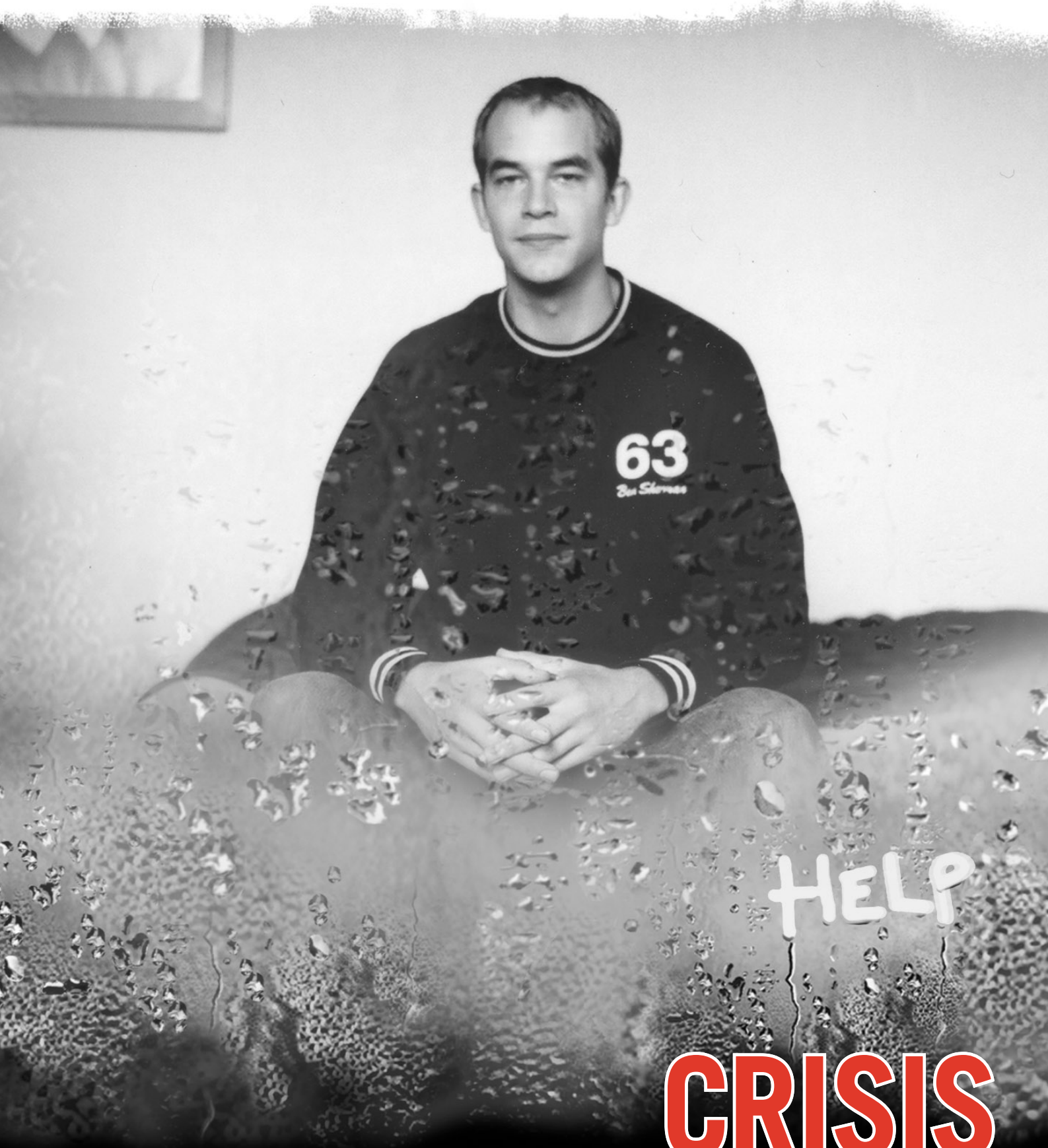


HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS: **Life on the Margins**

The experiences of homeless people
living in squats



HELP

CRISIS

Fighting for hope for
homeless people

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS: Life on the Margins

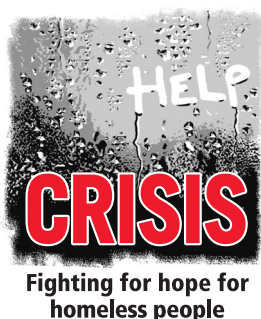
The experiences of homeless people living in squats

There are as many as 380,000 hidden homeless people in Great Britain. Although their existence is widely acknowledged, their plight is rarely tackled. Part of the reason for this is simply a lack of knowledge. This report represents the fourth instalment in a series of reports published by Crisis designed to understand the nature of their experiences and the extent of their vulnerability.

Life on the Margins: The Experiences of Homeless People Living in Squats casts light on the incidence and experiences of homeless people living in squats. The report draws on evidence generated through a survey of 164 homeless people in three case study areas (London, Sheffield, Craven, North Yorkshire) and is essential reading for anyone concerned with understanding homelessness in the 21st century – policy makers, housing and homelessness professionals, lecturers, teachers and students in housing and social policy.

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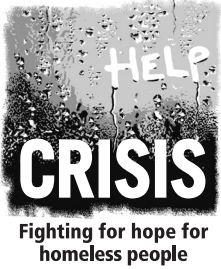
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HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS: Life on the Margins

The experiences of homeless people
living in squats

Kesia Reeve
with
Sarah Coward

A research report commissioned by
Crisis and the Countryside Agency



Crisis is the national charity for solitary homeless people.

We work year-round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness, fulfil their potential and transform their lives.

We develop innovative services that help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, join the world of work and reintegrate into society.

We enable homeless people to overcome acute problems such as addictions and mental health problems.

We run services directly or in partnership with organisations across the UK, building on their grass roots knowledge, local enthusiasm and sense of community. We also regularly commission and publish research and organise events to raise awareness about the causes and nature of homelessness, to find innovative and integrated solutions and share good practice.

Crisis relies almost entirely on donations from non-government organisations and the public to fund its vital work. Last financial year we raised £5m and helped around 19,000 people.

Much of our work would not be possible without the support of over 3,700 volunteers.

Crisis was founded in 1967 and has been changing the lives of homeless people for 36 years.

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The Countryside Agency is the statutory body working to:

- make life better for people in the countryside; and
- improve the quality of the countryside for everyone.

The Countryside Agency will help to achieve the following outcomes:

- empowered, active and inclusive communities;
- high standards of rural services;
- vibrant local economies;
- all countryside managed sustainably;
- recreational infrastructure that's easy to enjoy;
- a vibrant and diverse urban fringe providing better quality of life.

We summarise our role as:

- statutory champion and watchdog;
- influencing and inspiring solutions through our know how and show how;
- delivering where we are best placed to add value.

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Foreword

The fourth in the hidden homeless series, this publication provides us with another piece to the puzzle.

The report exposes a world in which squatting is a response to homelessness and housing need. In amongst this larger group of squatters are a group of very isolated, damaged and vulnerable people, hidden from view. This research investigates their situation and shows how squatting is a wholly inadequate solution to their problems. But all too often it seems they have nowhere else to go.

The message that emerges from this work is as simple as it is stark: homeless people living in squats must not be ignored. I urge anyone interested in understanding and tackling homelessness to read this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shaks Ghosh". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Shaks" and "Ghosh" being significantly larger and more stylized than the rest of the letters.

Shaks Ghosh
Chief Executive, Crisis

Executive summary

Squatting is a common homeless situation: More than one in four of the homeless people interviewed had squatted as a direct response to a housing crisis since leaving their last settled home. There were some marked differences in the nature and extent of squatting between the three case study areas.

Squatting was most common in Sheffield. This case study area has the highest proportion of empty property and therefore the greatest opportunities for squatting. On the other hand there is relatively low demand for social housing in the city and some provision exists for homeless people, making access to formal accommodation easier and, one might assume, less need for squatting. This is likely to explain why squatting in Sheffield was more likely to involve people excluded from mainstream housing provision or with chaotic lifestyles, drug dependencies and similar needs, making it difficult for them to negotiate the housing and homelessness system.

In contrast, squatting was virtually non-existent in the rural case study location of Craven. Although housing in the district is in high demand and limited supply and there is virtually no housing or other service provision for homeless people, thus limiting the formal housing options available to them, there are also very few opportunities for squatting. The proportion of the housing stock empty for any length of time in Craven is very low. In addition, it is far less possible to 'hide' in small rural communities and any incidence of squatting would be immediately noticeable to local residents. This is likely to explain why, of the few Craven respondents who had squatted, most had done so outside the district.

In London just under one quarter of homeless respondents had squatted. Like Craven, London has a high demand housing market with acute affordability problems, an undersupply of social housing and a relatively low proportion of empty properties. However, unlike in Craven, squatters can be more 'invisible' in the Capital and there are many services offering assistance, support and temporary accommodation to homeless people.

Analysis of these differences between the case study locations suggests that **the prevalence and nature of squatting in a given area is affected to some extent by housing market conditions, levels of service provision, and availability of empty property.**

Very little is known about squatting as a homeless situation:

Despite the relatively high incidence of squatting amongst the homeless population, there is virtually no evidence, awareness, or understanding about the nature and extent of squatting, nor about the situations, profile or experiences of homeless people who squat. For example: there is virtually no recent research evidence; statistical datasets and national surveys rarely collect information about squatters; the majority of service providers interviewed were unaware of squatting amongst their clients and, of those who were, most thought it was a very uncommon homeless accommodation situation; and only 22 per cent of front-line agencies interviewed were able to identify squatters through their client monitoring systems.

Squatters are a diverse population, squatting fulfils a diverse range of functions for homeless people and the living environments within squats are varied.

Homeless people squat in residential and commercial properties, from flats to factories to shops, for any length of time from just a day or two to many years. A number of key distinctions were identified:

- Some homeless people squat **intermittently** – using squatting as a way of obtaining shelter when conditions are too harsh for rough sleeping, or as one of many homeless accommodation situations they move frequently between – while others squat for more stable and **continuous** periods of time.
- Some squats comprise households which are **cohesive** and relatively static, the members of which consider themselves a 'household unit'. Other squats, often associated with a drugs culture, comprise a more transient population with a high turnover of residents, many of whom are not already acquainted and who formed a **non-cohesive** household.

- For some homeless people squatting represents a way of securing a temporary home as a **medium-term 'solution'** to their housing crisis. For others it represents little more than an **emergency measure** to avoid rough sleeping.

Three main patterns regarding the location of squatting in people's homeless pathways emerged:

Firstly, squatting tends to occur later in people's homeless pathways with very few squatting at the point of losing their settled accommodation. *Secondly*, squatting often follows a period of rough sleeping. *Thirdly*, squatting rarely provides a route through which homeless people move to more secure accommodation situations, or a route out of rough sleeping.

The most vulnerable sections of the homeless population are most likely to squat. For example, drug dependent respondents, those who had been looked after by the local authority, those who had been in prison, those with alcohol dependencies and those with mental ill health were far more likely to have squatted than respondents without these needs and experiences. Groups such as care leavers, ex-prisoners and people with drug-dependencies are now commonly recognised as being vulnerable to homelessness, but evidence from this research suggests that once homeless, they are then more vulnerable to accommodating themselves in hidden situations such as squatting.

6 main reasons why homeless people squat were identified:

- squatting is preferable to other forms of temporary accommodation such as homeless hostels;
- alternative temporary accommodation such as hostels does not meet their needs, for example by not accommodating couples without children together, or people with dogs;
- they do not want to burden friends and family by staying with them
- they are unable to access other temporary accommodation – because they are excluded, are ineligible; or there are no available spaces;
- to avoid rough sleeping and as somewhere to 'bed down' for the night;
- all other options, including staying with friends or family have been exhausted.

The housing needs of homeless people who squat are not being met through statutory homeless channels:

less than two thirds of respondents had approached the local authority for assistance. The evidence suggests that some of those who had presented as homeless to the local authority did so before they squatted, and only when the assistance received did not help them resolve their housing problems did they consider other options such as squatting. One third of squatters who approached the local authority were recognised as homeless and, despite the high levels of vulnerability evident in this population, only 10 per cent as being in priority need. Unsurprisingly, respondents in London and Craven, where the social housing is in very high demand, were far less likely to be recognised as being in priority need than those in Sheffield. Very few respondents secured permanent or temporary accommodation as a result of their approach to the local authority and the 'advice and assistance' provided was frequently felt to be inadequate. This assistance often takes the form of a list of private landlords, direct hostels and advice services which is of little use to homeless people who rarely have the financial means to secure private accommodation, or where hostel places are limited. In addition, the evidence suggests that many homeless people who squat do not re-present when their circumstances change or worsen, having 'lost all faith' in the local authority as a means through which to resolve their housing problems.

People who squat rely heavily on day centres for homeless people and similar services. Particularly for those without amenities such as hot water and cooking facilities, these services, which frequently offer washing facilities and food, become essential. In addition, they serve a social function, acting as a meeting place for people who have made friends during their homeless experience. There was also evidence that respondents

only accessed health and dental care in areas where there was a health service for homeless people. Contact with and use of services other than day and drop in centres was more limited and sporadic. Many respondents did not remain in contact with statutory housing services, difficulties associated with claiming benefits were reported, and there was a general frustration that attempts to get assistance from services did not match respondents' expectations or needs.

Squatters are, in every sense, a 'hidden homeless' population: monitoring systems, surveys and statistical datasets fail to identify squatters; many agencies are unaware of squatters or perceive squatting to be a rare homeless situation; very few squatters are counted in the official homelessness statistics either because they are not accepted as statutorily homeless or because they do not present as homeless to the local authority; their homeless situation is not literally visible in the way that rough sleeping is; and many squatters make concerted efforts to remain invisible to avoid eviction.

Recommendations

There are a significant number of homeless people, many of them vulnerable, who resort to squatting. In the face of restricted housing opportunities and limited or unhelpful assistance from local authority housing departments they accommodate themselves, becoming further removed from services, and therefore from potential assistance, in the process. And, 'hidden' from view and from statistics, they remain neglected by policy and strategy. There is, therefore, a clear failure to recognise and meet the needs of this section of the homeless population. The recommendations below would help address these issues and move towards a situation where vulnerable people are not left to accommodate themselves in inappropriate and sometimes unsafe environments.

Recommendation 1: Surveys and data collected by government local authority and service providers should include squatting as a distinct tenure category in order to expose the full scale of homelessness.

Recommendation 2: All local authorities should ensure that homelessness strategies address the needs of homeless people living in squats as well as those living in other forms of hidden homelessness. The methods used to carry out the homeless reviews should, therefore, be developed to capture all homeless groups.

Recommendation 3: Government should develop clearer and more directive guidance around the interpretation of homelessness legislation, in particular the assessment of levels of "vulnerability" so as to ensure that those who are most in need do not slip through the net.

Recommendation 4: Government should extend existing "priority need" categories to include additional vulnerable groups such as people with existing or previous drug and alcohol dependencies and mental ill health.

Recommendation 5: All local authorities should appoint a homeless officer with specific responsibility for single homeless people to ensure that they receive appropriate advice and support which can realistically help them resolve their housing problems.

Recommendation 6: All local authorities should develop dedicated outreach teams to target single homeless people living in squats and other hidden homeless situations, assisting them in accessing housing, services and support.

Recommendation 7: Government, local authorities and the homeless sector should look at ways of increasing awareness amongst homeless people of their right to present as homeless to local authorities.

1. Introduction

In recent years policy attention and resources have focused on the most visible form of homelessness – rough sleeping. The high profile activity of the Rough Sleepers Unit, whilst certainly positive, in some ways served to emphasise the common perception that homeless is synonymous with rooflessness, to the neglect of the very many people in other homeless situations.

The most visible of homeless people, and the only ones ‘counted’ in official estimates of homelessness – rough sleepers and households accepted as homeless by local authorities – have long been considered as the ‘tip of the iceberg’ by homeless campaigners and charities, which have been highlighting the existence and plight of single homeless people, those living in hostels, with friends and family, in other temporary situations, and those who are not recognised as homeless by local authorities.

In March 2002, with the publication of *More than a Roof*, the Government set out a new approach to tackling homelessness which, in a welcome move, readily acknowledges the less visible homeless groups such as those staying with friends and in hostels, and accepts that the extent of homelessness cannot be measured by official figures alone. Indeed the report references Crisis’ estimate that 400,000 people are living in hostels, staying with friends, or in other temporary accommodation situations. Recognising also that statutory homelessness is on the increase, the Government has committed to tackle homelessness.

This commitment is reflected to some extent in the *Homelessness Act 2002*. For the first time local authorities have a duty to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and develop a homelessness strategy. In addition, more vulnerable single people will now be owed a statutory housing duty following the extension of priority need categories. This, alongside the introduction of Supporting People, and the recognition in *More than a Roof* of the barriers facing certain vulnerable groups in accessing housing, can be seen to signal an increased commitment to addressing the housing needs of vulnerable groups.

However, there is still very little known or understood about those homeless people who have traditionally been neglected by policy, who are not ‘counted’ in official homeless figures or rough sleeper counts, and who policy is only beginning to recognise. In addition, despite the Government’s acknowledgement of the vast numbers of homeless people staying in ‘hidden’ situations such as with friends or in other temporary housing circumstances, the current priority of reducing the number of people living in bed and breakfast hotels focuses once again on just one specific group of homeless people, and one homeless accommodation situation.

In an attempt to improve understanding about the more neglected groups of homeless people, and expose the extent of ‘hidden’ homelessness, Crisis commissioned a series of reports on this issue. Other reports in the series focus on homeless people staying with friends and family, people living in hostels, and on estimating the numbers and cost of single homelessness. This report focuses on homeless people who squat.

1.1 The research approach

This research focused on *single people who squat as a response to homelessness*. ‘Single people’ were defined as those without dependent children rather than in terms of their marital or relationship status.

The term ‘people who squat as a response to homelessness’ was employed in recognition that some people squat as a lifestyle, cultural or political choice and that these issues underpin their squatting activity more so than their homeless situation. This is not to say that these squatters are not homeless, or that the participants in this research did not engage in cultural or political activity or make positive choices to squat. Indeed this distinction is not a hard and fast one. However, this research was undertaken specifically to understand, uncover, and explore issues relating to homelessness and the experiences of the homeless population, rather than to explore all the many dimensions to, and issues relating to squatting – one

aspect of which is homeless. To this end research participants were people who had experienced a housing crisis in the form of homelessness and had squatted as a direct response to this.

1.1.1 The research process

The research was conducted between September 2002 and June 2003 and involved four phases.

1. A review and evaluation of the homelessness evidence base, both qualitative and quantitative, to assess the extent of existing knowledge relating to the prevalence and experiences of homeless people living in squats.
2. Telephone and face-to-face interviews with 74 front-line service providers across three case study locations (London, Sheffield, and Craven) to explore: agency monitoring practices with regard to squatters; awareness of 'hidden' homelessness generally and squatting specifically; agency perceptions of squatting in their area, and the profile characteristics of homeless people who squat.
3. A questionnaire survey of 165 homeless people across the three case study areas, conducted in a range of homeless and non-homeless services. The sampling strategy involved identifying agencies known to work with particular client groups, in order to ensure the inclusion of these groups within the sample and to secure a reasonably representative cross-section of the homeless population. The questionnaire was designed to collect profiling information, to identify respondents' pathways through different homeless situations since leaving their last settled accommodation, to ascertain whether they had approached the local authority as homeless and the outcome of this approach, and the reasons why they became homeless. Respondents were also asked if they had squatted since leaving their last settled home, allowing this population to be extracted from the dataset and compared and contrasted with those respondents who had not squatted, and also in order to identify respondents with whom an in depth

interview could be conducted (see Appendix 1 for tables profiling the total homeless sample). In a separate exercise using the same survey, an additional 11 respondents were surveyed who were known to have squatted since becoming homeless.¹

4. In-depth interviews with 40 homeless people who had squatted since leaving their last settled home, identified through the survey of homeless people. These interviews explored issues such as: respondents' pathways into (and sometimes out of) homelessness and squatting; their daily lives; their patterns of service use; their views and experiences of squatting; the barriers they had faced attempting to access alternative accommodation; and the positive and negative aspects of squatting.

1.1.2 Selection of the case study areas

Case study selection was designed to ensure the inclusion of homeless people living in different housing market and service provision contexts, key factors known to impact on the incidence and experience of homelessness and which may affect the extent to which homeless people rely on squatting to temporarily address their housing needs. To assist with the selection process and to ensure inclusion in the sample of homeless people living in very different contexts, a threefold classification of location types was developed:

1. high demand for affordable housing, relatively high house prices, recognised homelessness problems and wealth of associated provision (temporary accommodation, advice and day centre provision, outreach work with rough sleepers and such like);
2. relatively low demand for affordable housing, relatively low house prices, a history of homelessness in the area and some associated provision;
3. high demand for affordable housing, relatively high house prices, no recognised homeless problem and limited provision of associated services.

In addition, the selection process recognised the need to ensure inclusion of different geographical locations,

¹ These respondents were 'targeted' in the early stages of data collection in the event of the general survey method proving unsuccessful in accessing squatters. This targeted sampling in fact proved unnecessary.

rural and urban districts and London, given the very particular and extreme situation in the capital. The result was the selection of three case study locations: London – a large urban area in the south east fulfilling the criteria of category 1 above; Sheffield – an urban area in the north of England fulfilling the criteria of category 2; Craven – a rural district in the north of England fulfilling the criteria of category 3. A fuller description and profile of these case study locations is found in Appendix 2.

2. Knowledge and awareness of squatting

Chapter summary

Very little is known about squatting:

- there is virtually no recent research evidence
- statistical datasets and national surveys rarely collect information about squatters
- the majority of services were unaware of squatting amongst their clients
- only 22 per cent of front-line agencies interviewed were able to identify squatters through their client monitoring systems.

2.1 What evidence is there about squatting?

Very little is known about squatting and there is virtually no evidence or information pertaining to the experiences or prevalence of homeless people living in squats. In addition, squatting appears to be a less commonly recognised homeless situation than, for example, staying with friends, in hostels, or rough sleeping.

For example, there is no recent research evidence relating explicitly or solely to homeless people squatting. Information pertaining to squatting as a homeless situation is found mainly in literature seeking to explore 'hidden homelessness' more generally. This growing body of literature frequently acknowledges squatting as a hidden homeless situation, and provides insight relevant, but not explicitly relating to homeless people living in squats, often focusing on a particular sub-group such as women (for example Webb 1994), young people (for example Fitzpatrick 1999), or minority ethnic groups (for example Carter 1998). However, this literature tends to focus on the collective experiences of the hidden homeless and while there is recognition of the diverse housing circumstances of this group of people, most studies fail to distinguish between the different situations in which the hidden homeless are accommodated and therefore fail to

provide many useful insights into the specific experiences of people living in squats.

In addition, this body of evidence, whilst sometimes attempting to quantify the 'hidden homeless' population generally, rarely refers to the numbers of people in particular housing circumstances. Reports tend to highlight the difficulties associated with quantifying hidden groups of people, and make only tentative suggestions as to the numbers of people who may be homeless but are not recognised as such. The only exception to this is research by the London Research Centre which estimated that 9,600 people were squatting, 80 per cent of whom were squatting in London (London Research Centre 1996).

Thus, while the *existence* of hidden homelessness, and sometimes of squatting more specifically, is highlighted in research evidence there is usually little or no concrete information, nor detailed discussion about this situation.

Statistical datasets are a further potential source of evidence but the caveats in these mean they rarely provide any information about the prevalence of squatting. For example, in the process of gathering data about respondents' tenure, a 'squatting' category is very rarely present and squatters would appear only in an 'other' category. Similarly, some statistical datasets do provide a 'squatting' tenure category but then amalgamate this with other categories. A few national surveys have attempted to gather data about squatters by distinguishing them from other people 'living here rent free' – including The General Household Survey 2001-2002, The Survey of English Housing 1999-2000, the Health Survey of England 2000, and the British Social Attitudes Survey 1999 – but in each of these surveys no squatters were identified, raising questions about the effectiveness of large-scale surveys at accessing this group of homeless people.

2.2 Awareness of squatting amongst front-line agencies

Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted

with 74 front-line service providers across the three case study locations. Overall, more than half (52 per cent) were unaware of squatting as a homeless situation their clients experienced. Of those who did report awareness of squatting, most believed it to be an uncommon homeless accommodation situation.

Awareness of squatting was highest in London, with nearly three quarters of agencies aware that some of their clients squatted, whilst in Sheffield 57 per cent of those interviewed reported being aware of squatting. Based on evidence from the survey of homeless people, this is unlikely to be a reflection of a greater prevalence of squatting in the capital – squatting was in fact more prevalent in Sheffield than in London (see Chapter 3). Only one service provider in Craven was aware of squatting, which is a likely reflection of the dearth of squatting in this rural case study location.

Agency monitoring systems can provide a rich source of data regarding homeless people's accommodation situations. These systems can also be the means through which agencies become aware of the prevalence of squatting amongst their clients in order to develop services to adapt to the needs of this client group.

However, although nearly half of all service providers interviewed reported an awareness of squatting, examination of monitoring practices revealed that in many cases their knowledge was impressionistic and anecdotal. Only 44 of the 74 agencies monitored their clients' current or last accommodation situation and of those which did, only 17 categorised squatting. Agencies in Sheffield were most likely to monitor squatting (42 per cent of those with client monitoring systems), in Craven least likely (25 per cent) and in London 31 per cent of agencies categorised squatting separately from other housing situations.

Of those agencies not monitoring for incidents of squatting, several explained that a separate 'squatting' category was unnecessary as so few of their clients were in this situation. This begs the question of how agencies know with certainty that squatting is an uncommon situation if their monitoring systems do not

allow it to be identified. A number of agencies categorised squatters under 'rough sleeping' or 'roofless', raising an interesting possibility that some agency perceptions of squatters extends only to those who bed down in empty or derelict buildings.

Limited monitoring indicates that agencies perceive squatting to be a relatively rare occurrence, and when questioned on this matter the vast majority reported that squatting was either uncommon or very uncommon. Improved monitoring would increase awareness of the prevalence of squatting and would also provide data on which to draw regarding the frequency and experiences of this group of hidden homeless.

2.3 Conclusion

A review of the evidence base regarding the nature and prevalence of squatting leaves little doubt that virtually nothing is known about squatting and that awareness of squatting as a homeless situation is limited. As long as this remains the case squatting will remain hidden and unacknowledged, as a way in which homeless people respond to their housing crisis.

3. Setting the scene

Chapter summary

Most forms of squatting are not illegal.

The evidence suggests that more than 1 in 4 homeless people squat.

Squatting takes place in a range of residential and commercial building types from houses to shops to factories.

There is great diversity in squatting situations, and it fulfils a range of functions:

- some people squat intermittently, some for continuous periods of time
- some squats comprise 'cohesive' households, others are more transient
- for some, squatting is a medium-term solution to a housing crisis, for others it is an emergency measure to avoid rough sleeping.

In order to provide context for the discussion and findings presented in the remainder of the report, this chapter presents information regarding the prevalence of squatting, and provides a broad overview of squatting situations.

3.1 Squatting: The legal context

Most forms of squatting are not illegal. In law, squatters are trespassers (people occupying property or land which someone else owns or is entitled to possession of without their permission) and trespass is not a criminal offence but a civil matter – a dispute between individuals. Thus, squatting is unlawful (a breach of civil law) but not illegal (a breach of criminal law), and in most cases owners must obtain a Possession Order from the civil courts in order to regain possession of a squatted property.

There are a small number of criminal offences relating to squatting, under the terms of the Criminal Law Act 1977:

- squatting on embassy property is illegal;
- squatting in a property that is currently occupied as someone's home (a 'displaced residential occupier') or in a property that someone is about to move into (a protected intending occupier), and refusing to leave when asked to do so is an arrestable offence.

In addition, the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994* introduced Interim Possession Orders (IPOs) which, in certain circumstances, provide a 'fast track' eviction process against squatters who are preventing a 'protected intending occupier' from moving in. Failure to comply with an IPO by vacating a squatted property within 24 hours of an Order being served is a criminal offence.

Although squatting itself is not illegal, the means of entering an empty property can be. Squatters can be arrested for criminal damage if they break into a property to gain access.

Squatters are, however, afforded some legislative protection. Under the terms of the Criminal Law Act 1977 it is an offence to use or threaten violence to enter a property if there is someone there who objects to them coming in – even if that person is a squatter.

3.2 How common is squatting as a response to homelessness?

Squatting is a relatively common means through homeless people obtain temporary accommodation. Over one quarter (26.4 per cent) of the 165 currently or recently homeless people surveyed reported having squatted since leaving their last settled home.

Comparison between case study areas suggests marked differences in the prevalence of squatting amongst homeless populations in different locations. In the rural case study (Craven) squatting was virtually non-existent, with only four respondents (11 per cent) reporting having squatted since becoming homeless, three of whom squatted outside the district. In Sheffield however, a very high 42 per cent of homeless people surveyed had squatted since their last settled home, while in London this applied to just over 23 per cent of respondents.

More than 1 in 4 homeless respondents had squatted since becoming homeless.

Half of those who had squatted since their last settled home had done so only once, and half had squatted between 2 and 8 times. However, these figures relate only to respondents' current or most recent episode of homelessness. In-depth interviews suggested that respondents who had been homeless on more than one occasion had sometimes squatted once or more during each period of homelessness.

The most common length of time reported as the longest period spent squatting was six months (21.7 per cent) although homeless people squat for widely varying lengths of time, from just a day or two through to many years. Very few respondents had squatted in the same property for longer than a year but analysis of in-depth interviews revealed that some spent far longer periods of continuous time squatting, albeit in a number of consecutive properties. In these cases respondents tended to remain in one squat until they were evicted, moving immediately into another until they were evicted from that property, in a cycle resulting in a fairly long-term squatting experience.

3.3 Where do homeless people squat?

Homeless people squat in a diverse range of empty buildings and property types, both residential and commercial, in the social and private sector. Although most commonly the squatters interviewed had occupied residential houses and flats, instances were also identified of respondents squatting in:

- factories;
- warehouses;
- outbuildings;
- schools;
- community centres;
- night clubs;
- shops.

This range of, sometimes unusual property types reflects that the type of accommodation squatted is often determined more by opportunity than choice or preference. The squatters interviewed did not seek out particular types of properties, but looked for any building which was empty and easy to gain access to, whether a house or a night club.

3.4 Exploring the diversity of squatting situations

It was clear from the research evidence that squatting fulfils a diverse range of functions for homeless people, that squatters themselves are by no means a homogeneous group, and that living environments within squats are very varied. In order to understand and capture the diversity of experiences presented throughout this report, and to provide a backdrop for subsequent discussion, this section draws out some key distinctions between different types of squatting situations.

1) Intermittent squatting and continuous squatting

Some respondents squatted frequently and intermittently, while others 'settled' in a squat for as long as they were able to remain there.

Intermittent squatters comprised two distinct groups. *Firstly*, there were those who were relatively long-term rough sleepers using empty buildings to sleep in for a few nights. These respondents tended to squat alone or with a partner or one friend for short periods of time. In these cases the function of squatting was little more than a way of obtaining shelter and 'bedding down' when conditions were too harsh for sleeping rough.

"I'd sleep in shop doorways and squatted if it were raining or really windy or that, to get shelter...I never stayed there for any length of time, I would rather be on my own in a shop doorway. Then if it was bad weather, rainy or really windy I would go [into a squat]."

(Male, aged 30, Craven, homeless in Leeds).

Secondly, there were those respondents who moved

quickly and frequently between different homeless accommodation situations such as staying with friends, rough sleeping, hostels or night shelters, and squats. These people were often more chaotic, sometimes with dependency problems. They tended to move into squats which were already established, often without knowing the other residents, and would move on while the property continued to be squatted by others.

In contrast to those homeless people squatting on an intermittent basis were those whose housing histories showed more stable and longer-term periods of squatting, usually within a household of people with home they had chosen to live with. These respondents did not necessarily squat for very long periods of time (although this was sometimes the case) but for as long as they were able to remain in the property before being evicted.

2) Squats accommodating cohesive households and squats accommodating non-cohesive households

Some squats comprised households which were cohesive and relatively static, the members of which considered themselves a 'household unit'. The level of cohesion and stability within these squats covered a spectrum. At one end were highly organised households, for whom squatting was a lifestyle or political choice, sometimes operating as a co-operative and part of a wider cultural or political squatting network. Others were not as organised but nevertheless comprised a group of people who had chosen to live together as household and attempted to make their squat a 'home'. Cohesive households were more likely to comprise continuous, rather than intermittent squatters.

In contrast, other squats – very often associated with a drug use culture – comprised a more transient population where there was high turnover of residents, many of whom were not already acquainted. These squats often operated as 'open houses' and although the properties themselves may have remained occupied for some time, those who moved through them were usually intermittent squatters who did stay long,

moving quickly between a range of homeless accommodation situations.

3) Squatting as a medium-term 'solution' to a housing crisis, and squatting as an emergency measure

For some, squatting represented a way of securing a temporary home as a medium-term 'solution' to their housing crisis. For others it represented little more than obtaining shelter for the night or somewhere to stay for a few weeks until they moved on to a different situation. In the latter cases, respondents were more likely to 'drift' into squatting situations, responding to opportunities to squat as and when they arose. These individuals did sometimes stay in a squat for some time, but rarely as a plan from the outset, tending to resolve their housing situation on a day-by-day basis. This group of homeless people tended to be intermittent squatters, staying in squats accommodating less cohesive households, or 'bedding down' in empty buildings.

Those for whom squatting represented a medium-term solution to their housing difficulties were more likely to squat for continuous periods of time, in a more organised and planned fashion and forming a household unit with other occupants of the squat.

The brief description of these various types and functions of squatting shows that there are relationships between the three sets of distinctions outlined. For example, people squatting intermittently are more likely to use squatting as a shorter-term measure, often in squats inhabited by less-cohesive households. Those for whom squatting represents a way of obtaining a temporary home in the medium-term are more likely to live in cohesive households and squat for a continuous period of at least several months but sometimes years.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has exposed that, contrary to the common perceptions of even those working with homeless people, squatting is in fact a common way in which

they respond to a housing crisis. Squatting is also diverse however and recognising this diversity is important: the data suggest that homeless people's experiences of squatting are often related to the type of squatting in which they engage, the environments within the squats they inhabit, and the function of squatting during a period of homelessness. For example, people whose only experience of squatting is intermittent, bedding down in derelict buildings, or living in transient squats associated with drug activity, generally have less positive views and experiences of squatting than respondents who used squatting as a way of obtaining a temporary home, sharing with friends or a partner.

4. A profile of squatters

Chapter summary

Squatters were more likely than non-squatting homeless people to be:

- male
- white British and white Irish
- between the ages of 26-35.

Council housing was the most common tenure from which respondents had become homeless.

65 per cent had approached the local authority as homeless. Of these:

- only 33 per cent were recognised as homeless
- 10 per cent were recognised as being in priority need.

Squatters are a particularly vulnerable population. For example:

- nearly 52 per cent had been in prison
- 46 per cent were drug dependent
- 37 per cent had mental ill health
- 35 per cent had been in care.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the profile characteristics of people who have squatted during their current episode of homelessness. A survey of 165 homeless people was conducted across three case study locations – 47 in Sheffield, 83 in London, and 35 in Craven. The survey sample included those who had not squatted since becoming homeless as well as those who had, making it possible to measure the profile

characteristics of squatters against a population of homeless people who had not squatted, and to identify where the characteristics and experiences of squatters are distinct.

4.1 Age, gender and ethnic profile of homeless people who squat

In the early stages of the research, interviews with front-line service providers had indicated that squatting is more common amongst the male homeless population. This was corroborated by the survey data which revealed that, compared with the sample of respondents who had not squatted during their current episode of homelessness, squatters were more likely to be male – 87 per cent compared with 61.7 per cent of non-squatters. In Craven, of the very few respondents who had squatted (just 4 in total) all were men, and in Sheffield 90 per cent of squatters were male (see Table 4.1).

Service providers suggested that the predominantly male profile of the squatting population reflects in part that homeless women find squats unsafe, particularly when there is regular turnover of residents. On the other hand, some suggested that squatting can provide a safer alternative to rough sleeping for homeless women.

These alternative views are a likely reflection of the different forms which squatting can take. For example, those service providers commenting that squats were unsafe for women tended to be aware only of squats accommodating a more transient or chaotic population. Those who had come into contact with women squatting as a safer alternative to street homelessness

Table 4.1 Gender

| Gender | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 87.0 | 83.3 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 61.7 |
| Female | 13.0 | 16.7 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 38.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 4.2 Age profile

| Age | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| > 20 | 5.7 | 10.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 12.6 |
| 20 – 25 | 20.8 | 17.2 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 21.8 |
| 26 – 35 | 43.4 | 24.2 | 60.0 | 100.0 | 30.3 |
| 36 – 45 | 20.8 | 31.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 20.2 |
| 46 – 55 | 3.8 | 6.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 10.1 |
| 56 – 65 | 5.7 | 10.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 4.3 Tenure of last settled home

| | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Council | 35.0 | 21.1 | 47.4 | 50.0 | 21.6 |
| Private rented | 22.5 | 36.8 | 10.5 | 0.0 | 25.0 |
| Owner occupied | 15.0 | 5.3 | 26.3 | 0.0 | 10.2 |
| RSL | 5.0 | 5.3 | 0.0 | 50.0 | 5.7 |
| Licensee | 10.0 | 21.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 18.2 |
| Supported housing | 2.5 | 0.0 | 5.3 | 0.0 | 3.4 |
| Other | 10.0 | 10.4 | 10.5 | 0.0 | 4.5 |
| Not known | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 11.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

were aware of more 'stable' squatting environments comprising cohesive and less chaotic households.

Comparing the age profiles of respondents who had and had not squatted during their current episode of homelessness reveals that squatters are less likely to be under the age of 20, and between the ages of 46 and 55, but that more fall into the 26-35 age range (see Table 4.2). In fact, over half of those currently squatting (53.8 per cent) were between the ages of 26-35. Respondents in London who had squatted since becoming homeless had a more varied age profile than those in the other two case study locations. In Craven the four respondents who had squatted since their last settled home were all between the ages of 26-35, and no respondent in Sheffield was over the age of 45.

Squatters were more likely to be white British than those homeless people surveyed who had not squatted (80 per cent compared with 64.2 per cent of non-squatters), and 10 per cent described themselves as white Irish compared to just 5 per cent of those respondents who had not squatted since becoming homeless. Squatters in London had a more mixed ethnic profile compared to Sheffield and Craven where, although the majority were still white British (65.5 per cent) there was a significant proportion of white Irish squatters (17.2 per cent) and also British or Black Caribbean squatters (nearly 7 per cent).

Again, of those service providers interviewed who commented on the ethnic profile of squatters all suggested squatters were a predominantly white and/or

Table 4.4 Outcome of squatters approach to the local authority as homeless

| | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Recognised as homeless | 33.3 | 16.0 | 55.0 | 33.3 | 38.0 |
| Recognised as priority need | 10.2 | 3.8 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 22.1 |
| Filled in an application form | 50.0 | 37.5 | 65.0 | 50.0 | 39.0 |

white British population. A few agencies pointed to squatting amongst European communities including Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

Housing

Of the homeless people surveyed who had squatted since becoming homeless, just over one quarter were currently squatting, one quarter were staying with friends or relatives, 11 per cent were sleeping rough and the remainder were in a variety of other temporary accommodation situations such as hostels and bed and breakfast hotels.

Table 4.3 shows that council housing was the most common tenure from which squatters became homeless. This was particularly true in Sheffield and Craven, while in London squatters had most commonly been living in the private rented sector in their last settled home. A comparatively high proportion of squatters in Sheffield had been living in the owner occupied sector immediately prior to their current episode of homelessness.

Nearly 65 per cent of respondents who had squatted since leaving their last settled home had presented to the local authority as homeless. One third of these had been recognised as homeless and 10 per cent as being in priority need (see Table 4.4).

Squatters in Sheffield were most likely, and in London least likely to be recognised as homeless. In Craven none of the squatters interviewed had been recognised as being in priority need, while this applied to less than 4 per cent of respondents in London and 20 per cent in Sheffield. This disparity between case study areas is likely to reflect in part the availability of, and demand for, social rented housing in these areas. A pressured

social rented housing market means that social housing needs to be ‘rationed’ and a rigid interpretation of the legislation will result in fewer households being owed a statutory duty to be housed. It will be no coincidence then that in Sheffield, where there is a ready supply of local authority housing, respondents were more likely to be recognised as homeless and in priority need than those in Craven and London where there is an undersupply of local authority housing.

Comparison between squatters and the sample of homeless people who had not squatted suggests that squatters are less likely to be recognised as homeless and half as likely to be recognised as being in priority need (see Table 4.4).

The vast majority of these respondents will not appear in the official homelessness statistics – either because they have not presented as homeless to the local authority, or because the local authority has determined that they not homeless under the provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002.

Over one third of respondents had not presented as homeless to a local authority.

Of those who had, the majority were not recognised as homeless.

4.3 Vulnerabilities and additional needs

The data suggest that people who squat whilst homeless are a particularly vulnerable population – significantly more so than those who have not squatted since becoming homeless.

Table 4.5 shows that respondents in the squatting

Table 4.5 Vulnerabilities and additional needs

| | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Been in prison or YOI | 51.9 | 33.3 | 75.0 | 75.0 | 26.7 |
| Drug dependent | 46.3 | 26.7 | 65.0 | 100.0 | 15.8 |
| Been on probation | 46.3 | 26.7 | 65.0 | 100.0 | 29.2 |
| Mental ill health | 37.0 | 23.3 | 50.0 | 75.0 | 29.2 |
| Been in LA care | 35.2 | 23.3 | 40.0 | 100.0 | 18.3 |
| Literacy problems | 22.2 | 26.7 | 15.0 | 25.0 | 18.3 |
| Alcohol dependent | 20.4 | 20.0 | 15.0 | 50.0 | 17.5 |
| Learning disability | 14.8 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 8.3 |
| Numeracy problems | 9.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.5 |

sample were more likely to have drug dependencies, to have been in the care of the local authority, to have mental ill health, to have a range of educational and learning needs, and experience of the criminal justice system than their non-squatting counterparts. The starkest differences between the squatting and non-squatting populations were found around issues of contact with the criminal justice system, experience of local authority care, drug dependency, and learning disabilities. Table 4.5 also reveals that, with the exception of literacy and numeracy difficulties and alcohol dependency, squatters in Sheffield were a particularly vulnerable population.²

The survey evidence suggests that, in some areas, the reason for the high levels of vulnerability evident in the squatting population lies in the fact that homeless people with the needs and experiences outlined above may be more vulnerable to squatting than those without. Groups such as care leavers, ex-prisoners and people with drug dependencies are now commonly recognised as being vulnerable to homelessness and over-represented in the homeless population, and this research suggests that once homeless, they are then more vulnerable to accommodating themselves in hidden situations such as squatting.

In the total sample of homeless people (squatters and

non-squatters) drug dependent homeless respondents, those who had been looked after by the local authority, those who had been in prison and on probation, those with an alcohol dependency and those with mental ill health were more likely to have squatted than respondents without these needs and experiences. In some cases the differences are very stark: for example 53.7 per cent of drug dependent homeless people had squatted compared with just 17.2 without a drug dependency, and 42.9 per cent of homeless respondents who had been in prison or a young offenders institution had squatted compared with 23.4 per cent who had not. Similarly, 42.1 per cent of care leavers had squatted compared with 21.6 per cent of respondents who had not been looked after by the local authority.

The most vulnerable sections of the homeless population are particularly likely to resort to squatting.

Interestingly, analysis of the figures by case study location revealed that while this was very true of vulnerable homeless respondents in Sheffield, applied to many vulnerable groups in Craven, in London this pattern often did not apply at all. For example:

² This could also be said of squatting respondents in Craven. However, as only four homeless respondents interviewed in this case study location reported having squatted since their last settled home, these data are not robust enough to make such a generalisation.

- Homeless respondents in Sheffield and Craven with mental ill health, who had been in prison, and who reported having been on probation were significantly more likely to have squatted than those who did not report having these needs and experiences, but in London these groups were less *likely* to have squatted than those without these vulnerabilities.
- Of all the drug dependent homeless respondents interviewed in Sheffield and Craven 76.5 per cent and 100 per cent respectively had squatted while in London the distinction between these two sample groups was less stark: 33.3 per cent of drug dependent respondents in London had squatted compared with 21.2 per cent of those without a drug dependency.
- Although the total sample of homeless care leavers were more likely to have squatted than non-care leavers, this was in fact only true of respondents in Sheffield where 80 per cent of homeless care leavers had squatted, compared to 32.4 per cent who had not. In both Craven and London care leavers were in fact *less likely* to have squatted than respondents who had not been in the care of the local authority.

The explanation for this disparity between case study areas may lie in the wider and more extensive provision of services (other than accommodation providers) for vulnerable groups in London compared with Sheffield or Craven. As one respondent from Craven commented:

"...there's no catering for the homeless apart from the soup kitchen. You can't even get a blanket. If you tried to sleep in a doorway you would probably get arrested. They don't want people like that in Skipton, they don't want people like me in Skipton. But why shouldn't I when I was born in Skipton?"
(Male, aged 30, Craven)

Thus, although the pressures on both temporary and permanent accommodation in London are acute and affordable housing is very limited, there is more extensive availability of services for vulnerable groups to assist and route them into more appropriate accommodation. In Craven the housing market displays some of the characteristics of the London housing market – including limited supply of social housing and high house prices in the private sector – but in this case study location service provision for vulnerable people is very limited.

4.4 Conclusions

It is clear from the evidence presented in this chapter that the housing needs of homeless people who squat are not being met through statutory homeless channels. Despite very high levels of vulnerability amongst this population, particularly in Sheffield and Craven, only a small proportion are recognised as being in priority need, or are even being recognised as homeless. In addition, it appears that the most vulnerable of the homeless population – particularly in areas without services dedicated to assisting vulnerable groups – are more likely to squat in response to becoming homeless. The local housing market and service provision context may have an impact on the extent to which homeless and vulnerable people squat to address their housing needs.

5. Housing and homelessness pathways

Chapter summary

Squatters are more likely to become homeless following a separation from their partner and following eviction than homeless people who do not squat.

The immediate causes of homeless amongst squatters mask a host of underlying 'triggers' including drug dependencies, mental ill health and compounding traumatic events.

There are three main patterns regarding the location of squatting in homeless careers:

- squatting tends to occur later in people's homeless careers
- it is often preceded by rough sleeping
- it rarely represents a route to a more secure housing situation.

The reasons why people squat as a response to homelessness include:

- a preference for squatting over other temporary accommodation, sometimes because alternative provision does not meet their needs
- they are unable to access, or have exhausted other temporary accommodation
- to avoid sleeping rough
- to avoid relying on, and 'putting on' friends and family.

The questionnaire survey took respondents through all the situations they had been in since becoming homeless so that a detailed picture of their 'pathways' into, and through, episodes of homelessness could be obtained. This exercise also enabled analysis of the points at which homeless people squat during these pathways. The issues arising from this exercise were explored in more detail through in-depth interviews.

5.1 Triggers of homelessness

The breakdown of relationships, eviction, and financial difficulties are now commonly recognised 'triggers' of homelessness, and examination of the immediate causes of homelessness amongst the squatters interviewed for this research revealed few surprises.

Table 5.1 shows that the most common reason why respondents left their last settled home was a separation from a partner, particularly in Sheffield and Craven. Being asked to leave the parental home following a dispute or relationship breakdown, and eviction emerged as the second and third most common triggers. The breakdown of relationships with parents was more common as a reason for becoming homeless in London than in Craven or Sheffield, while eviction was only relevant for squatters in London and Sheffield.

Comparing squatters with the sample of homeless people who had not squatted suggests that while separation from a partner is a common trigger for all homeless people, squatters were more likely to have become homeless following such a separation (37.3 per cent compared with 24.5 per cent of non-squatters) and significantly more likely to have been evicted from their last settled home (13.7 per cent compared with just 3.1 per cent of non-squatters). Very few squatters however (just 3.9 per cent – all in Sheffield) had become homeless for financial reasons such as an inability to maintain rent payments, or repossession for rent or mortgage arrears, while this was a significant contributory factor for the sample who had not squatted.

Further analysis of survey and interview data identified entering an institution – in particular prison, but also hospital – as frequently preceding a period of homelessness. In fact, release from prison to a situation of rough sleeping was commonplace, particularly for those who had served short sentences or been on remand. This will partly reflect that prisoners serving sentences of less than 12 months are released without compulsory input from the Probation Service. One respondent talked about the impact of being released

Table 5.1 Reason for leaving last settled home

| | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Relationship breakdown with partner | 37.3 | 28.6 | 50.0 | 33.3 | 24.5 |
| Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents | 17.6 | 25.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 18.4 |
| Eviction | 13.7 | 17.9 | 10.0 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Financial reasons | 3.9 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 13.3 |
| To seek employment | 2.0 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 8.2 |
| Parents no longer able to accommodate (no dispute or relationship breakdown) | 2.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Dispute with other occupants (not parents) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Other | 23.5 | 17.8 | 25.0 | 66.7 | 26.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

from prison without assistance finding accommodation:

“A lot of people like me come out of prison and have nowhere to go, end up in a squat and get into drugs, go out robbing all day. My drug habit’s worse now. There should be help when you get out of prison.”

(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

Some respondents who were homeless on release from prison had been in settled accommodation when they were sentenced. Others were homeless at the point of sentencing and remained homeless on release. For both these groups, but the latter in particular, the prison system had not provided an opportunity to engage with services in order to avoid homelessness, or to find a route out of homelessness.

Homelessness is rarely a direct result of one causal factor or event and the ‘immediate causes’ of homelessness presented above mask a host of underlying and entwined factors. For example: many of those who had been asked to leave the parental home or had separated from their partners reported that their

drug dependency had caused or exacerbated tensions in these relationships; some of those respondents who had lost their settled accommodation whilst in hospital had ongoing mental ill health; those who had been evicted from social housing for anti-social behaviour or rent arrears were unable to avoid homelessness because they were excluded from further social housing tenancies; for others, eviction from a settled home only resulted in homelessness because the current financial position of respondents rendered them unable to secure alternative accommodation. And often, respondents had experienced traumatic events earlier in their lives, acting as compounding factors.

We might posit therefore that while certain experiences and events are critical points in people’s housing careers making them vulnerable to homelessness, it is the range of other factors and life experiences which determine whether such experiences and events take people from that critical point into a situation of homelessness. The following quotes and the case study below are illustrative of the complex range of contributory factors to homelessness:

"I was in employment in 1997, working on a farm in a tied house. I had a very bad mental health breakdown. After that of course I lost the job, so the house, it all in fact and was hospitalised. By 1999 I was homeless."

(Male, aged 37, London)

"My head was sort of all over the place. I'd had a lot of arguments with my family and one of my family members died...My grandmother was the only one I really spoke to properly and she died...my head was all over the place and I thought I'd come down here [London] and straighten myself out but it didn't happen as I'd hoped."

(Male, aged 24, London)

5.2 Locating squatting within homeless careers

Three patterns emerged regarding the location of squatting in respondents' homeless careers:

- Squatting tends to occur later in people's homeless careers
- Squatting is often preceded by a period of rough sleeping
- Squatting rarely represents a route to more stable or secure accommodation situations

We will consider each of these in turn.

Squatting tends to occur later in people's homeless careers. It is rarely an immediate response to becoming homeless, with very few resorting to squatting as a means through which to resolve their housing crisis at the point of losing their settled accommodation.

A period of at least six months, but sometimes several years tends to have elapsed between the loss of a settled home and a first squatting experience, during which time respondents usually move through a range of other homeless accommodation situations including staying with friends or family members, rough sleeping, and hostels. A number of reasons for this are suggested by the data.

Firstly, respondents often acquired knowledge about, and accessed (existing) squats through other homeless people they had met and become friends with at day centres, hostels, or on the streets:

"One of my mates who I know from the [hostel] was staying there and asked me if I wanted to join him."

(Male, aged 20, London)

"I had a friend who was in the squat already. I knew he was in there a few months before I went in

Factors contributing to homelessness

Sarah's story

Sarah, currently aged 19, was living in her parental home when she started a new relationship with a man she met whilst on holiday. Her mother then passed away so Sarah went to live with her boyfriend. He was a drug user, dependent on crack cocaine and heroin, and before long Sarah was also dependent on crack cocaine. She then fell pregnant but her child was taken into foster care because of her drug use. The relationship between Sarah and her partner deteriorated after this, he became violent and attempted to persuade her into prostitution to fund their drug habits – "We started arguing and everything, and then he hit me and then wanted me to go out and get money for him working as a prostitute for him and I said no. So I packed my stuff and left". Having nowhere to go and nowhere else to stay she approached the Local Authority but "they gave me emergency accommodation for three nights but after that I had to leave...they told me they couldn't help me, that's what they said, they said they can't help me because I'm not in a needy situation."

there and he asked if I wanted to stop there...
(Male, aged 24, London)

To identify and access existing squats in this way individuals need to be located within this 'network' of homeless people, have built friendships, and gained a degree of trust from those already living in existing squats. People who have very recently become homeless are less likely to be in this position.

This issue was highlighted by service providers in Sheffield, a number of whom reported an informal network of homeless people through which others find the squats currently open:

"When clients get to know services and make friends they get to know where the squats are."
(Advice, drop in, and life skills training centre for young homeless people, Sheffield)

There was even suggestion than an arrow had been placed near the train station in Sheffield, signalling the direction of an open squat to homeless people newly arrived in the city.

Secondly, in many (but by no means all) cases, respondents reported that other temporary situations such as staying with friends or in hostels were preferable to squatting and it was only when these options were unavailable or had been exhausted that squatting was considered. Again, a period of homelessness usually elapses before all other preferable options have been exhausted.

Thirdly, the survey and interview data suggest that squatting, as a means through which to obtain temporary accommodation during a housing crisis, is rarely an obvious option to people recently homeless. Indeed awareness of squatting as a housing situation at all, and knowledge of how to go about squatting, was quite limited amongst recently homeless respondents. It is only after a period of homelessness that awareness of squatting increased. As one commented:

"I did have a chance to squat when I first went on the streets but it didn't really appeal to me. I didn't know anything about squatting. With my friend, he told me a lot about squatting and how easy it is. I learned more about the legalities, that's it's not illegal to squat as such."
(Male, aged 24, London)

Although most respondents had already been homeless for at least six months before they started squatting, a significant minority had moved quickly from their last settled home to a squat, albeit usually with a very brief period of a few days or a week rough sleeping in between. However, the housing careers of this group of squatters differed in one significant respect from those for whom squatting had not been an immediate response to homelessness, namely that they tended to have experienced episodes of homelessness prior to their last settled home. Thus, this group of squatters, like those who did not move directly from a secure home to squatting, had in fact already been through a range of homeless accommodation situations, built up networks of friends and acquaintances, and developed an awareness of squatting, albeit in a previous rather than current episode of homelessness. For example:

"I met up with some old mates from my last time on the streets. They told me about this squat so I went with them."
(Male, aged 42, London)

In addition, some of the settled accommodation situations of those respondents who had moved into a squat immediately on becoming homeless had been very short lived. Viewed in the context of their whole housing history these settled homes appeared as little more than a brief attempt at a route out of homelessness which had not been sustained. In other words, these short-lived tenancies were in fact part of a longer homeless career which included brief periods of settled accommodation.

Squatting often follows a period of rough sleeping. Amongst those respondents for whom it was possible to identify their precise pathway through different accommodation situations, the majority had been sleeping rough immediately prior to squatting (17 out of 25). An additional 10 respondents – who were unable to recall with accuracy all the situations they had been in or the chronological order of events, due to the chaotic nature of their housing careers – reported periods spent moving swiftly between situations of rough sleeping, sofa surfing, and squatting. Many of these will also therefore have been sleeping rough prior to squatting.

This common trajectory – from rough sleeping to squatting – is likely to reflect once again that individuals often access squats through a network of street homelessness:

“Through the streets, you meet people and they say ‘oh I’ve got a squat’ and you can move in.”

(Male, aged 18, London)

Thus, sleeping rough – and being located within a network of rough sleepers – can provide opportunities for homeless people to acquire knowledge about squats already inhabited where they might be able to stay.

It may also reflect, as noted in Chapter 3, that for some, squatting serves the purpose of providing shelter during a sustained period of rough sleeping:

“I saw an empty factory and thought I’d chill in there for a bit.”

(Male, aged 26, Sheffield)

“Was walking around town, it was cold and I just noticed it...there was nowhere else to go for shelter.”

(Male, aged 28, Sheffield)

Comparing respondents’ housing situation immediately prior, and subsequent to squatting suggests that **squatting rarely represents a route through which respondents move to a more secure accommodation situation, or a route out of rough sleeping.**

At first sight there is indication that squatting may play a role in providing a stepping stone into slightly more stable or secure accommodation, albeit still of a temporary nature, and provide a route out of rough sleeping. Of 25 respondents whose homeless careers could be accurately mapped:

- six were still squatting;
- four returned to the situation they had been in immediately prior to squatting – three to a situation of rough sleeping and one to staying with a friend;
- four went from a situation of rough sleeping or staying with friends or family to the reverse situation – arguably similarly insecure housing situations which do not constitute a ‘service’, or

bring the individual into contact with a service;

- one had previously been in settled accommodation but was living in a caravan subsequently;
- nine moved to a situation which – whether viewed positively by the respondent or not – could be seen as more secure accommodation arrangement. This is mainly people who were sleeping rough prior to squatting and who moved to hostels or night shelters after squatting (6) but also includes two people who had been staying with friends prior to squatting and moved to a hostel subsequently, and one who had been in a night shelter before he squatted and moved to a hostel subsequently;
- one returned to the family home.

Thus, of the 19 respondents whose housing pathways could be identified with accuracy (and who were not still squatting), only four returned to the exact accommodation situation they had been in before squatting, and only one respondent who had not been sleeping rough immediately prior to squatting subsequently went into this situation. Arguably, 10 of the 19 who were no longer squatting had moved from a squat to a more secure status of tenure – usually hostels – than they had been in prior to squatting. It is also significant that many of those who had been sleeping rough prior to squatting did not return to a roofless situation (17 were sleeping rough before squatting but only three of these returned to sleeping rough immediately after squatting). However, exploring respondents’ housing situations later in their homeless careers reveals that many of these individuals subsequently experienced a further episode of rough sleeping.

Squatting may therefore provide respite from rough sleeping for a time but many respondents continue in a cycle of homelessness involving squatting, rough sleeping, hostels, and staying with friends or family. It is a situation from which people access temporary hostel accommodation for a time, but not one from which people secure settled accommodation, or begin the process of moving in the long-term to more secure housing environments.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate some of the findings presented in this section, and map the relationship between respondents' last settled home, rough sleeping, and squatting.

The role and location of squatting in homelessness pathways: A summary

- Homeless people tend to squat later in their homelessness career.
- Squatting often follows a period spent sleeping rough.
- Each incident of squatting tends to be short lived – squats rarely last longer than six months and almost never longer than one year, although sometimes people will squat a number of properties in succession resulting in a longer-term squatting experience.
- Respondents frequently move from squatting into slightly more stable accommodation, but this is usually part of a cycle which returns to rooflessness later in homelessness careers.

The role squatting played in the homelessness pathways of squatters whose housing histories were identifiable did not differ significantly between the three case study locations. However, it is noteworthy that in Sheffield most respondents were 'intermittent squatters' with more chaotic homelessness careers. It is to this we will now turn.

5.3 The role of squatting in fragmented homeless pathways

In some cases it was possible to clearly identify where squatting occurred in homeless pathways but a significant number of respondents squatted intermittently and frequently during very fragmented, or 'chaotic' homeless careers.

In these cases – many of which were identified in Sheffield – the role of squatting was as a very temporary measure, sometimes to avoid rough

sleeping, and respondents rarely had any sense of how long they would remain in the squat. In other words these homeless people were more or less 'drifting' in and out of squatting, taking each day at a time, resolving the problem of where they would sleep on a day-to-day basis.

"I don't know where I'll be from day to day."
(Male, age 26, Sheffield)

The data suggest a number of key features of these fragmented squatting experiences:

- each incidence of squatting is usually short-term, sometimes just a night or two, sometimes weeks or a month, but rarely several months;
- it invariably involves moving in, or 'staying' in squats already inhabited by others,
- this type of squatting is common amongst people with drug dependencies
- periods of rough sleeping and staying with friends are the situations which usually intermittently accompany squatting.

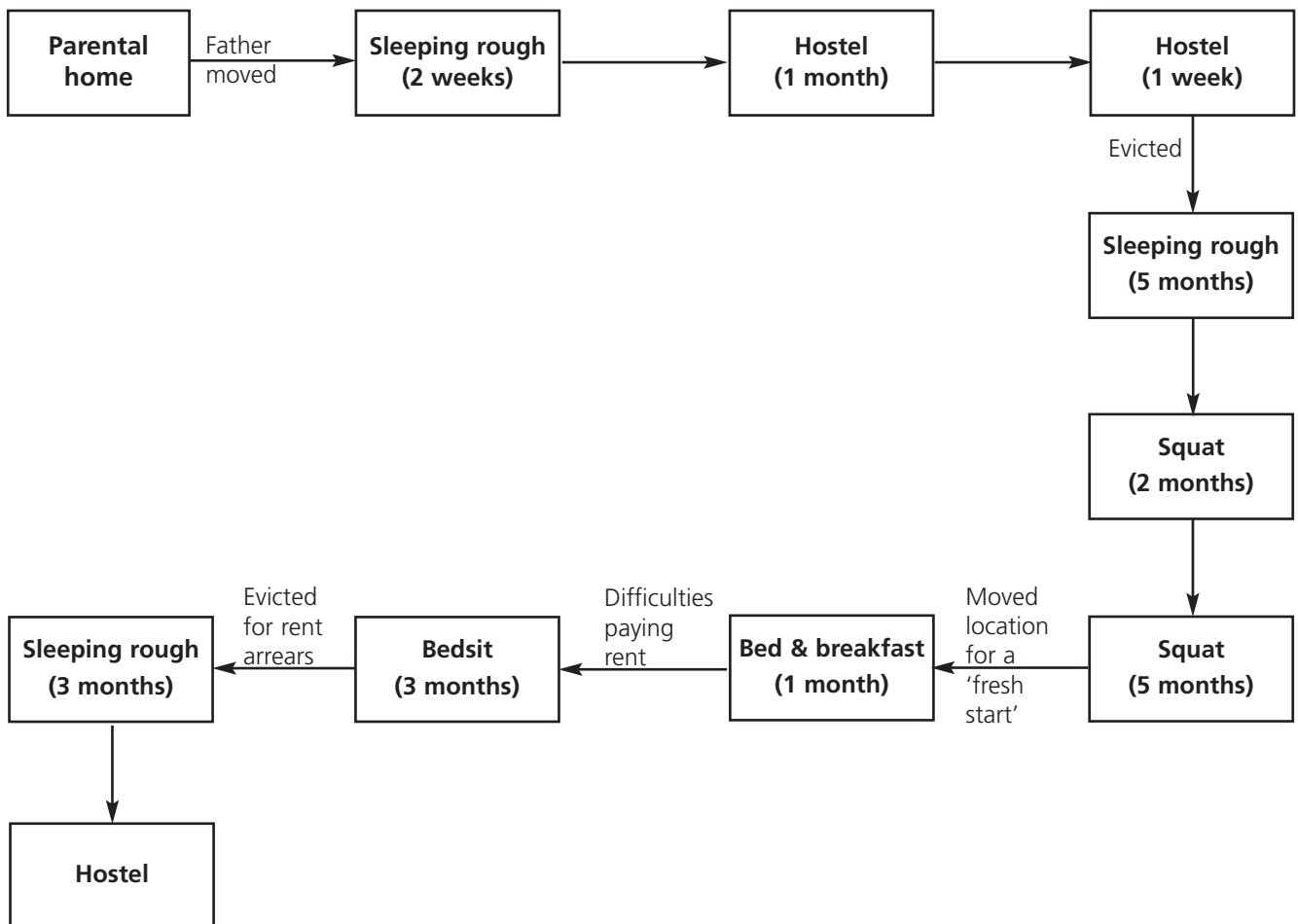
Those with fragmented homeless careers often squat opportunistically and squatting serves the purpose of resolving the immediate problem of finding somewhere to stay for a few nights. For some drug dependent respondents squats represented a place where they could buy and take drugs with other people who had a similar lifestyle and with whom they shared common experiences.

5.4 Why do people squat as a response to their homeless situation?

Squatting does not feature in the housing careers of all homeless people, and only some use squatting as a temporary solution to their housing crisis. In this section we will explore the reasons why people squat to further understand the role that squatting plays in respondents' housing pathways.

Figure 5.1 'Adam's' homeless pathway

Male, aged 21, Sheffield

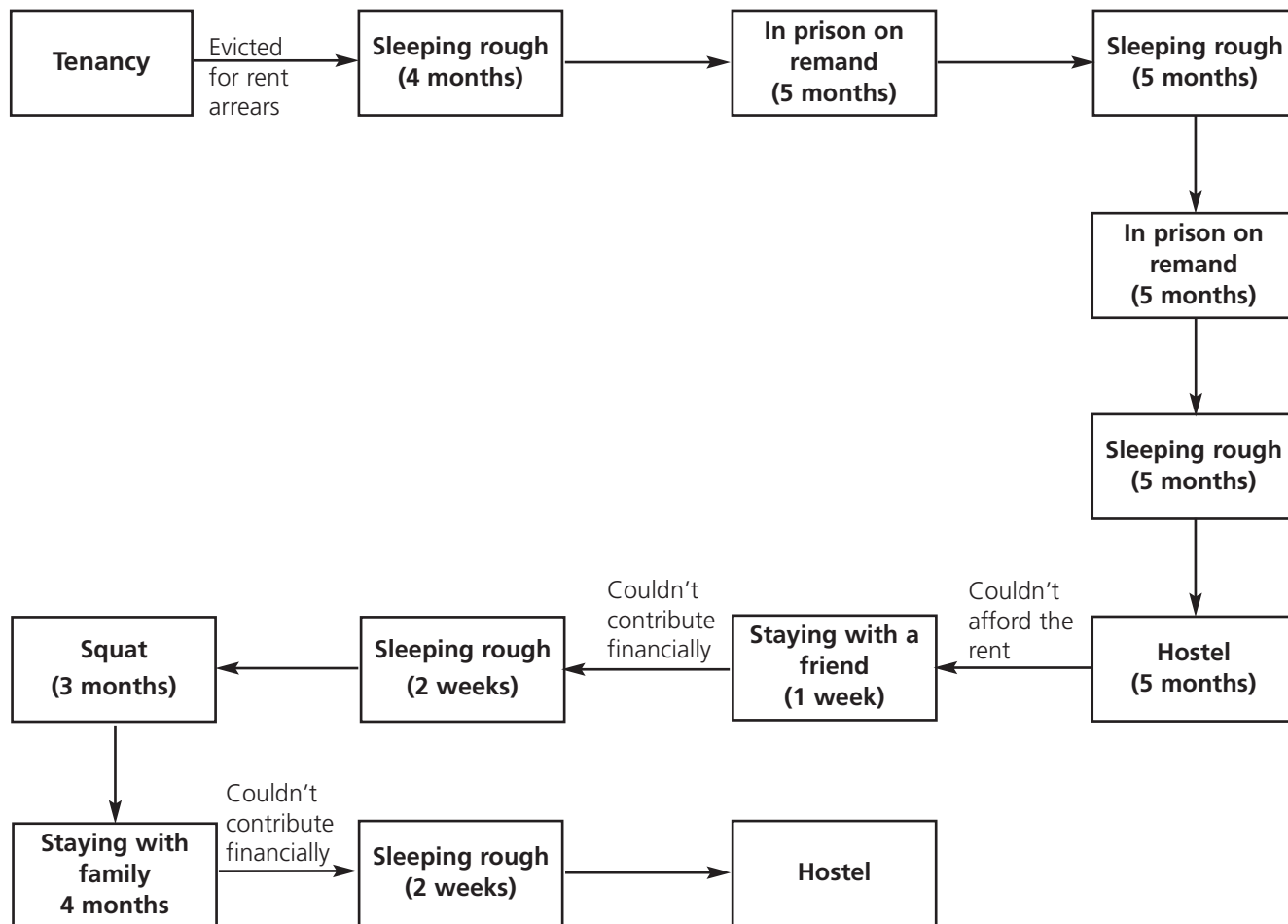


Illustrative features of Adam's homeless pathway:

- Squatting was not an immediate response to becoming homeless: 7 months between loss of settled home and squatting
- Rough sleeping immediately prior to squatting
- Includes a range of homeless accommodation situations in addition to squatting, including bed and breakfast, hostels and rough sleeping
- A period of rough sleeping since squatting

Figure 5.2 'Michael's' homeless pathway

Male, aged 31, white British, London



Illustrative features of Michael's homelessness pathway:

- Rough sleeping immediately prior to squatting
- Squatting was not an immediate response to becoming homeless
- A period of rough sleeping since squatting
- Being released from prison into a situation of rooflessness

Squatting was sometimes, but by no means always, a last resort. In fact, respondents reported very diverse views on the relative merits of squatting over other temporary accommodation situations, from those reporting that they would rather sleep rough than squat – *“I prefer the streets, feel safe and I know what’s coming. In a squat who knows?”* – through those who preferred squatting to many or all other temporary housing situations, to those for whom squatting was a positive choice, preferable even to permanent housing.

Despite this diversity the data suggest that many homeless people do try other avenues for resolving their housing crisis before they move into a squat.

“I tried all the B&Bs, tried all the hostels, rang Shelterline, they couldn’t help me. I had friends to ask but I felt cheeky, I hate asking people for anything, I prefer to squat.”

(Male, aged 26, Sheffield)

“I tried other avenues but nowt worked, no other alternatives but squatting”.

A series of more specific reasons why respondents first squatted, and why attempts to resolve their housing situation in other ways were not successful, were identified.

1) Because squatting was preferable to other forms of temporary accommodation

Respondents had very mixed experiences and views of temporary housing provision such as hostels, bed and breakfasts, and night shelters. While some felt relatively positive about these forms of accommodation, for a significant proportion they represented a last resort:

“There’s no way I’m going to stay in a hostel or temporary accommodation like a B&B...there are just too many rules and the rest are shitty places. If you haven’t got a problem you soon will have living like that.”

(Male, age unknown, London)

“They [CAT team] were going to put me in a hostel and it was a bit rough and I didn’t want to go in there, it’s rough from what I’ve heard, very rough.”

(Male, aged 24, London)

The extent to which respondents asserted a preference for squatting over hostels and similar accommodation depended on the provision available in their area, the quality of this provision and previous experiences of staying in such accommodation. It also depended on the type of squatting respondents had experienced and how positive this had been for them. Thus, those who had mainly only squatted during periods of rough sleeping, or had squatted intermittently in transient households, or had previously stayed in hostels with environments they found relatively pleasant were less likely to assert a preference for squatting than those who had stayed in hostel environments which they had found difficult, and/or whose previous experience of squatting had been positive.

Respondents who had squatted because it represented a preferable alternative to other forms of temporary accommodation were exercising some positive choice in this decision.

2) Because alternative temporary accommodation did not meet their needs

This applied mainly to those respondents in couples who wanted to remain living together. For example:

“In the meantime we were trying local HPUs in South London. Just told ‘here’s a list of hostels, ring round’. But either told on ringing that they are full, or they don’t take couples.”

(Female, age unknown, London)

Or those with dogs who could not find hostels that accepted pets:

“As people on the streets know, if you’ve got a dog to get a hostel place is almost impossible so squatting was the only way I’d get a roof over my head.”

(Male, aged 31, London)

For these respondents it was only after concerted efforts to access other forms of temporary housing provision that squatting became an option. However, there was some element of choice – albeit perhaps Hobson’s choice – with these homeless people preferring to squat than accept temporary housing

which did not allow them to remain with their partners or pets.

3) Out of consideration for friends or family

Respondents who squatted because they did not want to rely on friends and family often commented that staying with friends or family was an option available to them and a preferable environment compared with squatting, but they did not feel it was fair to 'put on' other people:

"I don't want to put myself on friends, that's just me. Whatever's to do with me it's down to me to deal with it and sort it out. I don't want to go and put myself on friends."

(Male, aged 23, London)

"I didn't want to hassle friends with my drug habit."

(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

For respondents who squatted for this reason, there was some element of choice in their decision to squat but this choice did not stem from a positive view of squatting, just a desire to avoid a situation they perceived would be negative for others.

4) Unable to access other temporary accommodation

Those who reported having squatted because other

options were unavailable fell into three categories.

Firstly were those who were excluded from hostels and similar accommodation either because they had been evicted previously and were now banned, or because they had rent arrears, or because they fell into a client group that certain hostels would not accommodate such as drug users or alcoholics. This was particularly common amongst squatters in Sheffield. *Secondly* were those who had attempted to access hostels and suchlike through the local authority but were informed they were ineligible because they were not in priority need or were not from the area. *Thirdly* were those who attempted to access temporary housing provision but found there were no places available.

Problems associated with finding available hostel places were reported by respondents across all case study locations. However, there was indication that some homeless people in London who were not sleeping rough faced an additional barrier to accessing hostel places. It was suggested that many hostel places were reserved for rough sleepers referred by CAT teams.

"Apparently, from what I've heard from staff in here and in other centres you need CAT workers.... You need to be on the streets and be seen on the streets...before they'll house you..."

(Male, aged 23, London)

Squatting as a last resort: Alan's story

In 1999 Alan, then aged 32, was released from prison having served a 5-year sentence. He was unable to secure accommodation and spent the next three years sleeping rough, occasionally squatting for a couple of weeks and, on the odd occasion, staying in a homeless hostel. During this time he came into contact with an outreach team and, with their assistance, approached the local authority and eventually secured a temporary tenancy (a flat). After 8 months the tenancy expired and despite Alan's efforts and the efforts of the outreach team the local authority would not renew the tenancy. Alan was unable to secure hostel accommodation as he was barred from the two direct access hostels in the city. He was barred from one of these hostels because he had allowed one of the hostel residents to stay with him in his temporary flat.

Alan therefore found himself with nowhere to go, facing street homelessness again when he *"met up with some old friends and they told me about a squat, so I joined them.....my options ran out, I had no other options. If I hadn't seen my friend I'd have been on the streets."*

Alan, who has depression and a drug dependency, has now been living in the squat for four months, sharing the one-bedroom flat, with no amenities and no glass in the windows, with up to 15 other people.

“It’s murderous because if you’re not sleeping literally on the streets and you don’t see a CAT worker and get CAT number then all the hostel spaces are reserved for people with CAT numbers so if you haven’t got a CAT number there isn’t many vacancies available.”

(non-squatter, male, London)

This places homeless people who are not currently sleeping rough, for example those who are staying with friends or family (and indeed those currently squatting), in the absurd position where rough sleeping becomes their route into temporary housing provision, and where they therefore have a better chance of securing a hostel place if they leave their current temporary accommodation, where at least they have a roof over their head, and place themselves in a roofless situation.

Where people start squatting because other temporary provision is not available, this is more likely to be a last resort with little element of positive choice.

5) Squatting to avoid sleeping rough

We have already mentioned elsewhere that squatting is sometimes used, and viewed, as a means of obtaining shelter while sleeping rough. Unsurprisingly many respondents squatting in this way, when asked why they first decided to squat, explained that this was an alternative to sleeping on the streets. For example:

“It’s simple innit? It’s either that or sleep on the streets.”

(Male aged 23, London)

“Why did I decide to squat? Simple, it was cold, the middle of winter and I was sleeping outside in a graveyard, that’s why.”

(Male, age unknown, London)

For these respondents squatting represented shelter, warmth, and a safer environment to the streets:

“It’s off the streets, safer than the streets.”

(Male, aged 28, Sheffield)

6) Because other options, such as staying with friends or family, had been exhausted

Some respondents had already been through all the accommodation situations available to them and their first experience of squatting occurred only once all these options had been exhausted. As one explained:

“My lead into squatting came when at the time I was sleeping on lots of people’s sofas and floors and my luck ran out of places to go.”

(Male, aged 32, London)

As the above quote suggests, this typically involved staying with all friends or family members willing to temporarily accommodate, until the point was reached where these relationships had all broken down, or family and friends’ willingness to accommodate ceased. However, there were cases where other options had also been exhausted, such as hostels with a maximum length of stay imposed.

In addition to those reasons outlined above, there was some evidence of homeless people squatting because they had limited awareness of the help and services available to them. Most knew they could seek advice from the local authority, or were aware of the existence of day-centres and advice services that may be able to assist, but a small minority had no idea that services were available to help people resolve their housing problems. As one respondent commented, talking about the very first time he squatted many years ago:

Table 5.2 Reasons for not squatting during a period of homelessness

| | All non-squatters (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| No aware of how / where to squat | 21.7 | 16.7 | 18.2 | 33.3 |
| Chose not to squat | 22.6 | 38.9 | 4.5 | 6.7 |
| No opportunities for squatting | 2.8 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 6.7 |
| Able to stay in other/ preferred situations | 52.8 | 42.6 | 77.3 | 53.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

“When I was younger I didn’t know what services were available to me. I didn’t know hostels existed. I’m from Chesterfield and they have nothing like this [day centre].”

(Male, aged 29, Sheffield)

5.4 Why don’t people squat?

Amongst those homeless respondents who had never squatted, just over half reported having been able to stay in other situations (see Table 2.1). In Craven, limited awareness about how or where to squat and the limited opportunities for squatting were more commonly cited reasons than in either other case study location. The vast majority of respondents in Sheffield were able to find other situations which were preferable to squatting, and a positive choice not to squat was significantly more common amongst respondents in London than in the other case study areas.

5.5 Conclusions

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that homeless people squat when there are no other, more appropriate options available to them. Squatting is rarely a first port of call on becoming homeless and, although for some there is an element of positive choice in their decision to squat, most have attempted to resolve their housing difficulties in other ways before they consider squatting. Once homeless people start squatting, this rarely provides them with an opportunity to move on into more secure or appropriate housing situations.

6. Life in squats

Chapter summary

Squatters often endure poor property conditions and lack basic amenities.

Uncertainty about the length of time one can remain in a squat, combined with limited financial resources, often restricts squatters' ability to repair and improve their squats.

Some squatters' face risks to their personal safety.

There was limited awareness amongst respondents of their legal position and rights, and few defend themselves against eviction.

Squatters devise a range of strategies for avoiding detection.

Squatting can be a positive experience. It provides a 'home', opportunities to work and study and live with like-minded people.

In this chapter we will consider a range of issues which emerged from in-depth interviews with people who had squatted since becoming homeless, about their daily experiences of living in squats.

6.1 Property conditions

The homeless people interviewed were asked about the condition of the properties they had squatted in, and their access to amenities. The responses revealed that squats were often in poor condition, sometimes structurally unsound, and in a few cases only part of the property was habitable at all. As one explained:

"It's got a downstairs which is just open space with a big hole in the ground where they drilled into the ground. I think that was to look at the subsidence...but we don't use that room. The walls aren't too bad, put posters on the wall basically."
(Male, aged 24, London)

Several respondents reported occupying just one room because the rest of the property was uninhabitable:

"It's very damp inside. We sleep in the kitchen because the floor has a carpet on it. The other rooms are very bad, walls breaking up, it's not very safe I don't think."

(Female, aged 28, London)

There was little evidence of respondents carrying out anything other than very basic repairs to properties, and few reported decorating their squats, instead tending to live with whatever condition the property was in when they occupied it. The conditions in which squatters live are therefore very much determined by the 'standard' of accommodation they can find.

However, as a number of respondents pointed out, it is important to recognise that the squatters interviewed were always uncertain about the length of time they would be able to remain in the squat, and were aware that they might have to leave at any moment. This, combined with limited financial resources, meant it was not worthwhile spending money on repairs or cosmetic improvements.

Those people squatting intermittently, moving into 'open house' squats, or bedding down in empty buildings were least likely to make efforts to work on a property in order to make it more habitable – a reflection of the function squatting was serving for them and the short-term nature of the situation.

Squatters do not have a legal right to gas and electricity supplies but they can legally obtain a supply. However, complete lack of amenities apart from cold water was commonly (although not exclusively) reported, and hot water, electricity and gas were described as luxuries.

"There's no electric, there's cold water, that's it really."

(Male, aged 24, London)

Although some squatters reported that other members of their household had arranged for amenities to be connected, there was little evidence of respondents seeking advice about this themselves. Again, they tended to live with the services functioning when they moved in. The data suggest that this is partly a reflection of limited knowledge about whether services

could be connected, and how one goes about doing so. For example:

"I suppose it would be possible. I know you can coz I know being in a squat people can have the electric on, and pay the electric and that. I know you can but I'm not sure how."

(Male, aged 24, London)

In a few cases the occupants had made attempts to connect the electricity supply themselves which is not only illegal, but also clearly raises issues of safety –

"He has connected the electricity but not very well. It keeps cutting out on us."

(Female, aged 28, London)

For those without amenities, continued reliance on homeless services such as day centres was commonplace. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

The condition of properties and the facilities in squats had a very real affect on respondents' experiences of squatting, their perception of this accommodation situation, and the extent to which they were content to continue squatting. Those who had squatted several times in properties in varied conditions commented that they would like to have remained in those squats which had been in better condition and had amenities. Those who had only ever lived in squats in poor condition and without access to hot water and electricity were more reluctant to squat again in the future and less likely to perceive squatting positively compared with other temporary accommodation situations. One respondent explained this in terms of how much the squat feels like a 'home':

"As it's got no real amenities it doesn't really feel like a proper home."

(Male, aged 24, London)

In some respects, for those who occupied properties in good condition, with hot water, and gas or electricity to provide heating and cooking facilities, squatting represented an acceptable form of temporary accommodation, often preferable to hostels or staying with friends and family.

6.2 Safety issues

Personal safety emerged as a key issue. In some cases this related to the condition of the property or dangers associated with entering the property. For example:

"There's two places [empty properties] in particular where you've got to climb over the wall...it's very dangerous to get in there but honestly I've got to do it, pull myself up on plastic guttering onto the slate roof,...there are holes and if I fell I'd go straight through the glass and I'm dead but I take the risk."

(Male, aged 23, London)

Two examples were identified of local authorities, believing properties to be uninhabited, boarding up squat with occupants still inside.

"The other week the council put shutters on, we got locked in and we had to prise ourselves out."

(Male, aged 31, Sheffield)

Other safety issues raised related to other occupants of the squats. It is important to note at the outset that these kinds of experiences, whilst common enough to warrant reporting, were restricted to those squatting in properties with a high turnover of residents, often associated with a drugs culture.

Respondents who had experience of squatting in these kinds of situations – particularly but not exclusively women – reported feeling scared, worried that their possessions would be stolen, and too afraid to go to sleep.

"It's scary. You can't really sleep coz there's other people round, you don't trust people... and there's some weird people in the squats and you're too scared to go to sleep so you just stay awake."

(Female, aged 19, London)

"It was scary, I didn't want to live there half the time."

(Female aged 18, London)

These concerns for personal safety often stemmed from the transient nature of the household and the fact that respondents did not know the other occupants:

"You don't feel safe obviously coz you don't know who's coming in and out. All different people are coming in and out, you've got junkies coming in and things like that".

(Male, aged 18, London)

This group of people had particularly negative views and experiences of squatting and were more likely to report that squatting would be a last resort in the future compared to people who had squatted in other environments. This was particularly true of those who did not share the lifestyle of the other occupants in the squat (for example revolving around drug use), but was even apparent amongst those who did. Some very bleak pictures were painted about life in these kinds of squats. For example:

"People ripping each other off all the time in the squat, people dying all the time, but that's part of squatting."

(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

It is of interest that amongst the population of homeless respondents who had not squatted, a number were clearly under the impression that all squats were like this, and cited this as a reason for not considering squatting as an option.

6.3 Legal awareness

Despite the high profile changes made through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (amended sections of the Criminal Law Act 1977), squatting is not illegal. It is a civil offence and legal owners must go through the courts to gain possession.

Only a few respondents reported knowledge of their legal position, or displayed understanding about their rights once in occupation. Levels of legal awareness were more common amongst cohesive households who had been living in squats for longer periods of time. For example:

"I got a Section 6 notice. A Section 6 is just a bit of paper you put in the door saying we've occupied the place, by law. Basically saying if anyone comes to take it by force that you can use force to defend it, that they need a court order to get you out. I didn't actually do it, my friends did it....my friend

went to the Citizens Advice Bureau and they told him and gave him the Section 6 notice".

(Male, aged 18, London)

However, most of those interviewed displayed little more than a vague awareness that squatters may have some rights to occupy or remain in occupation, without knowing precisely what this consisted of – *"I've heard of squatters' rights and that"*. Very few had even sought any advice about their legal position. On the subject of seeking advice from organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau one, for example, commented that *"I would never have thought of it"*. This respondent said he was vaguely aware of his legal position as a squatter but *"I weren't really bothered. At the end of the day it's somewhere to sleep"*. The knowledge respondents did have was often obtained through talking to other people who had squatted and this was found to sometimes result in misinformation. For example:

"They brought out new laws in the last few years, they can arrest you now...it's warm but probably illegal but you don't care and if you get arrested you get a nice warm cell for the night."

(Male, aged 28, Sheffield)

The exception to this general lack of legal knowledge and awareness is found amongst those respondents for whom squatting was a lifestyle or political choice. Evidence from interviews with the small number of respondents for whom this was the case suggests that research focusing on this kind of squatting would reveal a very different picture.

6.4 Avoiding detection

Although many of the squatters interviewed had little awareness of their legal status, of whether they could be evicted without court proceedings, and perhaps because they were sometimes under false impressions about their legal position, or simply in an effort to evade eviction for as long as possible, many reported leaving their squats during the day and making concerted efforts to avoid being seen entering and leaving the property.

"I'd tidy up in the morning, make it look like you hadn't been there. Take your belongings and go out begging or asking churches for food, anything you could until 7 o'clock at night."

(Male, aged 28, Craven)

"We kept it really quiet during the day so as not to let people know we were there...I used to get up really early and stay out till dark before coming back."

(Male, age 31, London)

One respondent described how occupants came and went from their flat through the balcony rather than the front door to avoid being seen, and another explained that, whilst inside the squat, the occupants all remained *"in one room and we kept quiet and everything so nobody else would know we were in there."*

Living in this way had an impact on the daily lives of squatters interviewed, rendering them unable to live any kind of 'ordinary' day-to-day life. In addition, this emphasises the 'hidden' nature of squatting: many are hidden in the sense that they are not included in the official homelessness statistics (see Chapter 4) and therefore not acknowledged as homeless, but nor are they physically visible, making concerted efforts to remain 'hidden' for fear that legal action might be taken against them, leading to their eviction.

6.5 Experiencing eviction

As one might expect, being evicted from squats was a relatively common experience. Exploring how respondents came to leave their squats revealed that while some moved out of properties which remained occupied by others, many had woken in the morning to face the police or bailiffs. For example:

"The Bailiffs came at 7 O'clock in the morning with a court order and we had an hour to leave...the bailiffs were alright. You get different bailiffs. Some will come in with bats and smash the place up and say 'go'."

(Male, aged 18, London)

"Suddenly the police were there at quarter past five in the morning, kicked down the door and said 'out'. We said 'can't we even get our clothes or anything?' and they said 'no, out'. And our stuff is in there but it's boarded up now."

(Female, aged 19 London)

Sarah, whose story was outlined in Chapter 5 and who is quoted directly above, explained the subsequent difficulties this eviction created for her, having not been allowed time to collect up her belongings. Aside from having to replace clothes and other essential items, she had to leave behind her papers and birth certificate, resulting in difficulties proving her identification when she made a new claim for benefits:

"I've made a new claim to the DSS but they said they couldn't do it coz I didn't have any identification or anything because my passport, my birth certificate are all locked up."

(Female, aged 19, London)

At the time of her interview Sarah had not received any benefit payments for several weeks, having to work through the long and bureaucratic process of obtaining and proving her identification. She was not the only respondent whose squat was boarded up unexpectedly with their possessions still inside. Gary, aged 35 and homeless in Craven also explained that *"I came home and it was all boarded up, the police were there, I lost all my stuff...I am sick of losing my stuff."*

Echoing the findings presented in section 6.3 above, most of those who had been evicted did not talk about the possession proceedings leading to this. In other words there was little evidence of respondents attempting to legally defend themselves against eviction by engaging in the legal process when possession proceedings were initiated against them. In fact, many seemed unaware of whether a Possession Order had been granted (or even sought) and showed little signs of having questioned this when bailiffs came to evict them. Rather, many of those interviewed (both those who had and had not been evicted from squats) seemed resigned to leaving a property once the police, bailiffs, or the owner of the property came to throw them out.

Similarly, respondents squatting in properties which were empty pending redevelopment often left of their own accord once the builders came to carry out renovation work, without being legally evicted or having a Possession Order granted against them.

The only evidence identified where squatters legally defended themselves in possession proceedings was in London, amongst respondents who had squatted for many years and whose intentions were to continue squatting as a positive choice. For example:

“Eviction is just part of the game. We squat council or housing association property and to evict us can cost £10-20k...but they don't want to negotiate so it's 'meet you in court'. We had a nice result last week on the Court Order, got it delayed by six weeks.”

(Male, aged 56, London)

This group of squatters had detailed knowledge of their legal status and rights and were part of a network of people who they could mobilise and seek advice and assistance from when facing possession proceedings or eviction.

6.6 Positive aspects of life in squats

It is important to recognise that despite the difficulties associated with living in a squat reported thus far in this chapter, squatting also represented a positive way in which homeless people resolved their housing crisis, albeit temporarily, and provided opportunities otherwise unavailable.

For many of those interviewed, squatting did not merely provide a place to sleep or stay temporarily, but represented a 'home' in a way that hostels or friends' houses did not. Despite having no security of tenure, squatting was a way of obtaining a 'place of one's own' – a house or flat to live in alone or with a partner or friends – during a period of homelessness:

“The one at the moment is good. We've cleaned it up and make sure no-one else comes in, we've sorted it out, it's our home.”

(Male, aged 26, Sheffield)

“It's your place, whether it's a nice place or a bad place it's your place.”

(Male aged 23, London)

“Because it was quiet and out of the way it felt right. I got attached to it...that's why I was so gutted when it got boarded up and stuff.”

(Male, aged 28, Craven)

In financial terms, living in a property without housing costs enabled some to become gainfully employed again, avoiding 'the poverty trap'. The survey did reveal high levels of unemployment amongst people who had squatted since becoming homeless but detailed interviews with these squatters revealed that some, although not employed at the time of their interview, had worked while they had been squatting.

Respondents pointed to high housing costs for hostel provision, commenting that they would not be able to afford these costs if they worked while staying in a hostel. In fact, the research uncovered examples of respondents who had secured employment while living in a hostel, were unable to maintain rent payments and had to leave this accommodation, became roofless, and were then unable to remain in the job while they were sleeping rough.

Similarly, in London in particular, respondents explained that the jobs they were skilled to do would not generate an income high enough to secure accommodation in the private sector, and that squatting is “better than the private sector as I didn't have to pay rent”.

Others were able to continue studying while they squatted when they had been unable to in other homeless situation such as sleeping rough:

“Mentally it makes you feel a bit more positive as I knew I could get up and go to college, had somewhere to cook, there was gas and electric.”

(Female aged 18, London)

The 'freedom' associated with squatting was emphasised by respondents, many of whom felt their lives were restricted by the rules placed on them in hostels.

"A lot of hostels are like prisons, there's so many rules."

(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

"[when squatting] you've got no-one around telling you what to do, what not to do, and what times you've got to do this that and the other. There's no rules basically..."

(Male aged 23, London)

It was not just freedom from the constraints of hostel life which attracted some homeless people to squatting, but freedom from what was described as 'mainstream society'. Amongst these respondents a strong political commitment to squatting was evident.

"The thing we have in common is our same views, on politics, religion 'the woes of society', social injustice. So we do what we can to change it...."It's a way of life for those who do not wish to live as mainstream society does...A radical rethink is needed and funding should be made available for a pilot experiment in squatting, to see how successful it is at eradicating homelessness."

(Male, aged 56, London)

"I think squatting is a good thing – in a society when a lot of people cannot afford anywhere pleasant to live due to social inequalities...if unused land and properties were used sensibly then many people would be able to live somewhere nice."

(Male, age unknown, London)

As a counterbalance to some of the bleaker pictures of life in squats presented it is important to emphasise that these are by no means the only, or even typical squatting environment. Some respondents painted very positive pictures of day-to-day life in their squats, as the quote below illustrates:

"It was quite an artists type squat, had been repaired...it was run like a co-op where we had group meetings to make joint decisions...lots of things go on. There are events with workshops held in the squat, cabarets, art shows, music workshops. Legal matters can also be helped for you by a squatting network. People doing positive things to help themselves."

(Male, aged 32, London)

6.7 Conclusions

This research sought to go beyond just providing headline figures about the numbers of people squatting, and statistics about the profile of the squatting population and their housing circumstances. It sought to understand and depict the lives of these homeless people – as they experience and live them day-to-day. In this chapter we have seen the difficulties of these day-to-day lives – of living without access to hot water or heating and cooking facilities, in properties unfit for human habitation, in environments where personal safety is at risk, and of facing bailiffs at 6 o'clock in the morning. We have also seen however that, despite insecurity of tenure and occupying properties in disrepair, squatting can also be a positive experience, preferable to other accommodation situations, providing opportunities to work and study, with like minded people.

7. Patterns of service use

Chapter summary

Squatters rely heavily on day centres, particular if they lack cooking and washing facilities in their squat.

The assistance provided by local authority housing departments very rarely helped respondents resolve their housing problems.

Nearly half reported receiving 'no help' when they approached the local authority.

Many considered squatting as an option only once their approach to the local authority had proved fruitless.

Many squatters had 'lost all faith' in the local authority as a means through which to resolve their housing problems.

Many respondents reported frustrated attempts to obtain assistance from services.

An overview of respondents' patterns of service use at the time they were squatting suggests, broadly speaking, a strong reliance on day centres and similar services which are used with the same frequency and patterns as periods of time when respondents were not squatting. However, despite continued reliance on (usually voluntary sector) day centres, contact with statutory housing services often fell away. Use of other services varied, but a general sense of frustration with attempting to access assistance from organisations other than day centres was frequently reported. We will now consider some of these points in more detail.

7.1 Using day centres

Many squatters interviewed continued to use day centres in much the same way as they had when in other homelessness situations such as rough sleeping. There are a number of reasons for this:

Firstly, where squatters lacked basic amenities such as cooking facilities or hot water, services which offer washing facilities and food became essential.

"I go to day centres mainly...have some breakfast,

sometimes then go for a shower every other day. You can get your clothes washed there as well."
(Male, Aged 24, London)

"I'd go to the [day centre] – you can take 50p and you can get food, breakfast, tea, coffee, cereal, a shower and stuff like that. It opens at 6 but you get there at about half past 5 to get a seat."
(Female, aged 19, London)

"I'd wash in there, shower in there, brush my teeth in there."
(Male, aged 23, London)

"We don't [cook]. I use day centres for sandwiches and things like that."
(Male, aged 24, London)

When describing a 'typical day', respondents who relied heavily on these organisations described days spent moving from one centre to another in a set routine which remained the same from one day or week to the next. They knew the time at which, or the day on which, various services or facilities were available at each centre and moved from one to the other accordingly.

Interestingly, respondents rarely talked about other services offered by day centres, such as links into employment training or housing advice, and it was apparent that squatters' use of these organisations focused primarily around provision of clothes, food and amenities. However, in London a number did comment on how helpful day centre workers had been in assisting them access hostel places, and were keen to emphasise that these were the only services which had provided them with any real assistance with resolving their housing and related problems.

Secondly, respondents who preferred to vacate their squats in the daytime for fear of being noticed often used these centres as a place to go to fill time.

Thirdly, day centres served a social function, and acted as a meeting place. For example, one respondent who had been squatting for a year explained that he lived in a property located in an outer south London borough where day-centre provision existed, but he cycled each day to centres in central London to see friends he had met while sleeping rough.

7.2 Experiences of approaching the local authority for assistance

To recap on information presented in Chapter 4, Nearly 65 per cent of respondents who had squatted since their last settled home had presented to the local authority as homeless, with respondents in Sheffield most likely (70 per cent), and respondents in Craven least likely (50 per cent) to have done so. In London 63.3 per cent of respondents had approached the local authority.

It is not clear from the survey data alone whether these respondents were squatting at the time they made their approach to the local authority. However, the interview data suggest that many will have presented as homeless before they squatted, and when the advice or assistance they received did not help them resolve their housing problems adequately they considered other options such as squatting. These data also suggest that once respondents had moved into a squat, following an unsuccessful presentation to the local authority, they often do not re-present for further assistance, or pursue their waiting-list application.

"I've never had a council house. When I left home at 16 I asked them if there was anything they could do. They kept telling me to come back tomorrow. In the end I lost faith."

(Male, aged 26, Sheffield)

"No point to keep pestering the council, they've made their decision."

(Male, aged 28, Sheffield)

Even when respondents' situations had changed and they were sleeping rough again, they sometimes did not re-present to the housing department, having 'lost all faith' in the local authority as a means through which to resolve their housing problems. As one commented:

"I've given up on the council, they don't want to help me. The only contact I have with them is when they step over me to get into work."

(Male, aged 30, Craven)

As reported in Chapter 4, the survey data revealed that of those who presented to the local authority only one third were recognised as homeless (with respondents in

Sheffield most likely, and respondents in London least likely to receive a positive decision), and a very small minority were deemed to be in priority need (10 per cent over all, 4 per cent in London, 20 per cent in Sheffield, and none in Craven). Indeed a strong and recurring theme in the in-depth interviews was respondents' experiences of being told their situation was 'not needy enough' to be statutorily entitled to accommodation. For example:

"They told me they couldn't help me, that's what they said, they said they can't help because I'm not in a needy situation."

(Female, aged 19, London)

"I tried using housing services in south London but was told as I don't have any of the associated problems that come with homelessness I'm not in priority need."

(Male, aged 31, London)

"Being a single male you are lower down the list, you're not priority or anything like that."

(Male, aged 24, London)

One respondent in Sheffield explained that he did not even approach the local authority for help finding accommodation, having known so many other homeless people who had tried this route unsuccessfully. On this basis he had drawn the conclusion himself that *"I can't get a place coz I don't fit their categories."*

Under the terms of Part VII of the *Housing Act 1996*, as amended by the *Homelessness Act 2002*, squatters should be considered homeless. Of those respondents who had approached the local authority not all will have done so whilst squatting but examination of the range of accommodation situations they had been in since their last settled home suggests that most of these would constitute a situation of homelessness under the terms of the Act. That only one third of respondents were recognised as homeless is therefore a surprise, and of some concern.

This research was focusing on single homeless people – i.e. those without dependent children. Single homeless people who are not vulnerable, despite being considered homeless, may not be recognised as being

Experiences of approaching the local authority as homeless: Not being recognised as homeless or in priority need

Martin's story

Martin is 26, homeless in Sheffield, and has mental and physical health problems and a drug dependency. He was taken into the care of the local authority aged 12 when his grandmother (his legal guardian) died, and over the next few years frequently ran away from his children's home, sleeping rough and in empty buildings. Martin reported that his grandmother's house was the last secure accommodation he had lived in.

In 1997 Martin began a three-year custodial sentence. On his release from prison in 2000 he went to stay with a friend but when his friend was sent to prison two years later Martin had to leave the property, having no right to stay there.

Martin contacted the B&Bs and direct access hostels in the city but none had any available bed spaces. He then presented as homeless to the local authority but was not recognised as being in priority need: "I went to the council but there was nothing they could do at all, I wasn't priority need....I tried the council, I've got lots of things wrong with me but still no priority". In fact, Martin reported that the local authority did not recognise him as homeless.

With nowhere else to go, Martin found an empty factory to squat and he remained there until he was able to secure a hostel place.

in priority need and therefore not owed a housing duty by the local authority. At first sight it is perhaps not surprising then that so few respondents fell into this category. However, given the high levels of vulnerability evident amongst this population (see Chapter 4), it is perhaps surprising that such a small proportion were awarded priority need status. Indeed many were vulnerable young people, people with mental or physical health problems, with drug or alcohol dependencies, care leavers, and those who had suffered recent traumatic life experiences³. Martin for example, whose story is presented above, explained that *"I've got a lot of things wrong with me – mental health problems, arthritis, and still I don't get any help."*

In order to identify more precisely the outcome of respondents' approaches to local authority housing

departments and homeless persons units, those who had made an approach were asked to explain, in their own words, what assistance they had received. These responses were categorised and the results are presented in Table 7.1 which shows that people who had squatted during an episode of homelessness had received less assistance than other homeless respondents. They were significantly more likely than their non-squatting counterparts to report having received no assistance at all, and were less likely to have secured temporary or permanent accommodation as a result of their approach to the local authority.⁴

In London in particular, no respondent who had squatted since becoming homeless had secured permanent accommodation as a result of their approach to the local authority, only 5.3 per cent accessed temporary accommodation, and over 78 per

³ Recent changes made by the *Homelessness Act 2002* extended the priority need categories to certain groups of people including those leaving institutions and young people aged 16 and 17. Although the Act was in force during the data collection exercise some respondents may have approached the local authority prior to this legislative change.

⁴ It was not possible to identify from the survey evidence whether these respondents were squatting at the time they approached the local authority, although all had squatted since becoming homeless and had approached the local authority during that same time frame.

Table 7.1 Assistance received from the local authority in each case study area

| Assistance received | All squatters (%) | Squatters in London (%) | Squatters in Sheffield (%) | Squatters in Craven (%) | Non-squatters (%) |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Advice only | 32.4 | 15.8 | 46.2 | 100.0 | 25.0 |
| Temporary accommodation | 14.7 | 5.3 | 30.8 | 0.0 | 32.4 |
| Permanent accommodation | 2.9 | 0.0 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 13.2 |
| No help received | 47.1 | 78.9 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 20.6 |
| Other | 2.9 | 0.0 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Unclear | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

cent reported receiving no assistance at all. In Craven all the squatters interviewed reported receiving advice only.

Although local authorities do not have a duty to provide accommodation for homeless people who are not in priority need, they do have a duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone presenting as homeless. It is therefore alarming that nearly half of all the homeless people interviewed reported having received ‘no help’. As one commented:

“I went to the council after my mum’s but I haven’t been since...I thought the homeless section didn’t really exist for my case, they didn’t help, it was like I didn’t exist. I would have liked them to, say, understand the situation and explain what they could have done to help me.”
(Male, aged 27, Sheffield).

It is likely that in some of these cases the local authority in question had in fact complied with its statutory duty. Respondents who had reported receiving no help in response to the survey question, when interviewed in depth, mentioned being given some advice – usually in the form of a list of telephone numbers of direct access hostels, Shelterline, and advice centres or a list of private landlords. The experience of the homeless people interviewed however was that this level of advice, when compared against their hopes and expectations of more concrete assistance that might directly lead to some form of accommodation, was that this constituted ‘no help’ because it had been of so little use to them in resolving their housing crisis:

“I only went to the council [here] once on the off chance they might be different. They give you a list of accommodation and services, it’s just a way to get rid of you.”
(Male, aged 28, Sheffield)

Advice about private accommodation in the area was of little use to most of those interviewed as they did not have the funds to rent in the private sector. As several explained:

“Ended up with nowhere and no money to get anywhere else. The council gave me a list of private landlords but I had no money.”
(Male, aged 20, Sheffield)

“Private accommodation needs bonds, I haven’t got that kind of money.”
(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

Aside from not being eligible, or finding the assistance provided inadequate, instances were reported of other difficulties accessing accommodation or assistance from the local authority. These included

- not having a birth certificate to prove one’s identification;
- not having lived in the area long enough;
- having rent arrears from previous tenancies;
- having to prove vulnerabilities and not knowing how to go about doing so;
- not being registered with a GP.

It is clear from the findings presented in this section that, for a range of reasons, the local authority is rarely

a route through which this group of people can resolve their housing crisis.

Barriers to accessing accommodation through the local authority

"I was born in Germany and I've been trying to get a birth certificate since I was 16. No-one can help me. As far as they're concerned I don't exist...every time I tried to get my own flat I haven't had any ID, and they need ID, they won't touch me with a flat. So it's been an easier option to stay with friends or squat."

(Male, aged 26, Sheffield)

"I went to jail and when I got out I was in arrears, only by about 15 quid but until I pay them that 15 quid they will not give me another property."

(Male, aged 23, London)

"They said they couldn't help me because I didn't have a GP."

(Male, aged 27, Sheffield)

"I tried the homeless section. They say you've got to have so many points or suffer from a mental illness but you have to prove it. I tried on more than one occasion...no proof of mental illness."

(Male, aged 21, Sheffield, with mental ill health)

7.3 Use of other services

The extent to which respondents used or approached other services such as health provision, the Benefits Agency, employment or training services, or organisations catering for specific groups such as those with drug dependencies or mental ill health varied. Some had no contact with any services at all other than day-centres, while others were regularly in touch with a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations. Examination of these varied patterns of service use did however raise a number of common issues.

Firstly, many of those interviewed reported a general feeling of frustration at attempting to get assistance, and of the assistance provided not matching expectations nor needs:

"You know it's not that you don't want help, but you don't know about help. You try to get help at first but it's like a dog, you get kicked so many times after a while you just say 'sod this', no-one wants to help."

(Male, aged 28, Craven)

"Like the Benefits Agency and places like that, it's like waiting for Christmas just to get seen and they are no help anyway."

(Male, aged 30, Craven)

Secondly, aside from a few respondents who were engaged with social services as care leavers, or because they had children in foster care themselves, contact with this agency was limited to a couple of respondents who had obtained emergency crisis payments from them. No respondent mentioned contact with the Probation Service.

Thirdly, in terms of health services the data suggest clear benefits of provision of health services specifically for the homeless. In London many respondents were receiving regular health and dental care from such a service, one respondent in Craven who had squatted in Leeds where a health service exists for homeless people also reported receiving health care from this agency, but no respondent in Sheffield (where such a service does not exist) reported being in touch with health or dental care services. In fact some respondents specifically commented on the difficulties associated with registering with a GP or dentist without a permanent address.

"I could not get a dentist. Not having an address. I had to give someone else's address for the doctor. The dentist wouldn't accept it."

(Male, aged 28, Craven)

For those who were able to access health care through a homeless-specific health service, this had provided additional benefits of access to drug treatment centres and counselling services which had been an essential component for them in starting the process of re-building their lives.

Fourthly, health services aside, being homeless had an affect on whether respondents received other services to which they were entitled. For example, a number

talked about the difficulties associated with signing on and claiming benefits while squatting and therefore having no fixed address:

"I'm supposed to get my money today, because they haven't given it to me. They said they can't because I'm no fixed address...I was going to go and get some food and clothes and things like that but now I'm going to have to go and beg money from people and that's what I don't want to do."

(Female, aged 19, London)

Some respondents reported strategies to overcome this such as using a friend's address or asking for 'personal issue' giro's which are collected in person rather than posted to the claimant.

7.4 Conclusions

An examination of squatters' patterns of service use suggests that they do continue to use and engage with services while squatting. However, this tends to focus mainly around voluntary sector homeless services such as day-centres, rather than statutory services. Although most have approached the local authority at some point the evidence suggests that this frequently occurs prior to squatting and, when no concrete assistance results from this, respondents are deterred from pursuing this route again.

8. Squatting in London, Craven and Sheffield: The relationship between squatting and the housing market

Chapter summary

The prevalence and nature of squatting in a given area is affected by:

- housing market conditions – for example levels of demand for social housing, housing supply, and rental prices in the private sector
- levels of service provision – for example in the form of hostel accommodation or services for the homeless
- the availability of empty property – i.e. the opportunities for squatting.

Throughout this report any notable differences between the profile characteristics and experiences of squatters in the three case study locations have been highlighted. Drawing on this information, this chapter explores the relevance of the housing market to the prevalence and nature of squatting in each area, suggesting that this provides some explanation for the diversity evident between case study locations.

The case studies were selected partially for their differences – particularly with regard to the housing market – in order that squatting could be located within a wider housing context. A full profile of each location is provided in Appendix 2 but we can briefly summarise these case studies area as follows:

Sheffield: A large northern city with an over-supply of social housing, and low housing demand for certain areas.

London: A large capital city where demand for social housing far outstrips supply, with acute affordability problems in the private sector and a general under-supply of affordable housing.

Craven: A rural district in north Yorkshire with limited supply of housing across all tenures and with an expensive private housing sector.

In terms of squatting in each of these areas – whilst diversity was found in all – the following provides a general overview picture:

Squatting in Sheffield: Squatting was more prevalent in Sheffield than either of the other case study areas, with nearly half of all homeless people surveyed squatting as a response to being homeless. Squatters in Sheffield were a particularly vulnerable population, many of whom had drug dependencies, had been in the care of the local authority as children, and had been in prison. The predominant type of squatting in this case study area involved people squatting intermittently, moving into squats which accommodated non-cohesive households, often in between other accommodation situations such as rough sleeping and staying with friends.

Squatting in Craven: Squatting was virtually non-existent in Craven and of the four respondents who reported having squatted since becoming homeless only one had squatted in the district, occupying an empty outbuilding alone.

Squatting in London: Squatting was less prevalent in London than in Sheffield but more so than in Craven, with nearly one quarter of homeless respondents having squatted since their last settled home. A more diverse range of squatting situations were identified in London covering the spectrum from rough sleepers ‘bedding down’ in derelict buildings for a night or two, to large groups of people staying intermittently in ‘crack houses’ and other properties with high turnover, to small groups of friends squatting as a household; to squats with an artistic culture, to highly organised squats forming part of a network of co-operatives.

There are a number of ways in which different housing markets and types of location (outlined above), can have a bearing on the nature and prevalence of squatting in different areas, as described in these summaries of squatting in each case study.

Squatting will occur when need and opportunity come together – i.e. when there are people who need or want to accommodate themselves in this way *and* when there are empty properties which can be squatted. The need certainly existed in all three case study locations, with homelessness an evident problem. However, in areas where housing demand outstrips supply there is less likely to be empty properties available for squatting.

Indeed, the data suggest that the absence of squatting in Craven, either as a lifestyle/political choice, or as a response to homelessness, is partly explained by the lack of squatting opportunities in the area. With high demand for, and limited supply of social housing and with private property yielding high rents, homeless respondents and agencies alike commented that it was rare for property of any tenure to be left empty for any length of time.

This is also true in London of course, yet squatting was relatively common amongst homeless respondents in the Capital. However, we saw in Chapter 6 that squatters make concerted efforts to remain 'hidden' so as to evade eviction and avoid coming to the attention of the local community, which may impose its own sanctions or report to the statutory authorities. In small rural communities, in contrast to a large city such as London, any incidence of squatting would be immediately noticeable to local residents, and it is far less possible to 'hide'.

The extent to which demand outstrips supply in the social rented sector can have a bearing on the allocation of social housing and assessment of homeless applications, which in turn affects the extent to which people can secure permanent accommodation, avoiding the move into temporary situations such as squatting. In addition, where local authorities have an abundant supply of housing they

are more able to provide housing to applicants to whom they do not owe this statutory duty. And indeed, in the two case studies where a rationing situation was evident – Craven and London – respondents were less likely to be recognised as homeless and in priority need, and less likely to secure accommodation as a result of approaching the local authority for assistance (see Chapters 4 and 7).

In contrast, the pressures on social housing in Sheffield are far from acute and there is an over-supply of housing in the social rented sector. On the basis of the preceding discussion it may be logical to expect that, with a ready supply of social housing and increased likelihood of being recognised as homeless and in priority need, squatting would be less prevalent. Indeed service providers in Sheffield commented that squatting is not common or widespread in the city because there is little impetus for people to squat, given the ready availability of accommodation. As one respondent put it: *"there is no need to squat in Sheffield as there a lot of vacant [council] properties"*. However, squatting was in fact more common in Sheffield than in either Craven or London where securing accommodation through the local authority was virtually impossible.

The experience in Sheffield therefore highlights that pressure on housing supply is not the only factor impacting on the likelihood of homeless people having to resort to squatting to resolve their housing difficulties. While this is certainly a relevant factor in the prevalence of squatting – as seen in both Craven and London – other issues come into play.

Service providers in Sheffield suggested that the individuals squatting in the city tend to be those excluded from hostel provision and local authority and housing association accommodation, for example, because of a drug use problem, previous behaviour, a criminal record and such like. These individuals resort to squatting, not because there is a general lack of housing, but because they cannot access the formal accommodation available.

The survey and interview data supported this view, with many squatters in Sheffield having attempted to access

hostel places and local authority (temporary and permanent) housing but finding they were banned or excluded – either because of previous behaviour, drug dependencies, or having rent arrears from previous accommodation. Others explained that their drug dependencies made it difficult for them to negotiate the housing and homelessness system at a time when they could focus on little else but their addiction. As one respondent explained:

“When you’ve got a heroin habit you haven’t got time for anything else. It takes over your entire life.”
(Male, aged 34, Sheffield)

That it is primarily those who are excluded from formal accommodation in Sheffield, or who have serious drug dependencies, helps to explain the vulnerable profile and the transient and chaotic nature of squatting in this case study.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

The single people participating in this research were not making a positive lifestyle or political choice to squat. Whether their experiences of squatting were positive or negative, these individuals were squatting as a direct response to their housing crisis. This research has found that, faced with limited assistance from local authority housing departments, no right to housing under the terms of the *Homelessness Act 2002*, without the financial means to obtain private housing, or with vulnerabilities that made negotiating the housing system difficult, one in four of the homeless people interviewed had resorted to squatting in order to temporarily accommodate themselves. Squatting is not therefore a rare or extreme aspect of homelessness but a common homeless situation, a common experience for homeless people, and a common response to homelessness, which needs recognising, understanding, and addressing.

While squatting can provide a more appropriate alternative to other homeless accommodation situations – and some of those interviewed did enjoy a positive environment in adequate conditions – for many it is a difficult and inappropriate situation. Without the funds to make basic repairs or improvement, limited knowledge about, or difficulties obtaining supplies of gas and electricity, a complete lack of security of tenure, uncertainty about whether they will be able to remain in the squat beyond tomorrow, or resorting to ‘bedding down’ in derelict buildings or sharing ‘open houses’ with people they don’t know, many homeless people are living in harsh conditions, without access to essential services and amenities. And in many instances it is the most vulnerable sections of the homeless population who are enduring these conditions.

This research has identified a significant number of squatters who are, in every sense, ‘hidden homeless’: they are hidden in the sense that monitoring systems, surveys and statistical datasets fail to identify them, or even attempt to identify them; many agencies are unaware of squatters or perceive it to be a rare situation for their clients to be in; they are hidden in the sense that few appear in the official homelessness statistics – because they do not engage with the local

authority or are not recognised as homeless; they are hidden in a literal sense because their homelessness is not visible in the way that rough sleepers are; they are hidden because their accommodation is not provided by an agency in the way that, for example hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation is and so they do not come to the attention of services; and there is no government ‘unit’ or ‘initiative’ set up to identify ways of better meeting their needs. As a result there is a clear failure to meet the needs of this section of the homeless population.

Recommendations

Squatters are a group of homeless people currently neglected by policy and research, partly due to the limited awareness of squatting as a common homeless situation. Unless concerted efforts are made to improve the evidence base regarding this section of the homeless population there will continue to be a failure to acknowledge squatting, it will remain impossible to assess the scale of squatting and identify squatters’ needs, policy will continue to neglect this population and, as a result, adequate and appropriate housing and service provision cannot be developed.

Recommendation 1: Surveys and data collected by government local authority and service providers should include squatting as a distinct tenure category in order to expose the full scale of homelessness.

Recommendation 2: All local authorities should ensure that homelessness strategies address the needs of homeless people living in squats as well as those living in other forms of hidden homelessness. The methods used to carry out the homeless reviews should therefore be developed to capture all homeless groups.

The results from this research suggest that many vulnerable people are not being recognised as such by local authority homeless person’s units. There is a lack of consistency with regard to assessing vulnerability, and awarding priority need status.

Recommendation 3: Government should develop clearer and more directive guidance around the interpretation of homelessness legislation, in particular

the assessment of levels of “vulnerability” so as to ensure that those who are most in need do not slip through the net.

Recommendation 4: Government should extend existing “priority need” categories to include additional vulnerable groups such as people with existing or previous drug and alcohol dependencies and mental ill health.

The ‘advice and assistance’ which local authorities provided to the homeless people interviewed for this research rarely helped them resolve their housing difficulties or find temporary accommodation as an emergency measure.

Recommendation 5: All local authorities should appoint a homeless officer with specific responsibility for single homeless people to ensure that they receive appropriate advice and support which can realistically help them resolve their housing problems.

Many squatters are vulnerable people living in dire conditions who are squatting because they are unable to address or resolve their homelessness in any other way. Their needs are clearly not being met but, as a hidden homeless population, they are at risk of ‘falling through the net’.

Recommendation 6: All local authorities should develop dedicated outreach teams to target single homeless people living in squats and other hidden homeless situations, assisting them in accessing housing, services and support.

Less than two thirds of respondents had approached a local authority for assistance. The evidence suggests that many homeless people who squat have little faith in the local authority as a means through which to resolve their housing problems, or do not believe that they are eligible for assistance.

Recommendation 7: Government, local authorities and the homelessness sector should look at ways of increasing awareness amongst homeless people of their right to present as homeless to local authorities.

Appendix 1 – Profile of the total sample of homeless respondents

A1-1 Age

| Age | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| > 20 | 11.0 | 12.2 | 2.1 | 12.7 |
| 20 – 25 | 23.2 | 22.0 | 23.4 | 26.3 |
| 26 – 35 | 34.1 | 25.6 | 46.8 | 31.4 |
| 36 – 45 | 17.7 | 22.0 | 17.0 | 17.8 |
| 46 – 55 | 8.5 | 11.0 | 6.4 | 5.9 |
| 56 – 65 | 5.5 | 0.3 | 4.3 | 5.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-2 Gender

| Gender | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Male | 68.0 | 67.5 | 74.5 | 60.0 |
| Female | 32.0 | 32.5 | 25.5 | 40.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-3 Ethnic origin

| Ethnic origin | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|---|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| White British | 67.7 | 47.6 | 84.1 | 67.7 |
| White Irish | 5.6 | 9.8 | 0.0 | 5.6 |
| Indian | 0.6 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 |
| Bangladeshi | 0.6 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 |
| British or black Caribbean | 6.8 | 11.0 | 4.5 | 6.8 |
| British or black African | 3.7 | 6.1 | 2.3 | 3.7 |
| Mixed heritage: white and black Caribbean | 1.9 | 3.7 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| Middle Eastern | 1.9 | 0.0 | 6.8 | 1.9 |
| Chinese | 0.6 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 |
| Other European | 5.0 | 9.8 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Somali | 0.6 | 0.0 | 2.3 | 0.6 |
| Unknown | 5.0 | 8.5 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

**APPENDIX 1 – PROFILE OF THE TOTAL SAMPLE OF
HOMELESS RESPONDENTS**

A1-4 Marital status

| Marital status | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Single | 76.4 | 69.6 | 74.5 | 94.3 |
| Married/Long-term relationship | 10.6 | 11.4 | 14.9 | 2.9 |
| Divorced | 8.7 | 15.2 | 4.3 | 0.0 |
| Widowed | 1.9 | 0.0 | 4.3 | 2.9 |
| Other | 0.6 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Unknown | 1.9 | 2.5 | 2.1 | 0.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-5 Employment status

| Employment status | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Employed full time | 11.5 | 13.3 | 0.0 | 22.9 |
| Employed part time | 4.2 | 0.0 | 4.3 | 14.3 |
| Full-time student | 3.0 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 5.7 |
| Voluntary work | 1.8 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Self-employed | 0.6 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Employment/youth training scheme | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.9 |
| Unemployed and available for work | 43.6 | 42.2 | 51.1 | 37.1 |
| Permanently sick or disabled | 24.8 | 28.9 | 23.4 | 17.1 |
| Part-time student | 1.8 | 0.0 | 6.4 | 0.0 |
| Looking after family/home | 0.6 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Retired | 1.2 | 0.0 | 4.3 | 0.0 |
| Unknown | 6.1 | 6.0 | 10.6 | 0.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-6 Vulnerabilities and additional needs

| | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Been in prison or YOI | 34.5 | 34.9 | 46.8 | 17.1 |
| Been on probation | 34.5 | 31.3 | 40.4 | 34.3 |
| Mental ill health | 31.5 | 27.7 | 38.3 | 31.4 |
| Drug dependent | 25.5 | 19.3 | 36.2 | 25.7 |
| Been in LA care | 23.6 | 25.3 | 21.3 | 22.9 |
| Alcohol dependent | 18.2 | 16.9 | 25.5 | 11.4 |
| Literacy problems | 18.2 | 15.7 | 21.3 | 20.0 |
| Numeracy problems | 6.1 | 8.4 | 4.3 | 2.9 |
| Learning disability | 8.5 | 12.0 | 8.5 | 0.0 |

A1-7 Length of time homeless

| Length of time | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2 years or more | 53.2 | 62.9 | 41.9 | 46.2 |
| less than 2 years | 46.8 | 37.1 | 58.1 | 53.8 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-8 Tenure of last settled accommodation

| Tenure | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Council | 25.2 | 7.6 | 51.3 | 33.3 |
| Private rented | 22.8 | 30.3 | 15.4 | 11.1 |
| Owner occupied | 12.2 | 6.1 | 20.5 | 16.7 |
| Licensee | 16.3 | 0.0 | 30.3 | 0.0 |
| RSL | 5.7 | 6.1 | 0.0 | 16.7 |
| Other | 5.7 | 6.1 | 5.1 | 5.6 |
| Supported housing | 4.1 | 4.5 | 5.1 | 0.0 |
| Not known | 8.1 | 9.1 | 2.6 | 16.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-9 Household situation before becoming homeless

| | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Alone | 18.3 | 25.3 | 15.0 | 5.9 |
| Partner | 34.0 | 29.1 | 52.5 | 23.5 |
| Parents | 29.4 | 29.1 | 17.5 | 44.1 |
| Sharing with friends | 3.9 | 3.8 | 2.5 | 5.9 |
| Other | 9.8 | 10.1 | 10.0 | 8.8 |
| Family (not parents) | 4.6 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 11.8 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

**APPENDIX 1 – PROFILE OF THE TOTAL SAMPLE OF
HOMELESS RESPONDENTS**

A1-10 Main reason for leaving last settled accommodation

| Reason | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents | 18.7 | 23.6 | 12.2 | 15.4 |
| Relationship breakdown with partner | 28.1 | 23.6 | 46.3 | 11.5 |
| Financial reasons | 10.1 | 11.1 | 2.4 | 19.2 |
| To seek employment | 6.5 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 3.8 |
| Eviction | 5.8 | 5.6 | 4.9 | 7.7 |
| Dispute with other occupants (not parents) | 2.2 | 2.8 | 0.0 | 3.8 |
| Parents can no longer accommodate (no dispute or relationship breakdown) | 2.9 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 7.7 |
| Other | 25.7 | 20.8 | 26.8 | 26.9 |
| Overcrowded | 0.7 | 0.0 | 2.4 | 0.0 |
| Got somewhere else | 1.4 | 0.0 | 2.4 | 3.8 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-11 Have you approached the LA as homeless in the past 2 years?

| | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Yes | 59.1 | 47.6 | 83.0 | 54.3 |
| No | 40.9 | 52.4 | 17.0 | 45.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-12 Outcome of approach to the local authority

| | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Recognised as homeless | 38.8 | 26.2 | 62.2 | 31.0 |
| Recognised as priority need | 20.1 | 16.4 | 27.3 | 18.5 |
| Filled in an application form | 42.0 | 20.7 | 68.1 | 42.4 |

A1-13 Assistance received from the local authority

| Assistance received | Total sample (%) | London (%) | Sheffield (%) | Craven (%) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Advice only | 29.5 | 20.5 | 24.3 | 57.9 |
| Temporary accommodation | 28.4 | 10.3 | 54.1 | 15.8 |
| Permanent accommodation | 11.6 | 15.4 | 8.1 | 10.5 |
| No help received | 23.2 | 43.6 | 8.1 | 10.5 |
| Other | 5.3 | 7.7 | 5.4 | 0.0 |
| Unclear | 2.1 | 2.6 | 0.0 | 5.3 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

A1-14 Prevalence of staying with friends or family and squatting

| | Total sample | London | Sheffield | Craven |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| Stayed with family or friends | 72.0 | 69.5 | 72.3 | 77.1 |
| Squatted | 26.4 | 23.5 | 42.6 | 11.4 |

Appendix 2 – A profile of the case study areas and of squatting in these areas

Sheffield

Key facts and figures

Sheffield is located in South Yorkshire and is the fourth largest city in England with a population of 513,234 representing 217,622 households (Census 2001). Approximately 9 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups, the largest of which are those of Pakistani origin (3.1 per cent). One third of Sheffield's wards rank in the top 10 per cent of the most deprived wards in the country according to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation.

There is a ready supply of social rented housing in the city, with local authority housing making up 30 per cent of the total stock. Despite the availability of affordable housing homelessness (as measured by official figures) has increased dramatically in recent years with the Local Authority reporting a 104 per cent in the number of households recognised as homeless between 2001/2002 and 2002/2003. The most recent figures show that in the first quarter of 2003 544 people were accepted as homeless and in priority need and a further 424 were accepted as homeless but not in priority need. The apparent mismatch between high levels of homelessness and ready availability of affordable housing is likely to be explained in part by an evident low demand problem in the city: according to the Empty Homes Agency there are nearly 32,000 low demand properties in Sheffield, Lee et al (2002) in their analysis of the Yorkshire housing market suggest that 40 per cent of the stock is at risk of low demand and the Local Authority's Homelessness Strategy (2003-2008) describes a city with *"falling demand for social rented housing, unpopular housing estates with high turnover and vacancy rates"*.

Sheffield has a relatively high proportion of empty houses, with 4.19 per cent of the total stock empty (9,522 properties), nearly one third of which is owned by the local authority. Of the private properties empty (6,058) over half have been empty for longer than 6 months.

A profile of squatters in Sheffield

42.6 per cent of the homeless people interviewed in Sheffield had squatted since their last settled home.

Tables A2-1 and A2-2 show that the squatters interviewed in Sheffield were a predominantly male population, most were aged 26-35 with some falling into the 20-25 and 36-45 age brackets. All described themselves as white British.

Table A2-1 Gender

| Gender | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Male | 90.0 |
| Female | 10.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table A2-2 Age

| Age | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| 20 – 25 | 30.0 |
| 26 – 35 | 60.0 |
| 36 – 45 | 10.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

The majority of respondents (60 per cent) had been homeless for more than two years and a relationship breakdown with a partner was the most common immediate cause of homelessness (see Table A2-3).

Table A2-3 Reason for leaving last settled accommodation

| Reason | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|--|----------------------------|
| Relationship breakdown with partner | 50.0 |
| Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents | 10.0 |
| Financial reasons | 10.1 |
| Eviction | 10.0 |
| Parents can no longer accommodate (no dispute or relationship breakdown) | 5.0 |
| Other | 25.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

In Sheffield, over two thirds of respondents had presented as homeless to the local authority, over half of these were accepted as homeless and 20 per cent were recognised as being in priority need (see Tables A2-4 and A2-5). In terms of the assistance received from the local authority, Table A2-6 shows that 30 per cent secured temporary accommodation, 7.7 per cent secured permanent accommodation and 46.2 per cent reported receiving 'advice only'.

Table A2-4 Have you approached the LA as homeless in the past 2 years?

| | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Yes | 70.0 |
| No | 40.9 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table A2-5 Outcome of approach to the local authority

| | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Recognised as homeless | 55.0 |
| Recognised as priority need | 20.0 |
| Filled in an application form | 65.0 |

Table A2-6 Assistance received from the local authority

| Assistance received | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Advice only | 46.2 |
| Temporary accommodation | 30.8 |
| Permanent accommodation | 7.7 |
| No help received | 7.7 |
| Other | 7.7 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Squatters in Sheffield appear to be a very vulnerable population. Table A2-7 shows that the majority had been in prison, were drug dependent and had been on probation, while half reported having mental health problems and a significant proportion had been in the care of the local authority.

Table A2-7 Vulnerabilities and additional needs Squatters in Sheffield

| | Squatters in Sheffield (%) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Been in prison or YOI | 75.0 |
| Drug dependent | 65.0 |
| Been on probation | 65.0 |
| Mental ill health | 50.0 |
| Been in LA care | 40.0 |
| Literacy problems | 15.0 |
| Alcohol dependent | 15.0 |
| Learning disability | 20.0 |
| Numeracy problems | 0.0 |

Craven

Key facts and figures

Craven is a rural local authority in North Yorkshire which is described accurately in the district council's Housing Strategy (2001/02) as 'a unique blend of market towns and villages set in a rural landscape of high quality: a major proportion of the district lies within the Yorkshire Dales National park.'

According to the 2001 Census Craven has a population of 53,620 representing 22,680 households, the overwhelming majority of which are white British (98.6

per cent). The largest minority ethnic group is Pakistani representing just 0.5 per cent of the population. No Caribbean, African or Bangladeshi residents were identified in the Census.

The local housing market is characterised by high demand, high house prices, and limited supply of affordable housing. Alongside Harrogate and York, Craven has the highest house prices in Yorkshire and Humberside, averaging at £100,161 in 2001 (Census), yet income levels are 15 per cent below the national average (Housing Strategy 2001/2). In terms of supply of affordable housing the social rented sector (local authority and housing association) is marginal, making up just 9.6 per cent of the housing stock compared with 20.3 per cent of the housing stock in the whole of Yorkshire and Humber. Figures produced by the Empty Homes Agency identify no low demand properties in Craven and Lee et al (2002), in their analysis of the Yorkshire housing market also suggest that 0 per cent of dwellings in the district are at risk.

The Local Authority's Housing Strategy (2001/02) identifies homelessness as an increasing problem in Craven, particularly since the extension of the priority need categories to 16 and 17 year olds. However, the official homeless statistics are failing to reveal homelessness as an issue with only three households being recognised as homeless and in priority need and a further 9 recognised as homeless in the first quarter of 2003.

According to the Empty Homes Agency, in April 2002 2.24 per cent of the housing stock in Craven was empty, representing 547 homes. The vast majority of these were in the private sector with only 23 council or housing association properties empty. Of those empty in the private sector (520) only 30 properties had been empty for longer than 6 months.

A profile of squatters in Craven

Only 4 homeless respondents interviewed in Craven reported having squatted since their last settled home, although this does represent 11.4 per cent of the homeless sample in Craven. However, three of the four had squatted outside the district and only one had squatted in Craven itself.

The profile of these four respondents shows that all four were male, white British and between the ages of 26 and 35. Of the three who answered the question about the length of time they had been homeless, all reported having been homeless for more than two years. Of the three respondents who provided a reason for leaving their last settled home one had experienced a relationship breakdown with their partner and the remaining two respondents cited 'other reasons'.

Two of the four squatting respondents had presented as homeless to the local authority and one of these had been recognised as homeless, but not as being in priority need. The two respondents who had approached the local authority for assistance had both received 'advice only' and neither had secured temporary or permanent accommodation as a result of their approach.

All four squatters in Craven reported having a drug dependency, having been in the care of the local authority, and having been on probation. Three reported mental health problems and having been in prison, and two reported having an alcohol dependency.

London

Key facts and figures

The housing market in London is characterised by very high demand, high house prices and limited supply of affordable housing. The average house price in London is £242,000 and, although there is a sizeable social rented sector, demand outstrips supply: there were less than 35,000 new lettings in 2001/02 but nearly 227,000 households on local authority housing registers (GLA 2003a). A very small proportion of the social rented stock is in low demand – just 1.3 per cent of local authority housing and 1.2 per cent of housing association stock – and low demand properties are concentrated in a small number of London boroughs, including Camden, Hounslow and Lambeth (GLA 2003a).

Given the dynamics of the London housing market it is perhaps not surprising that homelessness is a significant problem. In April 2002 a total of 28,652

households had been accepted as homeless by borough councils in the preceding year which represented nearly one quarter of all homeless acceptances in England, and there were nearly 58,000 households in temporary accommodation, representing more than half of all households in temporary accommodation in England (GLA 2003a). The most recent figures, produced quarterly by the ODPM, show that in the first quarter of 2003 just over 8,000 households were accepted as homeless and in priority need and a further 3,540 were recognised as homeless but not in priority need.

According to the Greater London Authority 3.2 per cent of the total housing stock in London is empty. Less than 10 per cent of all empty homes are local authority owned while 89 per cent is in the private sector (GLA 2003b).

A profile of squatters in London

Just under one quarter (23.5 per cent) of the homeless people interviewed in London had squatted since their last settled home.

Tables A2-8 and A2-9 show that the squatters interviewed in London were a predominantly male population, most were aged 36-45 although respondents spanned ages from under 20 to 65. The majority described themselves as white British (65.5 per cent) although 17.2 per cent were white Irish, 6.9 per cent British/black Caribbean, and 6.9 per cent described themselves as 'other European'.

Table A2-8 Gender

| Gender | Squatters in London (%) |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Male | 83.3 |
| Female | 16.7 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table A2-9 Age

| Age | Squatters in London (%) |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| < 20 | 10.3 |
| 21 - 25 | 17.2 |
| 26 - 35 | 24.1 |
| 36 - 45 | 31.0 |
| 46 - 55 | 6.9 |
| 56 - 65 | 10.3 |
| Total | 100.0 |

The vast majority of respondents (76.7 per cent) had been homeless for more than two years and a relationship breakdown with a partner was the most common immediate cause of homelessness followed closely by a dispute or relationship breakdown with parent, and eviction (see Table A2-10).

Table A2-10 Reason for leaving last settled accommodation

| Reason | Squatters in London (%) |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Relationship breakdown with partner | 28.6 |
| Dispute/relationship breakdown with parents | 25.0 |
| Eviction | 17.0 |
| Financial reasons | 7.1 |
| To seek employment | 3.6 |
| Other | 17.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

In London, 63.3 per cent of respondents had presented as homeless to the local authority, only 16 per cent of these were recognised as homeless and 3.8 per cent as being in priority need (see Tables A2-11 and A2-12). In terms of the assistance received from the local authority, Table A2-13 shows that very few secured temporary or permanent accommodation while the majority reported receiving 'advice only'.

Table A2-11 Have you approached the LA as homeless in the past 2 years?

| | Squatters in London (%) |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Yes | 63.3 |
| No | 36.7 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Table A2-12 Outcome of approach to the local authority

| | Squatters in London (%) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Recognised as homeless | 16.0 |
| Recognised as priority need | 3.8 |
| Filled in an application form | 37.5 |

Table A2-13 Assistance received from the local authority in each case study area

| Assistance received | Squatters in London (%) |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Advice only | 15.8 |
| Temporary accommodation | 5.3 |
| Permanent accommodation | 0.0 |
| No help received | 78.9 |
| Other | 0.0 |
| Unclear | 0.0 |
| Total | 100.0 |

**Table A2-14 Vulnerabilities and additional needs
Squatters in London**

| | (%) |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Been in prison or YOI | 33.3 |
| Drug dependent | 26.7 |
| Been on probation | 26.7 |
| Mental ill health | 23.3 |
| Been in LA care | 23.3 |
| Literacy problems | 26.7 |
| Alcohol dependent | 20.0 |
| Learning disability | 10.0 |
| Numeracy problems | 16.7 |

A range of vulnerabilities and additional needs were evident in the population of squatters in London. In particular, one third had experienced prison or young offenders institutions and over one quarter had drug dependencies (see Table A2-13).

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We would like to make clear that this report is based on research undertaken by the authors and that the analysis and comment contained within do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Crisis or the Countryside Agency. We accept all responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions in the text.

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March 2004

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Other Crisis publications

Homelessness Factfile

Tony Warnes, Maureen Crane, Naomi Whitehead, Ruby Fu

ISBN 1 899257 51 9 2003 208pp £12.50

This second edition of the *Homelessness Factfile* provides comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about homeless people in the United Kingdom, and policy and service responses to homelessness and its prevention.

The *Factfile* is however more than a directory, for it also reviews the current scene, and critically examines some of the most vigorously debated current policy and practice development issues. It is an invaluable resource with links, references, case studies and sources for further research. There is plentiful information about homelessness in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Updated information that supplements the printed version, can be found in the Factfile Online at www.crisis.org.uk/factfile

Publications in the Hidden Homelessness series

There are hundreds of thousands hidden homeless people in Great Britain living in emergency hostels, B&Bs, squats or on friends' floors. A series of publications have been commissioned to map out their experiences and highlight their plight.

Lost Voices – The Invisibility of Homeless People with Multiple Needs

Clare Croft-White and Georgie Parry-Crooke

ISBN 1 899257 52 7 2004 51pp £7.50

Homeless people suffer from extremely high levels of physical and mental ill health. Many are dealing with multiple health problems simultaneously, making them exceptionally vulnerable. However there are enormous obstacles preventing these individuals from accessing appropriate care. Service providers find themselves struggling to prioritise the myriad of competing difficulties. Ensuring care that is meaningful and appropriate is a difficult task across an often-fragmented system. In this research report we examine

the lives of single homeless people with multiple health needs, investigate issues related to access to care and services, and look toward the creation of meaningful solutions to the gaps and barriers that currently exist.

This work is critical reading for anyone seeking to understand and address the issues of multiple health needs among homeless persons. Programme developers, service providers, and policy makers will find this especially helpful as they strive to create meaningful solutions to complex situations of need amongst the most vulnerable people within their communities.

Your Place, Not Mine

David Robinson with Sarah Coward

ISBN 1 899257 54 3 2002 40pp £7.50

Efforts to tackle homelessness have focused on reducing the number of homeless people living in bed and breakfast accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough. Yet the vast majority of homeless people are living in alternative situations, such as squatting, staying with family and friends or living in hostel accommodation. Recognising and responding to this fact, this ground-breaking report profiles the incidence and experiences of homeless people staying with family and friends.

Drawing on interviews with over 150 homeless people, the authors reveal that staying with family and friends is a common homeless situation, in which the majority of homeless people find themselves at some point in time. The reasons why homeless people stay with friends and relatives are explored and staying with friends or family is revealed to be a highly insecure homeless situation characterised by unsuitable and hazardous living conditions. Recommendations are made about interventions required to limit the reliance of so many homeless people on family and friends, as well as how friends and relatives might be better supported to provide suitable and secure accommodation when able and willing.

Your Place, Not Mine: Homeless People Staying with Family and Friends is essential reading for anyone concerned with understanding homelessness in the 21st century – policy makers, housing and homelessness professionals, lecturers, teachers and students in housing and social policy.

How Many, How Much?

Crisis and The New Policy Institute

The problem of single homelessness is not new and has its roots in the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*. At its simplest it is about homeless single adults or couples without dependent children and how difficult it is to meet their needs.

Over the years Crisis has worked with, campaigned and lobbied on behalf of this group of people. However as is often the case with excluded populations, there has always been a lack of knowledge about the true scale and cost of single homelessness; in addition to this the introduction of new policy and legislation has created a degree of confusion over the status and rights of single homeless people.

How Many, How Much? sets out to close that knowledge gap.

Home and Dry?

Samantha Howes

ISBN 1 899257 50 0 2002 40pp £7.50

Homelessness and substance misuse are two of today's most pressing social concerns. Both are clearly linked to social exclusion and are closely associated with one another. Despite this and the notable practical work that has been carried out there is still a serious gap in knowledge to guide service delivery and policy development. *Home and Dry?* fills these gaps by exploring the nature and causes of substance misuse and looks at some of the ways that we might begin to tackle these problems. Based on interviews with 389 homeless people and dozens of service providers it is a powerful and comprehensive piece of research, unflinching in its investigations, it has few qualms in drawing the necessary conclusions.

Hidden but not Forgotten

Oswin Baker

ISBN 1 899257 49 7 2001 32pp £7.50

This ground-breaking report examines the life of over 50 hostel residents. By mapping their experiences not only within the hostel system but also before they became homeless, we have been able to build up what is perhaps the most detailed picture of hostel life today. The report will be required reading for anyone who wants to help shape the response to homelessness in the next decade.

Publications in the New Solutions to Homelessness series

Crisis' New Solutions research programme is dedicated to identifying the major problems facing homeless people and suggesting innovative responses, designed to enable practical, long-term responses to homelessness.

Trouble at Home: Family Conflict, Young People and Homelessness

Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown

ISBN 1 899257 48 9 2001 58pp £7.50

Family conflict is the main immediate cause of homelessness amongst at least two thirds of homeless young people. *Trouble at Home* looks at the causes and the scope for intervening to prevent young people from becoming homeless. Based on case studies with 12 organisations and structured interviews with 150 young people this powerful report identifies opportunities for the development of crisis intervention services, highlighting the role that can be played by the government initiatives. The report goes on to look at the benefits of mediation services and calls for the implementation of a nation-wide network of family mediation services.

Healthy Hostels: A Guide to Promoting Health and Well-being Among Homeless People

Teresa Hinton, Naomi Evans and Keith Jacobs
ISBN 1 899257 47 0 2000 40pp £7.50

This is the first guide to comprehensively explore health promotion work with homeless. It outlines how housing, resettlement and health workers can promote the health and well-being of homeless people and the most effective ways of working and what resources are needed. The report is a unique attempt to bring together the experience and knowledge gained through current work, with ideas for developing future work with this population. It contains a wealth of material and information and practical examples of health promotion activities. It also outlines the principles of good practice and offers valuable insights into how housing providers can gear up and become more effective in this area.

Lest We Forget – Ex-servicemen and Homelessness

Scott Ballintyne and Sinead Hanks
ISBN 1 899257 46 2 2000 36pp £7.50

In 1999, up to one in five hostel residents and nearly one in three rough sleepers have been in the Armed Forces. What have the Armed Forces done to stop ex-squaddies put their training to sleep rough into practice? Have the dozens of ex-Service organisations been able to weave an effective safety net? And does the homelessness sector even recognise someone's background in the Forces as a relevant factor? Lest We Forget plugs this information gap and points the way ahead to close down, once and for all, one of the most well-recognised routes into homelessness.

Walk on By... Begging, Street Drinking and the Giving Age

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Few issues spark controversy more than begging and street drinking. Should you give? Should you walk

past? Should you feel guilty? Or scared? Or angry? When all is said and done, should people really think that they have the right to beg? Drawing on interviews with hundreds of beggars and drinkers, and on dozens of case studies from all over Britain, Walk on By shows how new and imaginative thinking can be translated into lasting solutions both for the community and for the people literally helped off the pavements.

Homelessness and Loneliness – The Want of Conviviality

Gerard Lemos
ISBN 1 899257 43 8 2000 20pp £4.50

Homelessness is about many things – but it is isolation, loneliness and despair which perhaps leave the most damaging legacy. This report seeks to explore this overlooked area and proposes new ways to rebuild people's social networks through mentoring, befriending and family mediation. Ultimately it looks towards the establishment of 'the convivial life' as the key to any successful reintegration into society.

A Future Foretold – New Approaches to Meeting the Long-term Needs of Single Homeless People

Gerard Lemos with Gill Goodby
ISBN 1 899257 35 7 1999 48pp £7.50

This influential report states that homelessness is the symptom of a multitude of life problems rather than people not having anywhere to live. The author argues that, although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, its causes, characteristics and consequences change frequently and that work done by the Government, and voluntary agencies needs to reflect this changing landscape. The authors argue that multiple causes can make homelessness a future foretold for some people. It makes recommendations to address the barriers currently facing single people in housing need.

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