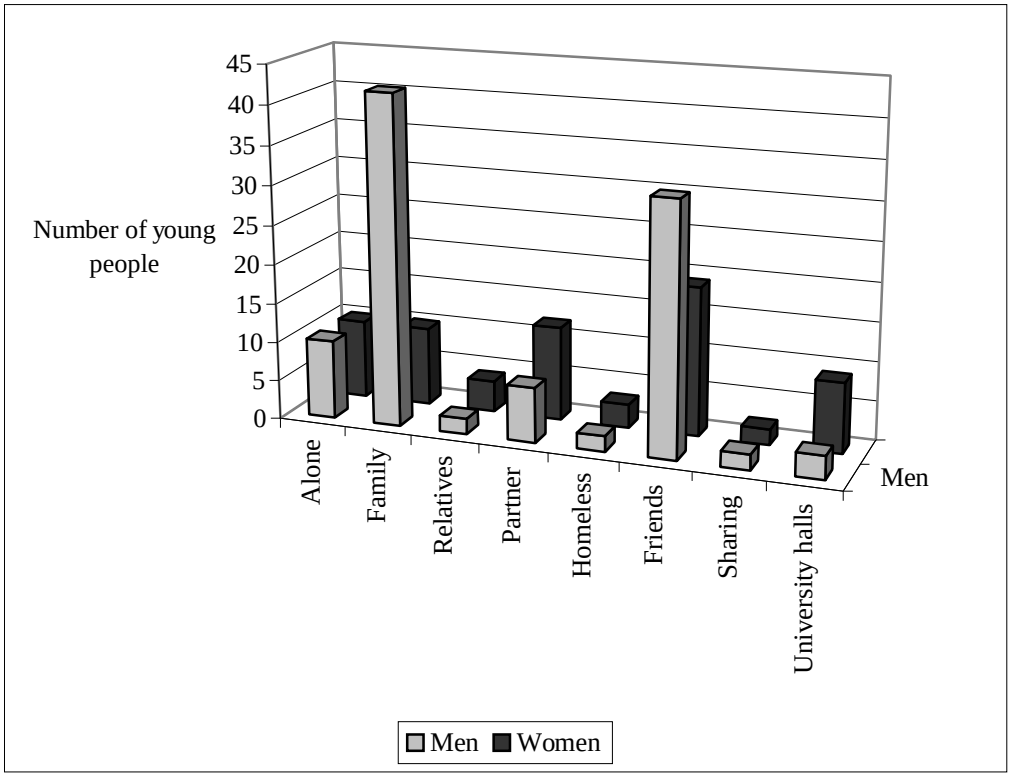
# 3.2 Housing Experiences and Issues

The following data was obtained from the Young People's Health and Housing Survey and interviews. For details of the survey respondents' characteristics see Section 3.1.1.

**Survey Data**

Chart 17 shows respondents' accommodation status.

**Chart 17: Respondents' Accommodation Status**



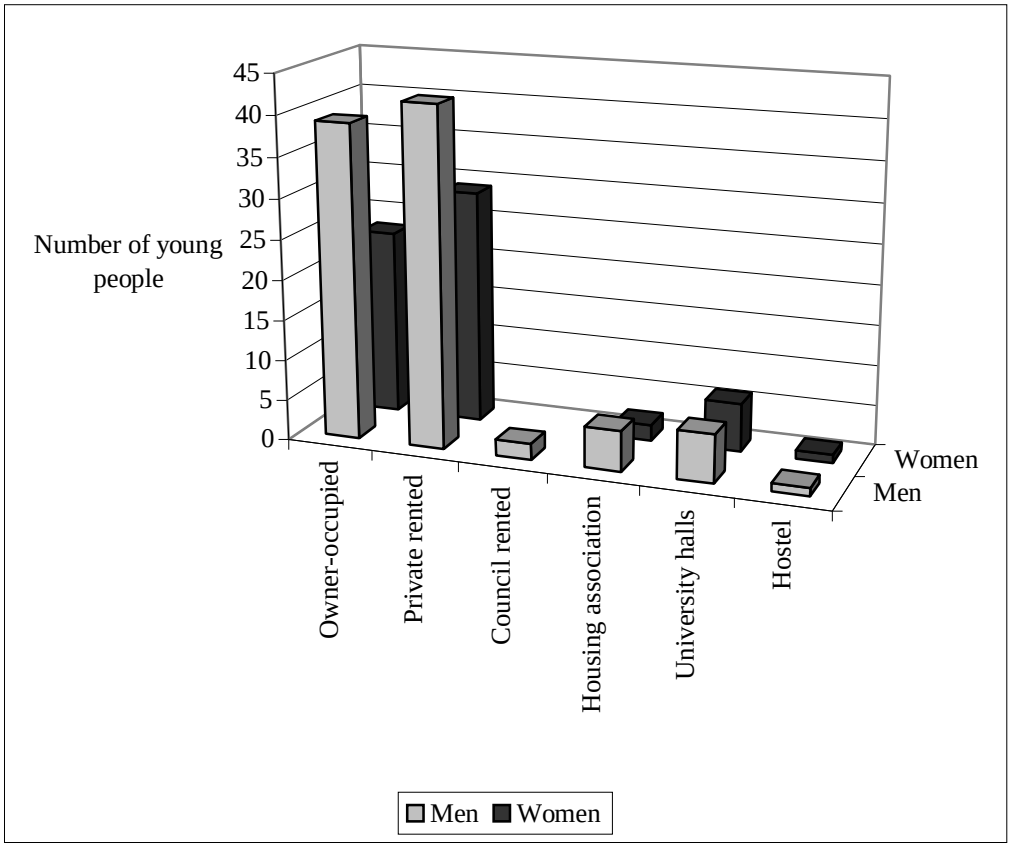

Note: *n* = 169

- Twelve per cent of respondents lived alone: ten per cent of men and 15 per cent of women.
- Thirty-one per cent of respondents lived with family: 42 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women.
- Four per cent of respondents lived with relatives: two per cent of men and six per cent of women.

- Eleven per cent of respondents lived with a partner: seven per cent of men and 17 per cent of women.
- Three per cent of respondents were homeless: two men and three women.
- Thirty per cent of respondents lived with friends: 32 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.
- Two per cent of respondents lived in shared accommodation: two men and two women.
- Seven per cent of respondents lived in university accommodation: three men and nine women.

Chart 18 shows the type of accommodation lived in by respondents.

**Chart 18: Respondents' Housing Type**



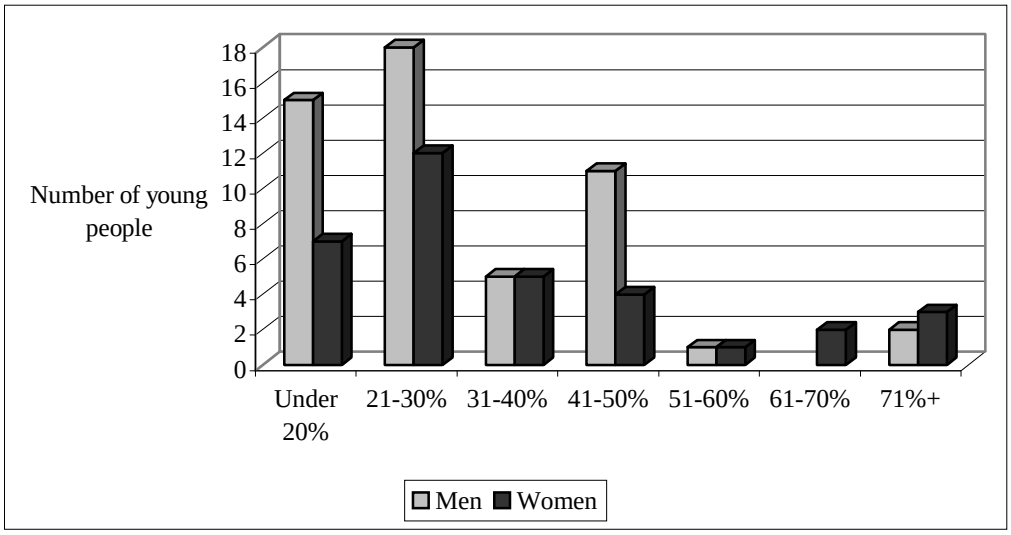

Note: *n* = 156

- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents lived in owner-occupied accommodation: 41 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women.
- Forty-two per cent of respondents lived in private rented accommodation: 44 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women.

- One per cent of respondents lived in local authority housing (two men).
- Four per cent of respondents lived in housing associations: five men and two women.
- Seven per cent of respondents lived in university accommodation: six men and six women.
- One per cent of respondents lived in hostels: one man and one woman.

Chart 19 shows the proportion of respondents' income spent on rent.

**Chart 19: Proportion of Income Spent on Housing by Respondents**




Note: *n* = 86

- Thirteen per cent of respondents spent less than 20 per cent of their income on housing costs: 15 per cent of men and ten per cent of women.
- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents spent less than 40 per cent of their income on housing costs: 38 per cent of men and 35 per cent of women.
- Forty-five per cent of respondents spent *less* than 50 per cent of their income on housing costs: 49 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.
- Five per cent of respondents spent *more* than 50 per cent of their income on housing costs: three per cent of men and nine per cent of women.
- A significant number of young people spent a significant proportion of their income on housing costs.

- 27 per cent of respondents reported that meeting their housing costs was, or was sometimes, a problem: 27 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women.

- 13 per cent of respondents were, or had been, homeless: 11 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women. Table 22 shows the reasons why they were made homeless.

**Table 22: Reasons why Respondents were Made Homeless**

| Reasons | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| "Drug use" | 1 | |
| "Family problems" | 3 | |
| "Financial problems" | | 2 |
| "Relationship problems" | 1 | |
| "Sexual abuse" | | 3 |
| "Thrown out after coming out" | 4 | 3 |

Note: *n* = 17

Table 23 shows the places that young people would go to if they were made homeless.

**Table 23: Places Young People would go if Made Homeless**

| Place | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| "Citizens Advice Bureau" | 2 | |
| "Friends or Family" | 9 | 7 |
| "Housing Association" | 4 | 3 |
| "No.5 (youth counselling service)" | | 1 |
| "Social Services" | 3 | 2 |
| "University Student Advice Centre" | 2 | |
| "On the Streets" | 1 | |

Note: *n* = 34

- Eleven per cent of respondents had experienced housing problems because of their sexual identity: ten per cent of men and 12 per cent of women. Table 24 shows the problems respondents encountered.

**Table 24: Housing Problems Caused by Respondents' Sexual Identity**

| Housing Problem | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| "Discrimination by landlord" | 3 | 1 |
| "Evicted by landlord" | 1 | |
| "Problems in hostel" | | 2 |
| "Refused tenancy" | 1 | |
| "Refused tenancy because of sexual abuse and sexual orientation" | | 1 |
| "Threatened by parents" | | 1 |

Note: *n* = 10

**Data from Interviews**

"It's important to me that the space I live in is one that I am comfortable with, so that I can just be myself. I don't want to feel as though I've got be careful about what I say or how I behave." (Young woman.)

"One of my housemates was thrown out of home by his parents after he came out to them. He was 18, in his first year at university. He ended up having to re-take his first year, which was really traumatic. He had a financial nightmare trying to get a grant from his local authority because of his parents' earnings. His parents claimed that they did not throw him out and that he was welcome to move back as long as he lived according to the way they wanted him to live. They did throw him out though. They changed the lock on the door after they made him leave. That sounds like throwing him out to me." (Young woman.)

"Coming out could be an issue in university halls of residence." (Young man.)

"I came out to my housemates and they were fine." (Young man.)

"I live in a shared house with my partner and a straight lad. He knows that we are a gay couple. It can be constraining at times, like when his family is over." (Young man.)

"When people come out it can make things uncomfortable at home. My experience is that it is easier to come out when you are not living at home. You don't feel that you are relying on your parents and there is more freedom." (Young woman.)

"I still live at home, but I did try looking for somewhere else to live once with some friends, but we couldn't afford it." (Young man.)

"Living in [university] halls [of residence] is difficult sometimes. I am out to my close friends but it could be a nightmare if you're widely out. It is so easy for someone to run round at three in the morning and deface someone's door and do something to their food or something. And you can't do anything about it." (Young woman.)

"We all live at home [five young men]. One problem for me is that I can't have sex." (Young man.)

"My mum knows and she just makes it blatantly obvious that she is going out. She goes, 'I'm going to a friend's house for an hour'." (Young man.)

"Living at home is not a problem for me, although you have to be careful about brothers and sisters." (Young man.)

"I've been kicked out of home four times. First I went to my dad's house, then to my gran's, then at a mate's, then to a hostel. The hostel was scary at times. There were lots of drunks and fights and stuff, but I got used to it. There were lots of other young people there, because their parents had thrown them out, drug problems, marriage break-ups, and stuff." (Young man.)

"I ran away from home for about a week. I stayed at a friend's, then a cousin who was a heroin addict. The police were looking for me. I lived on tea, coffee, cornflakes and

coconut biscuits. My dad found me. Things had been going round in my head so I had to get out." (Young man.)

"I was in a flat with someone but his was the only name on the lease. He chucked me out so that his friends could move in." (Young man.)

"My ideal situation is living with all my friends." (Young man.)

"I like living with my friends. Eventually I'd like to live with someone in a stable relationship. I don't think I'd like to live alone." (Young man.)

"I've experienced all three: being on my own, living in a shared house, and living as a couple. There are benefits to all three. Living on your own can be horrible, like when you come back to an empty place. Living as a couple can be quite stifling. Living with other people can take the pressure off the relationship." (Young man.)

"My parents know about me, but they insist that I am going to get married. I'm going to move out to get away from the stress." (Young man.)

"My parents are sympathetic but they're not completely comfortable with it so I want to get out and get some independence." (Young man.)

"I have worried about being made homeless because my parents are really homophobic. I've got a friend at work who has offered me a spare room if I need it." (Young man.)

"It is sometimes a hassle living at home. I wanted to go out places and my parents were restricting me, stopping me going out. They wanted to know where I was going all the time. I suppose they were just being parents but I wasn't ready to tell them where I was going." (Young man.)

"I feel safe at home but only in my bedroom." (Young man.)

"I want a flat of my own, but money is the problem. I've been looking for about six months but rents are just too expensive. I have approached a housing association but as far as I know, there is a three-year waiting list." (Young man.)

"I would hate to live on my own. I would get so lonely. However I do need space sometimes." (Young man.)

"I feel very uncomfortable living at home. I can't be who I want to be. And I have to lie about going to ReachOUT." (Young man.)

"It's quite hard to find a house. Then you need deposits and references and if they find out you're gay it's a lot harder. Some landlords don't like it." (Young man.)

"One problem with looking for a house is that everything's very high priced." (Young man.)

"I have lived in many shared houses. You have to be respectful. It can be constraining, like not being able to bring people back, and having to be non-camp. It can also be

difficult to find people to share with. There's been five occasions when people have refused to share with me because I'm gay." (Young man.)
"They should set up a housing place just for gay people." (Young man.)

"All housing workers should be trained around gay issues, and all agencies should have equal opportunities policies." (Young man.)

"Ideally I'd like something like 'Outlet' in London that has a list of wholly gay house-shares, or at least a list of gay-friendly places. It would take out the uncertainty about how people will react." (Young man.)

"More information about housing would be useful. I sometimes feel quite isolated information-wise." (Young man.)

## Discussion

Burrows *et al* (1997) listed the legislation and policies pertaining to housing and homelessness:

- 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act.
- 1980 right-to-buy policy.
- 1985 Housing Act.
- 1988 Housing Act.
- 1989 Children's Act.
- 1990 NHS Community Care Act.
- 1991 Department of the Environment Code of Guidance.
- 1995 Department of Social Security Statutory Instrument 1644.
- 1996 Housing Act.
- 1996 Housing Benefit reform.

Burrows *et al* argued that insecurity of tenure, overcrowding and poor housing conditions affected hundreds of thousands if not millions of people. Burrows *et al* also argued that the adequacy of explanations of homelessness as being a deliberate choice only began to be challenged in the 1960s when studies began to identify the roles of housing supply, relationships breakdown and economic change. Historically, the dominant political ideology had emphasised personal responsibility over structural causes and made a distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. This is reflected in current and past housing and homelessness legislation and policies (evidenced by the use of criteria in the eligibility and assessment process in local authority housing departments for example).

There are five main types of housing: council, housing association, owner-occupied, private rented and that provided by others.

Before the right-to-buy policy was introduced in 1980 there were approximately three million council houses. One third of this stock has since been sold. Public spending on housing in 1979-80 was £21.6bn (at today's prices), in 1995-96 it was

£17.8bn. Public housing subsidy has switched from bricks-and-mortar to individuals (through Housing Benefit, which increased from £1.5bn in 1979-80 to £5.5bn in 1997). An Institute of Fiscal Studies (1997) report stated that "the relative decline of social tenants' income had resulted, in part, from richer tenants leaving the sector as a result of the government's right-to-buy policy; in part, because it had become a requirement of entry to the social sector to have a low income; and in part because of changes in the economy, in particular, the increased unemployment in the 1980s" (cited in Ryle, 1997).

Burrows *et al* (1997) noted that in some areas pressure on council (and housing association) stock was such that people waited an average of 1.9 years on the waiting list of non-homeless people seeking re-housing. Many statutorily homeless people also waited many months, even years, in temporary accommodation (being in effect, still homeless).

In 1994-95, housing associations constituted four per cent of the housing stock and 17 per cent of public housing. Half of all housing association properties were either bed-sits or one-bedroom flats, so making a limited contribution to meeting total housing demand (Evans, 1996).

Sixty-eight per cent of people in Britain own their homes. Ten per cent of households rent their homes from private landlords (Shelter, 1997).

Rents in the private rented sector were significantly higher than in the public sector. This was problematic as the private rented sector traditionally catered for young single people. For example, in 1994-95, 56 per cent of those aged 20-24 lived in this type of accommodation. A Department of the Environment study found that from 1991-95 there was a steep decline in owner-occupation among 20-24 year olds and an increase in the proportion who were tenants in the private rented sector. Correspondingly, there was a high incidence of mortgage arrears, negative equity and repossessions (Evans, 1996).

Studies found that private landlords were reluctant to let to those claiming benefits (because of their 'undesirable' image and delays in benefit payment): three-quarters preferred to let to someone who was working. Studies found that those who did rent privately were often concentrated in the poorer quality stock, with fewer facilities and little security (Evans, 1996).

Other providers of accommodation included bed-and-breakfast and other hostels. This type of accommodation was often poor quality and in unsafe condition. Research has shown significant numbers of people are housed in this type of accommodation (Evans, 1996).

Audit Commission figures revealed that there were 800,000 empty homes and properties in England, one-in-25 of the total stock: 20 per cent of Ministry of Defence homes, 667,000 homes in the private rented sector, 79,000 in the council sector, 23,500 in housing associations and 20,000 other empty homes (cited in Brindle, 1997a).

Hetherington and May (1998) cited Audit Commission figures revealing that there were 250,000 long-standing empty homes in disrepair in England and 800,000 potential homes in empty buildings (office blocks, above shops, etc.). Hetherington and May compared these figures with total projected housing demand. The government estimated that 4.4 million new homes would be needed over the next twenty years to cope with

demand. This prompted the contentious ‘green-field’ versus ‘brown-field’ debate on where these homes should be built.

Rowan (1998) cited government projections that by 2016, 36 per cent of people will live in one-person households (four of out ten of England’s 24 million homes) compared to 18 per cent in 1971 and 25 per cent in 1991. This accounted for the government’s projected need for 4.4 million new homes; 40,000 new homes are planned for Berkshire by 2011.

Burrows *et al* (1997) classified homelessness into four main types: statutorily homeless (mainly families), single homeless, people sleeping rough and the ‘hidden’ homeless. They acknowledged the danger of classifications and definitions de-humanising and constraining the discourse, which in turn impacted on the response to homelessness.

Butler *et al* (1994) noted that the number of local authority acceptances (of people as statutorily homeless) rose dramatically after 1979. They associated this with two policies: the right-to-buy policy and the cuts to local authority housing subsidies (subsidies later transferred to housing associations). They argued this increase forced local authorities to interpret the legislation in increasingly restrictive ways (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Department of the Environment (1996) figures demonstrated a decline in acceptances in England from 144,780 in 1991 to 120,810 in 1995 (still double the 1979 level). However, the distribution of this national decline was not uniform. There was little decline or variation in the Southeast region for example (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

There has been extensive data collection on the statutorily homeless. Burrows *et al* (1997) cited a study reporting that of the 4.3 per cent of current heads of households in England who had perceived themselves to be homeless in the last ten years, almost 77 per cent had approached a local authority as homeless and of these, over 76 per cent were accepted as statutorily homeless.

Studies found that urban authorities accepted a higher number of statutorily homeless people than district councils (who lacked stock in their rural or semi-rural areas) (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

In 1995, 74 per cent of acceptances were households with children and 24 per cent were vulnerable households. In Inner London, 33 per cent of acceptances were vulnerable households and there was a high level of acceptances of people with mental health problems (Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Burrows *et al* (1997) argued the definition and measurement of single homeless people was problematic as this population was in a state of permanent flux.

Dant and Deacon (1989) and Caton (1990) argued that single homelessness was caused by economic and social changes which disproportionately affected the most vulnerable in society (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Pleace and Quiglars (1996) estimated there were 106,000 homeless people in London in the last quarter of 1995. They included 15,000 in hostels, 11,000 in squats

and 3,600 in winter shelters and hostels. From these figures, they estimated there were 26,000 single homeless people in London alone (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Burrows *et al* (1997) cited several studies emphasising the structural causes of single homelessness (mainly housing supply) and found others (mainly in the United States) identifying mental health problems as the major factor.

Burrows *et al* (1997) found information on the numbers of people sleeping rough, and the hidden homeless, ranged from poor to non-existent.

CHAR, the housing campaign for single people, (1994) cited the 1991 Census that found 2,702 people sleeping rough at 453 pre-selected sites in England and Wales; 1,275 rough sleepers were in London. CHAR noted that these figures did not include the 'hidden' homeless (those sleeping on friends' floors, squatting or living in empty and disused properties) and argued that these figures had been adopted as the 'proxy' figures (with consequences for housing provision, housing initiatives and public perception) (cited in Evans, 1996).

Crash (1996) monitored winter shelters in London and found that only 18 per cent of women and eight per cent of men had never slept rough (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Burrows *et al* (1997) argued that people sleeping rough were difficult to count and no agency with sufficient resources had ever tried to do it. Rough sleepers were mobile, spent periods on and off the streets and often did not use existing homeless provision.

Research by Randall and Brown (1993), and Kemp (1997), has shown that the needs of single homeless people and rough sleepers are often as great as those of the statutorily homeless (cited in Burrows *et al*, 1997).

Four (1974-76) Political and Economic Planning reports stated that Black people were substantially worse off than white people in terms of housing. Black people were more likely to suffer overcrowding and lack various housing amenities that even the poorest white people took for granted (cited in Fryer, 1984).

A Council for Racial Equality (1990) survey found one-fifth of accommodation agencies surveyed discriminated against ethnic minorities (cited in Shelter, 1997).

Rao's (1990) survey of women in council housing in London found that 32 per cent had been racially abused and 23 per cent had suffered damage to their property (cited in Shelter, 1997).

The 1991 Census found that 77 per cent of Asian people owned their own homes compared to 66 per cent of white people and 42 per cent of Black people. Thirty-seven per cent of the Black population lived in council properties as did 21 per cent of white people and 11 per cent of Asians (cited in Pool, 1997).

Department of the Environment surveys in 1992-93 found that one-quarter of homeless applicants to nine local authorities in England and Wales were either Asian (four per cent), Black (16 per cent) or from other ethnic minorities (five per cent). However, ethnic minorities represented just six per cent of the population (cited in Evans, 1996).

A 1993 report by the Centre for Housing Policy (University of York) found Black and ethnic minority groups over-represented among those most vulnerable to homelessness constituting 26 per cent of residents in bed-and breakfast hotels and hostels. Of these, 44 per cent were aged 16-17 and 38 per cent of those under 25 were Asian or Black (cited in *Shabaab*, 1997).

Shelter's (1993) survey of housing aid clients found that 8.7 per cent of 16-17 year olds and 11 per cent of 17-24 year olds were Asian or Black (cited in *Shabaab*, 1997).

Gilroy (1994) cited studies which repeatedly found Asian and Black applicants for council housing having to wait longer and being re-housed in inferior accommodation. Furthermore, many experienced racial harassment and threats (cited in Shelter, 1997).

A survey of homeless young people in 1995 found that about half of Asian and Black young people had stayed with friends or relatives before entering a hostel (compared to 25 per cent of white young people); sleeping rough was seen as a last resort for Asian and Black young people (cited in Evans, 1996).

The London Research Centre (1995) estimated that Black households formed over a quarter of all households accepted as homeless in London (cited in Shelter, 1997).

Evans (1996) cited several London surveys that found that 52 per cent of young homeless people were from ethnic minorities (who constituted only 20 per cent of the local population).

The Labour Force Survey (1981) found many women working in low-paid and unskilled jobs. Black and Irish women often did the most low-paid and unskilled work: 38 per cent of Irish women, 37 per cent African-Caribbean and 33 per cent Asian (compared to 22 per cent of white women) (cited in Dibblin, 1991).

Dibblin (1991) argued there were 62,000 16-17 year olds who were unemployed but not counted in the official jobless figures. Of young women under 18 in manual work, 69 per cent earned less than £100 per week. Women in non-manual work earned only 62 per cent of the average hourly rate of men. This was found to seriously constrain women's housing options.

Shelter (1991) argued that when faced with homelessness, women were less likely to approach housing agencies and were more likely to stay with family or friends or endure difficult relationships. Women's homelessness therefore was more hidden (cited in Shelter, 1997).

A Department of the Environment (1993) survey found that women represented just seven per cent of homeless people in day centres and 13 per cent of the people using soup runs (cited in Shelter, 1997).

The Resource Information Service (1996) found a lack of emergency hostel beds for single homeless women. They also found women's occupancy rates were higher in single sex hostels compared to mixed sex hostels, signalling that women prefer single sex provision. This was because women were often intimidated by male-dominated hostels (cited in Evans, 1996).

Burrows *et al* (1997) argued that homeless legislation – although some progress had been made – tended to focus on homeless families and single men, not on the specific needs of women.

The Low Pay Unit (1997) found that although women represented 44 per cent of the labour force, inequality still existed in terms of pay levels and working patterns. Women represented 80 per cent of part-time workers and 6.5 million women were low paid (cited in Shelter, 1997). Shelter (1997) argued that having less money therefore gave women less choice over their housing options.

Shelter (1997) reported that in 1996, 16 per cent of mortgages were held solely by women. Shelter argued these women often had to rely on a second wage to become home-owners, they tended to buy older and poorer quality properties and they committed a greater percentage of their income to their mortgages.

Shelter (1997) argued that women had been disproportionately and adversely affected by the government's right-to-buy and disinvestment policies as women were more likely to live in council housing. In 1996, 116,870 households were accepted for re-housing by councils in England. Sixty-five per cent were households with children. Once accepted as homeless, households were often placed in temporary accommodation. This was disruptive of family life in many ways. Women headed a disproportionate number of these households.

Shelter (1997) noted that 55 per cent of new housing association lettings went to women but pointed out that this sector had experienced increased rents. This contributed to the poverty trap for those women on low incomes.

Nearly 60 per cent of women who approached Shelter in 1996-97 were homeless or potentially so. This dispelled the myth that homelessness was a male problem. Five per cent of these women were fleeing domestic violence, disputes or harassment. Nearly seven per cent of all households accepted as homeless were victims of domestic violence (Shelter, 1997).

Dibblin (1991) argued that young women are among the most hidden and unrecognised of homeless people. It was for some a cycle of abuse, homelessness and poverty compounded by virtual total neglect by many service providers. The most hidden were Asian and Black young women, those with disabilities, ex-prisoners, single mothers and those leaving care. Young women sometimes used alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms to avoid the feelings of futility (which may lead to suicide). These – together with depression, poor self-esteem, poor health and physical and sexual abuse – constituted a whole range of problems that may be experienced by young homeless women. Hostel workers reported that young women left home earlier, often in a more abrupt way, than young men did.

Dibblin (1991) noted that despite their needs, there were fewer hostel places for women. Of 22,424 hostel spaces in London, only 3,622 were for women. Nationally, there were nine times as may spaces for men than women. The subsequent lower counts of women in hostels contributed to women's invisibility. Young women were also less visible on the streets because of the dangers of sleeping rough (physical and sexual assault, racial assaults, etc.).

Dibblin (1991) cited several studies indicating that young women were more at risk of homelessness. A Department of the Environment survey found that one-third of homeless people under 20-years old had lived in care and of these, young women were most at risk. A survey in the London Borough of Brent found 70 per cent of young homeless women were under 26. A survey of women seeking accommodation and living in hostels in Bristol revealed that 72 per cent seeking accommodation were under 25 and 29 per cent were under 18. Sixty-eight per cent of women in the hostels were under 25 and 13 per cent under 18. Housing aid centres in London reported that 70 per cent of their enquiries were from young women. A study of 40 young people (with equal numbers of men and women, Black and white) reported that none of the women had slept rough but 55 per cent said they had slept at a friend's or relative's house.

Hendessi (1992) estimated that 40 per cent of the young women who had been homeless had experienced sexual abuse (cited in Shelter, 1997).

Centrepoint (1996) noted that since 1988 16- and 17-year olds could not automatically claim benefits. In 1995-96, half of the young women who had approached Centrepoint had no income. Forty-one per cent of those in hostels in 1995-96 were women and half of these were aged 16-17. Evidence suggested that 79 per cent of young women were forced to leave home because of abuse, family conflict and sexual identity. Twenty-three per cent of young women in Centrepoint hostels in 1995 were care-leavers (cited in Shelter, 1997).

The New Earnings Survey (1996) revealed that young women aged 18-20 earned on average £160 per week, compared to £180 per week for young men (cited in Shelter, 1997). The Labour Force Survey (1996) revealed that the unemployment rate for young women was twice the rate of women of all ages. The two trends combined to restrict the housing options of young women (cited in Shelter, 1997).

Shelter (1997) reported that young people aged 18-25 received a reduced Job Seeker's Allowance even though their cost of living was the same as that of older people. Furthermore, Housing Benefit restrictions introduced in 1996 meant that single people under 25 on benefits or low income could only apply for assistance with rent for a single room (not self-contained accommodation).

A Chartered Institute of Housing survey (1990) of councils' allocation policies in England and Wales found:

- One-fifth of councils did not include young people on their lists.
- Thirty-three per cent would not grant tenancies to those under 18 years old.
- Eighty-one per cent of councils required a guarantor as evidence of family or agency support.

(Cited in Evans, 1996).

The Children's Society (1990) found that 25 per cent of homeless young women and eight per cent of homeless young men seeking refuge had disclosed they had been sexually abused and 37 per cent of their homeless clients had been in local authority care (cited in Dibblin, 1991).

Department of the Environment studies comparing council waiting lists in 1986 and 1991 found a striking change from 1986: the large increase in the proportion of younger applicants (43 per cent were under 25 in 1991) (cited in Evans, 1996).

A Department of the Environment (1991) survey found that 77 per cent of 16- and 17-year old homeless people reported having at least one health problem. This compared with 54 per cent for those aged 18-24 and 70 per cent for all ages (cited in Evans, 1996).

Dibblin (1991) cited several studies on youth homelessness. A sample of 150 young people in Aldershot found that 28 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women between 18-25 were homeless. Of those under 18, 16 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women were homeless. Centrepoint estimated that over 50,000 young people sleep rough in London. A study in Guildford reported that the number of young homeless people had doubled in recent years. The Joseph Rowntree Trust stated that homelessness had been growing at an increased rate outside of London for the past 25 years. Newcastle City Council found that more than 90 per cent of the young people they had accepted as homeless had been forced to leave home because of sexual abuse and violence in the family. Between 1988-89, youth homelessness in Norwich had increased by 41 per cent and in Rochdale by 26 per cent. Shelter estimated that 156,000 young people every year experience homelessness. And in 1990, 1,426 young people had been prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act for begging and sleeping rough.

A CHAR (1993) survey found:

- Only half of local authorities would usually define as vulnerable an applicant who was a young person who had left care.
- Only two-fifths of local authorities would usually define a young person with alcohol or drug problems as vulnerable.
- Only one-quarter of local authorities would usually define a young person sleeping rough as vulnerable.

Many young people were not formally assessed: only 71 per cent of local authorities in the survey assessed all of those aged 16 and 17 that approached them (cited in Evans, 1996).

A 1994 survey in Gloucestershire found 1,148 young people in the county who were homeless or in housing need. The proportion of young women increased from 32 per cent of the sample in 1993 to 40 per cent in 1994. The proportion of those under 18 increased from 22 to 33 per cent over the same period (cited in Evans, 1996).

Hutson and Liddiard (1994) advanced five models for explaining youth homelessness:

- The Child Model which emphasised the immaturity and inability of young people to cope with issues such as housing and living independently.
- The Individual Culpability Model which emphasised individual choice in becoming homeless.
- The Pathological Model, where young people who were socially inadequate and psychologically disturbed, were vulnerable to homelessness.

- The Political Model, where a mix of economic, political and social factors caused homelessness, although the model emphasised the social context of actions rather than the individual.
- The Spiritual/Religious Model, where homelessness was the result of the spiritual poverty of society.

In addition, numerous behavioural, individual and structural explanations of youth homelessness have been proposed: abuse, alcohol and drug problems, demographic factors, government policies, housing market factors, labour market factors, leaving care, leaving home, mental health problems, welfare benefits system, etc.

Several studies suggest direct links between abuse and young people running away from home. No clear links between prostitution and homelessness have been found but strong links between prostitution and earlier sexual abuse have been found (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Randall (1988) suggested the link between alcohol and drug abuse and homelessness was exaggerated. Randall's study found casual experimentation but not prolonged and problematic use. However, a minority did have significant problems but it was not possible to explain their homelessness as a cause or effect of their alcohol or drug use (cited in Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Randall (1988) found links between crime and homelessness: 38 per cent of a London sample had been charged with or convicted of a criminal offence. Randall argued this was survival offending. Other studies suggested a greater incidence of criminality. The criminal records of these young people often adversely affected their housing opportunities. Watson (1988) estimated that about one third of young people leaving custody were either homeless or at risk. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) identified a common cycle in these studies: homelessness-offending-apprehension-custody-release-fewer housing options-homelessness.

Important demographic changes may help to explain youth homelessness. Both the 'baby boom' of the 1960s and the trend towards more single-person households increased housing demand while government policies reduced housing supply (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Hutson and Liddiard (1994) argued that government policies had quite successfully discouraged young people leaving home. They argued the housing market was not providing enough appropriate housing at prices young people could afford. Council housing declined from 32 to 22 per cent of total housing stock by 1991, local authority building programmes were cut from 125,000 new homes in 1969 to 8,000 in 1991, only four per cent of those under 25 owned their own home, the private rented sector housed eight per cent of the population in 1991 compared to 25 per cent in 1966 and three per cent of housing was provided by housing associations. As young people were mainly housed in the private rented sector, its decline reduced young people's options. Their options were further constrained with the abolition of government rent controls.

The structure of the labour market – inequality, poverty, unemployment, wages, etc. – was an important factor in youth homelessness. In turn, the effects of the structure

of the labour market depended on age, ethnicity, gender, geography, religion, etc. (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Studies found young people leaving care (who had already experienced a disrupted childhood) were often expected to cope on their own at an earlier age, thus leaving them more vulnerable to homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

Several studies showed that young people often did not leave home by choice. There were often other factors, such as abuse, family conflict, etc. Research by Centrepoint of 7,500 young people found that 86 per cent had been forced to leave home (cited in Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

There appeared to be a link between mental health and youth homelessness. It was estimated that ten per cent of those discharged from psychiatric hospitals under community care legislation had no home to return to. However, it was not clear whether mental health problems were caused by homelessness or vice versa (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

The welfare benefits system was another important factor in explaining youth homelessness. The 1986 Social Security Act established an age-related system of benefit entitlement that was not based on need. From 1988, 16- and 17-year olds were no longer eligible for benefits (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994).

A survey by CHAR (1995) of councils in England and Wales found:

- Only three-quarters of councils had a policy of assessing all homeless 16- and 17-year olds who approached them to see whether they were entitled to accommodation under the Children's Act.
- Only 59 per cent of councils considered a 16- or 17-year old living on the street to be 'in need' under the terms of the legislation.
- A great majority of councils had not undertaken a need assessment of 16- and 17-year olds in their area.
- One-third of social services departments had not developed joint policies with housing departments.

(Cited in Evans,1996).

A Department of the Environment study in 1995 found a significant increase in the number of young people (20-24) living at home, with half of all men and a third of all women living with their parents (cited in Evans, 1996).

Evans (1996) noted there was no official measure of youth homelessness because young people had very few rights to housing, and because so many local authorities did not keep a record of their needs. However, the report of the National Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness estimated that at least 246,000 young people had become homeless in 1995. The Inquiry report concluded that the problem of youth homelessness was growing at an alarming rate, that it was not a marginal social problem, that it affected rural and urban areas alike, that a majority of young people were not sleeping rough and that young people varied widely in terms of their backgrounds, circumstances, prospects and hopes. Furthermore, youth homelessness

was caused by a range of economic and social factors: limited access to public housing, shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, low wages, and reduced welfare benefits (Evans, 1996).

Although young people (aged 16-25) accounted for 17 per cent of the total adult (aged over 16) population, a large and growing proportion of homeless people were young. Around one-quarter of single homeless people in hostels or sleeping rough were under 25 and single people aged 16-25 accounted for around a quarter of all homeless applications to local authorities.

Evans (1996) argued that the traditional and acceptable pathways to independence for young people – education and employment – had become more difficult to follow. Lower wages, reduced welfare benefit levels and higher unemployment – common among young people – had reduced their purchasing power in the private rented sector and, as they often did not qualify for public housing, their housing options were limited. Some examples illustrated the point. The number of young people claiming hardship payments rose significantly after 1988. A study revealed that of those aged 16 and 17 who applied for hardship payments in September 1990, ten per cent had been in care, 20 per cent had been abused, one-third were homeless and almost half had no money at all (cited in Evans, 1996). Evans (1996) argued that the welfare safety nets were failing young people for two principal reasons: first, because limited resources were targeted and second, because young people were often not seen as a priority compared to other groups for targeted resources.

In 1995, weekly earnings for young people were as little as a third of the average, as seen in Table 25.

**Table 25: Young People's Income Compared to Average Earnings**

| Age | Percentage Average of Female Earnings | Percentage Average of Male Earnings |
|---|---|---|
| Under 18 | 44 | 31 |
| 18-20 | 58 | 48 |
| 21-24 | 79 | 69 |

Source: New Earnings Survey, 1995 (cited in Evans, 1996).

Young people were more likely to be in temporary jobs: four times as many as those aged 24-55. In the first quarter of 1996, the unemployment rate for those aged 16-24 was about 15 per cent (twice the national average). However, this average figure masked some important differences: 18.6 per cent of those aged 16 and 17 were unemployed, 18.1 per cent of those aged 18 and 19 were, 33 per cent of Asian and Black young people were and 47 per cent of African-Caribbean young people were (cited in Evans, 1996).

The Inquiry highlighted the issues and needs of particular vulnerable groups, such as care leavers. Only one per cent of those under 18 had been in care but studies found that between one fifth and half of young homeless people had been in care. Studies also found:

- That in 1992, half of all local authorities did not have policies or guidelines for supporting care leavers.

- About half of those leaving care did not receive a Leaving Care Grant.
- About 23 per cent of those who had left care said they had received no support from any source.

(Cited in Evans, 1996).

Evans (1996) argued that despite the aims of Care in the Community, many young homeless people were overlooked. A number of studies found that social services departments usually only found young people eligible under the legislation if they had a problem or a reason for vulnerability that was additional to their age and many young people with multiple problems often missed the safety net.

Simmons (1997) cited a report by the Rural Development Commission that concluded that the employment and income outlook for young people in rural areas was gloomy. These delayed or even blocked young people's entry into the housing market. One-in-five young people aged 16-24 lived in rural areas but four out of five still lived in the parental home. The availability of affordable and suitable housing was a major factor for those young people thinking of leaving rural areas.

Brown (1987) examined local authority housing policies in London boroughs and found widespread discriminatory practice. For example, only 55 per cent of boroughs granted gay and lesbians partners the same rights of succession to council housing as heterosexuals (cited in Hubbard and Rossington, 1995).

The Lesbian Information Service (1988) surveyed thirty lesbians about their housing experiences. They found the lesbians in the study:

- Were more likely to feel insecure and be harassed if in insecure accommodation.
- Experienced emotional and physical abuse from landlords, neighbours, partners and ex-partners.
- Eighty-six per cent had experienced depression.
- Forty-three per cent had attempted suicide.
- Forty-three per cent had alcohol-related problems and 36 per cent had drug-related problems.
- Forty-three per cent had experienced housing problems because of relationship breakdown.
- Three women had been thrown out of home when they came out.
- Fifty-seven per cent stated they would like to live in some kind of lesbian environment.

The Lesbian Information Service found that housing policies frequently overlooked vulnerable groups of women. These included lesbian women, and lesbians who were Asian, Black, disabled, mothers, with alcohol and drug problems, with mental health problems, young, etc.

Anlin's (1989) study of lesbians' housing needs found that of 20 homeless participants, eight had been thrown out of home, five had had insecure tenancies, two were evicted from squats, two had experienced relationship breakdown, one was

homeless because a survivors' refuge had closed, one had experienced a marriage breakdown and another had suffered sexual harassment from a landlord.

According to CHAR (1989), harassment is one of the major causes of homelessness among gays and lesbians. CHAR identified the areas of discrimination that limited gays' and lesbians' housing options:

- Lack of legal recognition for gays and lesbians and Section 28, which encouraged and legitimised discrimination.
- In terms of council housing, gays and lesbians were less likely to be in priority categories.
- In terms of home ownership, insurance companies and mortgage brokers discriminated against gays and lesbians – and there was discrimination in tax law and tax relief.
- In terms of housing associations, few had equal opportunities policies or practice.
- In terms of the private rented sector, higher rents, insecure tenures, lower standards, harassment and evictions were common.

CHAR identified some the key issues and needs of gays and lesbians:

- Equality in council allocation procedures.
- Interpretation of homelessness legislation relevant to gays and lesbians.
- Rights of succession.
- Duty of care and housing after relationship breakdown.
- Protection from harassment.
- Training for housing workers.
- Confidentiality and safety.
- Visible gay and lesbian workers (who were supported).
- Progressive policies and procedures (which were promoted).
- Specialist housing provision.

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (1989) received more calls about housing than any housing agency. In 1989, they had 10,800 calls from people seeking information about accommodation. Of these, an estimated 60 per cent were homeless and the rest preferred to live elsewhere. Of a survey of 4,000 callers to London's Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (1990), one-in-four saw their housing crisis as directly related to their sexual identity (cited in National Federation of Housing Associations, 1994).

A survey by the Leeds Accommodation Forum (1990) found 16 out of 42 gay and lesbian participants had been made homeless as a result of relationship breakdown. Fifty per cent had experienced abuse, harassment, violence, damage to property, threats to their children, attacks on their pets, graffiti, or eviction. Most had felt unable to report these incidents (cited in Stonewall, 1992).

The Piccadilly Advice Centre (1990) reported that of 18,834 users (during 1989-90), three per cent declared themselves to be lesbian and nine per cent gay.

Ten per cent of those approaching Stonewall (1990) in 1989-90 were made homeless as a result of relationship breakdown (cited in Stonewall, 1992).

Of 327 enquiries to Stonewall Housing Association (1990) during a nine month period (1989-90), 46 had experienced homophobic physical violence. Forty-five per cent of applicants stated that harassment was a major factor in their homelessness and nearly 20 per cent had been asked to leave home when they came out (cited in National Federation of Housing Associations, 1994).

Camden's Lesbian Centre (1991) reported it had more demand for help with housing than any other form of advice (cited in Shelter, 1992).

Homeless Action's (1991) survey found that 20 out of 28 thought their lesbianism contributed to their homelessness or poor housing conditions (cited in Stonewall, 1992).

A study by the Resource Information Service (1991) into hostels in London found that only 29 of the 247 projects for single homeless people had any targets for, or encouraged applications from, gays and lesbians.

Shelter (1992) found that many housing associations and local authorities discriminated against gays and lesbians in the areas of joint tenancies and rights of succession. Section 28 had deterred local authorities from pursuing equal opportunity policies that incorporated sexual identity. Within the private rented sector, gays and lesbians risked harassment from landlords and other tenants, the threats of eviction, and short-hold tenancies increased the power of homophobic landlords. Insurance companies often required gay men applying for mortgages to have HIV tests and, even if negative, to pay higher premiums. In terms of housing rights, Shelter acknowledged that same-sex relationships were not recognised and therefore they had no statutory right to housing.

The National Federation of Housing Associations (1994) conducted a survey of 155 housing associations' equal opportunities policies. Forty-four mentioned gays and lesbians in their policies and only 13 had equal opportunity records for management committee members and shareholders. Of these, only four monitored sexual identity. No housing association management committee members or shareholders were out as gay or lesbian.

The National Federation of Housing Associations (1994) found that most local authority housing departments did not monitor gay and lesbian clients or their needs: joint tenancies for couples, safe affordable housing, rights of succession, etc.

Evans (1996) found that Asian and Black people, women, and gay men and lesbians were much more likely to stay with friends or relatives than to sleep rough.

The following two studies were conducted in the United States.

Remafedi (1985) found that 26 per cent of young bisexuals, gays and lesbians had been forced to leave home when they came out (cited in Governor's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Youth, 1994).

Kruks (1991) analysed data suggesting that bisexual and gay men appeared to be at increased risk of homelessness and suicide. Of 620 young homeless people in the

study, 11 per cent identified as bisexual, gay or lesbian, 72 per cent of the bisexual and gay men were selling sex for survival and 80 per cent had experienced homophobia. These homeless young people often experienced multiple problems: abuse, neglect, substance abuse, etc. Young bisexual, gay and lesbian homeless typically shared many of these same problems, yet also faced additional problems because of their sexual identity: low self-esteem, rejection, etc. Kruks cited the Los Angeles Taskforce on Runaway and Homeless Youth report that estimated that 25-35 per cent of homeless young people were bisexual, gay or lesbian. Fifty-three per cent of the young people in this sample had attempted suicide at least once and 47 per cent more than once. The Seattle Commission on Children and Youth report estimated that 40 per cent of homeless young people were bisexual, gay and lesbian.

Trenchard and Warren's (1984) study of 416 young bisexuals, gays and lesbians found that 11 per cent had been thrown out of home for being bisexual, gay or lesbian.

Sone (1991) reported the negative public reactions to Southwark Council's use of gay and lesbian foster parents but argued that these were homes where young bisexual, gay and lesbian people could thrive (in fact, the Children's Act included guidance on family placements for these young people leaving care).

Shelter (1992) argued that young bisexuals, gays and lesbians were more likely to be unemployed or low paid and therefore less able to support themselves and they were more likely to be vulnerable.

Johnson (1994) argued that local towns and villages in Britain often had little to offer in terms of information, resources and support services for young bisexuals, gays and lesbians. This contrasted with bigger cities where services were often more developed and hence more attractive to these young people.

The National Federation of Housing Associations (1994) noted that the 1989 Children's Act imposed a duty of care on local authorities to provide accommodation for young people (up to the age of 21) if it is in their welfare interests. This could include vulnerable bisexuals, gays and lesbians. The report also noted the 1990 Department of the Environment Code of Guidance statement that the risk of homelessness could arise from sexual abuse, sudden eviction or violence at home (all of which could affect young bisexuals, gays and lesbians).

Ross (1994) argued the right to privacy for young bisexuals, gays and lesbians in care was crucial, but cases were known where sensitive information had been logged and confidentiality had been broken. Young bisexual, gay and lesbian people in care had experienced bullying, feeling suicidal, harassment and a lack of support – both from other young people and workers. Ross argued that workers needed to be aware of the role their own attitudes and behaviour played in perpetuating a climate which drove young bisexual, gay and lesbian people to despair or underground. Gay teenagers in care often ran away, ending up homeless, using drugs, selling sex, etc. Ross argued that ethnic and gender issues were more openly dealt with than homosexuality (in care settings, training programmes, etc.).

The Lesbian Information Service's (1995c) study of twenty young lesbians who faced multiple oppression found that eight had been homeless. The Lesbian Information Service cited a study that found a high incidence of intimidation and violence directed at young bisexuals, gays and lesbians in emergency accommodation.

The Albert Kennedy Trust (1997) reported there were 19 placements of young bisexual, gay and lesbian young people with 'big brothers and sisters' in 1996. Fifteen were young men, four were young women, three were Asian, two were Black and one was Chinese. Of the 102 referrals made to the Trust in London and Manchester, 80 per cent were young men, 20 per cent were young women, six per cent were Asian and 14 per cent were Black. Of the contacts received by the London office, ten per cent were from young Asian people, ten per cent were Black, ten per cent were Irish and 25 per cent were young women.

Outpost Housing Association (1997) in Newcastle reported it had received 46 referrals in 1997: 30 gay men, 16 lesbians and nine disabled people. Most were aged 16-21. It had offered accommodation to ten people. Four per cent of these people had fled from domestic violence, two per cent had experienced relationship breakdown, five per cent had been sleeping rough, nine per cent had experienced harassment, 11 per cent eviction and 39 per cent family disputes. These young people had requested information and support around benefits, heterosexism, homophobia, personal safety, safer sex and sexual health (including lesbian sexual health).

The Stonewall Housing Association (1997) in London reported that 60 per cent of its tenants were women and 40 per cent men, 31 per cent were white and 60 per cent were Black (ten per cent Asian and 35 per cent African-Caribbean). Sixty-one per cent of tenants had self-referred, 15 per cent were referred through bisexual, gay and lesbian agencies and only six per cent through statutory agencies. In 1997, 594 people contacted Stonewall Housing Association: 47 per cent were under 25, 41 per cent were female and 58 per cent male, 60 per cent were white and 24 per cent were Black. The problems presented by these clients included: harassment and violence (15 per cent), eviction and repossession (14 per cent), relationship breakdown (12 per cent), insecure accommodation (11 per cent), family problems (ten per cent), overcrowded or sub-standard housing (five per cent) and homelessness (two per cent).

Streetwise Youth (1997) reported that 62 per cent of their young male clients (who sold sex) were either homeless, had slept rough, were staying with friends, at brothels, or with punters and a small number had stayed in short-stay hostels. Some of these young men lacked independent living skills and were thought to require supported accommodation. For many, breaking dependence on punters was problematic and many young people were left open to risks such as abuse, homelessness, poverty, violence, etc. Streetwise Youth had 153 clients in 1996 and 160 in 1997. Of these, 50 per cent had used the mental health services it offered and 70 per cent sought alcohol and drug advice.

The Tewkesbury Young Single Housing Project monitored 100 referrals in 1997. Five per cent had identified as gay or lesbian and one young women suffered months of verbal abuse and graffiti after coming out.

For those who were HIV-positive there were several important housing issues: confidentiality around their status, the need for appropriate and quality housing, secure tenure (to avoid stress), mobility and independent living, sheltered housing, 24-hour services, etc. (Jeffery and Popplestone, 1988).

May (1988) reported a study by Terrence Higgins Trust which found that 20 per cent of those surveyed who were HIV-positive had had landlord problems and 20 per cent had left hospital with nowhere to go.

A National Children's Home (1991) study of young people living on their own found that one-third had only eaten one meal (or no meal) in the previous 24 hours, many had unhealthy diets, a high number were physically ill and a majority were anxious, depressed, or worried (cited in Evans, 1996).

A survey by the Mental Health Foundation (1995) found that 25 per cent of young homeless people had attempted suicide, more than half had experienced severe parental abuse and neglect, homeless young people were twice as likely to suffer from psychiatric disorders as non-homeless people, a majority remained undiagnosed and only 15 per cent had received any treatment (cited in Evans, 1996).

Brown (1998) reported a study that found homeless and hostel dwellers (who could not register with a GP) up to 25 times more likely than the average citizen to die early. They were more likely to succumb to bronchitis, pneumonia or tuberculosis. Death rate anomalies in Brighton, Guildford and Oxford corresponded to areas of bed-sits and hostels. This pattern was repeated in Bath, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Norwich, Reading and Worcester – areas where homeless people were drawn to begging from the affluent.

ReachOUT's research project found that 12 per cent of respondents lived alone. Thirty-one per cent lived with family: twice as many men compared to women. Four per cent lived with relatives: three times as many women compared to men. Eleven per cent lived with a partner: twice as many women compared to men. Five people were homeless. Thirty per cent lived with friends, two per cent in shared accommodation, and seven per cent lived in university accommodation. Young bisexual and gay men were more likely to be living in the family home or with friends than bisexual and lesbian women, who were more likely to be living with a partner or relatives.

The research project also found that 37 per cent lived in owner-occupied accommodation, 42 per cent in private rented accommodation, two people in local authority housing, four per cent in housing associations, seven per cent in university accommodation and two people in hostels.

Thirteen per cent of respondents spent less than 20 per cent of their income on housing costs, 45 per cent of respondents spent *less* than 50 per cent of their income on housing costs and five per cent spent *more*. A significant number of young people spent a substantial proportion of their income on housing costs. This was sometimes unmanageable and problematic, for example, 27 per cent reported that meeting their housing costs was, or was sometimes, a problem. The high rent level locally, which some young people sometimes struggled with, obviously leaves some vulnerable to homelessness.

Thirteen per cent were, or had been, homeless: four per cent because of their sexual identity. Eleven per cent had experienced housing problems because of their sexual identity (being evicted, refused tenancies, etc.).

Several housing issues arose from the interviews: the choice and dilemma facing young bisexuals, gays and lesbians about being out or coming out to flatmates, family, landlords, etc. and its potential consequences. The problems and stresses of not being out, the importance of feeling comfortable and safe at home. The sometimes fearful and oppressive realities of homeless provision and the limited housing options available to

those young people who desire independence and/or those who have been made homeless.

There are a number of housing issues that are *pronounced* and *specific* to young bisexuals, gays and lesbians and a number of issues facing young people *generally*.

First the pronounced issues. Young heterosexual men and women are more likely to be living in the family home than young bisexuals, gays and lesbians, as shown in Figure 20.

**Figure 20: Young People's Accommodation Status**

| Accommodation Status | Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT's Findings | Young People: General Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Men Living in Family Home | 42% (1) | 50% (2) |
| Women Living in Family Home | 15% (1) | 33% (2) |

Note: (1) $n$ = 169; (2) Department of Environment, 1995 (cited in Evans, 1996).

Bisexual and lesbian women in particular were twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to be living away from the family home. Young bisexuals, gays and lesbians are thus *more* likely to face the housing issues and problems that are associated with trying to live independently. Some of these issues and problems relate to sexual identity while others do not (see below).

Bisexual, gay and lesbian youth were *three times more likely* to be homeless, or to have been homeless, than their heterosexual counterparts, as shown in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Incidence of Homelessness among Young People**

| Incidence of Homelessness | Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT's Findings | Young People: General Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Among Men and Women | 13% (1) | 3.8% (2) |

Note: (1) $n$ = 154; (2) National Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness estimated that at least 246,000 young people had been homeless in 1995 (cited in Evans, 1996). There were 6.4 million 16-24 years olds in 1995 (National Youth Agency, 1999).

As shown in Table 22, some of the reasons for their homelessness were related to their sexual identity (i.e. being thrown out after coming out) while others were not.

Second the specific issues. Being out and coming out as bisexual, gay or lesbian carries the risk of discrimination (and even being made homeless) by flatmates, landlords, parents, etc. This is compounded and legitimised by the lack of legal protection. Furthermore, not being out is not cost free. Not being honest and open can affect young people's lifestyles (i.e. constraints on personal freedom, etc.), their relationships with people they live with (i.e. having to lie, etc.) and their confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, given the nature of society and the realities of life for many

bisexuals, gays and lesbians (widespread discrimination, fear, homophobia, violence, etc.) it is important that bisexuals, gays and lesbians feel comfortable and safe at home. Home is a sanctuary from some of these social realities. Finally, young bisexuals, gays and lesbians potentially face discrimination mortgage brokers and housing providers because of their sexual identity.

Third the general issues. Young people generally face a number of housing issues and problems irrespective of their sexual identity:

- The imbalance between housing demand and supply.
- The lack of affordable housing in the private rented sector.
- The lack of affordable social housing (co-operatives, housing associations, local authority housing, etc.).
- Lower incomes compounded by the withdrawal of welfare benefit entitlement for 16-and 17-year olds (as of 1988), the restrictions on Housing Benefit for young people (as of 1996) and the lower minimum wage level set for young people (as of 1999).

These all act to seriously constrain young people's housing choices and options. For example, most of the young people in the ReachOUT research project lived in either owner-occupied homes or the private rented sector. Given that Reading is a relatively affluent area, this can cause problems, as identified by Child:

> Reading is in danger of becoming a 'little London' with rent and house prices going through the roof … Estate agents and youth accommodation workers say too few homes are being built to meet the town's economic boom. Of the new houses and apartments being built, they have warned that many are being snapped up by investors … This will leave the less well-off with the option of moving out of town or facing high rents – making Reading a rich man's playground. [One estate agent stated] "We have had some properties increase [in value] by 100 per cent … [and] if the employment opportunities are good, then demand for homes in this area will continue to increase by up to 30 per cent." A councillor stated that "The Council was providing around 200 new houses a year with housing associations, but admitted that demand was still outstripping supply" (Child, 1999).

For local housing agencies' perspectives (including policies and provision) see Section 4.1 and for local housing workers' perspectives see Section 4.3.

## *Summary of Main Housing Issues*

Data obtained from the Young People's Health and Housing Survey and interviews:

⇒ Eleven per cent of young people lived alone, 31 per cent with family, four per cent with relatives, 11 per cent with a partner, five people were homeless, 30 per cent with friends, two per cent in shared accommodation and seven per cent in university accommodation. Young bisexual and gay men were more likely to be living in the family home or with friends than young bisexual and lesbian women, who were more likely to be living with a partner or relatives.

⇒ Thirty-seven per cent of young people lived in owner-occupied accommodation, 42 per cent in private rented accommodation, two young people in local authority housing, four per cent in housing associations, seven per cent in university accommodation and two young people in hostels.

⇒ Thirteen per cent of survey respondents spent less than 20 per cent of their income on housing costs while 45 per cent spent *less* than 50 per cent of their income on housing costs and five per cent spent *more*. A significant number of young people spent a substantial proportion of their income on housing costs. This was sometimes unmanageable and problematic.

⇒ Twenty-seven per cent of young people reported that meeting their housing costs was, or was sometimes, a problem. The high rent level locally, which some young people sometimes struggle with, obviously leaves some vulnerable to homelessness.

⇒ Thirteen per cent of young people were, or had been, homeless – four per cent because of their sexual identity.

⇒ Eleven per cent of young people had experienced housing problems because of their sexual identity, including being evicted, refused tenancies, etc.

⇒ There are a number of housing issues that are *pronounced* and *specific* to young bisexuals, gays and lesbians, and a number of *general* issues that face many young people.

**Pronounced Issues**

⇒ Young heterosexual men and women are *more* likely to be living in the family home compared to young bisexuals, gays and lesbians. Bisexual and lesbian women in particular were twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to be living away from the family home. Young bisexuals, gays and lesbians are thus *more* likely to face the housing issues and problems that are associated with trying to live independently.

⇒ Bisexual, gay and lesbian youth were *three times more likely* to be homeless, or to have been homeless, than their heterosexual counterparts.

**Specific Issues**

⇒ Being out and coming out as bisexual, gay or lesbian carries the risk of discrimination (and even being made homeless) by flatmates, landlords, parents, etc. This is compounded and legitimised by the lack of legal protection.

⇒ Not being out is not cost free. Not being honest and open can affect young people's lifestyles (i.e. constraints on personal freedom, etc.), their relationships with people they live with (i.e. having to lie, etc.) and their confidence and self-esteem.

⇒ Given the nature of society and the realities of life for many bisexuals, gays and lesbians (widespread discrimination, fear, homophobia, violence, etc.) it is important that bisexuals, gays and lesbians feel comfortable and safe at home. Home is a sanctuary from some of these social realities.

⇒ Young bisexuals, gays and lesbians potentially face discrimination by mortgage brokers and housing providers because of their sexual identity.

**General Issues**

⇒ The imbalance between housing demand and supply locally.

⇒ The lack of affordable housing in the private rented sector.

⇒ The lack of affordable social housing (co-operatives, housing associations, local authority housing, etc.).

⇒ Young people's generally lower incomes compounded by the withdrawal of welfare benefit entitlement for 16-and 17-year olds (as of 1988), the restrictions on Housing Benefit for young people (as of 1996) and the lower minimum wage level set for young people (as of 1999).