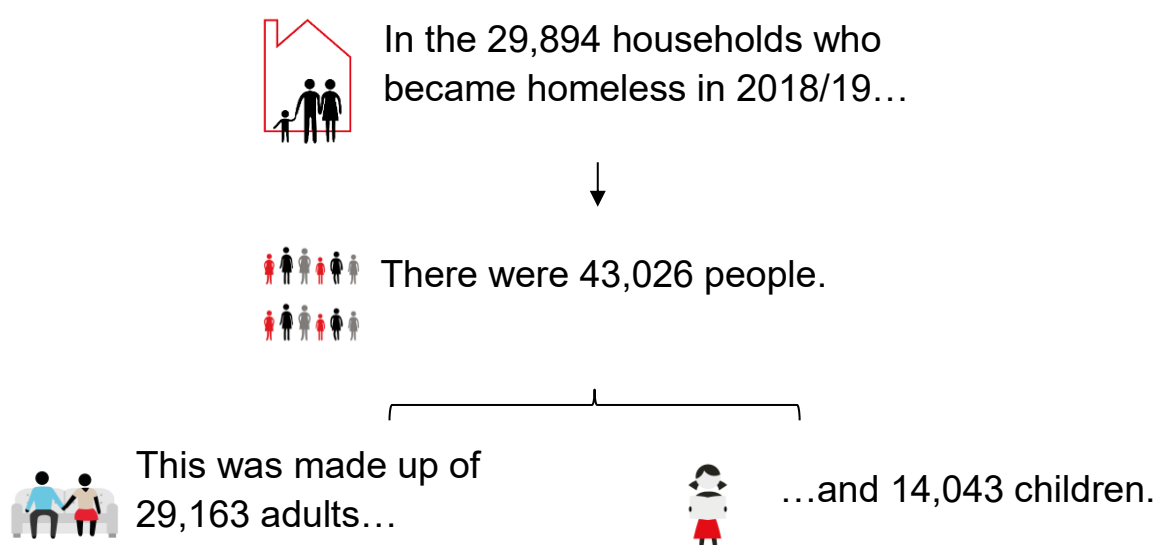# WHO IS HOMELESS?

Key points:

· Within the 29,894 households who were assessed to be homeless last year, there were 29,163 adults and 14,043 children.

· Contrary to prevailing opinion, homelessness isn't an overwhelmingly male issue. In 46% of households making a homeless application, the lead applicants were women.

· Higher rates of youth homelessness remains an issue, but applications are decreasing.

· Whilst the Scottish Government homelessness dataset gives us considerable insight into the demographics of people applying as homeless, it is important to remember that there is an untold number of people experiencing hidden homelessness who do not appear in the statistics. This report only captures the demographics of people who engage with statutory homelessness services.

How many children are in homeless households?

A homeless application is made on behalf of an entire household; that household might consist of one person, or it might consist of 6 people. The main dataset released by the Scottish Government shows the number of households who apply as, and are assessed as, homeless. For several years, Shelter Scotland has requested additional statistics to find out how many children and adults were in the households assessed as homeless.

In the 29,894 households who became homeless in 2018/19…

There were 43,026 people.

This was made up of 29,163 adults…

…and 14,043 children.

Look out! Unlike the headline figures of 36,465 households who applied as homeless, and the 29,894 households who were assessed as homeless, the above figures for numbers of children and adults *do not* **count repeat applicants multiple times**; they show the number of *unique* individuals in households assessed as homeless within the time period reported.

Despite an increase in the total number of households who became homeless compared to the previous year, the numbers of adults and children within those households has decreased slightly:

Households		Children		Adults	
2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019
29,371 ▲	29,894	14,744 ▼	14,043	29,948 ▼	29,163

This could be caused by an increase in single person households and a decrease in large households assessed as homeless. The data doesn't give information on the number of children per household, but it does show that there has been **a 3% increase in the number of single person households applying as homeless**.

We also know the age of children contained within homeless households. There is an overrepresentation of young children: **80% of children in homeless households were under age 11.** For more information, see our topic briefing on children who are homeless.[8]

Are some households more likely to become homeless than others?

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[8] Shelter Scotland (2019). Children experiencing homelessness 2019

Single adult households are more likely to apply as homeless

Single person households and **single parent households** are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics, compared to their frequency in the population as a whole. [9]
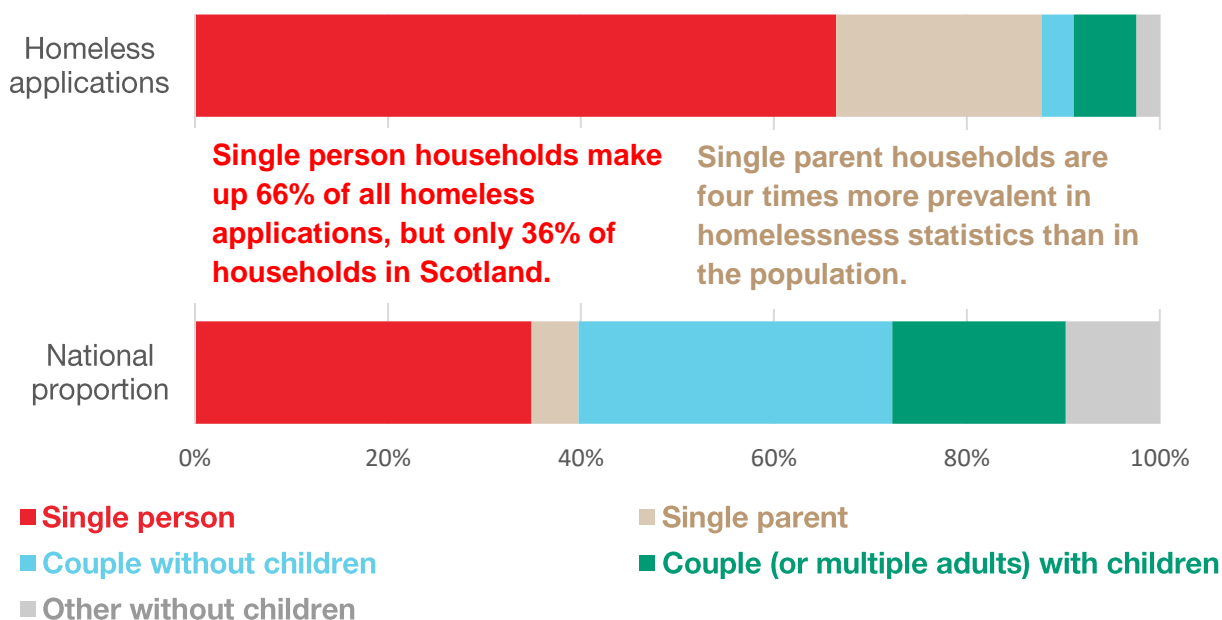

Single person households make up 66% of all homeless applications, but only 36% of households in Scotland.

Single parent households are four times more prevalent in homelessness statistics than in the population.

■ Single person

■ Single parent

■ Couple without children

■ Couple (or multiple adults) with children

■ Other without children

Chart 9: Proportions of various household types in homeless applications and the general population.

Look out! The Government dataset includes information on household type in relation to homeless applications, not homeless assessments. However, there is no reason to assume that the general distribution of household types would vary between application figures and assessment figures.

The table below shows how this is changing over time:

The only type of household who made less homeless applications in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18 are households containing children and 2 or more adults. However, when we split this category down further, we can see that less households containing a couple and children are making homeless applications (5% less), whereas more households that contain children and another configuration of adults are making homeless applications (4% more compared to 2017-18).

Single person	Single parent	Couple without children	Couple (or multiple adults) with children	Other without children
▲ 3%	▲ 1%	▲ 4%	▼ 2%	▲ 4%

When accounting for gender as well, applications from households containing a single woman are increasing fastest: 6% more applications in 2018-19 than 2017-18.

Age and gender

General perception is that homelessness affects men more than women. The data confirms that a slightly greater proportion of homeless applications come from men, but only by a slim margin.

Women	Men
46%	**54%**

Chart 10: Gender breakdown of the main applicant in homeless applications, 2018–19.

These figures have remained relatively stable, with men making up 51-55% of applicants every year since 2002-03.[10]

More young women apply as homeless than young men. At the other end of the age range, more older men apply as homeless than older women.

[10] No data is collected on trans or non-binary applicants.
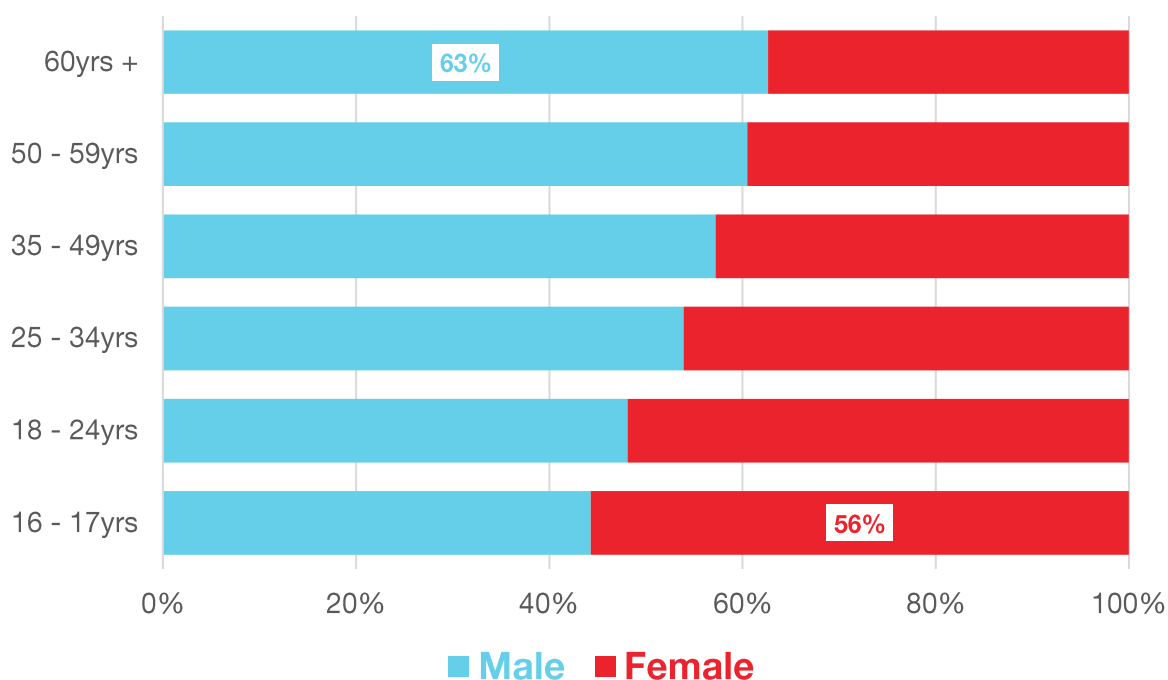
Chart 11: Gender and age breakdown of the main applicant in homeless applications, 2018-19.

Look out! Figures for age and gender reflect the age and gender of the "main applicant". Applications are made by *households*, rather than individuals, so there's no way of knowing from the above figures the age/gender of other members of the household.

Case study: Ellie

Ellie*[11] is a young mum. She made a homeless application after experiencing domestic abuse. She was offered temporary accommodation but it was far from her home, and would have been multiple bus trips from her son's nursery. Instead, she moved in with her two young children to her mum's house, sleeping on a sofa bed in overcrowded conditions, for three months until suitable permanent accommodation became available for her to move into.

Where does Ellie appear in the statistics?

✔ Ellie is 22, so appears in the youth homelessness figures. She is one of the 52% of homeless applications from 18-24 year olds that come from women.

✓ Ellie is the head of a single parent household – so she is part of the 21% of applications that come from single parents.

✗ Ellie has two children. Data about the ages and genders of her children isn't released in the main government dataset, but they would be counted as two of the 14,043 children in households assessed as homeless, in the statistics requested by Shelter Scotland.

Youth homelessness

Young people are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics. By "youth homelessness" we mean 16-24 year olds making an application on their own or with dependents.
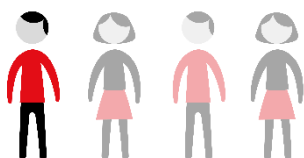
| **15 in every 1,000** | **young people apply as homeless…** | compared to | **7 in every 1,000** | **people aged 25 or over.** |

1 in 4 homeless applications comes from someone aged 16-24.
But this figure has steadily decreased from 1 in 3 in 2002-03.

Youth homelessness is falling
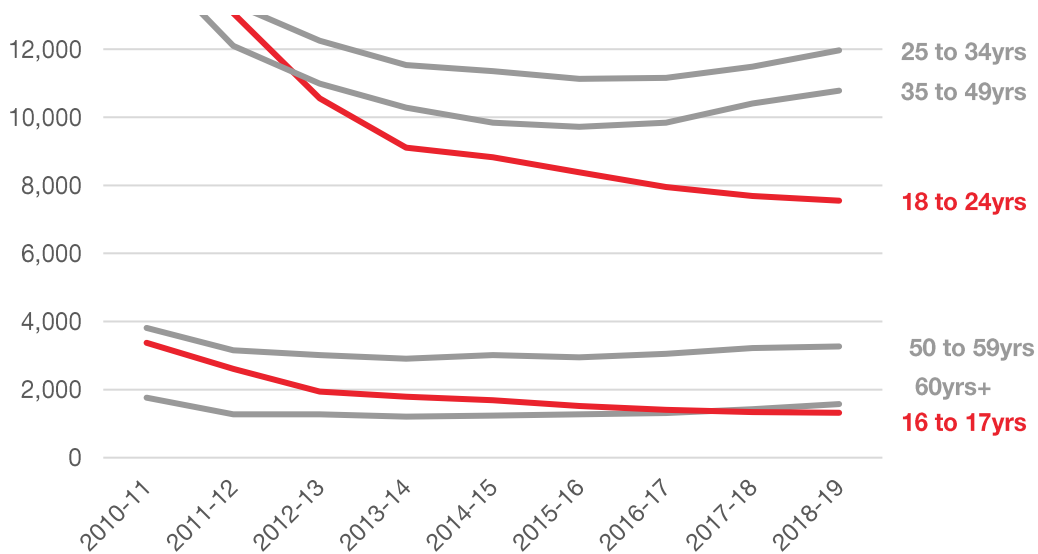Unlike all other age groups

Chart 12: Number of homeless applications by age of main applicant in homeless applications, 2010-11 – 2018-19

Young people apply as homeless at a higher rate than those who are older. However, applications from young people have in fact been falling, both in terms of raw numbers and as a percentage of all applications. The recent increase in homeless applications can largely be attributed to increases from people aged 25-49.

Data has been released by the Scottish Government for the past few years, providing more detail about youth homelessness. [12]

[12] Scottish Government (2019), Youth homelessness 2018-19

Youth homelessness is highest in **Orkney** and **Shetland**, and lowest in **East Renfrewshire** and **Glasgow.**
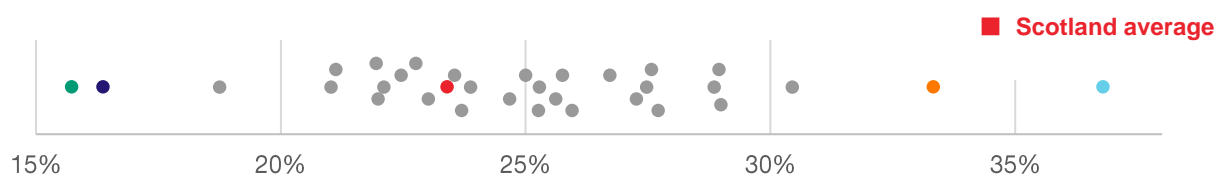

Chart 13: Proportion of all households assessed as homeless in which the main applicant was aged 16-24, by local authority, 2018-19

We can also tell what type of younger households make homeless applications.

Single female and **couple** households are more common in homeless **youth households** than **all homeless households**
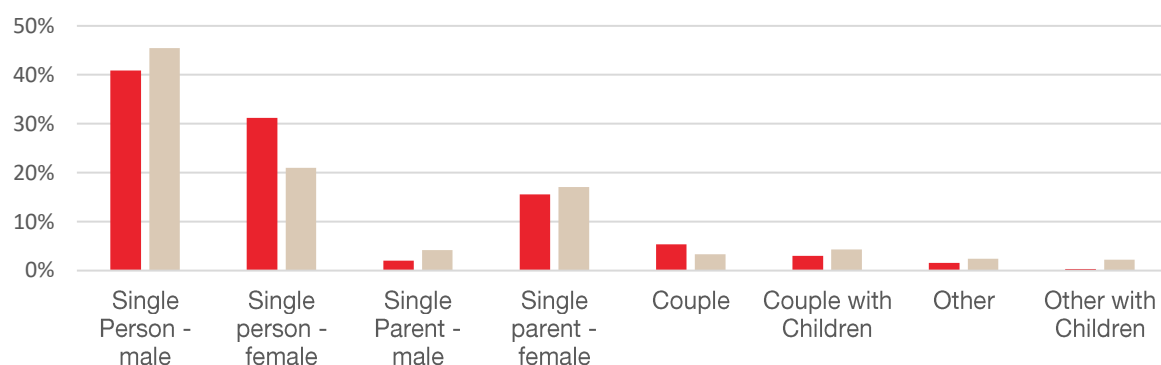Though the general distribution remains similar

Chart 14: A comparison of youth homelessness and general homelessness by proportions of each household type, 2018–19.

Look out! The Government youth homelessness data relates to youth households assessed as homeless. The general data for household type relates to households applying as homeless. The chart above is therefore not a perfect comparison. There is no reason to suggest a difference in distribution of household types between assessments and applications, but a further statistics request would be needed to confirm this.

Support needs

When a household is assessed as homeless, they are asked if they have a support need. In 2018-19, 14,506 households identified a support need, which is

49% of all households assessed as homeless that year. That proportion has been rising since 2007-08 and particularly following the introduction of the housing support duty in 2013.

33% 2007-08

Sharp rise when local authorities were first required to assess the support needs of homeless applicants in 2013.

49% 2018-19

Chart 15: Percentage of households assessed as homeless who identified at least one support need, 2007-08 to 2018-19.

The most common support need identified by homeless households was a mental health issue.

Mental health needs are rising quickly
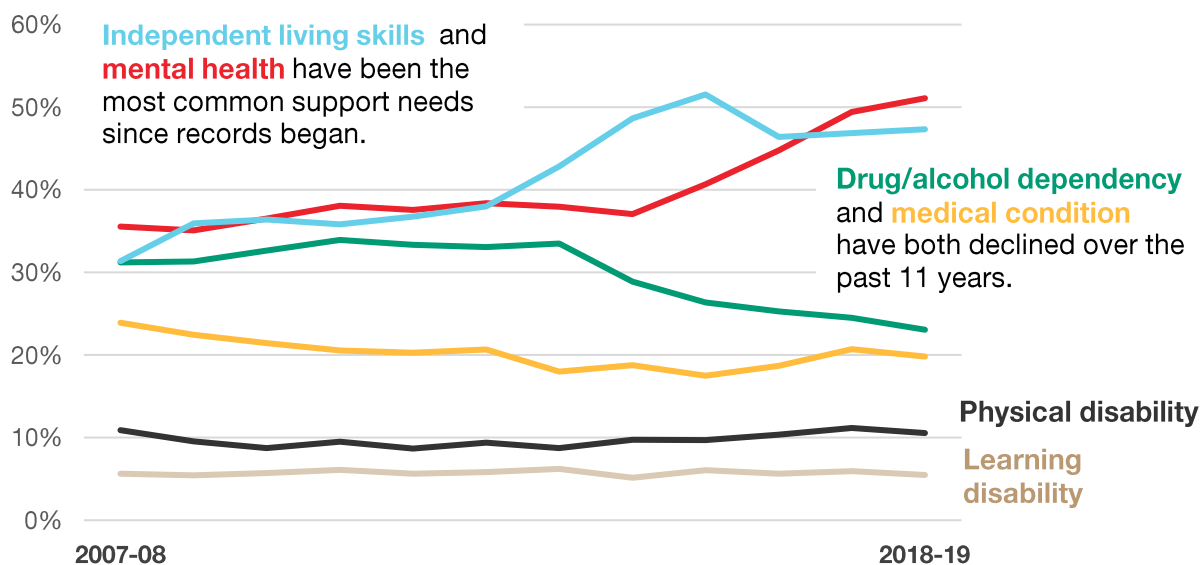### But addiction issues are falling significantly

Independent living skills and **mental health** have been the most common support needs since records began.

Drug/alcohol dependency and **medical condition** have both declined over the past 11 years.

Physical disability

Learning disability

60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

2007-08   2018-19

Chart 16: Proportions of support needs by category, 2007-08 to 2018-19

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[13] The Housing Support Services (Homelessness)(Scotland) Regulations 2012 came into force on 1st June 2013 and require Local Authorities to assess whether persons assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness need housing support services.

One household can record multiple support needs. Since 2007-08, as well as an increase in the overall number of households identifying a support need, the number of support needs identified by those households has risen.

The average number of support needs per household has risen consistently over the past decade
Among households who identified at least one

A slight decline, from 1.59 to 1.57 support needs per household

1.38 support needs per household

2007-08   **2017-18 2018-19**

Chart 17: Average number of support needs by household, among households who identified at least one, 2007-08 to 2018-19.

The data cannot show whether this national and sustained rise in support needs is due to an actual rise in their number, or due to increased awareness - either on behalf of the applicant (people are more aware that they have additional needs) or on behalf of the councils (local authorities are getting better at identifying additional needs).

There is *considerable* variation among local authorities in terms of the proportion of homeless households who identified a support need.

Compared to a national average of 49% in 2018/19…

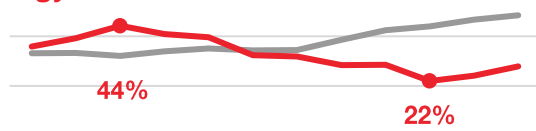0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
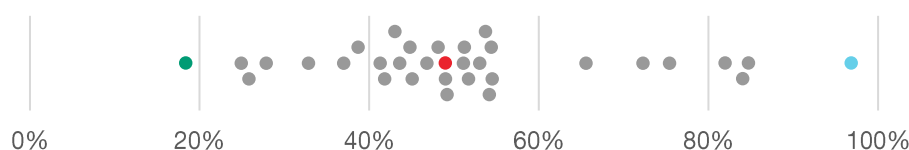
In **East Dunbartonshire** only 18% of homeless households identified a support need…

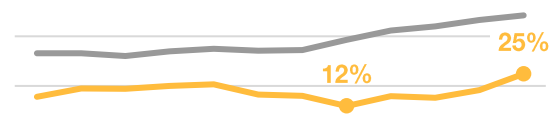While in **South Ayrshire**, 97% of homeless households did.

Chart 18: The proportion of households assessed as homeless who identified a support need, 2018-19, by local authority.

Looking across the 11 years of data, some local authorities have recorded increases that rise roughly in line with the national average, including Clackmannanshire, Glasgow and Angus. Some have recorded far more irregular variations (where grey lines indicate the national average).
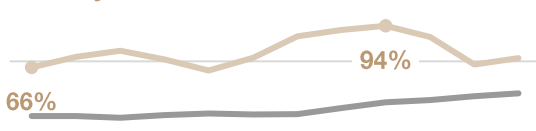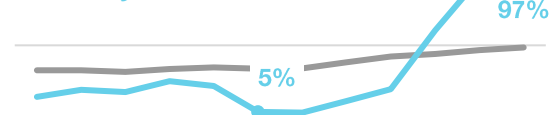
Argyll & Bute

44%

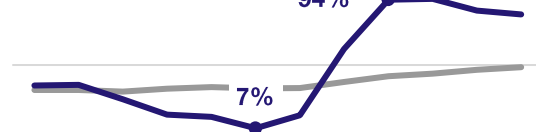22%

Midlothian

25%

12%

East Ayrshire

94%

66%

South Ayrshire

97%

5%

Falkirk

94%

7%

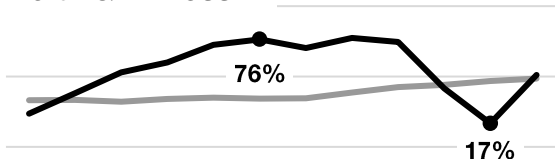**Perth & Kinross**

76%

17%

Charts 19-24: Percentage of households assessed as homeless who identified a support need 2007-08 to 2018-19, select local authorities compared to the national average.

The differences are likely down to different approaches by homelessness teams, but such radical variation merits further investigation.

Case study: The Perez family

Shelter Scotland worked with the Perez* family when they were faced with homelessness due to their landlord serving a Notice to Quit. The teenage daughter experiences very poor mental health and struggles to go to school. The young son is autistic and has very complex needs. Mrs Perez suffers from depression and relies on her own mum for support. Despite all of this, the Perez family were allocated temporary accommodation in an area outwith all their support. The young son hasn't coped well with the stress of moving into a new area, and his behaviour has deteriorated.

Where do the Perez family appear in the statistics?

✓ When they made their application, Mrs Perez identified that there were individuals with additional needs in her household. The family were subsequently assessed as homeless. This means that they are one of the 14,506 homeless households with at least one support need.

✓ When asked to identify which support needs were applicable to them, Mrs Perez identified 'mental health problem' for herself, and it was decided that her son's behavioural needs best fit into the category of 'learning disability'. This means they are part of the 51% of homeless households where someone

identified a mental health issue, and part of the 5% of households who identified a learning disability.

✗ While households can identify multiple categories of support needs, there is no option to identify multiple instances of the same support need within the household. So, while both Mrs Perez and her daughter struggle with their mental health, this isn't captured in the data.

Care experienced young people

It has long been recognised that care experienced young people are at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness. By "care experienced young people", we refer to any adult under 25 who has been looked after by a local authority as a child. When making a homeless application, the applicant is asked whether they have ever been in care. However, only households including an adult under 25 are asked this question.

Applications from care leavers are on the rise
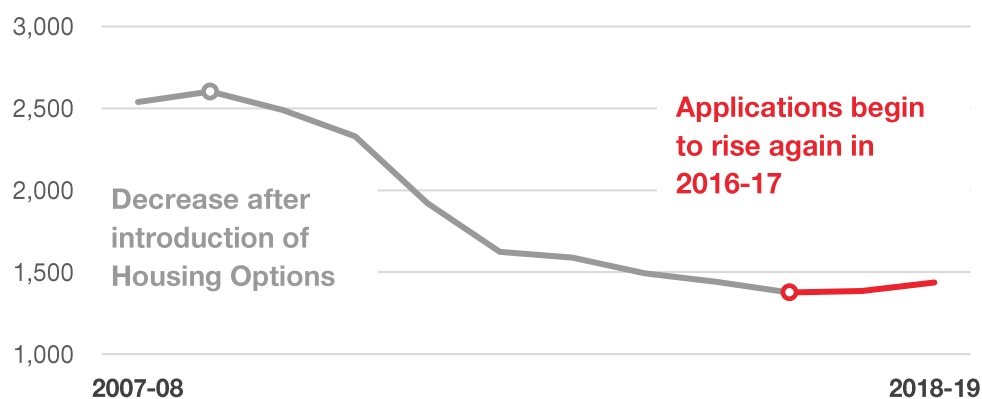Following the same trend as applications in general

Chart 25: Numbers of homeless applications in which the household contained an adult under 25 who had experience of local authority care.

In 2018-19, 1,437 households who applied as homeless contained someone under 25 who had been looked after by the local authority. This means that 7% of homeless applicants have experienced local authority care.

If households making a homeless application have been in care, they are then asked whether or not they left care within the past five years.

51% **49%**
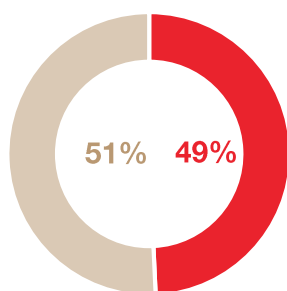
People who left care **within the past five years** apply as homeless in similar proportions as those who left care **over five years ago.**

Over the past 11 years, applications from people who left care **within the past five years** have been decreasing faster than from those who left care **over five years ago**.

744   729
708
641

2007-08   2018-19
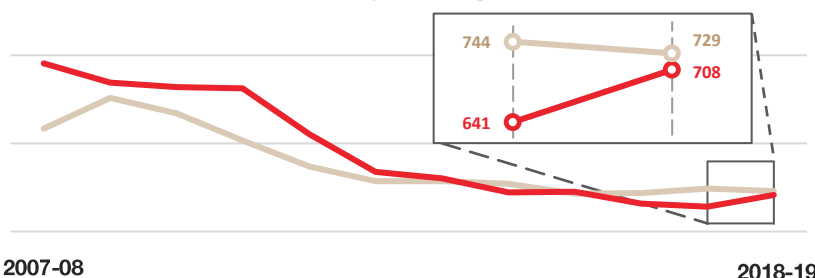
However, this trend has reversed **over the past year**. In fact, the recent rise in applications from care experienced people can be attributed entirely to a rise in applications from people who left care **within the last five years**.

Chart 26 (left): Of households applying as homeless which contained an adult under 25 with experience of local authority care, proportions who left care within the past five years compared to those who left over five years ago, 2018-19.
Chart 27 (right): as above, by year, 2007-08 to 2018-19.

The Scottish Government has started work on a series of **prevention pathways**, which aim to prevent homelessness among specific demographics which are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics. This is welcome work, but these pathways must focus on the prevention of homelessness and not the crisis response to these key groups. It must also be cross-sector and not housing and homelessness owned. One of these prevention pathways focuses on care experienced young people, which is timely, but the chronic and persistent over-representation of this group is a failing in both homelessness services and also in the response from the other parts of the system i.e. care.

Veterans

When applying as homeless, applicants are also asked if they or anyone in the households has ever served in the armed forces.

The number of applicants from the armed forces is increasing
Following the same trend of applications in general

As with care experienced people, applications begin to rise again in 2016-17

- 2,500
- 2,000
- 1,500
- 1,000
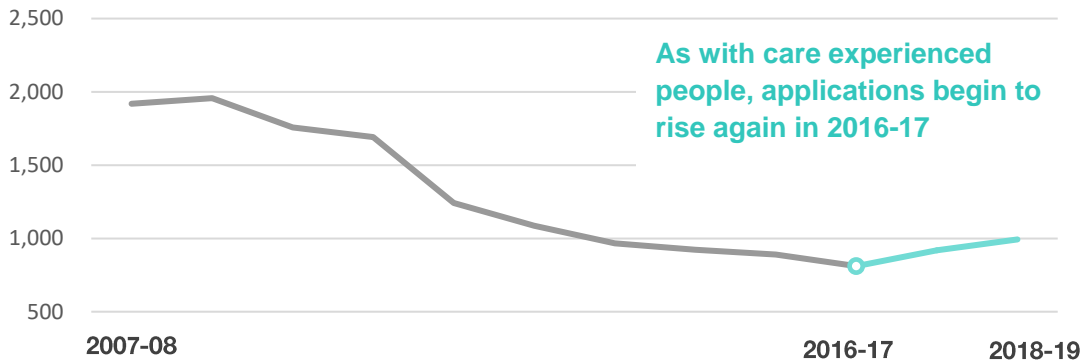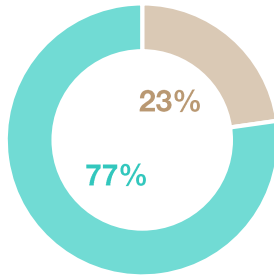- 500

2007-08   2016-17   2018-19

Chart 28: Percentage of homeless applications where a household member has served in the armed forces.

In 2018-19, 993 households who applied as homeless contained someone with experience of serving in the armed forces. This accounts for 3% of all homeless applications.

As with the previous question about care experience, the applicant is asked whether or not their experience in the armed services was within the past 5 years. The situation is very different from the question about care experience.

23%

77%

Since 2016-17, applications from people who left the armed forces **more than five years ago** have been rising at a much quicker rate than those who left **within the past five years.**

People who left the armed forces **more than five years ago apply** as homeless in far greater proportions than those who left the armed forces **within the past five years.** This has always been the case, but the difference is increasing.
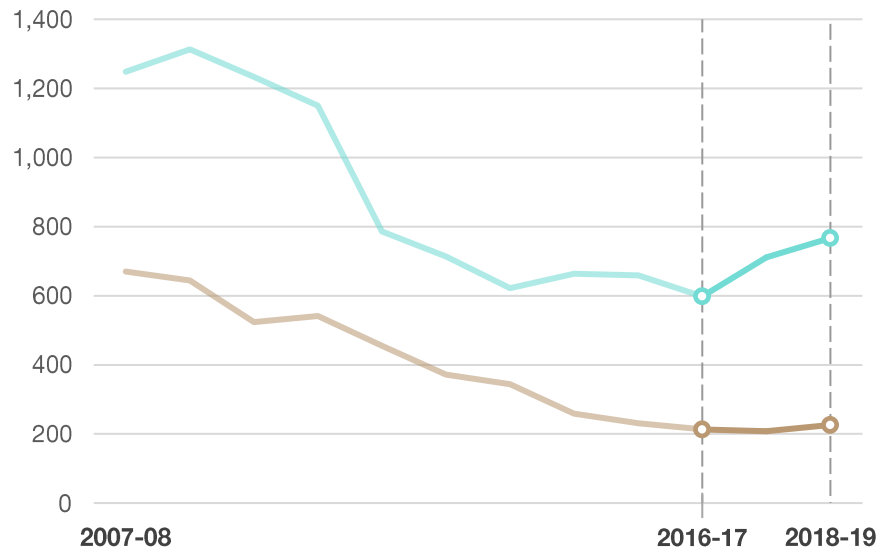

Chart 29 (left): Of households applying as homeless which contain someone who has served in the armed forces, proportions who left the armed forces more than five years ago compared to within the past five years, 2018-19.
Chart 30 (right): As above, by year 2007-08 to 2018-19.

Case study: Graeme

Graeme* is in his 50s, and disabled. He found himself homeless after his discharge from the armed forces. He applied as homeless to his local council, but had lots of issues, and ultimately didn't receive any support from the council's homelessness services. After some time struggling to engage with the homelessness system, he eventually found a property in the private sector that he could afford using his disability benefits payments.

Where does Graeme appear in these statistics?

✔ Graeme succeeded in making a homeless application, so his application is one of the 36,465 applications that were made in 2018/19.

✗ However, Graeme lost contact with the homelessness team after making an application, as he found the process confusing, difficult and unhelpful. This means he was never assessed as homeless, and so doesn't show up in the 29,894 households assessed as homeless.

> ✓ Because Graeme was in the army almost immediately before he applied as homeless, and because data about veterans is based on applications rather than assessments, he also appears as one of the 226 applicants who have served in the armed forces within the past five years.

Prison leavers

The official statistics give some information about the link between prison and homelessness. However, unlike the questions about care experience and serving in the armed forces, applicants are not asked if they have ever been in prison. The statistics only show if an applicant is making a homeless application directly after leaving prison, i.e. if they record their previous accommodation as prison. [14]

Fewer applicants are becoming homeless after leaving prison
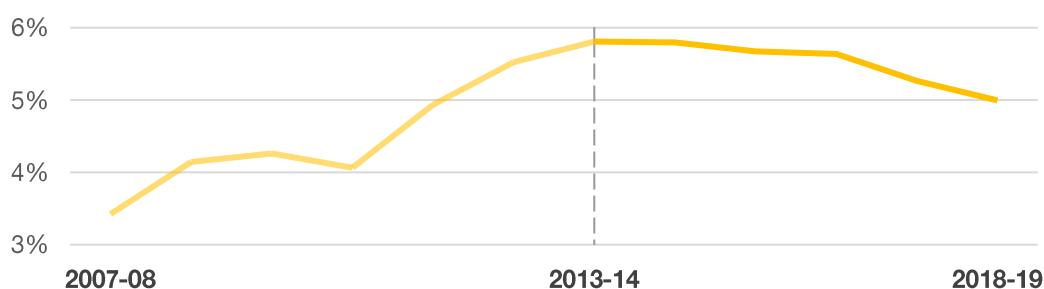After 6 years of increase

Chart 31: Proportion of households applying as homeless after leaving prison, by year.

We know there's a strong link between time spent in prison and homelessness. People leaving prison are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics, and a shocking 30% of those leaving prison don't know where they're going to live on their release.[15] However, it would be valuable to assess how long this increased likelihood of becoming homeless continues after someone leaves prison, in the same way that we can assess this in relation to care experience and the armed forces. Any changes to the homeless application procedure might consider the inclusion of such a question.

It is incredibly positive to see this decrease in proportion of applications from people leaving prison. It is possible that this is partly attributable to the adoption

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[14] There is one other place prison appears in the main government statistics release: when asked why they are applying as homeless, applicants can indicate that it is due to "discharge from prison/care/another institution". See 'Why do people become homeless' for more on this.

[15] Niven S and Stewart D (2005) Resettlement outcomes on release from prison, Home Office Findings 248

of the recommendations found in the Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone report, released by the Scottish Prison Service. [16]

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Case study: Paula

When she was released from prison after a short remand, Paula* was referred to Shelter Scotland from Criminal Justice Social Work. Paula had met with a case officer in prison and been told she would not be provided with accommodation assistance upon her release. Shelter Scotland tried to argue for a new homeless application be accepted. When this was refused, Shelter Scotland challenged the local authority for not following their legal duties. The local authority conceded their error, accepted a new homeless application and provided temporary accommodation.

Where does Paula appear in the statistics?

✓ Paula successfully applied as homeless, and listed prison as her previous address. This means that she is one of the 1,822 applicants staying in prison before applying as homeless.

! However, Paula's local authority at first denied her right to make an application. If Paula had not come to Shelter Scotland for assistance, she would not have appeared in the homelessness statistics, even though she was homeless.
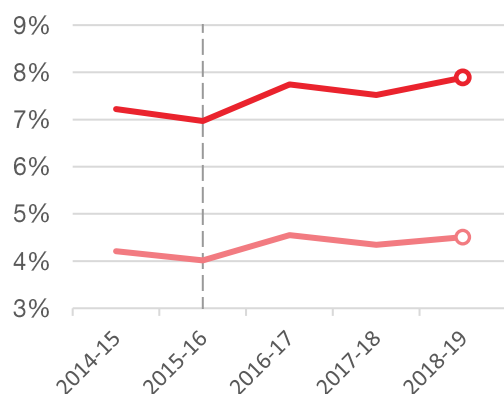
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Rough sleeping

The Scottish Government statistics **do not** give us accurate counts of how many people sleep rough in Scotland. Rather, it shows us how many people who do apply as homeless have recent experience of sleeping rough.

When applying as homeless, applicants are asked:

(a) whether they have slept rough at any point in the last 3 months, and

(b) whether they slept rough the night before making their application.

8% of homeless applicants have slept rough in the past 3 months, and this figure has risen by 18% since 2015-16.

5% of homeless applicants have slept rough the night before applying as homeless, and this figure has risen by 17% since 2015-16.

Chart 32: Proportions of homeless applicants who have slept rough in the past 3 months, and the night prior to making a homeless application, by year 2014-15 to 2018-19.

Remember! These figures only account for the proportion of homeless applicants who have slept rough, and are **not** an accurate picture of rough sleeping in each local authority. An untold number of people have experience of sleeping rough but, for a variety of reasons, do not make a homeless application: these individuals are not captured in this data. Due to the transitory nature of rough sleeping, it is difficult to do accurate rough sleeper counts.