Black and minoritized ethnic communities at disproportionate risk of homelessness in the UK

December 3 2022, by Glen Bramley

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In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been a heightened awareness of ethnic inequality in the UK. Despite some

recent [studies](link) on housing conditions in the context of the pandemic, little attention has been paid to how racial inequality and homelessness intersect.

Even before the current cost of living and energy crises, homelessness across the board was on the rise. Since 2009, the growing housing crisis has resulted in increases in most measures of homelessness. England in particular has seen numbers rise, even though special provision during the pandemic did temporarily bring [some measures down](link).

A study in 2005 already [found](link) that in every region in England, ethnic minority households were over-represented among those deemed homeless by local authorities. To gauge how things have evolved since, we recently carried out a [statistical analysis](link). We found that black and minoritised ethnic communities, taken as a whole, experience disproportionate levels of homelessness in the UK.

Disproportionate levels

We have used a broad and inclusive definition of homelessness. Core homelessness refers to the most extreme and immediate forms, including rough sleeping, staying in hostels/shelters or unsuitable temporary accommodation, or sofa-surfing. Statutory homelessness, meanwhile, is the term used by [local authorities](link) for those currently or threatened with homelessness who apply for support. Hidden homelessness refers to people dealing with homelessness in informal ways (including severely overcrowded households). Last, there are those at imminent risk of homelessness (for example, people facing unaffordable private rents).

Our analysis draws on ten data sources. These include 2011 population censuses, large-scale official and research surveys and administrative data from UK and devolved governments. We have used the standard ethnic minority categories used by the Office of National Statistics

(ONS) and other government bodies, and we mainly compare these groups with the white UK-born population group.

The first key finding is that black and minoritized ethnic communities, taken as a whole, experience disproportionate levels of homelessness in the UK. Between the different ethnic groups and between different forms of homelessness, the relative risks of homelessness vary. People from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds experience the highest risks—three-and-a-half times higher than white UK-born people—particularly of statutory and core homelessness.

Asian people, as a whole, experience lower risks of these forms of homelessness. However, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people face greater risks than Indian, Chinese and other Asian groups.

Further, there are geographical differences in the extent of these ethnic disparities. London displays more extreme disparities, with black people five times more likely than white to be statutorily homeless. In Scotland this ratio is around 1.5 times.

Evidence on the wider, hidden forms of homelessness shows a more adverse picture for Asian households, alongside the black and other groups. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black households are more than four times at risk of overcrowding and unaffordable rents than white households. Asian-led households are also twice as likely as white British households to share dwellings with other households or to have other adults (apart from their own adult children) living with them.

Racial discrimination is involved

The recent English Housing Survey showed that people who experienced racial discrimination, harassment or abuse were at a higher risk of homelessness. This is particularly the case for black people, a third of

whom report discrimination from social or private landlords.

In 2021 the UK government's [official report](#) into race and ethnic disparities argued that disparities in outcomes in education, health and other areas predominantly reflected factors other than racism or discrimination. The report, which attracted [widespread criticism](#), did not consider housing or homelessness.

Our research, by contrast, shows that ethnicity, migration background and discrimination do, in fact, increase the risk of homelessness. This is particularly the case for black, mixed and "other" groups, as well as for Pakistani and Bangladeshi people. (Here, "other" is the standard ONS categorization, which includes Arab/Middle Eastern groups).

We have found that there are important indirect routes by which ethnicity and discrimination-related factors impact on the risk of homelessness. These include poverty, private renting and housing insecurity. Once these indirect effects are accounted for, the relative risk for black and other minoritized ethnic households is substantially higher.

This supports our inclusion of groups at risk in our overall assessment of the evidence. To our knowledge, no other research exists that has analyzed UK homelessness in this way, using mediation models.

Since 2011, in conjunction with the UK charities, Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we have published the Homelessness Monitor report on the trends and driving factors in homelessness (annually for England; biannually for Scotland and Wales). This ongoing research points to [several short-term measures](#) that could reduce core homelessness, thereby significantly benefiting black and other ethnic minority groups.

These measures include raising the local housing allowance (to meet

private rent levels) and ending no-fault evictions. Reforming universal credit to end the [five-week wait](#), stop debt deductions and scrap the benefit cap would also help.

In the longer term, we need to build more social housing. We need to level up the country to depressurise the London housing market. We also need better support for [homeless people](#) with complex needs and a more humane policy towards asylum seekers.

Without action, though, the current crises combined with rising rents and ever less housing stock will only see more people become homeless. And black and other minoritised groups will continue to be disproportionately impacted.

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