

The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education

Shelter is the UK's largest homelessness and housing charity. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to provide information, support and advice to families across the country facing homelessness or struggling in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

A major new study from Shelter and YouGov reveals the lasting impact of homelessness and bad housing on a child's education. With 136,000 children growing up in temporary accommodation across Britain, it is unsurprising that more than half (56%) of state school teachers in Britain have worked at a school with homeless children in the last three years, and have witnessed some of the most devastating effects homelessness and bad housing can have on a child's wellbeing and their ability to learn.

To lift children and their families out of bad housing and homelessness, Shelter is calling on the government to:

- **Strengthen our welfare safety net, by removing the benefit cap and ensuring housing benefit is fit for purpose.**
- **Bring forward urgent legislation to end Section 21 "no fault" evictions, which remains one of the leading causes of homelessness.**
- **Tackle the root cause of the housing emergency, by investing in a new generation of social homes.**

A safe, stable home is a vital part of the foundation that every child needs in order to thrive in life. For each child trapped in bad housing, the potential consequences on their education and their future life chances can be severe. Growing up in temporary accommodation can mean sharing one room and one bed with your parents and siblings. It can mean living hours away from your school and friends. It can mean no private space to rest, play or focus on schoolwork.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the devastating impact that bad housing and homelessness has on the wellbeing and education of homeless children. To understand the impact of the pandemic on the education of homeless children and those trapped in bad housing, Shelter and YouGov carried out a survey of state school teachers from across the country, about the experience of teaching homeless children over the last three years and during the pandemic.

Of teachers who had experience of working with children who were homeless or living in bad housing in the last three years:

- **88% reported children missing school as a key issue.** This is often because children can face significant difficulties with their journey to school if they become homeless and are accommodated a long way from their former home.
- **87% reported children coming to school hungry.** Temporary accommodation such as B&Bs and hostels are often not equipped with suitable or any cooking facilities.
- **94% reported tiredness as an issue** for homeless children and those living in bad housing. In overcrowded accommodation children may struggle to sleep.
- **89% reported children arriving at school in unwashed or dirty clothing.** This can be caused by a lack of proper or affordable washing facilities in temporary accommodation, as well as issues such as mould and damp in poor-quality housing.

Of teachers who had experience of working with children who were homeless or living in bad housing during the pandemic:

- **73% said that children who were homeless or living in bad housing have had their education more negatively affected during COVID-19 compared to children in suitable housing.**
- **86% said that homeless children or children living in bad housing do not have the space or privacy at home to concentrate on schoolwork** - and have found it harder to complete their work since pandemic disruptions began.

Children in Temporary Accommodation

Case study: Mark Holland and his six-year-old daughter Macy became homeless in 2019 and were forced to sofa surf during the first national lockdown. They were placed in temporary accommodation after lockdown ended, but it was so far from Macy's school it required two long bus journeys, with fares costing £100 per week. "The temporary accommodation was awful," said Mark. "There was hardly any room for me to help Macy with her schoolwork, [and] we didn't have our own kitchen facilities, which made it harder for me to cook for her." With Shelter's support, Mark and Macy have recently moved into their new permanent social home. "Without a proper home, Macy's education could have been badly affected. Children need a secure home to thrive."

The COVID-19 pandemic has not created the challenges faced by those trapped in bad housing, but it has certainly exacerbated the long-standing problems with temporary accommodation and its impact on children. A chronic lack of social housing, private rents outstripping benefits and diminished council budgets has made it harder and harder for local authorities to procure long-term accommodation for homeless families. As a result, the numbers living in temporary accommodation has been steadily rising over recent years with 67,000 families living in temporary accommodation in Britain, including 136,000 homeless children. This accommodation is often poor-quality, overcrowded and by definition insecure.

More than 18,000 of these families are accommodated by unregulated private companies in "self-contained" accommodation. This often consists of just one room with a basic kitchenette and a tiny ensuite, which parents will share with their children. The accommodation will rarely have WiFi or laundry facilities, and is almost always overcrowded, meaning children will not have access to their own space to sleep, play or focus on their schoolwork.

Recommendations

Every child needs a safe, secure home in order to thrive – and bad housing can have a lasting impact on a child's wellbeing and their education. The pandemic is already threatening to set these children even further back in their education, damaging the life chances of homeless children. In order to lift the thousands of children and their families out of bad housing and homelessness, the government must take urgent action to end the housing emergency by:

1. **Strengthening the welfare safety net.** COVID-19 and the resultant economic crisis threatens to make it even harder for families on low incomes to keep up with rent. The government must lift the benefit cap, ensure housing benefit remains in line with need, and introduce targeted financial support for private renters who have built up rent arrears during COVID-19, to prevent a surge of evictions next year.
2. **Bringing forward legislation to end Section 21 "no fault" evictions.** Loss of a private tenancy remains a leading cause of homelessness and Shelter welcomes the government's commitment to finally put an end to no fault evictions and give private renters security in their homes.
3. **Investing in a new generation of social homes,** which will give children and their families stable, permanent homes they can afford. By introducing a new two-year New Homes Rescue Fund and then following this with a 10-year level up housing fund the government can ensure that the homes these families desperately need are delivered.