KANTAR PUBLIC=

Impacts of homelessness on children – research with teachers

Shelter

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Contents

Key findings

Teachers and education professionals described **extreme and extensive impacts of homelessness on children** they worked with

Who we spoke to

- Kantar Public interviewed 11 participants in total - **8 teachers and 3 education professionals** (with a pastoral role within their school) over the phone

    Participants worked in **10 different primary and secondary schools** across the country and had first-hand experience of working with children experiencing homelessness

Frequency and types of homelessness

- Teachers and education professionals reported a range of experiences of homelessness among their students, identifying between **1-2 cases and 20 plus cases of child homelessness** per school year

- Cases most commonly involved children living in **extremely overcrowded conditions**, **living in temporary** and emergency accommodation (B&B's/hostels) and **couch surfing** or staying with friends and family on a **temporary basis**

- Some cases of children being at **risk of violence or abuse** leading to homelessness or bad housing situations

"Not having a permanent home has a massive impact on children's ability to participate in school successfully in terms of participating in lessons and social participation…in terms of building their friendships… It can hold them back as they feel different to everybody." (Secondary School Teacher)

The impacts of homelessness on children, seen through the eyes of teachers and education professionals:

Children affected by homelessness often felt an **overwhelming sense of displacement,** having lost a place that felt like home. This led to a number of practical, emotional and behavioural challenges.

Practical challenges included **keeping track of possessions and uniform, limited access to bathroom or laundry facilities** and **no quiet place** to do homework.

Homelessness could also cause **severe emotional trauma** leading to emotional stress, anxiety and problematic behaviours. Whereas younger children often became withdrawn, older children could also become angry or aggressive at times.

These issues were compounded when a child was forced to move **outside the area**, increasing the length of journey to and from school: **exacerbating tiredness, lateness, anxiety, and undermining children's ability to maintain relationships** with peers and teachers.

Negative impacts were particularly influential at **critical points in a child's educational journey** – e.g. when a child was nearing exams, making it **difficult for them to catch up** irrespective of capability and potential.

Impacts could also be **more pronounced in areas of mixed levels of affluence and deprivation,** as children experiencing homelessness **'stood out' more to peers** and teachers, leading to feelings of a**lienation and self-consciousness.**

Teachers and education professionals also described how working with children experiencing homelessness led them to feel **emotionally and physically exhausted, frustrated and, at times, despondent.**

1. Research Design

1.1. Background

Child homelessness is a major issue in Britain, with Shelter forecasting 128,000 children will be homeless on Christmas day. While no child should end up on the streets, many children are officially classed as homeless, living in unsuitable temporary or emergency accommodation (such as B&Bs).[1] There are other forms of homelessness too, including children living with friends or family (sometimes called couch surfing), or living in accommodation that is unsuitable for habitation, either due to unsafe conditions or overcrowding.

Shelter has conducted a number of studies exploring the effects of homelessness on children, in terms of the impacts on their health, emotional wellbeing, and educational attainment. A study in 2006 found that children living in bad housing are nearly twice as likely as other children to leave school without any GCSEs[2]. In a survey of parents living in temporary accommodation, well over a third (42%) said that their child was 'often unhappy or depressed', with 30% saying their child found it difficult to make or keep friends[3].

1.2. Research objectives

While these effects are relatively well-documented, there is less evidence available about the effects of homelessness from the perspective of teachers - in other words - what are the visible and sustained effects of homelessness in the classroom? The aim of this research therefore, was **to explore the impacts of homelessness on children through the perspective of teachers and other education professionals**. Capturing the views of education professionals provides a unique view into the wider impacts of homelessness on children – in relation to a child's physical and mental wellbeing and their ability to learn and participate in school. Ultimately, the research aims to build on the existing evidence base around the impacts of homelessness on children (at both primary and secondary school age), whilst at the same time providing insight to inform Shelter's campaigning activities.

1.3. Methodology

Kantar Public interviewed 11 participants in total - 8 teachers and 3 education professionals (with a pastoral role within their school) - working in 10 different primary and secondary schools across London, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, West Sussex, Kent and Birmingham.[4] Interviews lasted around 30 minutes and explored participants' experiences of the impacts of homelessness on children. As such, the findings in this report reflect the experience and perspective of the participants rather than the children or their parents.

Participants were recruited on the basis that they had first-hand experience of working with children experiencing homelessness and were able to talk about the ways in which homelessness impacted them. Participants were recruited via a sample of schools located in local authorities with high incidence of homelessness;[5] through snowballing techniques - a process by which existing participants recruit participants from their own networks (e.g. friends or other staff working at their school); and through Kantar's recruitment networks. All participants were screened using a questionnaire to determine eligibility.

Interviews were anonymous and confidential and participant details (including the name of their school) have not been shared. Furthermore, the students affected by homelessness have not been identified, and any names used in this report have been changed.

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[1] See Section 175–177 Housing Act 1996 for legal definition of homelessness.

[2] Rice B, Against the Odds, Shelter, 2006

[3] Mitchell, F. et al., Living in limbo: survey of homeless households living in temporary accommodation, Shelter, London, 2004

[4] See Appendix B for the final achieved sample

[5] Schools were selected from a list of wards with the highest levels of deprivation in London and Birmingham

2. Context: participants and schools

This section provides background on the teachers and education professionals engaged in the research and the types of schools they work in, before exploring the types of homelessness and bad housing situations experienced by children at those schools.

2.1. Background on participants and schools

Participants interviewed in this research ranged from newly qualified teachers (e.g. in education for up to 2 years) to those who had been in education upwards of 30 years at a number of different schools, as well as education professionals with exclusively pastoral roles (e.g. family liaison officer, safeguarding co-ordinator). Teachers engaged in the research taught a range of subjects such as Science, Languages, or Physical Education, with some teachers carrying out additional responsibilities for students' pastoral care.

Participants worked in primary and secondary schools across the country in areas of either consistently high levels of deprivation or areas with pockets of deprivation. In areas with particularly high levels of deprivation, participants communicated a range of issues, such as high levels of unemployment and crime in the area. Participants also reported a higher than average incidence of pupil premiums, children on free school meals, children on child protection plans and looked-after children.

Teachers and education professionals discussed a range of issues that affected their students to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the area. These included poor spoken and written English (particularly common in schools in London and Birmingham), poor parental support (e.g. low attendance at parents' evenings), high truancy rates, financial difficulties and limited access to a computer in the home.

Specifically related to housing, participants identified a number of issues that affected the areas local to their schools, including: a lack of social housing; poor quality housing; areas under-going regeneration forcing tenants to (temporarily) move out of the area; families that had moved to the UK and were waiting to be housed currently living in overcrowded conditions; and, children who are forced to move frequently due to family circumstances.

> *"The housing situation is very difficult…There's just not the places for people to go to. That's where the problem lies really…The housing hasn't grown at the rate of the population…[there's] not as much social housing available now." (Primary, Pastoral support, East London)*

Participants tended to become aware of issues of homelessness either by observing students at school and following up on unusual patterns of behaviours (e.g. a child falling asleep at their desk) or as a result of being made aware of the issue by another teacher or education professional. There were also a few instances at one school in London where parents came forward to notify the school of their housing situation; although this was less common across the interviews.

Teachers and education professionals in the sample reported identifying between 1-2 cases (more common) and upwards of 20 cases (less common) of child homelessness per school year. With respect to the prevalence of homelessness among students, participants were generally unable to comment on overall trends, as they had moved from school to school during their career, and the nature and extent of issues were specific to the area in which the school was located.

2.2. Types of homelessness and bad housing

Teachers and education professionals described a wide range of types of homelessness and bad housing situations experienced by children they currently work with or previously worked with. The main types were identified as: living in temporary or emergency accommodation (such as B&Bs or hostels); hidden homelessness (staying with friends and family on a temporary basis or living in overcrowded conditions); and being at risk of violence or abuse leading to homelessness or bad housing situations. These are considered in turn below.

Living in temporary and emergency (B&B or hostel) accommodation provided by the council as a result of being made homeless. This could be as a result of eviction due to inability to pay the rent, or while waiting to be re-housed if previous accommodation was of inadequate quality.

> *"If you've got a child who's behaving in an unusual way…showing signs of not being interested, not being engaged, lethargic or looking kind of depressed and you might ask them: 'What's going on?' And they'll say: 'It's really difficult for me I'm living in this bed and breakfast at the moment.'"* (Secondary, Teacher, North East London)

Staying with different family members or friends each night or each week, sometimes couch surfing, where children were sleeping on family members' or friends' beds, sofas, pull-out beds or even their floor. This was usually due to disruption to family lives – in particular, cases where a child's parents had split up and there was no stable, consistent home.

> *"One child I taught didn't actually know where she was going after school…Another child that kept being dragged between mum and dad. That is a common phenomenon, they don't quite know where they are going to be staying whether with dad or mum."* (Primary, Year 6 teacher, Oxfordshire)

> *"Several students in the last couple of years are in sofa surfing positions."* (Secondary, Teacher, Kent)

Living in overcrowded (or otherwise poor) conditions -here children were living with extended family and sometimes friends or acquaintances in overcrowded accommodation. Children were reportedly sharing bedrooms (and sometimes beds) with a number of other children of different ages from babies to young adults in their late teens who often stayed up late watching TV or playing games. Additionally, participants described instances of children sharing bedrooms with adults with different routines and sleeping patterns.

> *"Overcrowding's really an issue…lots of people living in the same small flat…with no outside space - that really impacts on children, in particular their development because…lots of these children are confined to their flats."* (Primary, Year 5-6 Teacher, East London)

Teachers also reported cases where children were sleeping in rooms with noisy electrical devices, such as fridges, which children complained were keeping them up at night. Overcrowding also meant that access to bathroom facilities was limited and children were expected to share a single bathroom with many people. Participants also described their students having inadequate quiet space to do their homework after school.

As a result of these conditions - having to share living, sleeping, and bathroom space with many other people - participants reported children turning up to school late, often extremely tired, sometimes unwashed and unkempt and without their homework.

> *"Children who live in very overcrowded situations, lots of family living in the same place. Children who share beds with each other and again it disrupts their sleep so they come into school and they are very tired and not really ready to learn and through overcrowding children live with things like a fridge in their bedroom…a child complained to me saying that the fridge was buzzing all night and he couldn't sleep."* (Primary, Year 5-6 Teacher, East London)

> *"These children don't have anywhere to do their homework, often sharing rooms with young babies, there is a lot of sleep deprivation."* (Primary, Year 6 Teacher, Oxfordshire)

Being at risk of violence or abuse leading to homelessness or bad housing situations – teachers reported a couple of cases where children were either re-housed by the council or living in overcrowded accommodation because of the threat of domestic violence. Children were often moved from place to place,

re-housed or forced to live with relatives or friends. Some families were forced to move long distances from school because of the lack of housing available in the school's borough.

> *"I've had a couple of children who were living with both parents and then there was domestic violence, so the mum took the children to a refuge…she eventually moved in with a friend she knew and didn't really have a bedroom…it was the child, her mum and the other family. They didn't really have their own space."* (Primary, Year 5-6 Teacher, West Sussex)

3. Teachers' and education professionals' experience of the impact of homelessness on children

This section provides an overview of teachers' and education professionals' experience of the impacts of homelessness on children they currently work with or have worked with in the past. It concludes with a summary of the impacts of working with homeless children on teachers and education professionals themselves.

3.1. Impacts of homelessness on children

Teachers and education professionals described a wide range of ways in which homelessness affected the children they had worked with. An overwhelming sense of displacement, and a loss of a place that felt like home, seemed to underpin children's experiences. This translated into numerous practical challenges: around keeping track of possessions and uniform, limited access to bathroom and laundry facilities, and finding a quiet place to do homework. It also led to sometimes severe emotional trauma, leading to low emotional wellbeing and in some cases, problematic behaviours that the school had to respond to. Impacts were compounded when a child was rehoused in accommodation outside the area, significantly increasing the length of their journey to and from school. This exacerbated problems of tiredness, lateness, and anxiety, while simultaneously undermining the student's ability to maintain relationships with peers or participate in social activities. All these factors undermined children's ability and willingness to participate in school.

> *"Homelessness has a massive negative impact on children, on their mental health and their attainment in school and just their life chances."* (Secondary, teacher, North West London)

Overall, experiences and impacts of homelessness evolved depending on a child's age. Firstly, participants reflected that younger children tended to become more withdrawn; whereas older children tended to become more combative as a result of feeling displaced or uprooted. Secondly, negative impacts apparently intensified at critical points in a child's educational journey - in particular, when a child was nearing exams (e.g. GCSEs). Participants found that being made homeless at this point meant that the child would have little to no chance of 'catching up', irrespective of capability and potential.

Teachers and education professionals also commented that the impacts of homelessness (in particular appearance) could be more pronounced in areas of mixed levels of affluence/deprivation as children experiencing homelessness 'stood out' more to peers and teachers, whereas children living in areas of high levels of deprivation were slightly more able to 'blend in'. Participants described children's heightened sense of self-consciousness when they began to see themselves as different from their peers - again something that increased as children got older.

The impacts of homelessness on children were described as extensive and far-reaching and related to a child's mental health, attitudes and behaviours, educational attainment, social life, health and hygiene, clothing and possessions, as well as the length of a child's journey to and from school. These impacts are explored in more detail below.

Mental health, attitudes and behaviours

Teachers and education professionals referred frequently to the extensive and lasting mental health impacts on children experiencing homelessness. They identified children who had experienced high levels of anxiety and stress as a result of being up-rooted, and having experienced significant disruption to their daily routine. For example, one primary school teacher reported a case where a child who started living in temporary accommodation became extremely anxious when arriving at school, and again towards the end of the day when he was waiting to be collected.

> *"The overriding impact is anxiety for the children, hugely anxious…reaction is a lacking in confidence."* (Primary, Year 6 teacher, Oxfordshire)

> *"If you link the anxiety and confidence, how any child is expected to learn in that environment with that going on…some of them are…living in overcrowded situations, they are not getting enough sleep or they are living on the floor…I've taught a lot of children that are sleeping on the floor and therefore they are really tired all day long, even nodding off it is that bad."* (Primary, Year 6 teacher, Oxfordshire)

Participants noticed changes in a child's mood, with many becoming depressed and noticeably 'downbeat' or sad. These impacts often resulted in a loss of confidence and low motivation, both socially when interacting with friends and academically, when completing school work or participating in class. Younger children in particular were described as becoming withdrawn, noticeably sad and unable or unwilling to communicate their feelings or talk about their situation at home.

> *"They are just not really focused in the classroom and learning because they have got so many other things going through their mind...this can manifest itself in behavioural issues that weren't there before."* (Primary, Years 5-6 Teacher, East London)

Tiredness was identified by all teachers as one of the main drivers of worsening mental health and disengagement with lessons. Participants described cycles of tiredness, leading to inability to sleep, ultimately resulting in exhaustion.

> *"He seemed quite tired. You could see the bags under his eyes."* (Primary, Year 5 teacher, West Sussex)

Worsening mental health was identified by teachers and education professionals as resulting in particularly problematic behaviours. Students would often become either noticeably withdrawn (particularly in the case of younger children) or alternatively become angry or antagonistic (mainly in the case of older children). In some cases, participants found that children could be angry and antagonistic one minute and extremely withdrawn the next.

Children experiencing homelessness whilst at secondary school were often found to be oppositional towards teachers and peers – at times, lashing out, starting fights or refusing to do any classwork or homework.

> *"Depression, anger, being oppositional. When challenged the situation might escalate quite quickly."* (Secondary, Teacher, North East London)

Participants also commented on the particular emotional stress of homelessness felt by young teenage girls, as it was seen to compound the general worries and anxieties faced at this age.

> *"The stress of that situation is going to be different at different times…girls going through puberty…getting their periods. It's just an added stress…friendship issues."* (Secondary, Teacher, Kent)

Overall, worsening mental health and emotional trauma caused by homelessness was understood to have a lasting and significant impact on a child's ability to cope at school - both in terms of their ability to connect with peers and in terms of their ability to engage academically.

Educational attainment

Teachers and education professionals communicated that changes to a child's mental health, attitudes and behaviours directly impacted their ability and willingness to learn and participate at school. This was particularly influential at crucial moments in a child's educational journey – for example, when a child was entering GCSEs, from the age of 14, when the demands in terms of workload increased significantly. Whereas younger children were seen to be able to catch up once things 'settled down', older children that missed school in the lead up to GCSEs found it much more difficult or impossible to make up for lost time.

> *"If they have homework, they often forget their homework or say that they don't really have a space to do it in and if you are living in a hotel with all of your family in one room…that wouldn't be your top priority in that situation."* (Primary, Teacher, East London)

Lack of stability in the home led to decreased confidence and disengagement, undermining students' willingness to complete school work in and out of school. At the same time, teachers were told by students that they had no place to do their homework, particularly if they were living in over-crowded homes without a quiet place to sit and work. Some teachers said that they had created an online system for homework, assuming that their students would have access to computers at home. However, they eventually discovered that as a result of being made homeless, children had no access to a computer, sometimes discovering this only after a child asked permission to use the school computer to do their work.

> *"Things like homework, access to computers can be difficult if they haven't got a computer at home…I've started to notice kids who are split between two places, they can be moved and live a very long way away which makes it very difficult for them to get into school on time…homework can suffer, kids in that position can be tired during lessons and appear to be distracted and not engaged in lessons."* (Secondary, Teacher, North East London)

Overall, teachers and education professionals found that changes in housing circumstances had a clear direct on education attainment - in terms of basic attendance and punctuality, whether students were moving from school to school, and disruption during critical exam preparation years. However, the indirect impacts were also outlined as important - as changes to confidence, mental health and attitudes severely impeded children's engagement in learning.

Clothing and possessions

Teachers and education professionals found that children who were being moved from place to place or those that were living in B & B's tended to struggle to keep track of their uniforms and possessions. As a result, homeless children often turned up to school without the correct school uniform (claiming that they had left it somewhere they had been staying temporarily) or looking untidy or unkempt. Consequently, some of these students found it hard to develop and maintain relationships with peers because they looked different and often felt different. This was particularly pronounced in schools located in areas with mixed levels of deprivation, where there may be one or two cases of homelessness per year compared to schools located in areas of high deprivation. In the latter case, teachers found that issues around appearance were almost normalised, with many students wearing dirty clothing or looking unkempt or unclean.

Teachers and education professionals communicated that changes in appearance resulting from homelessness often had a greater impact on older children because they tended to be more self-aware than

younger children. Participants found that, as a result, older students would sometimes turn up to school looking unkempt and tidy themselves in the school bathroom before seeing friends.

> *"Not being able to wash your uniform as much as you would like, or just not having enough time in the bathroom in the morning. For teenagers that can quickly become an issue and can be quite obvious."* (Secondary, Teacher, North East London)

Additionally, younger children could become increasingly protective of their possessions at school, with one teacher recounting a case where a child became physically aggressive when a classmate took his pencil. According to the teacher, this behaviour was linked to the fact that the child did not have possessions in the home and therefore became protective of his things at school.

> *"A lot of the time it was linked to the fact they didn't have anything at home…what they had at school was important so if anyone touched it, that would be it…"* (Primary, Year 5 teacher, West Sussex)

In the case of younger children, not having access to their toys – in particular, their 'comforters' (cuddly toys or pieces of cloth that were particularly meaningful to them) - because they were left behind at other temporary accommodation was particularly distressing and led to increased anxiety and dislocation.

Ultimately, wearing clothes that were unclean and not having basic possessions that other children take for granted, resulted in children looking and feeling different to their peers. This was particularly felt by students attending schools where homelessness was uncommon or extremely unusual.

Health and hygiene

Due to lack of regular access to washing machines (particularly in B & B's) and as a result of being moved from place to place, participants reported that children experiencing homelessness were more likely to turn up to school in dirty, unwashed uniforms or wearing the wrong uniform. Infrequent or no access to bathroom facilities was also identified as contributing to poor hygiene and uncleanliness.

> *"Clothing wise they might not be in the correct uniform, not looking very smart. Other students I've taught at other schools there was a hygiene issues, clothes not being cleaned."* (Secondary, Year 8 Teacher, Hertfordshire)

In terms of changes to children's weight, teachers found that rather than losing weight, children experiencing homelessness tended to gain weight because they would buy fast food after school, knowing there would not be a meal at home for them later that evening.

In one case, a teacher found that, because a child was homeless and therefore did not have a fixed address, their parents were not receiving letters from the school's health advisor, such as information on inoculation. Another health issue identified by participants was the prevalence and persistence of head lice, which they attributed to over-crowded living situations.

Overall, participants reported that homelessness often resulted in children coming to school unclean or looking unkempt, and for some, resulted in weight gain – further alienating children from their peers.

Social (including peer and teacher relations)

Teachers and education professionals observed changes in behaviours in relation to peer and teacher relationships as a result of homelessness, with many children either withdrawing from friends or lashing out at teachers (and their peers). One teacher reported that a child they worked with started picking up negative behaviours from an older, more disruptive child they had been sharing a room with.

Peer relations suffered too, as many children felt different from their peers – either in the way they looked (unkempt or messy) or because of a loss of confidence and feeling ashamed about their home situations. This often resulted in children withdrawing from interactions with their friends.

> *"Children being a bit ashamed and not really wanting any attention drawn towards that….and maybe becoming a little withdrawn in that way from their group of friends...feel shame around it and they do not want to talk about what is happening at home with their friends at school so they want to keep home and school very separate…the social and emotional impact is huge."* (Primary, Teacher, East London)

Peer relations were further undermined by parents' inability to pay for activities such as discos due to financial struggles and as a result of children feeling ashamed or uncomfortable to invite friends home after school.

> *"He didn't know how to relate to children…he felt so different to them…he didn't want to make friends with them or talk to them…he's not developing any friendships…also he's not practicing those skills of friendship…he's missing out on that whole chunk of what school can provide."* (Primary, Teacher, West Sussex)

Distance travelled / long commute

Increased commutes to school as a result of staying with friends/family that live far away was identified by participants as a disruptive impact of homelessness. Teachers reported some children turning up late and hungry to school. In areas where schools had addressed local issues of deprivation and hunger by setting up free breakfast clubs, children living outside the borough were unable to reach school in time to access these.

> *"They have come to school tired because they have had to wake up extra early, tired, had this horrendous journey…and they worry whether they are going back to that unfamiliar home without their possessions and belongings."* (Primary, Pastoral care, Birmingham)

Moreover, some participants claimed that children living far away were unable to participate in social events after school because their journey home was too long, adding to a feeling of isolation from friends. Ultimately, children who had been housed in temporary accommodation outside their school's borough, arrived at school late and/or extremely tired and often missed out on school activities as a result.

> *"These children are missing special events and shared experiences with other students."* (Primary, Reception teacher, North London)

Overall, longer journeys to and from school not only resulted in children being extremely tired while at school, but also prevented children from attending social events organised by the school, distancing and alienating children from their friends.

3.2. Impact of child homelessness on teachers

Teachers and education professionals also described how they had been personally affected by working with children experiencing homelessness. In particular, those that worked with consistently high numbers of children experiencing homelessness reported the frustrations of investing a great deal of time and energy trying to help children early on in their careers without seeing any change. After a while, teachers reported feeling exhausted, frustrated and, at times, despondent, recounting many instances in which they had struggled to deal with the situation. In some cases, teachers described children who they had worked with very closely to try and combat some of the negative impacts of homelessness, only for the child to suddenly move away and leave the school. The sense of futility this brought had led some teachers to stop trying, feeling that there was little point in trying to make a difference. One teacher described a situation in which a

young child and his mother had been placed in temporary accommodation at which point the boy had become noticeably anxious and unsettled at school. The school provided support to the boy and his mother, including access to an educational psychologist, and as his teacher had regular conversations with him. However, the child was eventually re-housed outside the borough.

> *"You give all of your resources to it but it may not help in the end and other students missed out on your attention and support"* (Primary, Teacher, North London)

> *"It adds to the workload of the pastoral team…as a subject teacher…if they miss lessons, they can't do that…ultimately it's frustrating…you can't help them…"* (Secondary, Teacher, Kent)

> *"I think people just give up on them, they just see this is an aggressive child…I've tried to help they haven't responded so they are a lost cause then…I think people get tired of dealing with it...not everyone but I have seen it a lot. You are trying to do the best for every child but you can't."* (Secondary, Teacher, Hertfordshire)

Teachers and education professionals commented on their inability to effect change in this area – particularly as they felt they could do no nothing to address the root of the problem. Ultimately, they felt that inadequate stock and quality of housing was a major nation-wide issue that needed to be addressed.

> *"I think it is a sad state of affairs when we live in the country that we live in and we have children that are homeless and that they are living in the conditions that they live in…You shouldn't have to worry that you are going home to a bed and breakfast when you are a six-year-old really."* (Primary, Pastoral care, Birmingham)

> *"I have been in education for thirty years…[I've] seen that housing is key. . . sometimes it's difficult if they have to leave the school where they are settled because they have been rehoused. . .."* (Primary, Head teacher, East London)

4. Case studies of children affected by homelessness

This section summarises five case studies containing details of individual children affected by homelessness from the perspective of teachers and education professionals. To protect the identity of those affected, names have been changed.

Sam

Age 6, Year 1

- Sam's parents and 4 siblings were rehoused due to living in overcrowded conditions.
- They spent 3-4 months in temporary accommodation before being rehoused.
- During this time the family had to travel long distances to school, taking 3 buses and waking up at 6am and still frequently late to school.

"They have had to wake up extra early… and had this horrendous journey… they worry whether they are going back to that unfamiliar home without their possessions."

Sam's teacher

Impact at school

Long commute
- Frequently late to school
- Often tired while at school

Behaviour
- Disengaged
- Withdrawn and sad

Clothing and possessions
- No access to his own clothing, books and toys

Jordan
Age 14, Year 9

- Jordan's family was evicted when their landlord wanted to refurbish the property.

- They spent 3-4 months in temporary accommodation.

- When the family was re-settled after several months, Jordan's attendance and behavioural problems started to improve.

- However, his teacher believes he will struggle to catch up with what he has missed in time for GCSEs.

"He won't get what he is capable of in terms of GCSEs"
Jordan's form tutor

Impact at school

Attitudes and behaviour

- A temporary impact on Jordan's behaviour during the time he was living in temporary accommodation, including:
  - Being tired in class
  - Disengagement from lessons
  - Being oppositional to teachers
  - Truanting
  - Smoking

Educational attainment

Poor attendance
Falling behind in lessons during critical period

Naomi
Age 10, Year 6

- Naomi moved to the UK from Sri Lanka with her parents and siblings a year ago and their housing situation has been unsettled since.

- Financial circumstances will likely mean that Naomi's family will relocate outside on London.

- She is in her final year of primary school and the possibility of moving schools is unsettling for her.

"She left for half term not knowing if she would be coming back or not and she didn't say bye to friends…in denial that she might be leaving"
Naomi's teacher

Impact at school

Mental health

- Worried
- Unsettled
- Distracted

Educational attainment

- Has made progress, however the potential move will disrupt her last year of primary school

Peer relationships

- Has not opened up to friends about her home life
- Does not want to leave her friends

Ben
Age 3, Nursery

- Ben moved into temporary accommodation with his mother and younger siblings.
- For 6 months to a year they were commuting long distances so that Ben could stay in the same school.
- He was often late to school and missed events because of the commute.
- They were eventually permanently rehoused in a different borough, at which time Ben moved schools.

> "Eventually they couldn't be rehoused back here…it's very sad actually because just as he was forming all of these great bonds, they leave"
> Ben's teacher

Impact at school

Mental health
- Anxiety

Behaviour
- Developed separation anxiety - screaming and crying during school drop off
- Unable to settle at the start of the day

Peer relationships
- Initially struggled to make friends - missing special events and shared experiences with other students

Kelly
Age 10, Year 5

- Kelly's parents and 2 siblings were living in very poor conditions, and refused to pay rent until the landlord made improvements – but they were evicted.
- The family moved to temporary accommodation for 2 years, and are currently living in a hostel.
- The family is unlikely to be rehoused due to rent arrears.
- Kelly has begun to take on a parenting role for younger siblings.

> 'When a family has been made homeless it can ripple out…puts an enormous amount of pressure on the family"
> Family liaison officer at Kelly's school

Impact at school

Behaviour
- Significant change to behaviour
- Withdrawn
- Refusing to complete school work
- Disruptive
- Aggressive towards teachers

Support received
- Family support worker
- School learning mentors
- Meetings with housing department

Appearance
- Unkempt
- Clothes unclean

5. Appendix

Appendix A: Topic guide

Background

Shelter is a charity that campaigns to end bad housing and homelessness in England and Scotland.

To be considered homeless a child does not have to be living on the streets, in fact very few children in the UK are. Instead, a homeless child is one that is living in a home that is not permanent or is not reasonably suitable to occupy. This could be temporary accommodation with friends or family (including couch surfing), temporary accommodation provided by the council, living at risk of violence, or in a home that is likely to have a negative impact on their physical or mental health, as well as many other scenarios.

There are over 125,000 children in Britain who are officially homeless, with the highest rates being in our biggest cities.

Research Aim:

To **explore the impacts of homelessness on children through the perspective of teachers and other education professionals**.

This insight will help build the evidence base about the breadth of impacts of homelessness on children, at both primary and secondary school age. It will also help to inform Shelter's Christmas campaign this year.

Note to Moderators

Given that the interviews will last between 20-30 mins, please be extra mindful of timings. We are particularly interested in participants' actual experiences of the impact of homelessness on children (rather than opinions on causes/what should be done about it, etc).

Please note, this guide is not a script and is intended to be used flexibly, with participant responses guiding the flow of the conversation, topics covered in the order that they naturally arise and probes used only when needed

Length: 20-30 mins

1. Introduction **(2 minutes)**

Introduce research, reassure about confidentiality and set tone of discussion

- **Warm up and introduction**
    - Thank for participation
    - Introduce yourself and Kantar Public
    - Research on behalf of Shelter
    - Aim of the discussion is to **explore the impacts of homelessness on children through the perspective of teachers and other education professionals**
    - This information will be used by Shelter to inform their Christmas campaign, which includes a focus on effects of homelessness on children.
    - Interview length – 20-30 mins
    - Research is confidential and voluntary – your personal details will not be shared with Shelter or anyone else, if you do not expressly consent to do so
    - Any questions?

- **Recording**

Ask participant for permission to record, but reminder of confidentiality - then start recording and confirm consent

2. Background to participant **(5 minutes)**

Introduction to participant, roles and responsibilities within their school, type of school they work in

2.1 Roles and responsibilities

- **Brief background to participant**
    - Name
    - Current roles and responsibilities at their school
        - Teacher or other education professional
        - Length of time at school
    - How long they have been working with children

- **Nature of School they work in**
    - Type of school (e.g. primary, secondary)
    - No. and age range of pupils

Explain that we believe there is a high level of deprivation in the area, then explore

- Whether this fits with their experience

- How this plays out in their school

- Briefly, the kinds of issues pupils in the school/area face

- **Are there any school policies/guidelines for how to recognise/support students experiencing these issues**

  - What are they

  - Where did they come from

3. Experience and impact of homelessness   (15 minutes)

Explore prevalence of homelessness among children in their school, how they know about homelessness, and views on the impacts of homelessness

3.1 Definition of homelessness

Explain that we would like to talk specifically about homelessness among children and introduce definition: for each, we will briefly explore experience of this amongst pupils they work with

To be considered homeless a child does not have to be living on the streets; in fact, very few children in the UK are. Instead, a homeless child could be:

- Staying with friends or family on temporary basis

- Staying in temporary accommodation arranged by the council as a result of being found to be homeless

- Staying in emergency accommodation such as a bed and breakfast

- Living in very overcrowded conditions

- Being at risk of violence or abuse within the home

- Living in conditions that are inadequate and/or having a detrimental effect on the student's health

- **Which of these situations affect/have affected students they've worked with**

Researcher to further explore situations mentioned, using prompts below

Based on this understanding of homelessness:

- **How much of an issue they think homelessness is among children at their school**

  - Roughly, the number of students they have been in contact with that have experienced homelessness (as defined above) – either current or in the past

- **How they know whether a student is experiencing homelessness (as defined above)**

  - Would they have been notified by the school/parents explicitly about these circumstances

- – What signs they *first* become aware of

- – How might this change over time

- – Most concerning effects of homelessness

- – Unexpected effects/more nuanced effects

- – How might the impacts differ according to age of the child

    - ▪ Or by other characteristics

- **Whether they have noticed differences in incidence of homelessness during career/at different schools/over time** (i.e. do they think it is getting worse)

- **What their personal experience of the IMPACT of homelessness is on children they work/have worked with; spontaneous, probe on the following (if necessary)**
    - – Impact on child's:
        - ▪ Mental health and attitudes
            - • Increased tiredness
            - • Lack of attention/focus
            - • Low motivation and confidence
            - • Signs of distress/anxiety/depression
        - ▪ Behaviours
            - • Changed behaviour
            - • Poor attendance/punctuality
            - • Changes in educational attainment or ability to complete homework
        - ▪ Appearance
            - • Weight
            - • Physical health
            - • Clean clothes
        - ▪ Peer and teacher relationships
            - • Loss of friends
            - • Being bullied/bullying others
        - ▪ Ability to pay for school trips (if applicable)

4. Examples/case studies   (5 minutes)

> Explore particular stories or examples with students in their school, of how these issues manifest in practice, and how these relate to wider context

<u>4.1 Case study</u>

- **Ask participant to think about a SPECIFIC CASE where a child they have worked with has been greatly impacted by homelessness; then ask the following**
    - Age of child
    - Whether any siblings/what known about family
    - Type and duration of homelessness
    - Observation of child's experience (incl. appearance, attitudes, behaviours) at school before being affected by homelessness (if relevant)
    - Observed changes to child's appearance, attitudes, behaviours and other impacts they recognised in this particular case

- **Briefly explore their approach to this issue**
    - Whether/what conversations they had
    - Whether/what action they took
    - Impact on them as a teacher/educational professional

5. Close   (3 minutes)

- **Ask participant to sum up in one sentence their experience of the impact of homelessness on children**
- Thanks and explain that this research will inform Shelter's Christmas campaign.
- As part of their campaign, Shelter would like some teachers and education professionals to talk about their experiences to newspapers, and on TV or radio. Would you mind if we passed on your contact details to Shelter so they can discuss this possibility with you? You are not consenting to taking part at this stage, just to discuss it further with someone at Shelter.
    - o **If yes**, confirm email address
    - o **If no**, thank them for taking part

Appendix B: Achieved Sample

	Completed
TOTAL	**11**
PRIMARY QUOTAS	
Different Schools	10
Same School (Snowball)	1
SECONDARY QUOTAS	
Locations	
East London	3
Oxfordshire	2
North West London	1
Hertfordshire	1
West Sussex	1
North London	1
Kent	1
Birmingham	1
SCHOOL TYPE	
Primary	8
Secondary	3
PROFESSIONAL TYPE	
Teachers	8
Others (councillors or similar)	3

This project was carried out in compliance with our certification to ISO 9001 and ISO 20252 (International Service Standard for Market, Opinion and Social Research)