keeping.

c) Poor data entry

Poor data entry also undermined the value of ethnic monitoring. In some local authorities, a majority of applicants were of “unknown ethnicity”, while this category is meant to be used only in exceptional circumstances, i.e. when households explicitly refuse to disclose their ethnicity. This invalidates any effort at analysing the experiences and needs of ethnic minority

households. The reasons given for poor data entry included that fact that some communities (not just individuals) chose not to declare their ethnicity because they expected discriminatory treatment, the different interpretation of the meaning of the categories (with “unknown” reflecting the homelessness officer’s lack of knowledge of the origins of the applicant).

d) Lack of strategic use of ethnic monitoring data

The biggest problem by far was the lack of strategic use of the data actually collected on the ethnicity of homeless applicants in order to inform service planning and delivery. Generally, the culture of using administrative data flexibly as a management tool was not well developed in many local authorities. Thus, the very aim of monitoring – to identify needs and develop services accordingly – was often lost, as very few people had either the time or the inclination to put in place monitoring systems that would actually help inform management about local ethnic minority issues and needs.

The statistical treatment of data was extremely limited and often failed to provide the information needed to examine needs systematically. Typically, this person said:

“We’re very good at gathering stats here but we’re very bad about the reasons for gathering and about what we do with them. We gather loads of statistics but we don’t do it in a very smart way at the moment. It’s not particularly related to our information needs.”

As a result of underdeveloped monitoring systems, local authorities had a poor understanding of their ethnic minority population and of their use of homelessness services. They were generally unable to establish whether all local ethnic minority communities were treated fairly and recognised that the data collected needed further analysis to be intelligible. In most cases, local authorities were equally unable to provide evidence-based information on such crucial aspects of provisions as satisfaction with homelessness services, homelessness decisions made, causes of homelessness, type of accommodation offered, length of stay in temporary accommodation, satisfaction with temporary accommodation, outcome of re-housing, etc in relation to the ethnicity of applicants.

While there were serious monitoring problems in relation to the various dimensions of the main accommodation duty noted above, there was a near complete absence of information in relation to the take up of preventative measures by various ethnic minority groups. To our knowledge, no one kept a record of the information, advice and assistance provided to ethnic minority applicants which would allow councils to determine whether these varied systematically by ethnic groups and were adequate to their needs (although some councils did keep excellent records of the advice and information given to individual applicants and indeed put in writing a summary of that advice in a letter to the applicant). Given the new legal requirements to aim to prevent homelessness and to provide satisfactory support services to all applicants, this gap needs to be addressed urgently.

The lack of a strategic approach also meant that ethnic monitoring data were not used proactively. As a general rule, the data would only be looked into in response to problems being brought to the attention of senior management.

“The way I look at it, it’s there. If we think there’s a problem, we can check the facts and this is where anecdotal information is useful to point to possible problems. If somebody makes me aware of a problem, I can run the figures and look at them, but otherwise we don’t do it.”

This means that authorities are not in a position to know whether they are meeting the needs of ethnic minority communities in their area.

7.3.3. Partnership with the ethnic minority voluntary sector

The current study confirms the necessity of working in partnership with a range of organisations when seeking to prevent or to respond more adequately to homelessness amongst the ethnic minority populations. However, not all local authorities had extensive partnership working with the ethnic minority sector.

“There are not many or large successful black led RSLs in [the city]... How much of it is the responsibility of the Council, how we’ve worked with these organisations or failed to work with them, and how much it is the responsibility of the organisations themselves, it’s a hard one to call. But it’s an area where we recognise there is underperformance... The problem is that the Council can create an environment that fosters and helps these organisations to grow, but they do need to come from and be led by the communities themselves. There’s been a lack of push from the communities as well as possibly a lack of creating the right environment from the Council.”

According to those local authorities that work extensively with the ethnic minority voluntary sector, it is crucial to involve as broad a range of partners as possible. The particular partners most commonly involved with housing authorities in delivering homelessness services specifically for the ethnic minority populations were: ethnic minority-led housing associations, hostels and refuges; ethnic minority community groups; and Connexions. Some authorities also included faith groups, racial harassment support groups, and NASS in their working partnerships. In some rare cases, local authorities also worked with service users through different mechanisms, such as inviting user representatives to attend regular discussion fora or through community consultation on specific dimensions of service provisions.

“I think it’s very much about working with other people. There’s sort of three groups in it, isn’t there? There’s the statutory sector, there’s the voluntary sector and there’s the users of the service. And we need to take into account the views of all of those in how we provide services and we need to talk to people. I think the key to developing good services is working with other people and doing the multi-agency stuff.”

The main advantages of joint working with ethnic minority organisations include the fact that the ethnic minority voluntary sector has better knowledge, greater experience and expertise of the ethnic minority communities they represent and serve. This is summed up below:

“You’ve got to work with the voluntary sector. You can’t do the job without them because we [local authorities] are Jack and Jacqueline’s of all trades, and masters and mistresses of none, in the specialist BME way. So we can offer good general housing advice. We can give all the good options the specialist service might not be able to, but we wouldn’t be able to give the specialist support, and have the cultural understandings that that specialist agency has. Some clients don’t want to be associated with a BME specialist project, but some say: ‘I need people of my own culture for that support, mutual support and understanding’. So what we wanted to do was to offer choice and letting those options come from the community, and let the community drive it.”

“BME people should have the same range of options and quality of services as everyone else. But we don’t really know how to translate that principle into a reality. They [the BME voluntary sector] know their own communities inside out. We don’t. We have to listen to them to establish priorities, to set up more effective communications, to reach out to people, in every way, we are dependent on them.”

Other advantages noted by all interviewees (local authority staff, voluntary sector organisations and ethnic minority households) are that the ethnic minority voluntary sector is also more trusted by ethnic minority communities, that it is more flexible and can be more innovative in its service provisions, and that it is much more person-focused than housing services tend to be and can therefore offer individual packages of care.

However, local authorities also noted or invoked disadvantages to working with the ethnic minority voluntary sector. These pertained mainly to the fact that some organisations were under-developed and under-resourced, and to the fact that organisational and management structures were sometimes ill-equipped to deal with the administrative demands which working with statutory services entail. Thus, clashes in the cultures of the voluntary and statutory sectors sometimes occurred, and issues around capacity building remained a key problem.

Local authorities took different approaches to these difficulties. Some effectively ignored the ethnic minority voluntary sector. They recognised the need “in theory” of involving ethnic minority partners but mainly emphasised problems such as a lack of understanding of the organisational remit of homelessness services in the voluntary sector, the absence of suitable ethnic minority partners locally, the lack of willingness amongst the ethnic minority voluntary sector to act as partners, the lack of capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector, the time involved in developing and sustaining working relationships with outside agencies, etc. However, these comments seemed based on very little real effort at developing partnerships. For instance:

“BME housing associations by and large don’t want to play with us on this one. I know cos I’ve tried. I’ve phoned them up and phoned round them all and asked could we work with you, do you have stock that we could use as temporary accommodation? But they’re

not interested because there's so much demand for social housing that there's very little stuff that they have difficulty actually letting. So there wasn't much point in pushing further on that one."

Others used the ethnic minority voluntary sector almost as a substitute (rather than a complement) to their own services, thereby abrogating some of their responsibility towards ethnic minority clients. As a major ethnic minority-led housing association stated:

"Within the last four weeks, we've had four cases where a mainstream refuge refused to take a [South Asian] woman on simply because they had no workers to speak that language. That's not delegating. That's abrogating their duty. But they don't give the funding and backup to have that kind of attitude."

Other local authorities acknowledged the potential problems of working with organisations that have a different culture, but made concerted efforts to overcome difficulties and to reach out to the ethnic minority voluntary sector.

"The BME voluntary sector was very suspicious of the statutory sector. So we set up a joint working group on the basis that there was an equal balance of voluntary people and statutory people so that the voluntary people didn't feel they were outnumbered, etc. And the voluntary people came not as individuals from their projects but representing for us. So we had representatives from churches, mosques, Homelessness Forum, voluntary sector supported housing forum, that kind of thing. And we also set it up where we had two independent chairs, one from the statutory sector and one from the voluntary sector. And the idea for that was that the agenda wouldn't then get crowded by one or the other side. So I think you can address some of those things by how you actually structure your groups."

"It's awkward in a sense that we speak different languages. The council is very constrained from, you know, financial and policy issues and it's different to our system. We would bring to the table very much a perspective from the client, saying we should focus on the client's needs not on the bureaucratic issues that you may have. And that can be an interesting clash sometimes. I think we all learn and the services eventually improve everywhere."

The study suggests that involving the ethnic minority voluntary sector as a key partner in the planning and delivery of homelessness for ethnic minority people and refugees is crucial, but that partnerships have not yet reached their full potential in most authorities. Many local authorities seem unaware of the ethnic minority groups existing in their area and would need to profile those before further constructive work can take place. Greater support and long-term funding of the ethnic minority voluntary sector are necessary to build capacity. Explicit protocols are also important to determine the terms of the partnerships between organisations.

7.4. Conclusions

In terms of their organisational cultures, local authorities differed along the following dimensions: conceptions of homelessness; conceptions of homelessness services as "service" or "business"; interpretation of the Homelessness Legislation (in particular eligibility,

vulnerability and priority needs, intentionality, and local connection); and extent of multi-agency working. These factors were profoundly shaping the quality and range of homelessness service provision.

In relation to ethnic minority homelessness, local authorities lacked a strategic approach to meeting the needs of ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Local authorities had some knowledge of cultural factors specific to particular ethnic minority communities or sections of communities, but did not have a systematic, coherent and evidence-based understanding of the causes of ethnic minority homelessness and of the best ways of preventing, reducing or alleviating it. They recognised that little or no effort had been made at targeting these groups and some were aware that significant numbers of vulnerable ethnic minority people were not accessing services.

Local authorities differed in their commitment to ethnic monitoring as well as in their recording and monitoring practices. The lack of any strategic use of ethnic monitoring data was particularly noticeable and problematic. Although all local authorities were aware of the potential benefits of multi-agency working, partnerships with the ethnic minority voluntary sector and housing providers were rarely extensive. Similarly, consultation of ethnic minority communities and homelessness service users was hardly ever undertaken.

In those local authorities where there was some commitment to improving homelessness services for ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the key drivers of commitment were: the overall organisational culture of particular local authorities; the role of individual “leaders” in championing ethnic minority issues; the introduction of performance indicators; and critical cases having highlighted exclusion and discrimination and prompted the council into action. While there were many instances of good quality homelessness services in general, there were few instances of documented “good practice” to report in relation to ethnic minority homelessness in particular.

8.0. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. Conclusions

8.1.1. *Social exclusion*

All the ethnic minority communities experience social exclusion, poverty, discrimination. All are disproportionately affected by the lack of affordable housing, as these factors reduce their housing options. This largely accounts for the comparatively high rates of statutory homelessness found in all ethnic minority groups, since the latter have fewer resources to cope when personal or financial difficulties arise.

8.1.2. *Causes of homelessness common across ethnic minority groups*

A number of causes of homelessness were found across all ethnic minority groups (excluding refugees):

- **Pregnancy, family tensions, overcrowding and inability to accommodate**

Pregnancy was a common underlying reason for being accepted by local authorities as being homeless and in priority need, to the extent that it often led to family disputes, overcrowding, and parents or relatives being no longer willing or able to accommodate. In our sample, it was most commonly found amongst young, single Black Caribbean and Black African women.

- **Relationship breakdowns and domestic violence**

Relationship breakdowns and domestic violence were also found across all groups. However, in the South Asian and Irish communities, a majority of single female-headed households became homeless because of domestic violence. Relationship breakdowns were most commonly found in the Black African community.

- **Evictions by private landlords**

Evictions by private landlords were common across all groups and were thought by voluntary and community organisations to be increasing. They were usually linked to landlords wanting their property back for sale, higher rent, or personal use. They were sometimes prompted by tenants requesting home improvements that the landlords did not want to do. Evictions were rarely linked to rent arrears, and when they were, this was generally due to delays in obtaining Housing Benefit and to insufficient benefits. Most cases of evictions by private landlords were found in London.

8.1.3 *Causes of homelessness specific to each ethnic minority group*

- **The South Asian communities**

Domestic violence, forced marriages and family disputes were the main causes of homelessness amongst female-headed South Asian households. The particular patterns which domestic violence and family disputes assume in the South Asian communities differ from those in the general population, with the extended family sometimes being involved in the abuse and with parents to daughters abuse being relatively common (especially when young women were becoming pregnant or in cases of forced marriages). The most common cause of homelessness amongst South Asian couples with children was being forced by private landlords to leave their accommodation. Overcrowding was a very common contributing factor to homelessness, since many South Asian homeless households lived in three-generational households before becoming homeless.

- **The Black Caribbean community**

Pregnancy leading to family disputes and overcrowding and, therefore, to parents, relatives or friends no longer being able or willing to accommodate, was by far the most common cause of homelessness in the Black Caribbean community. This reflects the large numbers of female-headed households in the Black Caribbean population as a whole. Uniquely in the ethnic minority population, the Black Caribbean community counts many cases where homelessness was due multiple and complex problems related to child abuse, time in care, drug abuse, school exclusion, crime and mental health problems. This combination of problems cohered and generated difficulties in coping with everyday life. It often led to repeat homelessness. Other less common causes included being forced to leave private rented accommodation when landlords wanted their properties back, domestic violence, and financial difficulties leading to rent arrears.

- **The Black African population**

The Black African population is extremely diverse. Given the range of experiences and backgrounds characteristic of the Black African sample, no clear and distinctive pattern emerged with respect to their reasons for homelessness. The main causes identified were pregnancy, relationship breakdowns and overcrowding. Becoming pregnant was more common amongst those established in England and was associated with single motherhood. Amongst more recent migrants, there were more cases of relationship breakdowns and overcrowding. The breakdowns were partly linked to the difficulties of adapting in a new environment. Overcrowding was linked to the arrival of relatives from African countries or to the birth of children. It sometimes led to evictions by private landlords.

- **The Irish community**

The main causes of statutory homelessness in the Irish population were domestic violence and financial difficulties. Together, these accounted for three-quarters of the cases of homelessness. The cultural and economic factors that had kept many Irish women and children in abusive domestic situations are beginning to lose their hold, enabling more Irish women to leave. Financial difficulties linked to unemployment, low income, increases in private rents, long-term illness and problems with housing benefit were common, sometimes leading to rent arrears and, eventually, to evictions. Irish voluntary organisations also pointed to substantial unmet needs amongst single, older, vulnerable men who do not approach local authorities for help.

- **The refugee population**

Loss of NASS accommodation was the single most important cause of homelessness amongst refugees and, in some local authorities, the main cause of homelessness overall. Other issues affecting refugees are racial discrimination and harassment; difficulty communicating in English; lack of knowledge of services; unrecognised physical, mental and emotional needs; and social isolation and insecurity.

8.1.4. Infrequent or absent causes in the study

A number of factors did not appear with any frequency in the study as the “causes” of people’s current episode of statutory homelessness. Rent arrears rarely led to homelessness, except when linked to administrative problems beyond the client’s control, or to sudden and substantial private rent increases beyond the client’s means. Overcrowding, family disputes, drug or alcohol misuse, and time spent in institutions were often contributing factors, but were rarely the main reason for homelessness. Mental health difficulties were generally an outcome of domestic violence or of homelessness itself, rather than a cause. Return from abroad led to homelessness in a single case. Finally, no one had lost their permanent accommodation due to anti-social behaviour.

8.1.5. Repeat homelessness

Repeat homelessness seems relatively uncommon in ethnic minority communities. Although a significant proportion of the sample (22 of the 82 households interviewed) claimed that they had been homeless prior to this particular episode of homelessness, very few of them had been statutory homeless before. Many had stayed with family and friends for short periods at times of crisis, but very few had either approached their council, slept rough or self-referred in hostels and bed & breakfast accommodation. Except in the Black Caribbean community (where some had multiple and complex problems leading to chronic difficulties and recurrent episodes of homelessness) and in cases of domestic violence (outside of the South Asian communities), most households were settled and were experiencing their first episode of statutory homelessness at the time of the study.

8.1.6. Unrecorded homelessness and housing need

Both the voluntary and statutory sectors felt that many ethnic minority people in housing need or at risk of homelessness were not approaching statutory services for advice, information and assistance. They highlighted a number of issues which they thought affected the low take up of homelessness services (in relation to assumed needs) in ethnic minority communities. These included:

- The lack of a strategic approach to ethnic minority populations amongst local authorities, which means that provisions are not always meeting the needs of ethnic minority groups
- The fact that many ethnic minority households, especially recent migrants and those who do not speak English, lack basic knowledge about homelessness services and are not aware of their rights
- Communication problems, which mean that those who do not speak English are less likely to approach services or to receive the most adequate service
- Negative images of social housing, including fear of discrimination and harassment
- Cultural preferences for home ownership, especially in the South Asian communities
- Fear of being accommodated in unsuitable, “White” only areas, away from one’s own community and support network
- Distrust of officialdom, especially amongst refugees

8.1.7. Knowledge of statutory homelessness services

Knowledge of statutory homelessness services varied across the communities. Most groups had either basic or poor knowledge of services. The exceptions were most Black Caribbean and some Irish respondents, who had a much better knowledge of services.

8.1.8. Pathways through services

Good knowledge of statutory services amongst the Black Caribbean community resulted in most households going directly to statutory homelessness services. Amongst other communities, pathways were related to both familiarity with provisions and to causes of homelessness. In cases of domestic violence, pathways included contacting the police, GPs and going directly to refuges. Amongst South Asians and some Black Africans, there was a general reluctance to approach family and friends due to cultural factors. Community groups and religious organisations were practically never used by South Asians because of fears over confidentiality. This contrasts with the Irish community, which relied heavily on the voluntary sector. With respect to refugees, their pathways through services were largely related to the type of information received whilst in NASS accommodation.

8.1.9. Experiences of statutory homelessness services

Accounts of experiences with statutory services were generally very poor. The main areas of complaints were poor customer service, the bureaucratic nature of services, lack of consistency in advice, poor information about progress of their application, and being frequently moved between temporary accommodations, usually at short notice and without explanation. Such experiences were relayed across all groups, although South Asians and refugees were the least likely to raise objections.

8.1.10. Variations in local authority homelessness provisions

In terms of their organisational cultures, local authorities differed along the following dimensions:

- Conceptions of homelessness
- Conceptions of homelessness services as “service” or “business”
- Interpretation of the Homelessness Legislation
- Extent of multi-agency working

These factors were profoundly shaping the quality and range of homelessness service provision.

In relation to ethnic minority homelessness, local authorities did not have a strategic approach to meeting the needs of ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Local authorities had some knowledge of cultural factors specific to particular ethnic minority communities or sections of communities, but did not have a systematic, coherent and evidence-based understanding of the causes of ethnic minority homelessness and of the best ways of preventing, reducing or alleviating it. They recognised that little or no effort had been made at targeting these groups and that significant numbers of vulnerable ethnic minority people were not accessing services. They welcomed the research and were looking forward to guidance on how to approach ethnic minority homelessness.

Local authorities differed in their commitment to ethnic monitoring as well as in their recording and monitoring practices. The lack of any strategic use of ethnic monitoring data was particularly noticeable and problematic.

The key drivers of commitment to better services for ethnic minority people were:

- the overall organisational culture of particular local authorities
- the role of individual “leaders” in championing ethnic minority issues
- the introduction of performance indicators
- critical cases highlighting exclusion and discrimination

8.2. Recommendations

8.2.1. General recommendations for local authorities

On the basis of interviews with statutory and voluntary service providers as well as with ethnic minority homeless households, it is clear that local authorities need to develop a more strategic approach to address the concerns of ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A number of recommendations emerge to improve statutory homelessness provisions for ethnic minority groups. These recommendations are underpinned by four broad principles:

- services should reflect the multicultural diversity of contemporary British society
- the needs of ethnic minority homeless households should be recognised, addressed and properly funded
- the institutional response to identified needs should be evidence-based and targeted to meet the most pressing needs
- evidence, information, best practice and learning gains should be made easily available across all levels of government and other relevant organisations

In developing their Homelessness Strategy for ethnic minority communities, local authorities should:

- **Profile the local ethnic minority population**

Any attempt to provide good service depends on having some knowledge of potential service users. Using the latest Census data, literature, relevant local surveys and studies, and all available sources, local authorities need to develop a clear profile of their local ethnic minority population.

For instance, with respect to refugees (about whom very little is known), local authorities should work jointly with NASS regional officers, NASS accommodation contractors, the regional asylum seeker consortium, and voluntary organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees to map the needs of asylum seekers who are likely to be at risk of homelessness, if given leave to remain. Such joint work would provide information on the numbers of destitute households accommodated in the area under the 1999 Act, their country of origins, their household composition, their needs, the proportion of such households that are likely to be at risk of homelessness when their NASS support ends, and a more detailed understanding of cultural differences between groups.

- **Map existing ethnic minority resources**

Local authority areas differ in the extent to which they have a rich ethnic minority voluntary sector, housing associations, religious institutions, etc. to draw on for help and advice. Existing ethnic minority resources should be mapped out, with a view to identifying:

- pathways into homelessness
- potential partners
- gaps in provisions

Local authorities should inform ethnic minority applicants about potential resources available to them.

- **Assess future trends in ethnic minority population and needs**

The ethnic minority population is changing fast. For instance, while there used to be very few elderly South Asian people, this is now a growing section of the ethnic minority population. Greater numbers of South Asian and Irish women are reporting domestic violence. The traditional extended family is no longer the norm in South Asian households. The majority of Black Caribbean are now UK-born, and the needs of second and third generation people are very different from those of migrants as well as those of the general population. The Black African population is the fastest growing of all the ethnic minority groups. The refugee population is perhaps most rapidly changing as a result of international relations. These factors will impact on the extent of homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities and on their services requirements. Therefore, there is a need not only to assess the suitability of current provisions but also to map future needs and to predict trends. Estimating future trends as carefully as possible should already be done as part of the Homelessness Reviews, but this will need to be undertaken specifically for ethnic minority groups.

- **Make ethnic monitoring compulsory, ensure consistency of monitoring practices across partner organisations, and make strategic use of monitoring data**

Ethnic monitoring of homelessness services should be treated as compulsory. The ethnic group categories should be clearly defined according to the 2001 Census categories and extended or amended to reflect local circumstances. The “country of birth” of refugees should also be monitored. In local authority areas where NASS disperses refugees, there is a case for monitoring the linguistic preferences and abilities of applicants, their need for interpreters and their religion.

ODPM should provide further guidance to local authorities on the use of the “Other ethnic origin” and “Unknown ethnic origin” categories.

Local authorities need to take a strategic and proactive approach to ethnic monitoring and put in place systems adequate to their own information needs. In relation to homelessness services, local authorities should monitor such aspects of service provisions as:

- number of applications
- decisions on eligibility, priority need, intentionality, local connection
- outcomes of review panels and appeals
- type of temporary accommodation provided
- time spent in temporary accommodation
- satisfaction with temporary accommodation
- uptake of specific local initiatives (e.g. choice-based lettings, tenancy support schemes, rent deposit schemes, housing-rights advice)
- advice and information provided
- referrals made to other agencies
- housing outcomes

As far as possible, monitoring practices should be kept consistent across organisations so that information can be pooled and compared more easily. Using the latest Census categories should help to ensure such consistency.

- **Develop multi-agency partnerships with the ethnic minority voluntary sector**

Given the wealth of knowledge and experience about the specific needs of ethnic minority people in the voluntary sector, together with the trust they enjoy from their service users and the flexibility they have in developing innovative and person-focused services, it is crucial that statutory service providers develop extensive partnerships with the ethnic minority voluntary sector.

- **Build capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector**

Having recognised the value of ethnic minority voluntary organisations, local authorities should seek to develop their capacity to act as full partners. Currently, lack of capacity in the ethnic minority voluntary sector is too often invoked as a barrier to multi-agency working with ethnic minority groups. Local authorities should put in place mechanisms to support their local ethnic minority voluntary sector. For instance, in some local authorities, community initiatives developed by specialist ethnic minority agencies are funded under the main programme funding. There are also secondment or exchange programmes in place so that staff from the voluntary and statutory sector can share information and learn from each other.

Participation from the ethnic minority voluntary sector in multi-agency fora is also actively encouraged and funded to develop common working practices and greater awareness of the contributions each partner can make. Mechanisms to ensure full participation at such fora include having a rotating chair so that all perspectives can be given adequate airing and legitimacy. Local authorities could also realise economies of scale and increase both their own capacity as well as that of the ethnic minority voluntary sector by sharing relevant training or research costs, for example.

- **Consult and involve ethnic minority service users in service planning**

Ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should be consulted about their needs and involved in determining the most pressing provisions for themselves or their community. This consultation can take a number of forms and it can be direct or indirect. The views of ethnic minority stakeholders can be ascertained through such methods as surveys, focus groups, neighbourhood conferences, community surveys, local forums, citizens' juries, residential events, use of local media, and ethnic-minority community development workers or link workers (Blackaby & Chahal, 2000)

- **Consider ways of reaching out to the ethnic minority communities**

There is a consensus that ethnic minority communities find it difficult to approach statutory services. This suggests that:

- homelessness services (including preventative help and advice) should be more visible in areas where ethnic minorities are more heavily concentrated
- greater use should be made of ethnic minority agencies for consultation and for promoting services
- all forms of communications with ethnic minority stakeholders should be improved to reflect language needs and cultural identity
- eligibility criteria for homelessness and housing should be explained in simple, jargon-free terms
- services should be organised to take account of the "natural" pathways used by ethnic minority communities

- **Make information available in ethnic minority languages**

Most local authorities have in place some basic arrangements to provide translation and interpretation for ethnic minority clients, such as using own staff or contacting Language Line. However, because the costs of translation and interpretation services are high and are not always budgeted for, there is a general reluctance to use them. Many service providers therefore rely on family and friends to act as informal translators. This is particularly the case for ad hoc or introductory meetings.

There is a case for providing basic information about housing and homelessness services centrally, in the main ethnic minority languages. This would ensure both consistency of information and economies of scale. More specific information, or information in less common ethnic minority languages could then be developed locally, according to needs.

In other cases, there is a need for developing a “Happy to Translate” logo that would be used in all statutory services and be immediately recognisable by ethnic minority service users.

- **Improve all aspects of customer services**

The experiences reported by ethnic minority homeless households in relation to local authority front line staff and caseworkers indicate that all aspects of customer relations should be reviewed. Although many of the experiences described by ethnic minority households are unlikely to be specific to them and probably apply to all homelessness service users, a concerted effort at improving customer services would go a long way towards satisfying their concerns. In particular, attention should be given to:

- treating all applicants fairly and with respect
- making eligibility criteria and the decision making process more transparent
- making the allocation process more transparent
- providing applicants with information about the total supply of social housing in the local area
- training all relevant staff on potential discriminatory biases in their application of the homelessness legislation
- ensuring that caseworkers are readily available to deal with enquiries about progress of applications or queries from tenants in temporary accommodation
- keeping people informed about the progress of applications
- giving as much advanced notice as possible about possible changes in temporary accommodation, if these cannot be avoided
- making complaints procedures explicit and simple
- ensuring that frontline staff reflect the ethnic make-up of the local population
- taking racial harassment cases seriously to promote safety and increase confidence in statutory service providers
- develop culturally-sensitive, individually-tailored packages of care to promote empowerment

The needs of many ethnic minority households are relatively simple and mainly revolve around having a secure and adequate roof over their heads. However, in some cases, the needs are wider because people experience multiple disadvantages, including unemployment and poverty, linguistic problems, low educational achievements, intense emotional needs after domestic violence or parental abuse, social isolation, mental health problems, poor physical health, etc. It is therefore important that local authorities develop broad partnerships to deal with such cases and that they devise individually-tailored packages of care that promote successful integration and civic participation in the long-term.

- **Put in place flexible cross-authority working arrangements**

Given that the ethnic minority population is not evenly distributed (there are areas of high concentration and areas of low concentration), that any one community can be found across a number of local authorities, and that specialist services can be expensive to provide, it is particularly important for local authorities to develop more flexible arrangements to facilitate cross-authority working when addressing the needs of ethnic minority homeless households.

- **Consider the implementation of Choice-Based Lettings (CBLs)**

Some local authorities have recognised that housing and homelessness officers, often with the best of intentions, make assumptions about the preferences specific ethnic minority groups have for specific areas and types of property. Such assumptions often prove unsubstantiated. They restrict options for ethnic minority applicants. One solution to this problem has been to implement “choice-based lettings” (CBL).

Although it is not easy to assess the full impact of CBL, according to an ODPM-funded evaluation of the schemes in the 27 areas where CBL were piloted, the new system was generally greeted with enthusiasm. Participants felt a sudden opening up of choice and greater control over their housing situation. However, for those participants with low priority need, this could give way to disillusionment as they realised that there was little chance of finding accommodation in the area they wanted. However the new systems were still felt to be more open than the previous lettings systems. CBL also went some way towards addressing concerns over officer discretion.

Moreover, the scheme has led to properties that had been vacant for some time being let. It has also shown that homeless households are more flexible in their choices than is usually assumed. This has had a positive impact on ethnic minority homeless households, increasing their access to a wider range of properties by challenging the assumptions frontline staff held about their preferences for certain areas.

- **Accommodate ethnic minority households sensitively**

Currently, some local authorities are willing to take significant risks over the safety of ethnic minority families by moving them into areas where they are likely to experience racial hostility. While it may be desirable in some cases to move ethnic minority households into traditionally White areas, this should be done in a planned and careful way.

- **Assist ethnic minority homeless households in settling into their temporary and permanent accommodation**

It is important to manage the settlement of ethnic minority households more adequately, both in their temporary and their permanent accommodation. Given that many experience difficulty communicating in English, are not familiar with the welfare provisions, are not familiar with the new area, may be fearful of racial attacks, need to settle children into schools, and feel generally vulnerable, more attention needs to be devoted to how ethnic minority households are settled into their new accommodation. Effective settlement support services can go a long way towards ensuring that tenancies are not lost due to lack of support and, therefore, towards preventing repeat homelessness.

- **Adopt a more consistent approach to refugees**

Local authorities vary considerably in their provisions to refugees. There is a need to improve knowledge and evidence about the refugee population and to develop more consistent services across local authorities. In NASS dispersal areas, local authorities should:

- monitor both the ethnicity and the country of birth of refugees
- interpret “vulnerability” and “priority need” in line with ODPM guidance
- not apply the criterion of “local connection” with the respect to former asylum seekers
- enquire specifically into potential mental health needs amongst refugee applicants

8.2.2. Services that would impact positively on ethnic minority homelessness

Given the main causes of homelessness and the unmet needs identified in the various ethnic minority groups, the following measures are likely to have a disproportionately positive impact on most ethnic minority households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness:

- better maintenance of temporary accommodation
- measures to promote access to the private rented sector for people on low incomes
- measures to promote access to housing associations
- closer work with private landlords to maintain properties and to reduce evictions
- greater support to households reporting environmental health problems
- greater support to households threatened with evictions before they actually become homeless

-
- introduction of Choice-Based Lettings
 - comprehensive housing and benefits advice to homelessness applicants
 - a trusting approach to households reporting racial harassment and measures that are not punitive for the victim
 - sexual education in schools and free contraception to prevent teenage pregnancy
 - adequate childcare provisions to allow single homeless mothers to work
 - appropriate levels of support to ensure that women fleeing domestic violence do not go back to abusive situations for lack of options

In addition to these general measures that would benefit all ethnic minority groups, there are also initiatives that should be targeted more specifically at certain ethnic minority communities or sections of the communities.

In South Asian communities:

- greater supply of larger properties
- more supported housing for elderly South Asians to decrease overcrowding and reduce family tensions in extended households
- monitoring domestic violence, parental abuse and forced marriages separately in areas with large South Asian populations
- adequate, community-specific provisions for South Asian women fleeing domestic violence
- multi-agency work to challenge attitudes towards domestic violence within South Asian communities
- outreach work and floating support with women still in abusive relationships
- counselling for women having fled domestic violence and parental abuse available to South Asian languages

It is worth noting that although family mediation and attempts at keeping the victims of domestic violence in their own homes can be adequate and effective, such practices need to be managed with great sensitivity, in order not to further endanger the victim.

In the Black Caribbean community:

- comprehensive support for care-leavers, young people excluded from schools, drug abusers and people leaving institutional settings

In the Irish community:

- a more proactive approach to reaching out and meeting the needs of single, older Irish men
- high need supported housing for elderly Irish men
- greater supply of one bedroom flats
- outreach work and floating support with women still in abusive relationships

In the refugee population:

- clear institutional guidelines on the interpretation and implementation of the homelessness legislation in relation to vulnerability, priority need and local connection
- better transitional arrangements for those leaving NASS accommodation
- the provision of detailed information about local, regional and national services (e.g. health, housing, education, employment, cultural legal) to applicants
- systematic, sensitive and comprehensive “exit” interviews to identify support needs

No specific measures were identified specifically for the Black African population. This is largely because the population is very diverse and no clear pattern of need emerges. However, in areas where particular Black African nationals are concentrated, homelessness service providers should become aware of their culturally specific needs. Generally, the list above needs to be adapted or expanded to reflect local realities.

Appendix 1

Homeless households in priority need accepted by local authorities by Government Office region and ethnic group

	Total acceptances 2004/05		North East		North West		Yorkshire & Humberside		East Midlands		West Midlands		East of England		London		South East		South West	
Number of acceptances¹																				
White	89,180	7,400	14,830	10,110	7,590	10,540	8,850	10,390	10,870	8,670										
African/Caribbean	12,430	90	450	910	380	1,160	290	8,500	400	280										
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	6,570	100	640	710	410	1,190	270	2,820	380	90										
Other ethnic origin	6,500	130	630	530	320	590	270	3,480	340	210										
Unknown ethnic origin	6,170	260	830	1,170	430	600	490	1,560	430	440										
Total	120,860	7,940	17,360	13,430	9,120	14,050	10,150	26,730	12,420	9,680										
Share of acceptances within region																				
White	74%	93%	85%	75%	83%	75%	87%	39%	88%	90%										
African/Caribbean	10%	1%	3%	7%	4%	8%	3%	32%	3%	3%										
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	5%	1%	4%	5%	4%	8%	3%	11%	3%	1%										
Other ethnic origin	5%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	13%	3%	2%										
Unknown ethnic origin	5%	3%	5%	9%	5%	4%	5%	6%	3%	5%										
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%										
Share of population within region²																				
Households in 2001																				
White	93%	98%	96%	96%	95%	92%	97%	77%	97%	98%										
African/Caribbean	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	11%	1%	1%										
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	4%	1%	7%	1%	0%										
Other ethnic origin	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	6%	1%	1%										
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%										

Note: Totals and percentages may not sum due to rounding

1 P1E Homelessness Statistics, ODPM

2 Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY

Research design

The aim of the research was to determine the causes of homelessness amongst various black, minority ethnic and refugee (ethnic minority) communities, with a view to identifying best practice in both preventing and responding to homelessness amongst these communities. The research was undertaken between February and September 2003.

The research had four main components:

- a literature review on the causes of homelessness among ethnic minority communities (produced as a separate document)
- interviews with ethnic minority homeless households
- interviews with statutory homelessness service providers
- interviews with national and local voluntary organisations working with ethnic minority homeless households

Given the subtlety and sensitivity required to understand the complex chain of events and circumstances that lead someone into homelessness, a qualitative approach was preferred. This also offered greater flexibility to accommodate the different cultural styles, communication skills and linguistic preferences of the ethnic minority subjects taking part in the study, and it allowed expert informants (from both the statutory and voluntary sectors) to expand on the key themes selected for discussion.

The research was designed to address the total experience of homelessness among ethnic minority communities. It sought to find out about the personal stories, experiences and difficulties of ethnic minority homeless people first-hand, but also to combine their accounts with the perspectives of the statutory and voluntary service providers who work to meet the needs of these homeless households. Through interviews with a range of stakeholders, we endeavoured to determine the various causes, triggers and pathways to homelessness in the main ethnic minority communities living in the UK.

This juxtaposition of perspectives and experiences provides evidence about:

- the personal, cultural and structural dimensions of homelessness amongst the various ethnic minority communities
- the extent to which current provisions meet the needs of ethnic minority homeless households
- the strategies needed to prevent, overcome or at least minimise the impact of homelessness amongst ethnic minority households

Sampling

Interviews with all three categories of respondents (ethnic minority homeless households, statutory and voluntary service providers) were conducted in nine different local authority areas in England.

In each of the nine locations, a target sample of 2 representatives of the local authority, 4 representatives of voluntary sector organisations and 8 ethnic minority homeless households was set. In one local authority, an additional 8 interviews with Irish homeless households was set. This was because of the high concentration of the Irish population in that area. In addition, a small number of interviews with national organisations involved in the prevention or management of homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities were also conducted.

The total target sample and the achieved sample for each category of respondents were:

Category of respondents	Target sample	Achieved sample
Local authority representatives	18	30
Local voluntary sector organisations	34	36
National charities/voluntary sector organisations	5	7
Ethnic minority homeless households	80	82
Total	141	155

The increase in interviews with local authority staff was due to the fact that some local authorities had a number of people with direct or indirect responsibility for ethnic minority homelessness. In these areas, it was felt important to interview more than the two originally planned in order to get a good understanding of the issues being researched.

● Selection of local authorities

The nine local authorities were selected on the following basis:

- geographical location: London (3), the North (3), the Midlands (2), the West (1)
- large concentration of ethnic minority communities
- significant variations in ethnic minority homelessness applications between 1999 and 2002

Interviews in local authorities were conducted with the following officials:

- Directors/managers of housing services
- Directors/managers of homelessness services
- Race equality officers
- Community care/community development officers

-
- Asylum seekers support officers
 - “Supporting People” teams
 - **Selection of local and national voluntary sector organisations**

Interviews were conducted with 43 representatives of voluntary sector organisations. Organisations were selected if they belonged to one or more of the following categories:

- Homelessness services providers
- Ethnic minority-specific housing associations
- Ethnic minority-specific refuges and hostels
- Ethnic minority-specific resource centres/community groups
- Single or multi-faith organisations
- Organisations devoted to fighting racial discrimination and harassment
- Community development projects
- Organisations providing services in relation to known causes of homelessness (such as domestic violence, family disputes and relationships breakdowns, drug and alcohol abuse, de-institutionalisation, etc).

Some of the organisations were recommended by local authorities, as they were key partners in delivering homelessness services for ethnic minority households. Others were identified through our own database of community groups, directories of voluntary sector organisations, the literature and recommendations by other interviewees.

- **Selection of ethnic minority homeless households**

Eighty-two (82) in-depth interviews were conducted with ethnic minority homeless households. The sample was drawn from households accepted by their local authority as being eligible for homelessness services, in priority need, and unintentionally homeless. The vast majority of them lived in temporary accommodation where they had been placed by their local authority.

In many local authority areas, the identification and recruitment of the subjects were often aided by the councils. In addition, local community groups, specialist housing associations, refuges and hostels helped with the recruitment of research participants.

● Profile of the ethnic minority respondents in the sample

This section gives a profile of the ethnic minority homeless households who took part in the study. When possible and appropriate, the characteristics of the sample are related to national data, to establish the external validity of the dataset.

● Ethnicity and country of birth of respondents

The quotas for each ethnic minority group were not based on the population sizes of the various ethnic minority communities. Rather, they were based on information on rates of statutory homelessness in the ethnic minority communities and determined using two main criteria:

- the need to reflect the over-representation of certain ethnic minority groups (such as Black-Africans and Black-Caribbeans) in homelessness statistics
- the need to “boost” the number of homeless people from the groups where statutory homelessness is less common (such as the South Asian communities) in order to ensure reasonable representation and more meaningful data.

Table 1: Ethnicity and country of birth of respondents

Ethnicity	Country of birth		
	UK	Non-UK	Total
South Asian	10	18	28
● Bangladeshi	1	7	8
● Indian	5	5	10
● Pakistani	4	6	10
Black	10	16	26
● Black-Caribbean	8	4	12
● Black-African	2	12	14
White	4	4	8
● Irish	4	4	8
Mixed	4	0	4
● White & Black-Caribbean	3	0	3
● White & Asian (Bangladeshi)	1	0	1
Refugees	0	16	16
Total	28	54	82

A comparatively large number of refugee households were interviewed because of the ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity inherent in this population. Refugees originated from the following countries: Somalia, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Angola, Kosovo, Kenya and Sierra Leone. Irish subjects were included in the sample because of well-documented discrimination and disadvantage in this population.

Within this ethnic breakdown, particular homeless households were selected to cover a range of household sizes and composition (with a strong emphasis on families), types of accommodation, and recorded causes of homelessness. As far as possible (within the constraints of the patterns of homelessness applications and acceptances in each community), we recruited men and women of different generations, of different religions, of different degrees of “vulnerability”, and of various levels of acculturation in British society.

● Gender of respondents

While at a population level, gender amongst most ethnic minority groups is either balanced or tipped in favour of males, the majority of respondents (73%) in the sample were women. The over-representation of women holds in all ethnic groups. This is due to a number of factors, including the fact that some of the most common causes of homelessness tend to affect women disproportionately (such as domestic violence), the institutional response to domestic and personal crises (which usually consists in rehousing women and children rather than men), and the greater availability of female heads of households during daytime, when most of the data collection took place.

Table 2: Gender of respondents, by ethnicity

Gender	Bangladeshi	Indian	Pakistani	Black-Caribbean	Black-African	Irish	Refugee	Total
Male	4	2	2	3	4	1	6	22
Female	5	8	8	12	10	7	10	60
Total	9	10	10	15	14	8	16	82

● Age of respondents

At a population level, all ethnic minority populations have a younger age profile than the white population. This is also true of the sample, in which 43% were aged between 17 and 30 years-old.

Table 3: Age of respondents, by ethnicity

Age	Bangladeshi	Indian	Pakistani	Black-Caribbean	Black-African	Irish	Refugee	Total
17-20	3	0	2	5	3	0	1	14
21-30	0	5	2	4	4	1	5	21
31-40	3	3	4	4	6	3	7	30
41-50	2	1	2	2	1	3	3	14
Over 51	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
Total	9	10	10	15	14	8	16	82

● Type and size of households

At a population level, the average household size is similar for people of White and Black-Caribbean backgrounds, but Black-African and Indian households are rather larger, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are approximately twice the size of White households (Owen, 2003). In this study, household size was measured by the number of children living with the applicant.

There are also major differences in household types between ethnic groups. Again, at a population level, living alone, co-habiting and other non-traditional forms of partnership are most common amongst the white, Black-Caribbean and Black-African communities, while marriage is most common in the South Asian groups. Single-parent families account for 42% of all Black households, compared to 13% of white and 10% of South Asians households (Owen, 2003). The sample for this study broadly reflects the national picture. It also reflects the criteria of eligibility for accommodation.

Table 4: Household size, by ethnicity

Household size	Bangladeshi	Indian	Pakistani	Black-Caribbean	Black-African	Irish	Refugee	Total
No child	1	4	3	3	0	0	3	14
Pregnant	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	4
1 child	2	1	1	8	7	1	6	26
2 children	0	4	3	1	4	1	2	15
3 children	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	10
4 children	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	6
5 or more children	3	0	0	1	0	2	1	7
Total	9	10	10	15	14	8	16	82

Table 5: Household type, by ethnicity

Household type	Bangladeshi	Indian	Pakistani	Black-Caribbean	Black-African	Irish	Refugee	Total
single no children	1	3	3	2	0	0	1	10
single pregnant/children	3	3	5	12	11	6	6	46
couple no children	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
couple pregnant/children	5	2	2	1	3	2	6	21
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4
Total	9	10	10	15	14	8	16	82

The most common household type in the study comprised single applicants either pregnant at the time of the interview or with children. This type of homeless family was particularly frequent in the Black-Caribbean and Black-African communities, as would be expected from the Census data, but was found in all ethnic groups. The second most common family household type comprised of couples with a pregnant woman or with children. This existed across all ethnic groups, but was slightly more frequent amongst Bangladeshi and refugee households. The third largest household type was made up of single people (either men or women) without children, all of whom were deemed “vulnerable” in the terms of the homelessness legislation. The remaining five households included arrangements such as grand-mother and grand-children, refugee siblings, a couple without children, etc. Larger families (with 3 or more dependent children) were mainly found in the Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Irish and refugee communities.

Data collection

● Interviews with statutory and voluntary service providers

With both statutory and voluntary service providers, the interviews sought to assess:

- the main causes of homelessness amongst ethnic minority groups
- pathways into homelessness and patterns of service use amongst ethnic minority groups
- the needs of ethnic minority homeless households
- the type and quality of provisions currently available to ethnic minority homeless households
- strategies to reduce, prevent or minimise the impact of homelessness amongst ethnic minority groups
- examples of good practice

Wherever possible, information was also collected on the organisations and services interviewed, their policies, planning and strategies, funding arrangements, statistical data, ethnic monitoring and any relevant surveys they may have conducted. In this way, a wealth of contextual material was obtained to complement the qualitative analysis.

● Interviews with ethnic minority homeless households

The interviews with ethnic minority homeless households sought to assess:

- the causes and triggers of homelessness
- pathways into homelessness
- the cultural factors shaping the experience of homelessness

-
- the experience of living in temporary accommodation
 - knowledge and attitudes towards existing service providers and charities
 - use of and satisfaction with mainstream and specialist homelessness agencies

The majority of interviews with ethnic minority homeless households were conducted in the place where the respondents were living at the time. Some also took place in community centres. A small financial reward was offered to the research participants for their support with the research.

The data collection took place between March and August 2003.

- **Language and gender matching**

All the interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the respondents. ETHNOS has a team of researchers who can conduct interviews in all the main South Asian languages. Interpreters were used when interviewing refugees who did not feel at ease in English. Of the 82 interviews, 64 were conducted in English and 18 in the preferred language of the respondent. Interpreters were used on 11 occasions.

Gender matching was ensured when interviewing Muslim women, women who were homeless because of domestic violence, and when the subjects expressed a preference for a particular gender.

- **Analysis**

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. All researchers conducting the interviews were involved in the analysis. Key 'top-line' findings and themes for the analysis were identified with special attention paid both to what was specific to each community and common to all. The relative importance and frequency of these themes was then assessed and verbatim quotes were chosen to illustrate each theme.

APPENDIX 3: ETHNIC GROUP CATEGORIES USED IN THE 2001 CENSUS

It is recommended that the following basic categories be used by all local authorities. These categories are based on the 2001 Census, the most reliable and recent source of information on the ethnic minority populations in the UK. They therefore offer maximum comparability and are adequate for housing purposes.

The categories can be extended or amended to reflect local circumstances, and aggregated as necessary for analytical purposes.

In areas where NASS disperses refugees, it is recommended that housing and homelessness services also record the “country of birth” of applicants in addition to their ethnicity.

White

- British
- Irish
- Other

Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed background

Asian or Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Any other Asian background

Black or Black British

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black background

Chinese or other ethnic group

- Chinese
- Any other

REFERENCES

- Barclay, A.; Bowes, A.; Ferguson, I.; Sim, D. & Valenti, M. (2003) Asylum seekers in Scotland, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.
- Blackaby, B. & Chahal, K. (2000) Black and minority ethnic housing strategies: A good practice guide. London: Chartered Institute of Housing, Federation of Black Housing Organisations and The Housing Corporation.
- Clancy, A.; Hough, M.; Aust, R. & Kershaw, C. (2001) Crime, policing and justice: The experience of ethnic minorities. Findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey, London: Home Office Research Study 223.
- Carey Wood, J.; Duke, K.; Karn, V. & Marshall, T. (1995) The settlement of refugees in Britain, Home Office Research Study 141, London: HMSO.
- Carter, T. (1998) Perspectives on homelessness: Characteristics, causes and solutions, Housing Studies, 13, 2, March, 275-281.
- Census (2001), London: Office for National Statistics.
- ODPM (2002) Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Davies, C. & Lyle, S.; with Deacon, A; Law, I; Julianne, L. & Kay, H. (1996) Discounted voices: Homelessness amongst young black and minority ethnic people in England, Sociology and Social Policy Research Working Paper 15, Leeds: University of Leeds.
- DETR (2001b) Supporting People: Policy into practice, London: DETR.
- DTLR (2002) More than a roof: A report into tackling homelessness, London: DTLR.
- Elam, G. & Chinouya, M. (2000) Feasibility Study for Health Surveys among Black African Populations Living in the UK: Stage 2 – Diversity among Black African Communities, Department of Health: Joint Health Surveys Unit.
- Family Resource Survey (2000) London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Fitzpatrick, S.; Kemp, P. & Klinker, S. (2000) Single homelessness: An overview of research in Britain, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Garvie, D. (2001) Far from home: The housing of asylum seekers in private rented accommodation, London: Shelter.
- Hickman, M. & Walter, B. (1997) Discrimination and the Irish community in Britain, London: CRE.
- Homelessness Act (2002) London: HMSO.
- Julienne, L. (1998) Homeless and young single people from black and minority ethnic communities, Youth and Policy, 59, Spring, 23-37.

- Karmi, G. (1998) Refugees, In S. Rawaf & V. Bahl (Eds) *Assessing health needs of people from minority ethnic groups*, London: Royal College of Physicians & Faculty of Public Health Medicine.
- Labour Force Survey (2001) London: Office for National Statistics.
- Labour Force Survey (2002) London: Office for National Statistics.
- Labour Force Survey (2004) London: Office for National Statistics.
- Murphy, M (1996) Household and family structure amongst ethnic minority groups, in Coleman, D & Salt, J (Eds) *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census, volume 1: Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations*, London: HMSO, 213-242.
- ODPM (2002) *Homelessness strategies: A good practice handbook*.
- Oxfam & Refugee Council (2002) *Poverty and asylum in the UK*, London: Refugee Council.
- Parekh, B. (2000) *The future of multi-ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, London: Profile Books
- Peach, C. (1998) South Asian and Caribbean ethnic minority housing choice in Britain, *Urban Studies*, 35, 10, 1657-1680.
- Peach, C. (ed) (1996) *The ethnic minority populations in great-Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census series, Volume 1*, London: HMSO.
- Randall, G. & Brown, S. (1999) *Prevention is better than cure*. London: Shelter.
- Robinson, V.; Andersson, R. & Musterd, S. (2003) *Spreading the 'burden'? A review of policies to disperse asylum seekers and refugees*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Silove, D.; Sinnerbrink, I.; Field, A. et al (1997) Anxiety, depression and PTSD in asylum-seekers: Association with pre-migration trauma and post-migration stressors, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 170, 351-357.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal*, London: Cabinet Office (SEU).
- Sodhi, D.; Johal, S.; Britain, E & Steele, A. (second edition) (2001) *The diverse needs of black and minority ethnic communities: An annotated bibliography of housing and related needs studies and initiatives to promote diversity*: Manchester: Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Archive.
- Somerville, P.; Steele, A. & Sodhi, D. (2002) *Homelessness amongst black and minority ethnic people: A scooping exercise for Shelter*.
- Survey of English Housing (2002), London: HMSO.
- Walker, R. & Ahmed, W. (1994) Asian and Black elders and community care: A survey of care providers, *New Community*, 20 (4), 635-646.
- Zetter, R. & Pearl, M. (1999) *Managing to survive: Asylum seekers, refugees and access to social housing*, Bristol: The Policy Press/The Housing Corporation.