

# Young Black People's Experiences of Homelessness in London

# Citation for published version:

Ajai-Thomas, C 2024, Young Black People's Experiences of Homelessness in London: Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: a knowledge and capacity building programme. Heriot-Watt University.

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Download date: 20. Jun. 2025

# Young Black People's Experiences of Homelessness in London

Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: a knowledge and capacity building programme



Christiana Ajai-Thomas July 2024



# About the programme

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# About the author

This research was carried out by Christiana Ajai-Thomas (Roni), I-SPHERE and Oak Foundation Research Intern 2022 as part of the Homelessness amongst Black and Minoritised Ethnic Groups in the UK research programme.

The research was supervised by Professors Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Sarah Johnsen.

# Acknowledgements

The author and I-SPHERE team would like to extend our thanks to members of our Programme Advisory Group; Dr Francesca Albanese (Crisis), Dr Shabna Begum (The Runnymede Trust), Harinder Birring (Shelter), Rachel Casey (JRF) Dr Nigel de Noronha (Manchester University), Dorian Leatham (Independent member), Maurice McLeod (Independent member), Louise Montgomery and Brian Robson (Oak Foundation), for their invaluable support and guidance on this internship research and all aspects of our programme of work.

We would like to offer heartfelt thanks to the frontline organisations and key informants who took time out of their pressured schedules to help us with this work.

Above all we would like to thank the 13 young people who bravely shared their personal stories.

### Disclaimer

All views expressed and any remaining errors in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and should not be assumed to reflect the views of Oak Foundation, or members of our Programme Advisory Group.

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# **Executive Summary**

This report explores the homelessness experiences of young Black people in London. Research has found that young people under the age of 25 have long faced heightened risks of homelessness, and within that young Black people are at particularly acute risk. London is the undoubted epicentre of a crisis of high levels of homelessness, long social housing waiting lists, and spiraling private rents sweeping across England. Based on in-depth interviews with expert key informants and young Black people with direct experience of homelessness, the research explored experiences of statutory and voluntary sector services, views of the housing crisis, and feelings of belonging and 'placelessness' in the city. Key findings included:

- Interviews with young people confirmed previous research that relationship breakdown was the most prominent cause of their homelessness. But this didn't mean that the young people had trouble maintaining relationships; sofa surfing was commonly used as a means of avoiding rough sleeping, illustrating the availability of personal support networks.
- Homelessness was experienced as a period of instability marked by concerns about affordability of
  rent, how long they could stay with friends and family, and temporary accommodation provided by
  local authorities. This instability was considered in the context of a historical tendency for Black people to
  suffer housing instability, and was understood to be a symptom of racialised distribution of harm.
- Young Black people differed on how they defined homelessness, with some viewing it as absolute lack of shelter, and others interpreting it more broadly as housing instability, with the term homelessness an imposition for some who do not see their situation as such.
- Young Black people reported largely negative experiences of statutory services including difficulty being believed, and not receiving help until they were desperate, and some felt that their race contributed to this.
- The voluntary sector compensated at least to some extent for the shortcomings of local authorities by attending to the emotional needs of young Black people arising from the affective nature of homelessness as not just a lack of housing but an experience of personal turmoil.
- There was consensus regarding the existence of a 'housing crisis' in London. Young people expressed concerns about affordability of living in the city which were echoed by key informant comments on the widespread effects of the crisis and the potential discrimination young Black people may face during housing searches.
- Young people overwhelmingly felt a strong sense of belonging in London thanks to being able to live in an ethnically diverse community they felt they could be a part of. Living outside London, by contrast, was viewed as less able to offer community without this strong minority presence. Social networks in London also greatly contributed to belonging and homelessness did not seem to detract from this sense of belonging they held.
- Asked about their ideals of home young people largely expressed a desire to simply to have a place of
  their own and tended to describe homes that addressed deficiencies they currently experienced such
  as instability, lack of privacy and safety concerns. 'Placelessness' was experienced as a conflict between
  ideals and reality.
- There is a need for holistic, adequately funded solutions that are attentive to young Black homeless
  people's needs beyond obtaining suitable accommodation through help with employment, education,
  substance abuse, mental health, and opportunities to socialize with peers so that young people could
  regain a sense of normalcy.

# 1. Introduction

# Background

Recent research has found that London's struggling Black working class are the most likely to end up in temporary accommodation or experiencing other forms of homelessness (Bramley et al., 2022). At the same time, young people under the age of 25 have long faced heightened risks of homelessness (Watts et al, 2015; Homeless Link, 2018). The current homelessness crisis in England is felt most keenly in London, where rates of temporary accommodation use are by far the highest in the country, and on current projections will rise faster than elsewhere in the coming years (Fitzpatrick et al, 2023). London is the undoubted epicentre of a crisis of high levels of homelessness, long social housing waiting lists, and spiraling private rents sweeping across England (Watt, 2020). The idea of an acute 'housing crisis' in London is evidenced by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in their annual Housing in London Reports (Gleeson et al, 2023,2022,2021,2019) which provide the evidence base for the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy. Recently the GLA also analysed housing and race equality in London finding Black Londoners experience worse housing conditions, less tenure security, higher rates of housing need, worse affordability and lower wealth than White Londoners. Whilst some of these inequalities could be traced back to lower income and employment GLA state "differences are exacerbated by London's high housing costs which disproportionately affect those on low incomes, increase barriers to mobility across London and amplify differences in property wealth" (Gleeson 2022).

While historically there has been research attention paid specifically to young Black people's experiences of homelessness in England (Davies et al, 1996; Rooney and Brown, 1996; Julienne, 1998), this material is now very dated. Cognizant of a lack of current research focused on how race influences youth homelessness in the UK, I sought to bring to light the experiences of young Black people in particular. I specify Blackness to disembed Black experiences from the homogenising power of categories like 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' (BAME) or 'people of colour' (POC). Whilst these categories are useful for talking about the broad pattern of racial discrimination, they can also serve to erase the specifics of a Black or Asian, for example, experience.

In understanding Black experiences of homelessness I took as a theoretical starting point McKittrick's (2011) identification of the plantation as "meaningful geographic locus through which race is made known (and bodies are therefore differently disciplined) across time and space" (p.949). This I contend can be extrapolated from its historical North American context to the UK to interrogate young Black people's experiences of homelessness in the context of racialised place. I aim to understand homelessness in a *longue durée*<sup>1</sup> of race – that is, race as a long-term historical relation working across time and space is reproduced in London. I employ the concepts of place and placelessness to understand London as a location in which individuals interact with the structures governing the city such that experiences of homelessness can tell us something about the way the city operates and how individuals navigate the city with race considered to be a key factor in this interaction (Massey, 1991; McKittrick, 2011).

The remainder of this chapter considers in more detail the theoretical framework for my research, before exploring the concept of homelessness that is central to this work, and providing a brief overview of the existing evidence on youth homelessness and relevant service provision. It ends by presenting the research questions focused on in this study and the structure of the remainder of the report.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A long period of time during which social processes develop or social structures evolve.

# Race and racism

Desmond and Emirbayer (2009) define race as "a symbolic category, based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, that is misrecognized as a natural category" (p.336). This means that race is an idea actively created by human beings, rather than being pre-given, that marks hierarchized difference between people. Racial categories are place and time specific (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009) meaning that although racialisation persists globally, racial difference is constructed differently at different times and locations. For example, the categories of black and white were formed as antithetical to each other on slave plantations where blackness symbolized unfreedom, inferiority and dispossession whilst whiteness symbolized freedom, superiority, and wealth. This did not mean that all white people were in fact wealthy but rather that the concept of whiteness was formed around the ability to accumulate wealth. The cause is the consequence, as famed anti-colonial thinker Franz Fanon (1963) put it, "you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich". On the plantation, whiteness did not guarantee wealth, but wealth was reserved for white people.

Cedric Robinson (2000) argues that race was formed as essential to capitalism. Through practices of, what Marx (2015) called, primitive accumulation such as colonialism and slavery (Kelley, 2017) feudal relations were transformed into capitalist ones by putting masses of capital into the hands of the European bourgeoisie. These strategies, as productive of the capitalist mode of production, exacted this transfer of wealth through racialized dispossession such that the victims of colonialism and slavery tended to be non-white people. In doing so land, labour, and money became the foundations of capitalism as well as the elementary structures of race (Singh, 2016). As such, Robinson uses the term racial capitalism to describe a racialized distribution of harm inherent to capitalism that can be traced back to these early racializing events.

Though the slave plantation may not exist today race remains intertwined with capitalism as it continues to, for example, mark black people as more likely to experience homelessness. Key to this thinking, however, is that race does not mark us with pre-determined life chances. These life chances are actively produced through institutional and interpersonal racism within capitalism. Institutional racism refers to the way white domination of people of colour is embedded and operating in institutions that shape our daily lives such as corporations, schools and universities, the legal system, and political bodies (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). Specifically, this involves social, economic, and political domination whereby rights are withheld, inequalities reproduced, and inclusion denied. Interpersonal racism is instead manifest in everyday social interactions and practices involving both overt racist abuse and covert habitual, commonsensical practices of racism (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). Indeed, interpersonal and institutional racism are co-constitutive, each serving to legitimize and even embolden the other. To consider homelessness in this context is to ask why race affects one's likelihood of experiencing homelessness and how institutions and individuals contribute to this.

# Theoretical grounding: space, placelessness and homelessness

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) seminal work on the production of space follows a dialectical approach to argue that "each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space." (p.170). That is, firstly, a space has a particular set of laws formed by the actions of those bodies within it. The violence enacted by White masters against Black slaves on the plantation, for example, produced the plantation as space in which subjugation of Black bodies was governing law. Secondly, this space produces the body insofar as it confers identity and governs what one can do and how they do it. The plantation then produced the White body as superior and Black body as inferior. The example of the plantation – site of early racialised capitalist development – illustrates how space is divided up in accordance with the division of labour and bodies are reinscribed into this division. Borrowing from Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, Lefebvre argues that in the ideological tendency towards dualism space takes on a thing-like character becoming a passive receptacle that masks the social relationships latent in spaces – that is the

division of labour - and the production of space (Merrifield, 1993). In this sense, space is in fact both thing and process insofar as it does have a physical quality and is produced as a thing distinct from the body in the process of its production.

If space is productive of and produced by social relations then place emerges as a spatial process where everyday life is situated (Tuan in Ilbury, 2021). That is to say, place refers to the social interactions that constitute space. McKittrick's conception of place and placelessness draws from Doreen Massey's (1991) global sense of place which attempts to reformulate localised place in the context of an increasingly globalised world. The rapid extension of economic, political, and cultural social relations across the planet through intensified internationalisation of capital known as time-space-compression has been argued to result in placelessness. Relph (1976), beginning to observe the subordination of identity to the homogenising process of industrialised mass society, defined placelessness as inauthenticity of place – no sense of place at all. In this conception, a sense of place combines environment, identity, and memory to make locality known. Placelessness then is the flattening of place in the unification and standardisation in the process of modernity (Gao and Zhou, 2021), it is a loss of local character. Placelessness is often conceptualised as disorientation upon new frequent contact with the other as time-space-compression dissolves the barriers of distance between imperial core and colonised periphery (Massey, 1994).

Where placelessness has been thought of as the loss of the true, fixed historical character of place - as simply the opposite of place, Massey challenges us to consider the racist implications of talking about the true people of a place. She notes that movements against gentrification have followed this same logic claiming the loss of traditionally working-class places (Massey, 1994). By considering place as a process, we might instead see gentrification and immigration – any conflict of communities and identities – as issues of the political and social content of changes in a place (Massey, 1994). Following this, placelessness ought to be understood as not defined by the presence of an other but a lens through which to analyse the constant change place undergoes. A critical approach to doing so is explicitly concerned with identifying who asserts dominance in the process of place and who is dominated. McKittrick's notion of Black placelessness then is concerned with localised reproduction of anti-Black domination in conversation with broader globalised flows of power that becomes apparent in policies that peripheralise Black people in urban spaces and criminalise Blackness to legitimise and enact dispossession as well as in the internal feeling of not belonging (Roy, 2019). With this critical, globalised approach to place, placelessness might reasonably be understood as the systemic lack of a sense of a place only insofar as analysis of change reveals this reproduction of non-belonging.

Notions of place and placelessness are useful for this study then because they address the disorientation that comes with being homeless – the potential feeling of non-belonging – and draw this sensation into a wider dialectic between individuals and dominating structures of space. In this dialectic place as process of contestation serves to affirm the agency of homeless individuals who at once experience domination and are capable of responding to it. Situating Black homelessness in global "historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (McKittrick, 2011 p.949) rejects the totalising script of Black people as those without. Whilst studies seeking to understand racial inequality often condemn Black people to dispossession and thus inadvertently naturalise racial order, adopting a Black global sense of place is interested in how Black people as actors capable of making life even in the midst of city politics that are antithetical to Black life.

# Understanding the concept of homelessness

Virtually all literature on homelessness addresses the variety of potential ways of defining the phenomenon because homelessness exists as both an ontological experience and ideological construction (Somerville, 2013; Preece et al., 2020). That is to say homelessness exists in experiences of individuals in various forms and the imaginings of academics, policymakers, and the general public (Somerville, 2013).

Decisions to broaden or narrow the definition are often politically motivated (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). Governments, for example, tend to adopt a minimalist definition focused only on rough sleeping (or 'rooflessness') and other extreme forms of homelessness so as to contain the size of the problem they are dealing with) and in doing so might also serve to absolve them of responsibility for other forms of housing insecurity. Campaigners, on the other hand, tend to adopt the widest definitions so as to seek aid for as many struggling people as possible but doing this might "include too many people to be of use in prioritising resources for the most needy" (Tipple and Speak in Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016 p.126).

In the UK, there is a well-established legislative framework for homelessness, known as the 'statutory homelessness system', that can be traced to the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, initially covering all of Great Britain and then incorporated into separate legislation for different parts of the UK in subsequent acts. Under England's Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local authorities have a legal duty to rehouse some categories of homeless households having made inquiries concerning eligibility, homelessness, priority of need, intentional homelessness, and local connection to the local authority. Within this homelessness is understood as being without accommodation in the UK which one has a legal right to occupy and being unable to gain access to or unable to be reasonably expected to live in accommodation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

While the statutory homelessness system provides a very wide definition of homelessness by international standards (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021), and is internationally unique in giving at least some homeless people legally enforceable rights to housing, the scope of these entitlements is narrowed by the additional criterion of 'priority need'. This means that, in England, only families with dependent children are generally entitled to be secured housing, and single people must be adjudged especially 'vulnerable' to be entitled to considered in priority need and therefore entitled to rehousing. Homeless people's rights can also be restricted if they are found to be 'intentionally' homeless (i.e. to have brought about their own homelessness in some way) or to have no local connection with the local authority to which they have applied (REF).

In practice, then, scope of protection offered by the legal definition of homelessness is not as broad as one might expect. Moreover, shortfalls in social housing supply – deliberately inflicted by successive governments' neoliberal project since the 1980s (Watt and Minton, 2016) – have meant that local authorities, especially in London, have often interpreted their homelessness duties in a narrow fashion in the face of ever-shrinking housing resources (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021; Wilde, 2022). With Black people heavily over-represented in the statutory homelessness in London in particular (Bramley *et al*, 2022), these concerns over the functioning of this system and the rationing that it imposes will likely be especially relevant to the experiences of young Black people at risk and living in the capital, as is further discussed below.

Important as these statutory definitions of homelessness are, they do not account for the social and affective nature of homelessness – the fact that homelessness is an actual experience of turmoil. Somerville (1992) argues that in the legal definition of homelessness, human misery is reduced to a mere technical or legal problem, leaving out people's 'sense of home'. Busch-Geertsema et al. (2016) attempt to capture the deeper meaning of homelessness via explication of three domains of home from which housing adequacy can be determined and against which different forms of homelessness can be understood:

- Security domain Regarding capacity to make a home and stay there for a reasonable period. This refers to the legal right to occupy, practical likelihood of eviction and affordability of housing.
- Physical domain Regarding the home meeting the household's qualitative and quantitative needs e.g. freedom from pollutants, suitable size for number of members
- Social domain Regarding freedom to enjoy social relations of the relevant community, capacity for privacy, and safety from internal threats

Similarly, in order to better understand the affective nature of homelessness, Somerville (1992) first contends with the multidimensional nature of 'home' identifying seven key signifiers:

1. Shelter – decent material conditions

- 2. Hearth emotional and physical wellbeing
- 3. Heart loving and caring social relations
- 4. Privacy control and privacy
- 5. Abode place for living and sleeping
- 6. Roots sense of individual identity
- 7. Paradise ideal home

In many ways this corresponds with Busch-Geertsema et al.'s (2016) domains of home in the sense that both models understand home as social as well as material. However, Somerville (1992) goes further to consider home as a cognitive and intellectual construction that potentially contradicts material conditions so that a sense of home might be present in the otherwise unhomely and vice versa (McCarthy, 2018). Homelessness as lack of home is not just the lack of shelter – even if we understand shelter to have security, physical and social domains – but also a state of misery and yearning arising from conflict between ideals of home and reality of home. Indeed, such a conception of homelessness lends itself to talk of placelessness as both refer to a disorienting conflict between self and reality. Home, in the context of racial capitalism<sup>2</sup>, is situated in relations of belonging emerging through interactions with legal and territorial workings of property that delineate inside and outside (Nethercote, 2022). Home then comes about as both a racialising and racialised process insofar as property – through capital accumulation throughout history – has been instrumental to producing racial hierarchies of difference (Bhandar in Nethercote, 2022) and racialised subjects emerge through interactions with property (Nethercote, 2022). All of this may impact both to how young Black people view homelessness as a concept, and also their inclination to apply this lens to their own housing experiences.

Statistical research has indicated that people from some minoritised communities are at particular risk of 'hidden homelessness' (Bramley *et al.*, 2022), that is their homelessness may not be visible in official statistics as they haven't applied to or been accepted by local authorities as homeless and they may not be in contact with specialist homelessnessness services or sleeping rough in visible areas (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). Preece et al., (2020) note that in their study of people living in precarious conditions, such as 'sofa surfing', participants rarely identified with the term homeless, revealing both the persistence of 'homelessness as rooflessness' as norm but also the stigma attached to homelessness so that people resist homeless identity. Participants sofa surfing in this study appealed to the existence of social connections and personal belongings to evade homeless identity, demonstrating the significance of heart and roots as signifiers of home, even while they lacked the other five signifiers identified by Somerville (1992). Exploring how young Black people perceive their circumstances when living in situations that might be perceived as constituting hidden homelessness is a key theme of the study.

# Evidence on homelessness amongst young people and the service response

Homeless Link (2018) found that roughly half of the individuals who access homelessness services in England are between the ages of 18-24, and young people in the UK are three times more likely than adults to have experienced homelessness over the past five years. Watt (2020) notes that for many young people homeownership has become an impossible dream whilst a severe lack of social housing leaves social renting increasingly out of reach. In lieu of social housing, then, young people are often reliant on the private rental sector (PRS), leaving them increasingly vulnerable to homelessness as private sector rents spiral and 'no fault' evictions from the PRS accelerate in the post-COVID era (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2023). London is where we see the worst of this with a notoriously expensive and insecure PRS. With a crisis of affordability coupled with cuts to state benefits, evictions by private landlords are the leading cause of homelessness in the city (Wilde, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Racial capitalism refers to Cedric Robinson's (2000) notion that capitalism was developed with and continues to have an inherently racial character due to the fundamentality of slavery and colonialism to the rise of the European bourgeoisie such that in the division of labour the exploited tend to be of the inferiorised races.

Previous research has indicated that young people have pathways into homelessness that tend to be different to those of adults. In particular, being asked to leave the family home has long been noted as the most common immediate trigger of youth homelessness in the UK (Watts et al., 2015), and Centrepoint (2023) found young people commonly reported "family or friends no longer able to accommodate" as cause of homelessness when they approached local authorities for help.

Another key causal factor is that young people have been disproportionally impacted by welfare benefit reforms as their entitlements have been eroded by successive UK governments (Homeless Link, 2018). A reduced level of Universal Credit, entitlement to only the lowest rate of Local Housing Allowance, and a greater risk of benefit sanctions (Homeless Link, 2020) all significantly reduce the capacity to access and maintain housing. Watt's (2020) study of youth homelessness, precarity and poverty in east London found that when work travel costs and Housing Benefit changes were accounted for the difference between earnings and benefits-only income was often marginal demonstrating low income as also contributing to homelessness. Young people in this study (70% of whom were from BAME backgrounds) worked in private sector, non-union jobs characterised by poverty level wages — typically just £5-8 per hour - and precarity — zero-hour contracts and short-term contracts lacking the employee protections of salaried pay. As such, despite subsidised hostel rents, several had accumulated rent arrears and were in no position to pay rent in the PRS.

Young homeless people in England may access either statutory or voluntary sector support services, or both. The statutory homelessness system as noted above grants rehousing entitlements to homeless people who are in a 'priority need' group (albeit that this rehousing may be in the expensive and insecure PRS rather than in social housing). With respect to young people, automatic priority status has been extended to homeless 16-17 year olds as well as 18-20 year old care leavers, with care leavers over 21 who are assessed as vulnerable also deemed to be in priority need (Watts et al., 2015). Other young people over 18 may not be considered to be in priority need unless they are considered especially vulnerable, which can be a very high threshold (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021). This still means many single homeless young people over the age of 18 may not be entitled to rehousing, though since the coming into force of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 there are new legal duties on local authorities to try to prevent and relieve homelessness for single people who are eligible for assistance, irrespective of priority need.

Even where a duty is accepted to attempt to prevent or relieve a young person's homelessness, or to rehouse them, these interventions may not meet a young person's needs. In Homeless Link's (2020) study of youth homelessness, participants reported often not being believed about their circumstances and being asked for proof they could not obtain, for example, where domestic abuse was the cause of homelessness. This gatekeeping and disbelief not only placed some at further risk of abuse but also negatively affected their mental health. Young people also reported that when housing and support was actually granted by local authorities it was often unresponsive to their needs. It failed to holistically address their mental health and wellbeing needs and left them isolated and, thus, at risk of losing their tenancy. Similarly, Watt's (2020) participants spoke of the negative effect of being given housing outside London by local authorities displacing them from their London-based support networks on their mental health. Out-of-area placements are a major concern within the statutory homelessness system and mainly affect those placed by London Boroughs and disproportionately affect Black households (lafrati et al, 2023). People waiting in (sometimes poor quality) temporary accommodation for long periods can despair at their limbo status feeling as though "they were being punished for a crime they did not commit" (Watt, 2020 p.139). Conscious of media depictions of them as benefits scroungers seeking to take advantage of local authorities, young people in Watt's (2020) study describe a fallacy of choice whereby low-income youth are coerced into low quality PRS accommodation and/or into leaving their home boroughs or London altogether, or alternatively remain homeless.

Alongside the statutory homelessness system, there is a network of specialist youth homelessness accommodation and other services across the UK, including in London, overwhelmingly provided by voluntary sector agencies (Watts *et al*, 2015). Prevention initiatives aimed at tackling youth homelessness can also include family mediation services, signposting to other services and advice for young people,

working with local troubled families programmes, joint working with Children's and Housing Services, and access to short-term funds (Homeless Link, 2018).

It is therefore important in this current study to explore young Black people's specific experiences of this system of statutory and voluntary service network.

# Research questions and report structure

Based on the literature and evidence review presented above, the following research questions were developed for the study:

- What are young Black people's experiences and perceptions of homelessness?
- What are their experiences of both statutory and voluntary sector homelessness services?
- What are their views on the current housing crisis?
- How does homelessness affect feelings of belonging in the city?
- How do they shape, and how are they shaped by, the racialisation of place?

The remainder of the report proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the research methods used in the study. Chapter 3 presents my findings on young Black people's experiences of homelessness, while Chapter 4 focuses on their experiences of the statutory and voluntary service sectors. Chapter 5 highlights their housing aspirations and the links with place and placelessness. Chapter 6 draws the threads of the report together into a set of conclusions and policy recommendations.

# Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding this research along with reviewing evidence regarding young people's homelessness and service response to this. I have explicated the notions of space and place as both productive of and produced by norms. Whilst space is both thing and process as a non-physical thing distinct from the body in the process of its production, place is a spatial process of social interactions occurring as Massey (1991) notes, in the context of globalized flows of power. If then, place is to be thought of as a process by which power is reproduced or challenged in small-scale social interactions, a critical approach to studying place is explicitly concerned with identifying who asserts dominance and who is dominated in this process. The racial character of domination becomes apparent in McKittrick's (2011) notion of Black placelessness which is concerned with localised reproduction of anti-Black domination in conversation with broader globalised flows of power. By foregrounding place and placelessness then, the experiences of young Black homeless people might reveal the reproduction of Black non-belonging and dispossession in their everyday interactions in the context of a broader global racial hierarchy.

Considering placelessness then as a lens for understanding young Black people's experiences of homelessness, I have reviewed literature on the definition of homelessness. I have shown that the statutory definition of homelessness encompasses a broad range of experiences of housing challenges. However, in practice, homeless people's entitlements under this law can be limited by the additional criterion of priority of need and the need to ration local authorities' limited resources has also led local authorities to interpret their homelessness duties in a narrow fashion (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021; Wilde, 2022). Beyond statutory homelessness, scholars have attempted capture homelessness as an experience of emotional turmoil on top of material lack by including things like the capacity for privacy, and safety from internal threats, emotional wellbeing, or the ability to enjoy loving and caring social relations as additional features that might determine whether or not one is homelessness (Somerville, 1992; Bush-Geertsema *et al.*, 2016). Additionally of interest is the notion of home as a form of property key to reproducing racial hierarchy such that we might understand homelessness as a racialized experience (Nethercote, 2022).

Finally, I have considered existing studies into young homeless people so that I could be aware of the

experiences my own participants were likely to have had. Key findings where that young people were becoming increasingly reliant on the PRS where they found themselves struggling with increasing rents and 'no-fault' evictions in lieu of available social housing (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2023). Further to this, young people – especially those from BAME backgrounds – tended to work low-paid, insecure jobs and were entitled to lower rates of benefits which also contributed to becoming homeless.

Now we move on to the Methods chapter before I present my empirical findings over the course of the three chapters focused on young Black people's experiences of homelessness, relevant service, and housing aspirations and sense of place and placelessness respectively.

# 2. Research Methods

This chapter outlines the study's research design, approach to sampling and access to interviewees, and relevant ethical considerations.

# Research Design

As the intention of this research was to explore young Black people's experiences of homelessness in London and relationship with place, a qualitative approach was necessary to gain insight into the lived experiences of the researched group as it offers the means and communication context for these research participants to speak for themselves (Seymour, 2012).

The project was divided into three main stages. First, it involved a targeted literature and policy review focused on theorisations of space and place, discourses on defining homelessness and available empirical research into youth homelessness. The results of the review were presented in Chapter 1 above.

The second stage comprised in-depth interviews with key informants (n=3) working in voluntary sector homelessness organisations in order to sensitise me to the broader context surrounding young Black people's homelessness in London and the changes needed to improve their lives, as seen from the perspective of service providers and advocacy organisations. The topic guide used in these interviews can be found in Appendix 1. It covered youth homelessness and service provision, the housing crisis and policy, and the future role of homelessness organisations.

The third stage involved interviews with young Black people experiencing homelessness. I interviewed 13 young people in total, with sampling and access as outlined below.

# Sampling and access for young people interviews

The sampling criteria for young people participating in the study was three-fold. They had to be:

- Black;
- aged between 18 and 25;
- currently living in London or have lived for a substantial period in London; and
- have experienced homelessness or severe housing challenges. This criterion was deliberately broadly
  drawn to be consistent with the broad definition of homelessness applied in the programme as a whole
  (Bramley et al, 2023), and the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, and to avoid imposing the
  label of 'homeless' onto people who may not necessarily see themselves as such.

Interviewees fitting these criteria were sought out through two avenues: first, via a social media call and, second, via youth homelessness organizations.

A call for participants was put out via the departmental X (formerly Twitter) account to try to reach relevant young Black people via social media. The sampling via social media initially seemed the most productive route to finding participants with around 30 people emailing to indicate interest in participating. However, it became clear that, unfortunately, the vast majority were misrepresenting their situation in pursuit of the £25 gift voucher incentive for participation. To deal with this issue, a short questionnaire was devised and sent to those responding to the social media posts asking their age, ethnicity and area of residence without reminding them of the necessary criteria for participation. In the end, only two of the social media recruits contributed a usable interview.

Second, sampling via voluntary sector organisations also presented challenges. I started by establishing a spreadsheet of all of the relevant youth homelessness organisations in London and identifying those within

which we may have any contacts. Contacts within these organisations were often happy to pass on the invitation to participate on to clients but this, unfortunately, did not result in any interviews. After some time, I changed tack to work with a smaller number of youth homelessness organisations. After discussions and the satisfaction of internal approval processes, two organisations for young homeless people in London agreeing to proactively recruit participants with me coming into their organisations to conduct interviews. The achieved sample was 11 interviews across these two organisations.

In total, therefore, 13 interviews were conducted. Interviewees key characteristics and experiences are captured in the table below.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Current accomm	Causes of homelessness	Homeless history
Emmanuel	21	Male	Temporary shared accommodation	Conflict with relatives caused by suspected criminal activity	Sofa surfing, rough sleeping, hotels
Rashid	18	Male	Hotels	Conflict with parent	Sofa surfing
Carlton	23	Male	Temporary shared accommodation	Conflict with friends	Prison, living with a friend/ sofa surfing, rough sleeping
Yas	23	Female	Social housing	Conflict with family and partner	Rough sleeping, temporary accommodation
Bailey	24	Male	Temporary shared accommodation	Conflict with parent caused by suspected criminal activity	Prison, YMCA
Ayana	20	Female	Temporary social housing	Conflict with parent	Sofa surfing, rough sleeping, shared accommodation, hotels
Sinead	23	Female	Shared accommodation	Conflict with family	Sofa surfing, rough sleeping, PRS
Isla	18	Female	Shared accommodation	Abusive family home	Family home
Remi	18	Male	Shared accommodation	Overcrowded family home and conflict due to participant's sexuality	Sofa surfing
Joseph	24	Male	PRS	Eviction from overcrowded home	PRS apartment, rough sleeping.
Kunle	21	Male	Temporary shared accommodation	Discharged from foster care placement due to age	Living with foster carer
Benita	21	Female	Supported accommodation	Conflict with parent	Sofa surfing
Martin	23	Male	Boarding facility for charity volunteers	Job loss and eviction	Rough sleeping

As can be seen, temporary accommodation, shared accommodation, sofa surfing and rough sleeping featured prominently in homelessness histories. Conflict with friends or family appeared to be the leading cause of homelessness though familial abuse, overcrowding, eviction, job loss and discharge from foster care also featured as causes. There were 8 male and 5 female participants.

# Interview process

All but one with one of these interviews were conducted on the premises of the two organisations that assisted with the research, with the remaining interview conducted online (using Teams). In one of the organisations I was invited to visit over 2 days. In a private room on site, interviews were conducted in quick succession thanks to the organisation having lined up participants in preparation. I also had the opportunity to talk to young people informally over a lunch break. In the other organisation, I was similarly given space to conduct interviews and due to the safeguarding policy of the second organisation, these interviews were conducted in the presence of a member of the organisation. The topic guide of questions used in these interviews can found in Appendix 2. It covered current living situation, housing and homelessness history, homelessness experiences, place and belonging and housing aspirations.

Lamont and Swidler (2014) note that asking questions in an interview is not so distant from ordinary interaction, particularly when the interviewer creates an environment that does not feel too formal. This was made possible by the casual settings in which interviews took place – at home over video call or inperson sitting in a private room chatting on sofa chairs. Further to this, interviews as conversation might only be considered positive when they simulate or resonate with the interviewees comfortable conversational tone. As such, following Haraway's (1988) idea that all knowledge is grounded in the social, historical, and geographical positions of those involved, my being a young Black person from London meant I could engage with participants in a manner that felt close to a natural conversation. Indeed, participants gave feedback that they had felt like they had just had a nice chat and one noted that they likely would not have been so comfortable talking if they had not found themselves in conversation with a Black person.

# **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval from Heriot-Watt University's ethics committee was obtained for this study. In line with key ethical protocols participants were given an information sheet explaining the nature of the research and informed consent was obtained verbally (and recorded) at the start of every interview. It was made clear that interviewees were under no obligation to participate and could decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time with no consequences. The research complied with the Data Protection Impact Assessment undertaken for the research, with all participants given pseudonyms to conceal their identities, and interview recordings and transcripts securely stored on the University server.

Attentive to the fact that recounting experiences of homelessness and housing challenges in interviews could be distressing for participants, trauma-informed practices were employed. This included ensuring questions were carefully framed to ensure that they would not be interpreted as accusatory, demanding, or judgemental, and reassurance was given at the start of the interview that they were free stop the interview at any time. If any interviewees did show any signs of distress during an interview the protocol would be to assess whether to have a break and then continue (if they were willing to do so), or to terminate the interview completely. The wellbeing of the interviewee took precedence over the requirement for data.

# 3. Young Black people's perspectives on homelessness

This chapter offers an overview of young Black people's perspectives on homelessness based on their own testimony, complemented by insights from stakeholder interviews to place these experiences in a broader perspective. Specifically, it looks at their routes into homelessness, their experiences of being homeless, their understandings of homelessness, and their perception of the 'housing crisis' in London.

#### Routes into homelessness

Stakeholders' accounts aligned with the existing literature on causes for young people's homelessness, noting relationship breakdown and friends and family no longer being able to support young people as the commonest causes. The other common cause highlighted by one stakeholder was rising private landlord evictions (see Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2023).

"So it's family breakdown, and then you've got relationship breakdown as well. So it could be a young woman who is actually experiencing domestic violence, for example, so there's that kind of relationship breakdown as well. That's the biggest cause of homelessness. Then what we've got is evictions by private landlords, and that obviously is increasing." Stakeholder 2

All stakeholder agreed that the housing crisis has made it harder to access and keep housing with huge competition for properties in the PRS and unaffordable rents. They added that the COVID-19 pandemic complicated the effects of the housing crisis with the threat of transmitting and contracting the disease leaving young people on the edge of homelessness or hidden homeless unable to rely on support they could've before lockdowns.

"So with COVID-19, what we saw is young people actually become a lot more visible in the figures because they were sofa-surfing or hidden or had complex family relationships that weren't sustainable. Maybe they stay there a bit and then not on other nights. So they wouldn't have a secure place to stay regularly. Then with COVID-19, not being able to remain... Where those people were on the edge of homelessness or hidden homeless, they were... They weren't able to lean on any of the places where they might have been able to before because it was locked down" Stakeholder 3

Similar themes were echoed in the interviews with young people. Yas, for example, noted another effect of COVID-19 was to increase the priority given to street homeless people which meant that those facing other housing challenges were relatively de-prioritised.

"The lack of social housing - I think I was meant to get housed when COVID happened, but because the priority was people on the street, I wasn't in there like because I'd rather the people on the street get something before I did. Much as it's not our home, I still had a roof under [sic] my head. So I wasn't mad about it. I understood it. Obviously, I'm not happy about it, but I'm not going to be like because I'd rather the people on the street have somewhere to live. So it was one of them ones where it's like, I get it. Wish things could be different, but I get it, why it's happening. But they should have helped these people before it got to a global pandemic instead of now suddenly, and now it's having to affect me." Yas

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, relationship breakdown was the leading cause of homelessness reported by the young Black people interviewed. For most, relationship breakdown referred to conflict with family or friends.

"Yes, I was living with my mum. I lived with my mum in East [London\*] around... I had a holiday,

that's all I remember. I went on holiday for eight months. I came back, and I was out. Yes, I could live there for some reasons. Yes, it was bad!" Ayana

"Family issues. Just family. It's even complicated that I don't even understand how I'm in this situation. [...] Yes, just issues with parents and family and shit." Sinead

In Rashid's case his relationship with his mother was complicated by risks of external violence. Still recovering from being stabbed, Rashid alluded to his involvement in crime putting his mother at risk. So in in addition to the conflict between them making it difficult to live at home, it was also in his mother's best interest for him to leave.

"I love my mum to bits, but it's like, me and my mum are in that war. We just start bubbling up, you know what I'm saying? I love my mom. I'd never hit my mum. It's just stupid arguments, you get me? It's my mum not understanding why I do whatever I do for what reasons. I do. Obviously, I don't want to be around my yard too much because I want to protect my mum as well. The less people that know of my mum's existence, the better, you get me? Literally." Rashid

Other young people also spoke of the effects of alleged criminal activity on family relationships. Bailey, for example, spoke of finding himself staying at a YMCA facility when his mum grew tired of police calling at the house:

"Just my mum said there's too much police in the house. She's a single mum, so she just said, 'Just leave the house,' and I went to the [Kingston\*] Church, and they referred me to the YMCA. I lived there for six months, and then this happened." Bailey

During his stay at the YMCA Bailey was asked to leave due to suspected sale of drugs.

For Isla relationship breakdown referred to her being abused in the family home. "I lived with my mum and my brother, but it was more of an abusive household."

As a result, she was moved to temporary youth accommodation by her local authority. Meanwhile, for Remi, relationship breakdown was associated with both homophobic attitudes towards him by family members as well as overcrowding in the family home:

"It was kind of crowded. I shared a room with two of my brothers. It was three of us in one room. It was also just a bit, at least for me personally because I'm gay, so at home it was a bit awkward and uncomfortable at times. That's the reason why I guess I ended up moving out." Remi

Routes into homelessness other than relationship breakdown with family were also reported. For example, both Joseph and Martin reported eviction by their landlord. Joseph was evicted when his landlord learnt of the overcrowding in the apartment he was renting along with others:

"[...]we were staying in accommodation that was, kind of, clustered. We didn't have the luxury of space. We didn't have the luxury of many – we were not comfortable, really, because we were so many in the apartment. Then because the landlord, I think the landlord became aware of it, and then they will send a team of people to come and evacuate [meaning evict] us from the place we were in." Joseph

Martin, however, was evicted when he was no longer able to afford rent after losing his job.

"I moved down to [Barnet\*] and I lost my job within a year of getting to [Barnet\*]. You know, downsizing, like a major structural change. I lost my job. Since then I wasn't able to keep up with my accommodation, which was fairly decent at that point. I struggled with homelessness for a while because after I couldn't make rent. I had no support from family, from friends, I had no one to turn

to. it was quite hard, pretty difficult, like four months homeless on the street in the cold of winter." Martin

And finally for Kunle, who was interviewed with the help of his support worker, discharge from foster care led him to pursue a homelessness application to his local authority:

"Once you were told that you have to leave the foster care placement when you turned 21, you didn't have any stable accommodation where you could go, so your PA, [Acassa\*], helped you to do the homelessness application. Is that correct?" Support Worker

"I was meant to be getting my bidding number before, but my social worker that was doing it, he kind of disappeared, and then there were issues with getting my own bidding number, so I had to get her instead." Kunle

# **Experiences of homelessness**

Experiences of homelessness histories reported by young people in the interviews included sofa surfing, rough sleeping, and stays in hotels and other temporary accommodation. Sofa surfing, hotels, and other temporary accommodation tended to account for longer-term housing situations whilst rough sleeping tended to appear in brief spells when it could not be avoided. Most had sofa surfed at some point following loss of accommodation, demonstrating the availability and utilisation of personal support networks:

"At one point, I was sofa-surfing, and I was on the street at one point as well, before I came here."

Carlton

"I started working at some point. [...] So I used to sleep in the work basically, and then I got my friend's house. She works late at night, and she normally comes in the morning. I'll go there to take a shower, or whatever, and go back straight to work." Ayana

"I used to live with my mum before and then my mum kicked me out when I was 18 and then I was sofa surfing and stuff like that. I didn't really know what to do because I didn't want to have to go through telling my nan what happened with my mum. Anyway, she found out because it was getting long for me to just keep on staying at a friend's house and all of that. So I was staying with my nan." Benita

Staying at hotels and other temporary accommodation were also reported.

"I'm up and down accommodation, hotel right now. [...] Until they get me a secure home, maybe in a YMCA." Rashid

For Emmanuel a stay in temporary accommodation followed a grueling three weeks spent rough sleeping.

"I was sleep deprived, I was tired, I was all of that. They took me in. That's when I went into the Crisis team and the Crisis team helped me with medication in terms of sleeping because I wasn't sleeping at all. Coming to [New Horizon\*], I was put at a hotel near here. When I was put at a hotel near here, I was, all right. My money was almost going. I'm not on Universal Credit. I can't go back to work because I don't know if I'll be staying at this hotel for a certain period of time." Emmanuel

Both Rashid and Emmanuel were still living in temporary accommodation when interviewed.

Yas had been in temporary accommodation for four years before recently getting social housing:

"From this year alone, I've moved to seven different places, but I've been hopping from place to

place since I was 19, and I'm currently 23 now, almost 24. So it's been a very hectic four years." She described in depth the dangers for a young Black person, particularly with mental health issues, in temporary shared accommodation recounting various instances of violence by other people in the accommodation.

"When you're black and in the system they generally see you as a statistic. So if you're a black person with mental health problems, you've got any sort of problems, whether it's small, little, big, mental health, you're a statistic, you're a danger, let's put you with other dangerous people who actually should be separated from us. If you're a White person with these exact same things, let's help you, let's protect you, let's put you in a safe area. Let's do this." Yas

Sinead found herself sleeping rough for a few nights when sofa surfing was no longer possible but eventually pursued privately rented accommodation with the help of her local authority.

"It's been couch surfing. A couple of nights of rough sleeping. Basically, I got a private rent with me and my friends, that I organised, because the council didn't do nothing but they said they'd pay for my deposit or something. Imagine I didn't get my deposit until after I'd left the property, so I have to scrounge all the money myself. The past four years have been madness." Sinead

When the tenancy ended and none of the friend's she was living wanted to renew the contract, Sinead sought help from a youth homelessness organisation who helped her gain a place at a shared accommodation tailored for young people as a steppingstone onto private renting.

Martin had spent the longest time rough sleeping of any participants, after he was evicted. Following some months on the streets, he was offered board at a homelessness charity's accommodation for volunteers.

"[...] I was sleeping on the streets of [Barnet\*]. anywhere I could find. It could be like a park. It could be like some premises, some business premises when they've closed for the day. I just look for a space and curl up there. [...]I met this charity, and they offered dinner to homeless in the nights. At first, I had no money then so I was getting my daily meals from there. It just continued like that for about, I think, for a further two months to three months before I was able to try to talk to someone in the charity. Basically, I liked what they were doing, and I just wanted to help out. I wasn't expecting that I was going to get the boarding house." Martin

Kunle had been safely housed with a foster carer until his discharge from foster care meant he had to apply as statutory homeless. Meantime, Isla became homeless as her local authority moved her from an abusive household into safer shared accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness.

Young Black people's accounts of their housing histories confirmed a tendency to be hidden homeless insofar as they tended to avoiding sleeping rough due to safety concerns, at least in visible locations. Stakeholders also noted how young Black people are particularly targeted on the streets by police so that the visibility of being on the street is especially unsafe for them. As such they employ techniques like staying on buses, not sleeping through the night, and avoiding rough sleeping 'hotspots' where they are more likely to be seen by the public as well as other homeless people and public services.

"We hear a lot of stories of young people being... Young Black people being attacked on the streets or targeted and moved on by police in a different way to, say, an older person sleeping rough or a White person sleeping rough. So that visibility isn't safe for young Black people, particularly, and so they're likely to employ other tactics to keep safe during their homelessness. That's often things like staying on buses or not sleeping throughout the night but it also is not going to rough sleeping hot spots" Stakeholder 3

Most participants did report, however, having experienced statutory homelessness, having approached their local authority regarding statutory homelessness or having been statutory homeless in the past.

"Yes. So I went to the council, that was the first time I got kicked out, I called the council. They helped me. But the second time around, when my nan did it to me, the council wasn't helping me and I had to call Centrepoint and they gave me loads of referrals." Benita

"I think I done it. I need to double-check. I've just been busy working, so I haven't checked, because I remember they gave me paperwork to fill in, so I need to double-check it. But if I'm not there, I need to reapply for it. I need to go on the list [the social housing register], because it takes like two years for them to accept it." Bailey

Their experience of statutory homelessness services is discussed in the next chapter.

Across young people, the common thread was a homelessness history characterised by instability. Most recalled moving from one housing situation to another with frequency.

"Eventually, I called up the council. They helped me with accommodation and I was in accommodation for a year-and-a-half, I think. I was in a room-share thing. So the first one. Then I moved to a second room-share. Then the second room-share, I started working full-time, so I couldn't afford the rent anymore and I got kicked out. So then I was sofa surfing again. Then I went back to my nan's again. This time my nan kicked me out. So yes, I had to leave, but I got accommodation through [\*New Horizon]." Benita

Stakeholders noted that relationship breakdowns and job loss can happen to anyone, it is only at the point a person's support networks have been exhausted that these events become catalysts for homelessness.

"Often I've seen, when we've done case mapping you can see somebody who lost their job, got into a fight with their partner, fell out with their children, couldn't get another job, six years on they've got personality disorder, on medication, have been going from place to place, now taking substance misuse, you can literally map their journey from that catalyst moment, but the difference is they didn't get the support they needed at the time." Stakeholder 1

Most young people interviewed reported temporary accommodation as their current housing situation further reiterating the unstable character of their housing histories. Stakeholder 1 noted how quickly a belief that destabilising events like relationship breakdown can happen to anyone and that personal support networks should be there to help in these events. This can lead us to consider homelessness the individual failing of Black people historically maligned by racist stereotypes of broken homes and absolve the state of any responsibility to provide support.

"I think there's a danger that if we present it that way, the government's going to say, it's not our responsibility then." Stakeholder 1

# Understandings of homelessness

Participants varied in their views as regards whether they considered themselves currently homeless. Whilst some viewed homelessness as being without a roof over one's head, others understood it as lacking a stable place to call one's own.

"I have a bed. I have a bed to rest on. That's just about it. I think if you don't have a bed then you're homeless straightaway." Emmanuel

"At least for me, I'd probably say housing challenges [rather than homeless]. There wasn't really a time where I was on the streets or anything. I always had a friend, maybe a friend to go to. Yes, it was still kind of challenging." Remi

"I would say right now, because, basically, this is a homeless person's unit, so if it wasn't for this, I would, basically, be homeless, so, yes. I'm getting on this, and then after that I'm not sure what's going to happen, if I can't keep this place for more than - so, yes, I'm just waiting." Kunle

Carlton had initially said he did not consider himself homeless but changed his mind stating:

"Actually, no I would actually, because it's still a temporary accommodation. It's not actually a home. It's still somewhere where I'm still going to have to move to somewhere else." Carlton

Yas, however, had just recently secured a social housing tenancy so no longer considered herself homeless.

"Four years. So I've literally now got a place from like a month. It even feels weird saying, 'Oh, I'm going home.' It's such a weird sentence. I don't know. It just feels really weird." Yas

Having experienced rough sleeping and several temporary accommodations, her not being homeless was defined by stability of social housing.

Like Carlton, when asked if he considered himself homeless, Rashid weighed up the importance of stability versus physical shelter in defining homelessness.

"Not really because I'm in a hotel, but yes, I haven't got no stable home, you get me? Even though hotels are nice and all, you can't cook yourself food, can't go to the kitchen and cook myself food, can't warm yourself food. The way I warm it, I slap it in a kettle. You can't go downstairs. So, yes, I guess so." Rashid

His understanding corresponds with Somerville's (1992) domains of home. Whilst his hotel room offers shelter it lacks an aspect of abode – defined as a place for living and sleeping. Rashid has a place to sleep but not a place to live. He is not free to cook for himself the way you'd expect to in a home, and this affects his considerations of what homelessness is.

However, stakeholder 3 expressed concerns over a narrowing emphasis on homelessness as rough sleeping within government policy (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2023), and the specific effect this would have on young people, including young Black people.

"So that means a lot of resource and a lot of press and comms and messaging around what homelessness is is targeted towards. Yes, to that sleeping rough form, which then means that young people are often left out of the conversation because they're not seen in that. They're not seen as a problem because people aren't picking them up on the streets." Stakeholder 3

# The housing crisis

The stakeholders interviewed all concurred that the housing crisis has made it harder to access and keep housing in London.

"Just from my own experiences of living in London, it's becoming harder to... It's harder for me as a professional with a relatively stable job, let alone someone who doesn't have the experience, the guarantors, the financial backing of parents or someone else." Stakeholder 3

"There is a housing crisis, and it's much more acute for young people because sometimes, residents don't want more young people, especially if it's in one place. [...] So more affordable accommodation. Good quality, affordable accommodation for young people is critical, and we need to make sure this accommodation has good transport links in order for them to get to a job or

education. Otherwise, they're going to be spending a lot of money trying to get to those places. Money that they haven't got." Stakeholder 2

Some young Black interviewees felt that the housing crisis was affecting them directly:

"Yes. That's why I'm actually going into private renting because that's going to take a long period of time to get - I've heard people here take four years just to get a house and I'm not ready to wait for that long." Emmanuel

Remi expressed concern over being able to stay in London in future because of the crisis.

"Yes. Yes, definitely. That's definitely something to worry about. Especially, I know properties closer to central London tend to be more expensive as well." Remi

Others weren't entirely sure they were in a position to be affected by the crisis but saw potential to be affected in future.

"Not necessarily, because I've only recently started bidding, and it kind of affects me because I'm not really sure how much I'm going to be able to afford once I move out of here, but I'll have to worry about that when I get there, so it's a bit too early for me to answer." Isla

"Not really, because I was not working. I was not thinking, as well. I left at young age, so I was not paying any rent until now as well. So now, well I don't know. Yes, I might start paying my gas bill and things like that." Ayana

Thinking specifically about the effects of the housing crisis as a Black person, Carlton – exhibiting a tendency which often arose across interviews – talked of Blackness in the abstract. He demonstrated a sort of 'common-sense' consciousness of racism whereby although he could not speak of his own experiences by which the housing crisis affected him differently as a Black person, he believed it to be the case for other Black people. This consciousness is common-sense insofar as most Black people are aware of some degree of racism in society so that, perhaps especially when talking to another Black person, it seems obvious that Black people might have experiences different from non-Black counterparts as a result – even if one has not experienced this themselves.

"I think so. I don't know, because I was curious, I done a research before about single mums and stuff like that. Obviously, I think it does because the percentage of single mums in the Black community compared to the White community, the levels are completely different. Black communities have a lot higher, loads of single parents in general. So Black communities have a lot higher single parents. So the cost-of-living crisis affects a lot more, because more times, it's like, they've got more – not more responsibilities, but they've got more things they need to focus on, if that makes sense." Carlton

Similarly, Rashid could not be certain that he himself had experienced discrimination in the midst of the housing crisis but held a common-sense consciousness of the fact that being a young Black man might affect whether he'd be selected for housing in a highly competitive market.

"I don't even know. Some things I don't even see, like it's all done on the computer, on the phone. They might even have spaces, they just say, no, fuck this kid. So there's a good reason that even now, I haven't got one. It's a long process, but once it happens, at least that's why I'm stressed out, but then again it does. As I said, it's taken this long." Rashid

Certainly stakeholders shared the view that private landlords acted operated discriminatory practices of tenant selection according to a hierarchy of desirable tenants, which disadvantaged both young people and Black people:

"The young people we work with are at the bottom of the ladder because landlords would prefer to rent to probably a family, then maybe older people, younger people, and then the young people we support. Also, the young people we support don't have a guarantor. They haven't got a deposit, they don't have a guarantor, so it's even harder work for them.[...] If they have an Anglo-Saxon name, they'll probably get through that door, but then once they get there, then they do face discrimination as well, in terms of they [service users] really believe very strongly that, actually, they didn't get the property because of the colour of their skin." Stakeholder 2

# Conclusion

This chapter has explored how homelessness is experienced by young Black people living in London. Relationship breakdown in the family home was found to be the major cause of homelessness, reflective of wider evidence of pathways into homelessness for young people. Though relationship breakdowns can happen to anyone, then there is a structural issue to be addressed regarding the reproduction of young Black people's disproportionate rates of homelessness (Bramley *et al*, 2022).

The frequent reference to sofa surfing in young people's housing histories showed that personal support networks are often utilized by young people to keep them off the streets. However, such accommodation is inherently unstable with the potential to be asked to leave when friends and family can no longer accommodate or for young people themselves to feel they have overstayed their welcome. Where young people's housing histories largely involved tactics to avoid sleeping on the streets, whether sofa surfing, staying in hotels or finding temporary accommodation with the help of local authorities and homelessness organisations, homelessness can be understood then as the result of a destabilising event – like relationship breakdown – occurring when one has a low capacity to restabilise afterwards due to the exhaustion of social and material resources.

Whilst there was much commonality across the sample of young Black people in their housing histories and types of homelessness experienced, young Black participants varied in their understandings of the housing crisis and what constitutes homelessness. Regarding definitions of homelessness, whilst some viewed it as a lack of shelter, some saw their lack of stability as making them homeless even if they did have shelter, and others were conflicted over stability versus shelter as defining features of homelessness. As such, speaking of homelessness in purely minimalist terms – lack of shelter – in anti-homelessness work does not sufficiently capture the way that some young Black people view their housing challenges. Nevertheless, that some did view it in these minimalist terms signals that we should avoid imposing definitions onto people who do not necessarily subscribe to the label of homeless and instead ought to focus on homelessness reduction that offer solutions to people who may not consider themselves homeless but face similar issues to those who do. Indeed, this is bolstered by the similarity of housing histories and further still by the fact that these housing histories largely involved periods of rough sleeping and tactics of evading being without shelter. Where young Black people are less likely to be rough sleeping, understandings of homelessness that focus on rough sleeping are inherently exclusionary to young Black people allowing them to be erased from discussions of need.

Regarding the housing crisis, there was consensus over its existence but where some were already feeling the effects of a lack social housing and increasingly high rents some predicted potential effects in the future and others still spoke in the abstract of the housing crisis' effects on Black people as a category. Those speaking in the abstract demonstrated a consciousness of the racial debt under which Black people are born.

# 4. Young Black people's experiences of service provision

This chapter expands on young Black people's experiences of receiving support from local authorities and voluntary sector homelessness organisations, again with stakeholder interviews providing some broader perspective. It starts by providing an overview of young people's experiences of applying as homeless to local authorities, and then reviews the housing outcomes that resulted from these applications, before considering their view on the support received from voluntary sector organisations. Stakeholders' views on housing and homelessness services are considered towards the end of the chapter before overall conclusions are drawn.

# Applying as homeless to local authorities

As noted in Chapter 1, when people approach their councils for homelessness assistance, local authorities have a legal duty to make inquiries concerning eligibility, homelessness, priority of need, intentional homelessness, and local connection to the local authority (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2021). Through such enquiries, local authorities assess whether a person is considered statutorily homeless and if so they must take action to find that person accommodation.

Overall, seven of the young people confirmed that they were registered with their local authority as statutorily homelessness, four were unsure about their status and two had not approached their local authority. Young people had very different routes through which they found themselves applying as statutorily homeless.

For example, Remi and Isla were both in contact with the local authority homelessness services from a young age with both being assisted into shared youth-specific accommodation. Though she did not go into detail about how she came into contact with her local authority, Isla shared that her local authority had moved her out of her abusive family by referring her to young people's shared accommodation. In Remi's case, he was moved into shared accommodation after his mother told his school he wasn't living at home.

"Yes, actually. My mum actually told my school, when I was in school, that I wasn't living at home. That's how I was obviously recommended to here [youth shared accommodation]. My school told [Bromley Council\*], and I guess for a period I was declared homeless before" Remi

In other cases, young people had needed assistance of voluntary sector services to receive the assistance to which they were entitled. Emmanuel, for example, had approached his local authority for help himself, but it seemed that his application process did not get moving until a homelessness organisation stepped in to help him.

"It was annoying because when I tried it myself whilst I was homeless, they didn't hear me. They only heard me when the Crisis team got involved. The Crisis team nagged them. They were, 'Listen, this guy's been in your area for a long period of time. He's part of your council. You should help him out. He's registered in your local area,' and yes, they took me on board. Apart from that, if it wasn't for the Crisis team, I don't think they would have heard me." Emmanuel

Joseph felt that his local authority may have been involved in the eviction that led him to be homeless (he felt that the local authorities may have collaborated in some way with his landlord) so was sceptical about approaching them for help until a homeless organisation helped him with the process.

"Then I felt a lot more comfortable with the whole process, but having the local council attend to my issue really wasn't something I was all about, because I felt the evacuation [eviction] actually came from the local council. So going back to the local council to actually seek some form of

assistance, it was really disturbing for me. Then I really felt that the local council would actually have to take a process, a lot of process, and I wasn't in for some of the documentations at the time." Joseph

Strikingly, a number of young people were unsure about whether they were currently considered statutorily homeless by their local authorities and thus were an 'open case' with the council accepting a duty towards them. For example, Kunle was unsure as to whether or not he was considered statutory homeless, but his support worker clarified that as a care leaver his local authority would have ongoing duties towards him (though wasn't clear if the support worker had in mind Children's Services duties or the statutory homelessness system):

"So just to let you know, just to clarify that, they must have that, and somebody should be in touch with you about your move-on plan, just like what your PA [personal advisor] was saying the other day, because this is just temporary, interim accommodation. There must be some kind of a plan for you to move on, especially because you're a care leaver, and the local authority has that duty to provide something a bit more stable for you in the long run." Support Worker

Sinead had been accepted as statutorily homeless in the past but her case had been closed after receiving help to get a PRS tenancy with friends.

"[...] Yes, I had to re-approach them and I got like halfway, so I don't actually know if, after that tenancy, if I was registered as homeless, because when I called them, I thought I'd already been - they closed my case basically. So I had to do it all again, and I don't think I made it that far because I was just too depressed." Sinead

Similarly, Remi and Bailey had been in contact with their local authorities in the past but were unsure if they were currently considered statutorily homeless.

"I thought I am, but I need to double-check, because I think done it when I was homeless in [Kingston\*]. I think I done it. I need to double-check. I've just been busy working, so I haven't checked, because I remember they gave me paperwork to fill in, so I need to double-check it. But if I'm not there, I need to reapply for it. I need to go on the [social housing] list, because it takes like two years for them to accept it." Bailey

In general, young Black people seemed to have a relatively negative take on their experience with interacting with local authority homelessness services. Rashid spoke for many interviewees in claiming that support was only received from the local authority when one was desperate.

"They only do something when something happens to you. I'd just turned 16, literally, they didn't care, I was calling them up, people telling them, I'm sleeping in cars, I'm sleeping in buses, sleeping everywhere. They didn't care. I was trying to get people to call them, to show them I need help. No one cares. I get there's bigger problems out there, I get that, no one can really fix my problems, but still, it shouldn't take me getting stabbed to get a little bit of help." Rashid

Concern about not being believed was another theme that emerged (see also Homeless Link (2018)). Ayana, for example, described the struggle to be believed by local authorities. She explained that in order to be believed she had to put in a lot of work, often physically going to visit the local authority, to prove she was being honest about her situation.

"Mostly in them type of areas, when you're homeless, you have to, you know, rip out your shit and then go there or something. Me, I can't man. If you believe me, believe me. That's it. To be honest, I had to work a lot." Ayana

Some young people explicitly identified race as a factor that they perceived to have affected their

treatment by the local authority. Yas brought up a similar point about the potential harm being done to young Black people by failing to help them early enough.

"It's like, what? What's going on? Why do they want to always put us into a box, statistic to say Black people have the highest rate of homelessness. Black people have so much mental health problems. That's because they stick us in a box. When it's a White person, they were quick to help them. They're quick to give them treatment. They're quick to take care of them. That's why the statistic is lower. Not because of actual facts, it's just because they're quicker to help a White person then they are a Black person." Yas

Benita also felt that she may have received different treatment than her White friends.

"I don't know because I have a mixture of friends, but my White friends, they got help immediately from the council. I do feel like race plays a big part in it. I don't know." Benita

Sinead displayed the Du Boisian double consciousness – the Black experience of viewing oneself through the eyes of a whiteness when aware of a veil between Black world marked negatively and the White world marked positively (Du Bois, 1903; Wynter in Thomas, 2006) - that also arose in young Black people's experiences of homelessness. That is, she recognised how her Blackness marked her negatively so that, for her, it would always have an effect on her interactions with others. Interestingly, she noted how Blackness and homelessness might function together as markings that would produce prejudices against her during interactions with local authorities.

"Maybe. I guess, yes, because there's always going to be prejudice against people in an underprivileged background and shit, and especially if you're Black and homeless, then you're going to get judged. It doesn't matter whether you're not homeless, you're Black, so you're going to get judged, with the homeless you get both judgements." Sinead

Remi had a more positive reflection than most on his interaction with his local authority homelessness services.

"To be fair, I think I lucked out. I guess I had an all-right housing social worker. She was quite nice. She got things done. At times I guess I felt like I was left in the dark, but I guess that's normal. Maybe she was left in the dark about things as well at times. It was okay. It took a while before I actually moved in to here, to be fair. I guess that's normal" Remi

Two interviewees had not approached the council homelessness services at all. Martin, who had lived up north before moving to London and finding himself homeless, had not applied as statutory homeless in London as he was unsure of how the process would work.

"Well, no, I've haven't applied because I just moved here not that long, about three years ago. I'm not very conversant with how the council works around here. It works quite differently back in [Newcastle\*]. I've not really made attempts to turn it over to council for any form of support yet." Martin

Meanwhile, Carlton, who had recently returned from prison, had not applied to his local authority but intended to do so.

"Interviewer: So are you registered as homeless with, like, your local authority? Carlton: That's what I'm trying to do. That's what I need to do."

# Housing outcomes following assistance from local authorities

Across the group who had approached the local authority for assistance, three had been given temporary accommodation as a result of applying as homeless—this was in the form of shared accommodation, hotels, and temporary social housing—while four young people had been rehoused on a more long-term basis (including one who had spent time in temporary accommodation). This long-term accommodation was shared youth accommodation (Longer term De Paul youth accommodation for under 18s and moved onto 18+ accommodation), PRS accommodation, and social housing. One young person also secured PRS accommodation with support from a voluntary sector homelessness organisation.

Amongst those still living in temporary accommodation, Rashid had been staying in a hotel for two months with the help of his local authority and a youth homelessness charity. Ayana had recently been given temporary accommodation in the form of an apartment.

"To be honest, yes. I was surprised when I got the flat. I was looking more, like, I don't know, a studio, max. Yes, a studio, like a shared... So it was very good. I kind of found myself in there." Ayana

Others had a less positive experience of temporary accommodation. Yas, for example, had spent time in different shared forms of temporary accommodation. She described racist treatment in one place she had lived in where she felt she was treated as an aggressor by White co-habitants and accommodation staff despite being the one subjected to drug use and aggression.

"In one of the places that I lived, there was this guy. He was clearly 100 per cent, not think, it was 100 per cent he was on crystal meth, class A drugs. He would drop the pipe in front of the camera, he'd scream, he'd suddenly lost so much weight. He would be staying up for the whole night. You can't play music after 10:00, and he would get away with him playing his music, but if I accidentally dropped something, 'Oh my gosh, [Yas] I don't want you to disturb my children.' '[Yas is] doing...' What? I would literally tell him, 'Sorry, I dropped something, I hope it didn't wake up your kid' and [Yas] the aggressive one. I'm trying to directly communicate, but when these White people are banging on my door, and all this kind of stuff... 'They have their fair reason to be able to do this because [Yas] you have been antagonising." Yas

The unaffordability of temporary and supported forms of accommodation while working was a key issue for some. Benita, for example, explained that when living in shared accommodation she had begun working full-time and had no longer been able to afford rent as a result.

"I started working full-time, so I couldn't afford the rent anymore and I got kicked out. So then I was sofa surfing again." Benita

Others mentioned that they faced restrictions on the hours that they could work in temporary accommodation:

"Yes, I've got work, but it's the fact that if you're in temporary accommodation you can't work more than certain hours and especially when you're on Universal Credit. So, coming from a background where I've worked full time and haven't got these restrictions it's annoying. So, my main aim is basically to work full time and pay off what I need to pay off and rent by myself." Emmanuel

As noted above, two young people had secured a PRS tenancy as their long-term housing outcome. Sinead had approached her local authority before whilst sofa surfing and was eventually helped into the PRS through a buddy-up system that allowed her to rent with her friends. She complained, however, that her local authority had told her they would pay for her portion of the deposit but didn't get the money to her until the end of her tenancy leaving her to scrape money together herself:

"Basically, I got a private rent with me and my friends, that I organised, because the council didn't do nothing but they said they'd pay for my deposit or something. Imagine I didn't get my deposit until after I'd left the property, so I have to scrounge all the money myself." Sinead

At the end of the tenancy when her friends didn't wish to stay on Sinead found herself homeless again unable to pay the rent without housemates so had to re approach her local authority for help but was disappointed to discover she'd have to restart the application process as her case had been closed:

"Technically when they asked for the tenancy to be renewed and no one wanted to stay, so I can't pay £1,650 on my own. I had to leave. I had to re-approach them and I didn't because I was too depressed and anxious at the time, to even go through all the forms. Oh, it's stressful." Sinead

Yas was the only young person who had been allocated settled social housing via the statutory homelessness system but had issues with regards to its location:

"My ideal outcome would have just been outside of [Brent/North West\*]. That's the only difference in what I would have preferred, because one of the dangerous areas is [Wembley\*] and that's literally walking distance from me. So it's just...

Interviewer: Bit too close for comfort.

Yas: Yes. It's getting easier to go there. It's not as difficult as it used to be. So hopefully I won't even remember those things from before." Yas

Another form of medium-term accommodation was youth-specific shared accommodation which both Isla and Remi had received. Isla was satisfied with the accommodation explaining that life was easier now that she had her own space. Having recently turned 18, she was coming to the end of her term at the accommodation and hoped to find accommodation in the same area as the current accommodation. Remi, also 18, had just moved out of youth-specific supported shared accommodation and moved onto lower-support youth shared accommodation. Like Isla, he noted the independence gained from having one's own space – this independence increased with the shift from supported to low-support.

"I have my own room and then I have my own kitchen. it's very different to here [supported accommodation]. Whereas here it's all kind of one space, in there [low support accommodation] it's separate rooms. I still have to share a bathroom, but that's fine." Remi

# Support from voluntary sector homelessness organisations

As discussed in Chapter 2, most young people interviewed were recruited through two youth-specific homelessness voluntary organisations, and so were currently receiving support from these charities. In addition to this, two participants had received support from non-youth specific voluntary organisations (unlike the other participants, Joseph and Martin were reached through social media and were receiving support from other homelessness charities that were not youth specific).

Overall, participants seemed much happier with the services received from youth homelessness charities than that received from their local authorities, with some explicitly comparing the two:

"I haven't even really dealt with the council since I found New Horizons, because these guys are way more efficient and they actually help, and you can feel they actually want to help. That's the difference, when you actually know when you feel that someone wants to help, it's very different. You feel a lot more comfortable and welcome and not so much of a burden." Sinead

"So I went to the council, that was the first time I got kicked out, I called the council. They helped me. But the second time around, when my nan did it to me, the council wasn't helping me and I had to call Centrepoint and they gave me loads of referrals. New Horizon was the only referral that got

#### back to me." Benita

A sense of being pleasantly surprised at the help on offer from specialist youth homelessness services was apparent in some of the interviews. Bailey, for example, had been sceptical that the youth charity would be able to help him but was pleased with the practical support that they offered:

"I came here [youth charity] in 2018...I thought there's no point me coming in, because they don't explain it to you what they can actually help you with... but if you actually go through with it, it's like, oh, it's actually a lot of help. So 100 per cent I get a lot of help... Vouchers they help you with, food, washing-up liquid for my clothes and that stuff. I've had a lot of stuff." Bailey

As noted above a major element of the assistance that charities offered was help navigating the statutory homelessness system, enabling young people to secure longer-term accommodation.

"To be honest, this here [the youth homelessness charity] that's finished a lot of things for me, because there were even people from here that'll go to an [local authority] appointment with me, you know what I mean?" Ayana

Similarly, Yas was supported by one of the charities in her interaction with her local authority. She had made sure to share important information with support staff at the charity so that when she did not feel equipped to speak to local authorities she could pass them onto these staff.

"All of these kind of things [to do with social housing], I'm just like, take my phone, have my email address, this person can speak on behalf of me. I don't want to do it....When it's done they can summarise it to me, but if it's not done, I don't want to hear it." Yas

The other types of assistance that young people mentioned from these youth-specific homelessness providers included supported accommodation, help with overcoming isolation, support with employment, education, training, help with mental health and substance misuse issues, and support with independent living skills.

As mentioned earlier, Remi and Isla were living in low-support and supported accommodation provided by youth-specific voluntary organisations. Martin was also living in accommodation provided by the voluntary homelessness organisation that had helped him off the streets and he himself now volunteered at.

"Currently I reside with a charity where I currently work. it's like a boarding facility for volunteers. We provide food for the homeless and vulnerable people during the winter. I took up a job as a volunteer there, and I reside in the boarding facility." Martin

He explained that the volunteer role came with stipends that helped with personal needs.

"Yes, that's all my wages currently. It's not like an employment. I get given stipends, you know, to secure some more personal needs like personal hygiene and all" Martin

Overall, Martin was grateful for the role and happy with his conditions sharing a room with four other volunteers.

Others explained that they had been helped by youth-specific homelessness organisations to obtain temporary and longer-term accommodation. Before, ending up in prison Carlton had received help with temporary shelter that would keep him off the streets.

"They provided me with, like, shelters and stuff like that, to go to, so I didn't have to be on the street, and supported me. Obviously, I ended up in prison." Carlton

Some participants noted receiving help with employment. Carlton, for example, was happy to be receiving support with employment from an organisation for prison leavers in addition to support from a youth specific organisation.

"For employment, it's more from some company that I was working with in jail, for catering and hospitality courses called. They're meant to be setting me up for interview soon." Carlton

Joseph had received specific mental health support and rehabilitation for his problems with drug abuse in addition to having accommodation provided for him. He was also offered him a volunteer role were he could contribute to ensuring others got the support he had received.

"First off, it impacted on my conditions, which was being homeless, I think it was being able to cater for my home, for my accommodation. They were able to cater for my mental health, because I was experiencing some seizures from drug-induced psychosis, because in the slum, I would just put it as in the slum, where we were in, we had a lot of drug people using drugs, and I was greatly influenced. So the rehabilitation process was wonderful, and then they actually made me [offered the opportunity to] volunteer to support them in their project. So, it's been wonderful." Joseph

# Stakeholder views on housing and homelessness services

Stakeholders discussed the limited resources available to local authorities and homelessness organisations which were understood as putting a great strain on services, and provide some context for some of the more negative experiences above.

Resource issues included lack of direct access to accommodation and affordable housing, and insufficient provision to meet mental health and substance abuse needs. One stakeholder noted that limited resources - and the resulting need to ration them – in the housing crisis alongside young people's financial issues had the effect of lowering both young people's and local authorities' expectations of acceptable quality accommodation:

"It [the housing crisis] changes the expectations of what people should and can expect in terms of quality of accommodation. So if you can get someone to accept a young person into a property, then it doesn't matter if that property's appropriate for that young person's needs or safe for that young person. It's like, 'Just take it. You have to take it and if not you're intentionally homeless, so we can't help you more'. "Stakeholder 3

Another stakeholder believed that, owing to insufficient funding for both local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to work with young homeless people, the focus is often on signposting young people onto someone else rather than helping them.

"We've compartmentalised people into these different categories and funding will help them, but if you're not in that category, then you need to go to somebody else who might have that funding. There isn't a collective responsibility of whoever comes through the door, how can we help them? You're almost taken through some process, some procedure to ensure you go to somebody else who might be able to help you." Stakeholder 1

Further to this point, this stakeholder argued that services have now been set up to manage access generally by making people 'prove' their vulnerability and, specifically in the case of young Black people, tend to remain judgemental when people seek advice:

"[...] the loops we make a person go through to prove that they're vulnerable. They're vulnerable, therefore we're going to make it really hard for you to get help by proving you're vulnerable. Get your medical records together. Get your GP to send it through. Navigating other complex systems to

get the help you need [...] You are not invited to seek help when you need it. I think there is this kind of, it's something we've been asked to look at, there is this barrier of judgement around Black youth or young people when you're seeking advice" Stakeholder 1

Two of the stakeholders went on to address a lack of focus on Blackness throughout homelessness organisations and local authorities. Both noted how organisations create projects to specifically target the problems of women and asylum seekers but the same cannot be said for Black youth.

"The narrative around this is not going to shift. I know colleagues in the sector, who've been working in the sector a long time, and still will not acknowledge the high percentage of marginalised communities, Black people, who are experiencing homelessness. They still won't see it. So race is still, in the debate around housing and homelessness, it's still down there." Stakeholder 1

"[...] because unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have certain protections for a certain amount of time and are more visible within the data because they're registered with social services and things like that, it's a really important group to acknowledge and recognise within research. It's also important to recognise that they're ... Not the only group and that.... Because there's a really visible bit of data here and not a very visible bit of data in terms of the groups that are hidden, particularly young black people, it's...." Stakeholder 3

However, the stakeholders interviewed agreed that the solution lay not so much in the creation of bespoke 'Black' services but more so addressing the multiple identities young Black people hold through long-term support on multiple fronts in the existing services sector. Where identity can denote many things, identity here refers to the structurally and interpersonally imposed labels attached to individuals. In other words, youth and Blackness - though capable of carrying subjective meanings for the individuals they apply to – are statuses carrying weight as socio-economic positions so that a combination of the three might tend to produce particular needs. For example, one stakeholder called for government recognition of the institutional factors causing disproportionate rates of homelessness in racialised communities.

"[...] I think until this government starts to recognise the institutional factors that are causing homelessness for different race communities, that's not going to shift. That's what they need to do and it's going to take a really brave government to say, how have our allocation policies, how have our institutional structures meant this is why people have ended up in these areas, and in this deprivation, and therefore this situation." Stakeholder 1

The argument here is that particular racial identities tends to carry a heightened risk of homelessness — which in turn has the effect of producing new needs for individuals. This recognition is needed to support calls for revised service models that more appropriately target the holistic needs of young Black people and, importantly, the funding to do so.

"[...] for young people, we've already messed them up. The support they will need now, longer term, is going to be significantly more if there had been that intervention back then. So, we're going to have radically rethink our existing models which are institutionalised and developed for a very different type of homelessness 20 years ago." Stakeholder 1

Holistic solutions involve, firstly, paying attention to what young Black people themselves say they need.

"When young people are marginalised, that limits the opportunity [...] for them to have their voices heard and we need to address that balance [...] before we come up with answers." Stakeholder 3

Moreover, support cannot simply be about getting people into accommodation. In order to avoid repeat homelessness young Black people also need support with mental and physical health, finding suitable jobs, and developing life skills. Insofar as these are needs not distinct from those of other young homeless people, this reiterates that intention is not bespoke Black services but to sufficiently target the needs that

result in disproportionate rates of Black homelessness. Stakeholders therefore called for integrated specialist services working together to produce long term solutions that address the multiple needs arising from young Black people's multiple identities.

"We need to recognise that young children and young people are young children and young people and have limited experiences and need additional... Different types of support from adults and that for young Black children and young... Black children and Black young people, their experiences may have meant that they've been forced into adult roles or seen as adults much too young and that's... They challenge our own approaches. In terms of service delivery, we... There needs to be more investment in vying for services and there needs to be more investment in youth services in general and those be linking up with homelessness services." Stakeholder 3

Another stakeholder proposed pre-16 prevention supporting children and families earlier so that young people do not become homeless later in life, and more youth-specific accommodation so that in the event that they do become homeless young people could be protected from potential exploitation in all-age hostels.

"Then what we're saying is pick them up virtually straightaway, so they're not rough sleeping, put them in accommodation where there's an assessment centre, whatever it might be, or a hostel, which is only for young people, help them with their life skills – budgeting, cooking, how to pay a bill – and then at the other end, make sure there's affordable accommodation, good quality, for them to go into. [...] but prevention has to be key because actually we don't want young people having to go through that path unless they have to". – Stakeholder 2

# Conclusion

This chapter has explored both stakeholders' perspectives on statutory and voluntary sector housing and homelessness services and young Black people's experiences navigating these services. Most young Black people had applied to their local authority as statutory homeless but often reported negative experiences, including difficulty being believed during the application process, not receiving help until they were desperate, and a perception of different treatment from White peers. Stakeholders noted how a lack of resources available to local authorities had resulted in lowered expectations for acceptable housing, and practices that made accessing services difficult. Negative perceptions arose sometimes as preconceptions about local authorities and at other times as a result of experiences. Some young Black participants felt that the statutory homelessness process was inaccessible and were grateful to homelessness charities that helped them through it by talking to local authorities on their behalf and attending appointments with young people. In this sense, the voluntary sector seemed to function as an intermediary between young Black people and local authorities who were often perceived negatively. Overall, experiences in the voluntary sector were more positive than those with local authorities with young people describing support with employment, mental health and substance abuse and accommodation as improving their experiences of homelessness and housing challenges.

Of those who had applied to their local authority as homeless, housing outcomes were split fairly evenly between temporary accommodation in the form of hotels, temporary shared accommodation, temporary social housing, and longer-term accommodation in the form of youth specific shared accommodation, social housing, and PRS accommodation. Experiences of temporary accommodation seemed generally positive although one participant recounted the danger of drug use and aggression present in non-youth specific temporary shared accommodation. By contrast, youth specific shared accommodation yielded very positive experiences with young people citing the independence they felt they gained as an advantage.

Stakeholders noted a lack of focus on Black people generally and young Black people especially as a vulnerable group in service responses to homelessness. The belief was that service providers were not attuned to young Black people's multiple needs and identities. Most young people interviewed were

currently receiving support from two particular voluntary sector organisations, which may of course have influenced the balance and perspective of the sample. Nonetheless, it was striking the role that these organisations played in promoting participants' wellbeing, particularly via the provision of services that extended beyond accommodation and addressed other needs. In particular, unlike local authorities, these voluntary sector organisations were able to support mental health and the social lives of young people in ways that were experienced as profoundly valuable.

This chimes with stakeholders' calling for holistic solutions to young Black homeless people's multiple identities and needs. This would entail service providers listening to young Black people's concerns and responding to them with a view to the long-term. They recommended early interventions to prevent homelessness - which would respond to the perception that young Black people are receiving support too late, when they have already become increasingly vulnerable – as well as integrating specialist youth services within generic homelessness services. Their call for holistic solutions was not to support the creation of Black-specific services, but rather a rethinking of how the needs that tend to result from being both young and Black are addressed within both youth homelessness and general homelessness services.

# 5. Young Black people's housing aspirations, and the links with place and placelessness

This chapter examines young Black people's housing aspirations in order to understand their relationship with place and potential placelessness. It seeks to answer the question of how young Black people shape, and how they are shaped by, the racialisation of place. It is split into three sections with the first looking at young Black people's ideals of home, the second exploring the importance of place and placelessness, and the third their perceptions of how attainable their housing ideals are and the role of race in influencing that.

# Ideals of home

Some participants talked about their ideal home, often making a distinction between the best housing outcome that they felt they could expect via assistance from their local authority and their 'dream' accommodation.

Regarding their application to local authority for housing assistance, they typically had modest aspirations - likely informed by a cognisance of the limits to housing that local authorities could provide. I use modest here to mean that they hoped for the bare minimum of what could be considered reasonable housing. In this vein, Rashid asserted that he was not expecting much from his local authority and would be grateful to just have a small space with decent facilities:

"Give me a little one room, most probably a small open kitchen, living room type of thing, with a toilet there, and that's it. Literally a little something like that. I'm not expecting nothing mad; I'm not expecting nothing like bougie [meaning: nothing fancy] too, obviously, but you know what I'm saying, it's a home. That's what I'm grateful for, a little bed to sleep in, that's all I really need" Rashid

However, he had greater aspirations for the dream housing of his future. He hoped for an apartment with a garden large enough to accommodate the dogs and children he hoped to have one day. Having spent long periods living in hotel rooms, Rashid desired a home that offered him space to move and breathe freely:

"Enough space to have my dogs. One dog to keep the family entertained. Dogs are a responsibility. It teaches kids' responsibility. It's a way of income too; breeding and that. Yes, I just want a nice house, a three or four-bedroom house just in case I want two kids or three, and a little guest room or something. Open kitchen, nice big open kitchen, big open living room, and a nice garden view. Good view, it has to have a good view. I need space, I need air. That's what I want at least at the end goal, when I'm old and grey and shit." Rashid

Where Rashid talked about his dream housing with a future family in mind, Martin expressed being content with a small space because he did not have this family yet:

"Something decent enough to fit all my stuff. I'm not looking for anything very big. I'm just looking for something very basic. Since I'm still a bachelor, I'm still growing up, I wouldn't mind a studio apartment, spacious enough with the kitchen and my toilet facilities, basically. Like a kitchen and a bathroom, because being unmarried and a bachelor, I wouldn't need too much space like that because then be unnecessary and just not very useful." Martin

Similarly, Isla emphasised that she would be content with a small place from her local authority as, being just one person, she did not need too much space. That said, her 'dream' accommodation for the future was a larger space more suited to an adult:

"Well, hopefully I can bid for it, just a flat. I'm not really the type of person that likes big houses. I feel like there's too much space, and I would just fill it with junk. My future house, probably two, three bedrooms, nothing too big, nothing too small, just a little tiny garden." Isla

A common theme of simply wanting a place of one's own arose in participants' ideals, key to which was having a stable place to stay. This was in contrast to the instability that had typically characterised these young people's housing histories to date. Kunle, for example, specified that he wanted his own permanent accommodation:

"Oh, ideal-ideal, is just like I have my own place, like somewhere I know is not going to be temporary; just a permanent place." Kunle

Benita also desired permanent and stable accommodation that would eliminate her fears of being homeless again:

"My ideal accommodation would just be somewhere where it's stable and that I know is permanent and I don't have to worry about being homeless again, because I am scared of that because I really don't think I'm going to get help again." Benita

For Remi, a place of his own entailed spacious accommodation that was specifically for him. This contrasts with his prior experience of an overcrowded family home:

"Maybe just a nice place for myself. Definitely have a spare room or something, quite big, quite spacious but also for me, I guess." Remi

Meanwhile, Emmanuel's place of his own was to be a safe space that he could call home:

"I've privately rented myself so I just need my own space with a bedroom, kitchen, a little garden [...] Just if I had my own space and I know that I'm working and I can go to the gym, come back. It's my safe space. That's what I'd call home." Emmanuel

Overall, it seemed that participants had aspirations grounded in their material reality. That is to say, their ideals responded to the problems homelessness had caused for them as well as the present needs they had as young people which were distinct from those they might have when older. Particularly, the desire for a place of their own in the context of the instability homelessness had entailed for these young people reveals placelessness as this state of longing, as I now explore in more detail.

# The importance of place and placelessness

Most participants hoped to continue living in London in the future and often considered this important to the formation of their ideal home. Typical reasons involved the diversity of and social networks in London. Emmanuel, for example, noted that he had better connections with people in London as opposed to where he had lived outside London when he had been made to leave his family home:

"It's the fact that I know more people here and I've studied here, so I know better connections"

Emmanuel

Benita similarly explained that London is where her friends are as well as being a familiar location so she felt comfortable there. In this sense, place is formed around the comfort knowing a particular area can provide:

"Yes. For me, I just feel comfortable there, because I know what is around and that's where most of my friends are based as well." Benita

On this point, Joseph added an ethnic element to the sense of community gained in London noting that he felt more comfortable developing close relationships with people as he encountered more people from a similar background to himself:

"A lot of Black people, people of my own ethnic origin from here, and I feel a lot more comfortable having a family relationship with people." Joseph

Further to this, this contributed to his sense of belonging in London as shared background helped him to build rapport with others. As such he hoped to live in London in the future.

"Yes. It contributes a lot to my trust level, with having to trust people around me, you know. The environment we live in is a product of your interactions. So I think having close interactions with my background would definitely go a long way in building trust and then having a more social relationship and rapport with people also." Joseph

Sinead's relationship to London was more specifically tied to her native south London, known for its large Black community. Her comfort in the area was not just about knowing the area well but also the character of South London as not just a place where lots of Black people live but also one where she felt protected:

"Walking around the south, I don't feel like I get judged. I see a lot more Black people. I see a lot more White people that are cool. I don't see no uppity Tories. Sorry. That's, I think, the main thing, and I guess that those go back to history with like the Eastenders and all the Cockney people, as much as they're still racist, back in the day, they were probably one of the most accepting people because they were all around, more than the Tories, yes, I think it's still the same. There's always going to be a level of prejudice and hatred, but I feel like there is more acceptance in the south and less judgement, prejudice and segregation, I guess, than in North [London\*]. What I've noticed." Sinead

Thus, despite expressing interest in living abroad or one day being able to afford to live in a rich part of London, Sinead remained a proud south Londoner who would happily continue living there if she could afford it. Indeed, her connection to her locale demonstrates the significance of social interactions in place to forming a sense of belonging:

"I think I've definitely made my belonging. I've chosen to feel like I belong there, I guess. I guess it's not chosen, I guess it's more of a feeling. Out of my life, there's no place I want to be more, I've realised that. I've made a network here. I'm a singer, I'm an actress. There's photographers I know, there's producers I know. I could not just up and move my life somewhere else, unfortunately." Sinead

Rashid's relationship with London was similarly rooted in his particular locale of East London. His experience of violence in the area left him conflicted about whether he would want to live in London in the future. He went so far as to say of this violence that in the future he'd prefer to move his children out of London and into a quieter, less diverse area (where they may experience racism) in order to protect them from the dangers he'd been subjected to living in East London:

"No lie, I'd rather my kids go through racism than growing up around drug dealers and killers, because I know I can teach them to mentally be prepared for all of that, you understand? But I can't teach them to like or dislike certain stuff. You get what I mean? Kids will be kids, they all like to experiment, you know what I'm saying? I know how [London\*] is." Rashid

Yet, Rashid still wanted to stay in London, at least in the near future. It was not only family connections but also the fact of having come of age in the city that continued to tie him to London in spite of the violence he had experienced.

"No I don't want to leave. Even though I do want to leave, I can't leave now. I've built connections, I've done so much here to leave and start a new life. I'm doing the same thing my mum done. Why do that? Why start again from the bottom? I've already gone homeless too many times. I've already started from the bottom. I'm not doing that again. That's too long." Rashid

Here the relationship to place is not just one of the social interactions we engage in to form place but also the way place shapes us against our own will. Rashid found himself irrevocably linked to London in spite of his disdain for it because of the environment's contributions, for better or for worse, to the process of his becoming who he is. The almost distressing character of his being tethered to London suggests placelessness insofar as Rashid did not have a place he belonged in freely.

Yas found herself similarly bound to London, having lived there her whole life. She explicitly described a love-hate relationship with the city in which, on the one hand, she praised its infrastructure and diversity:

"It feels so weird. I hate but I love London. It's a very love-hate relationship, because TfL [Transport for London], that's the best thing. Secondly, it's so diverse. I like walking down the street and see that every person I walk past is from a different background, culture, or religion, because then it just makes you more aware." Yas

But on the other hand, she complained of encountering hypocrisy particularly referring to double standards to which she is held as a Black queer person. She explained that whilst her family were alright with her having gay friends, the idea of her being gay was problematic to them and this sort of hypocrisy hampered her relationship with London:

"I could have gay friends, that's fine, but if there's a suspect of me being gay, or bisexual, or something, there's the problem. Things like that, just hypocrites." Yas

Yas importantly calls attention to the way that place is shaped not just by interactions with large institutions but also through smaller-scale interpersonal relations with social networks such that her experience of homophobia in her family came to colour her feelings towards the city as a whole. Perhaps then, for Yas, the ability to be homophobic in this interpersonal manner appeared as a reflection of what is more generally acceptable throughout London. Whatever the reasoning, it is evident that interpersonal relationships in the city inform the broader relationship with the city, and identity – in this instance, sexual identity – can effect both of these relationships.

Some aspired to move elsewhere. Carlton's future dream accommodation was thought of with a future family in mind. Being of Jamaican heritage, Carlton hoped to move back there one day and start a family as he felt London was too hectic:

"To be honest, I just want to work for a good, say, seven, eight years. So probably, because I'm 23 now, so probably, like, into my 30s, or when I hit early 30s and have enough money saved to be able to start my own family and maybe be able to move to Jamaica. I want to move back to Jamaica before I start my own family." Carlton

Carlton's perception of Jamaica's peacefulness in contrast to the hectic-ness of London was certainly informed by his having fallen in with the wrong crowd and found himself in prison. He went on to explain he felt he need to be surrounded by positive influences in order to feel at home somewhere:

"When I used to always be around negative people, my aura was always negative, and I was always a negative person. When I started to put myself around the right people, it's like, I started to, what's it called, be more at peace, and my mind was more peaceful as well." Carlton

Talking of going back hints at Black diasporic relationship to 'homeland', Brand (2002) describes the Black diaspora as inhabiting a space formed of ancestor's forced movement across the globe on slave ships. In this light, the return to homeland might be understood as a desire forged in the legacy of this violence.

London may then be a place, for some, defined in part by distance and difference from the homeland. Sinead similarly explained that her dream would involve returning to the 'Motherland' of Jamaica though she also dreamt of perhaps living near Regents Park – well known for being an expensive part of London – or Spain or Greece if she managed to earn enough.

"Yes, I'd love to stay in London. I can't lie, my dream is to have a house in the country. A house in Spain or Greece, or really and truly the Motherland Jam. I want to have a townhouse in London. That's the dream. Obviously, if my life ends up in that way where I'm able to have the privilege and I've worked for, then I'll treat myself to a little nice townhouse on Regent's Park, that'll be lovely." Sinead

Bailey's ideal housing outcome from his local authority was to acquire social housing but he hoped to one day be able to travel to other countries.

"I don't want to live in a council for the rest of my life, [...] I want to travel. Yes, move around, different cultures, different language, different energy, everyone's different. I'd go to flippin' Korea, but everyone's going to Korea. I don't know why. Literally, have you seen, everyone's going to Korea?" Bailey

This was not reflective, however, of negative feelings towards London but simply of a desire to travel. Indeed, when asked if he felt a sense of belonging in London his answer was similar to that of those who wished to stay in London as he noted diversity as making London distinct from the rest of England.

"A hundred per cent. It's mixed. [London\*] is - I wouldn't go anywhere else in England. Everyone says when you come to [London\*] it's like you're not in [London\*]; you're in a different place. If you go to this part of [London\*] it's Asian. There's Blacks, there's Moroccans." Bailey

For Bailey, he could belong in London because of the significant Black community along with other ethnic minorities so that even if confronted with racism he could not be convinced that he did not belong in the city. By contrast, the lack of or smaller populations of Black people outside London meant that he did not feel he could live elsewhere in England. He did not then experience placelessness as non-belonging. Likewise, Kunle hoped to leave London one day thinking that America might be an option for him one day but did not feel that he did not belong in London.

## Attainability of ideals and the racialisation of place

Participants largely focussed on income when reflecting on what was important to attaining their ideal home. Kunle, for example, felt that his current income was a barrier to attaining his ideal but remained confident that he was capable of increasing his own income to ensure he could get himself permanent accommodation:

"I would have to say income, for now. Even if it's without the council's help, I'm still going to get my own place regardless. I just need to be making more money, like trying to make sure I can sort out everything by myself, even without their help, but right now, I'm dependent on their help." Kunle

Isla hoped that a future career in music or literature might help her maintain permanent housing though it is important to note that in the current climate it would unfortunately be very difficult to do this:

"Hopefully, I could either become a writer, like, a lyricist, before the next five years or something, and then I could just live off what that brings me. If not, then I'm just going to take my skills and become a children's book writer." Isla

Rashid also hoped that through multiple streams of income he would soon be able to afford his ideal home although the injury sustained from being stabbed had made his work as a barber harder. He emphasised the attainability of his goals given his hard work and strong determination:

"I'm a barber, but because I'm still trying to get used to holding my hand and that. Yes, it'll be a little second before I get back in shape, and it's kind of pissing me off. I can't really do what I love, but it's cool, it's all the process, you get me? I'm a dog breeder too. I've still got a couple of pit bulls there. I'm trying to get into a lot of stuff, at the same time, as quick as possible so then I get that money as quick as possible. I'm trying to make sure that I save that, especially the stuff that I'm building, just to make sure I get to my goals. I'm setting a date when I have to have that money; nothing can stop that goal. Not my arm, nothing. Even with a cast on, I'll be working. Trust me, bro." Rashid

Joseph was similarly self-assured that his goal of getting his own apartment was attainable through hard work.

"Well, I'm passionate about it. I'm young, and I see this as achievable. It might take time, but if you have a plan, then it definitely can be workable." Joseph

This eagerness to work towards their goals begs the question of what other barriers could then be making it difficult to attain housing. Emmanuel was just trying to get back into the swing of things after being made to leave his aunt and uncle's home so was seeking to start bartending again. Though he was optimistic that he could steadily increase his income through bartending so as to reach his ideal of an apartment, unlike other participants he expressed concerns about the high cost of rent.

"Cost of rent is ridiculously high which is annoying, but I know with my experience through bartending I can easily get a job that pays high, but it's the fact that - the reason why I'm starting with a low income is because I just want to work myself back into it because I've spent like these four months, five months without working. I just want to get myself back used to bartending again." Emmanuel

Benita also was concerned about the cost of rent and felt that she could not afford rent without financial support from her local authority:

"I guess it's the prices. It's just really expensive. I can't afford to live somewhere without help. It's so expensive, £2.5k for a one-bedroom flat. I'm like, what?" Benita

Sinead similarly felt that living in London, let alone in her dream home by Regent's Park, seemed unattainable in the current housing market. Interestingly, she raises the issue of homeownership as appearing increasingly out of reach for young people such that she ruled it out entirely as a possibility. Against her ideal, her realistic outlook was that she would have to leave London as it continues to become more and more unaffordable:

"The way the world is looking, realistically, I'm never going to own a house anyway. So realistically, if I want a house, I'm probably going to have to go to Essex or Blackpool. I'm going to have to go out of [London\*] because if it just keeps going up and up, the way it is, we're going to get kicked out. Well, I'm not affording it, we can't afford to live here." Sinead

We can begin to understand placelessness in these housing concerns insofar as the socio-economic processes that lead to these concerns are at odds with the sense of belonging young Black people earlier described. That is not to say that young people do not feel a sense of belonging in London, as earlier discussions show that they certainly do, but rather that this growing inability to live where they feel this belonging is indicative of a city that rejects their belonging through failing to accommodate their housing ideals.

Whilst all participants seemed conscious of the potential effect of racial disadvantage on the attainability of their ideal homes, they differed in their opinions on whether this would affect them personally. Kunle, who had been confident he could get permanent accommodation by increasing his income, was pursuing online work and felt that the remoteness of this would mean that his Blackness wouldn't be able to affect his income and in turn his ability to attain this accommodation. In this sense, he did seem to believe Blackness could affect income but did not feel this would be of concern for his own circumstances:

"I wouldn't really say so, to be honest. Most of the things I want to do is, basically, going to be over the internet, so being Black doesn't really affect that. It's easy. I'm seeing people make money over the internet, like doing different types of stuff, so I'm just going to do that as well, or I'm going to try to, anyway. Yes, as long as I go that route, being Black is going to affect it. No one else is going to be involved, so it will just be easier." Kunle

Martin also expressed consciousness of racial disadvantage sharing the commonly heard Black idea that Black people have to work twice as hard as their White counterparts to be successful. He seemed certain then that he was capable of working this hard such that being Black would not impact his ability to achieve his ideal. For Martin, it was his current financial situation rather than Blackness that acted as a barrier:

"Basically, no, apart from the fact that I have to work twice as hard to get everything I have. Basically, it's just a lack of finance and access to finance currently." Martin

In both Kunle and Martin's responses we see a conflict between their identification of the impact of racism and their own determination to be successful. Both believe that their determination can triumph in this conflict, however, their very consciousness of racial disadvantage as something to evade reveals the racialised character of the place they live in. That is to say that even as London is attractive because of its ethnic diversity and the lower perceived threat of racism it also emerges in these narratives as a place where race can be an organising characteristic so that Blackness has the potential to lower your life chances. In this sense, the attainability of ideals may have a racial dimension to it.

When asked if race could impact attainability of one's ideal home, Benita similarly exhibited a consciousness of the potential for racial discrimination, in that she felt that her race may have impacted encounters with local authorities on top of her issues affording rent as full-time work had affected the benefits she received:

"In some ways, I think so, yes. I don't know because sometimes you can get a good egg and you can get a bad egg, over the phone. I don't know. I think it just depends. For me, in that case, I think it's my race that has affected, a little bit, and because of the situation of being kicked out for working full-time and not being able to afford the rent, yes." Benita

Just as Benita was unsure of whether race had affected her housing situation we cannot be sure either. Instead, it is this fear of race being the reason for poor outcomes that illustrates the racialised character of London as young Black people experience it.

Sinead, on the other hand, was more explicit about believing this racial dimension exists. She held strongly that Blackness had an impact on the attainability of one's ideal home because of deep rooted history of racial disparity in the UK. She argued that whilst some White people might benefit from generational wealth, Black people historically and presently were likely to struggle getting well-paid work and in turn secure permanent housing:

"Definitely. I think it affects Black people more, mainly because of the generational wealth thing that we have in this country. This is the thing where it's like I understand what some of the Conservative ideology is, where you say if you work for your money, you should be allowed to keep all of that money and make more money from it and be praised for working hard. However, when you're putting other people down because of that, just to bring yourself up, no, that's not right.

When other people are suffering. First of all, it's hard enough to get a job when you're Black. So if it's harder for me to get a job, how is it easier for me to make money? How am I meant to keep this money and then invest the money and then get a house? It's not possible at the same level as White people unfortunately, because there's always the prejudice. Always." Sinead

Much research into racial discrimination and structural disadvantage as products of colonialism and chattel slavery exists that might support Sinead's claims. Importantly, through reference to generational wealth she draws attention to precisely the racialised sociospatial organisation McKittrick (2011) argues persists in places Black people find themselves inhabiting today. That is a question of where White wealth in London has come from, the methods through which it has been maintained and the people who are dispossessed because of this.

## Conclusion

The young Black people's ideals of home reflected the deficits experienced while being homeless such as instability, lack of privacy and issues with safety. Their conception of their ideal home typically looked to remedy these deficiencies indicating the salience of conceptions of home that go beyond the existence of a roof over one's head. Participants' ideals lend weight to Busch-Geertsema et al.'s (2016) domains of home and Somerville's (1992) signifiers of home, both of which aim to illustrate the multiple dimensions that make up home. Particularly, though, Somerville's notion of a sense of home is evident in young people's ideals as the strong theme of just wanting a place of one's own takes us beyond their lived experiences of home into the realm of the emotional connections made with shelter. The desire for a place of one's own reads as a state of yearning arising from the conflict between ideals of home and reality of home.

On the whole, participants tended to have a strong sense of belonging in London informed by comfort in the areas they knew well and the ability to live amongst people from diverse ethnic backgrounds such that their own minority status was not so stark. This suggests young Black people shaped racialised place by maintaining the multicultural character of the city simply through reproducing Black and minority ethnic community in their everyday interactions. In this light, non-belonging is not a useful operationalisation for placelessness as by focusing on individual reactions to their environments it does not capture the racialised division of labour in spatial organisation that placelessness refers to. Indeed, it is possible for a personal sense of belonging to co-exist with structural disenfranchisement. McKittrick (2006) suggests that the significance of the slave plantation was that Black dispossession became the governing logic of how Black people could occupy space and this sociospatial organisation in which Black people are supposed to be dispossessed has travelled beyond the plantation. It is not within the scope of this report to provide evidence of the many ways this sociospatial organisation McKittrick describes can be found to manifest in London, however, that some young Black people in this study appeared cognisant of this organisation in their concerns of potential racial discrimination and displacement from the city due to high rents suggests the existence of a London that is hostile to young Black people's belonging. Placelessness is not the state of non-belonging but a conflict between self and reality in which young Black people find themselves yearning for ideals of home that elude them.

If place is a site of contestation via the various conceptions of place that arise in a particular locale, then placelessness occurs through the persistent domination of one particular conception over others. In other words, although young Black people develop their own relationships with the city these relationships are contested by a powerful housing market that functionally excludes them from the city through high rents. Young Black people are not the only people affected by this housing crisis but their disproportionate rates of homelessness call attention to how the domination of a conception of place in which home is commodity might function to curb their ability to continue making place.

# 6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study sought to understand and highlight the ways young Black people experience homelessness, place and placelessness in London by exploring the following research questions:

- 1. What are young Black people's experiences and perceptions of homelessness?
- 2. What are their experiences of both statutory and voluntary sector homelessness services?
- 3. What are their views on the current housing crisis?
- 4. How does homelessness affect feelings of belonging in the city?
- 5. How do they shape, and how are they shaped by, the racialisation of place?

Following a literature review of theoretical approaches to space and place in relation to Blackness and available research on youth homelessness, three interviews with key informants and 13 interviews with young Black people in London were conducted. This chapter reviews the study's findings on each of the above questions and draws out potential implications for government, local authorities, and voluntary sector organisations.

## Young Black people's experiences and perceptions of homelessness

This study confirmed previous research findings that relationship breakdown, typically in the form of conflict with family members, is the leading cause of homelessness for young people (Centrepoint, 2023). This was not, however, indicative of a problem with maintaining relationships per se, nor is this situation unique to young Black people (as earlier Centrepoint (2023) research demonstrates). Participants often sofa surfed to avoid rough sleeping, demonstrating the availability and utilisation of personal support networks. Relationship breakdown was a major destabilising event for young Black people such that homelessness can be understood as the result of the low capacity to restabilise after such an event. Whilst this was the leading cause of homelessness, other causes were also found including job loss, eviction, familial abuse, overcrowding in the family home, and discharge from foster care.

Young Black people experienced homelessness as a period of instability. They often expressed concerns over being able to afford rent and stay with friends or family illustrating the instability of their housing situations. Temporary accommodation featured prominently in housing histories as the most common current accommodation as well as some having formerly lived in temporary accommodation. Insofar as these experiences occur in a history of Black people's tendency to suffer housing instability, they can be understood as symptoms of racialized distribution of harm in which Black people tend to live with the looming threat of dispossession (McKittrick, 2006; Nethercote, 2022). This threat is arises in the disproportionate risk of homelessness for Black people (Bramley *et al.*, 2022).

This study applied a broad definition of homelessness that incorporated multiple dimensions of home, and commensurately multiple potential deficits in home that might lead us to classify someone as homeless (Somerville, 1992; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016). Some but not all the young Black people I interviewed believed themselves to be homeless though all were living in circumstances that would be considered statutory homelessness. Some saw lack of stability as homelessness, some viewed having some sort of shelter as enough to classify them as no longer homeless, and others still were conflicted over whether a lack of stability despite having shelter was enough to make them homeless. This was consistent with theoretical debates regarding definitions of homelessness. On the one hand, that some participants did apply a minimalist definition themselves describing their perception of homelessness demonstrates that the use of the term homelessness may be an unwanted imposition on people who do not see themselves as such. On the other hand, a minimalist approach to homelessness that looks only at the existence of reasonable shelter does not capture the range of perceptions of homelessness, as illustrated by the fact that many young people did adopt a wider definition of homelessness, nor does it account for the harm experienced in these homeless situations.

## Experiences of statutory and voluntary sector homelessness services

Young Black people reported largely negative experiences of the statutory homelessness system including problems such as difficulty being believed, not receiving help until they were desperate, as has also been flagged in other research (see Sutton-Hamilton *et al.*, 2022), but also and a perception on the part of some that they were being treated differently from their White counterparts. Consistent with this, key informants noted that inadequate resources in the sector had affected the way local authorities operated, particularly noting lowered expectations for acceptable housing outcomes on the part of both homeless applicants and local authorities with young people expected to take properties that may not be suited to their needs or in an area that feels unsafe for them. They also noted the existence of gatekeeping practices whereby already vulnerable young people must struggle to prove their vulnerability (see also Homeless Link, 2020) and the focus on the part of local authorities, as well as to some extent in voluntary organisations, appears to be on passing people onto other services rather than helping them.

This seemed to confirm Wilde's (2022) theorization that a logic of needing to ration limited resources available to service providers governs how people in need of support are treated. Existing literature has not, however, captured the way race was thought by both key informants and some young people to affect their experiences where they expressed concern specifically that their Blackness might have made an already challenging process worse. Particularly concerning was the perception that as Black people they were more likely to only be helped at a more dire stage of their situation. This could be potentially linked to the notion of adultification bias experienced by young Black people which Davis and Marsh (in Davis, 2022) define as "[...] when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children". This process is understood to be distinctly racialized with Black children tending to feel the influence act of this dehumanization on how they are safeguarded and protected (Davis, 2022). The statutory process appeared to be sometimes inaccessible to young Black people who often sought support navigating the system from voluntary sector organisations.

In contrast to the statutory system, experiences with voluntary sector homelessness services were more positive. It should however be noted that this was a small sample, most of whom were accessed via two voluntary sector organisations who kindly assisted with the research, and therefore cannot be considered necessarily representative of all young Black people's experiences with voluntary sector homelessness services. Nonetheless, it is still noteworthy that the experiences reported were overwhelmingly positive. The few negative reports pertained to difficulties gaining support from other voluntary sector organisations before arriving at their current organisation. The voluntary sector compensated to at least some extent for the shortcomings of local authorities by attending to the emotional needs of young Black people arising from the affective nature of homelessness as not just a lack of housing but an experience of emotional turmoil (Somerville, 2013). Experiences of voluntary sector services were comparatively better not only because these seemed more adequately and appropriately resourced to meet the needs of young people, but also because the scope of their capacities and remit allowed for a more holistic approach. That is to say that whilst local authorities were focused only providing accommodation within the confines of their statutory duties, voluntary sector organisations additionally focused on providing for the person as a whole by offering help with employment, education, substance abuse, mental health, and opportunities to socialize with peers so that young people could regain a sense of normalcy.

## Views on the current housing crisis

There was a consensus regarding the existence of a 'housing crisis' in London (Watt, 2020, Gleeson, 2022), but participants felt the effects differentially. Some were acutely aware that soaring rents and limited social housing were making it harder for them to live in London. Specifically, they expressed concerns that they'd no longer being able to afford living in London, would be unable to pay rent without support or would have to look into the PRS as the prospect of obtaining social housing looked unlikely. Indeed, social housing appears increasingly difficult to obtain but remains desirable because of the high cost of private renting. Others felt that although they weren't currently affected by the crisis due to living in accommodation

where they did not have to pay rent, they could foresee being effected in the future when affordability of rent might become important.

Stakeholders echoed these perspectives noting that the fact the housing crisis is affecting people who aren't homeless or at risk further reinforces just how devastating it is for vulnerable young homeless Black people. Further to this, they noted that young homeless people may be discriminated against during their search for accommodation due to their relatively low income and lack of guarantors whilst young Black people may also experience racial discrimination in this process.

Thinking about effects of racism on experiences of the housing crisis, Blackness was considered as something that might potentially have an impact but often spoken of in the abstract. In other words, some participants reflected on how the housing crisis might negatively impact Black people as a category rather than discussing whether this was the case for them as individuals. This meant expressing an awareness that Black people due to typically lower economic position may experience worse effects of the crisis and that they may be racially discriminated against during their search for housing. Such awareness could be understood as a Du Boisian double consciousness defined as when Black people are cognizant of their race as a negative marker attached to them in a White dominated society (Du Bois, 1903).

## Homelessness, belonging and the racialisation of place

The concept of belonging was used in this study as a potential means of concretising and understanding young Black people's relationship to place and placelessness with a sense of 'non-belonging' conceived of as potentially signifying placelessness. Young Black people overwhelmingly articulated a strong sense of belonging in London, referencing living in and interacting with an ethnically diverse community as a large part of why they felt able to belong. By contrast, they felt less able to belong outside London which was perceived as not offering this community believing that in areas without the same level of minority presence they may be subject to racial othering. It seemed that ethnic diversity functioned to minimize the significance of one's own minority status so that young Black people did not 'stick out' and thus could belong.

The existence of social networks in the city also greatly contributed to the ability to belong. In this sense then young Black people did not experience placelessness as non-belonging nor did they seem to have their sense of belonging reduced by homelessness. That the young Black people described the importance of interacting with their ethnically diverse, and particularly Black, communities to their sense of belonging suggests young Black people shaped racialised place by maintaining the multicultural character of the city simply through reproducing Black and minority ethnic social networks in their everyday interaction (Massey, 1991).

For some, negative experiences of place due to violence and homophobia respectively soured feelings towards the city. Nevertheless, these participants remained tethered to the city almost against their will which could suggest placelessness insofar as the nature of the city meant one could not freely identify with it. In other words, for these participants belonging was imposed by the city for this place had shaped them as they'd grown up there but in the negative interactions that had shaped them came a sort of disidentification with this place.

Participants were asked to describe their ideals of home as a means of understanding their relationship to place. Their ideals of home tended to address the deficiencies of homelessness such as instability, lack of privacy and safety concerns. Notable was the desire for a place of one's own that arose in these ideals. This can be thought of as a dominant theme that characterised homelessness as a state of yearning arising from conflict between ideals and reality. This conflict became further evident in young Black people's concerns about the attainability of these ideals including potential racial discrimination that might hinder earning power and displacement from the city due to ever increasing rents. Although they had a sense of belonging in the city, placelessness arose in this yearning. We might understand this yearning alongside concerns

about attainability in the context of a governing logic of dispossession organising Black life in space and place (McKittrick, 2006). That is to say the conditions of London as a place that leave young Black people more likely to be homeless and yearning for a place of their own suggest the racialization of place as the domination of such harmful conditions over Black lives.

#### Recommendations

A range of the findings of this study have implications for approaches to tackling homelessness amongst young Black people.

First, one striking point to emerge is that, in many ways, young Black people are not a unique group with experiences distinct from other young homeless people. Their causes for becoming homeless aren't so different from other youth nor is their experience of homelessness as instability. Blackness largely played the role in these experiences of potentially accelerating the risk and harm of homelessness whether through perceived racial discrimination in interactions with local authorities or in the context of the broader systemic racism and economic and social disadvantage that leaves Black people disproportionately affected by homelessness (Bramley *et al.*, 2022). As such, it would not make sense to formulate responses to the experiences revealed in this report that treat young Black people as a category with specialist needs in need of specialist services. To do so would be to treat Blackness as a deficiency in need of treatment due to the unique disadvantages it causes and in turn reify racist ideology of Black people's inherent inadequacy. Rather, what the findings in this study reveal is a need for responses that address the structures which drive homelessness amongst young Black people and to ensure that service responses work appropriately for both young Black people and other young people who become homeless.

Second, given that homelessness is the result of a destabilising event often within the family then, pre-16 intervention and long-term preventative interventions are necessary to ensure that when such events occur people are able to recover quickly enough to avoid homelessness. As suggested by stakeholders, this should involve long-term support for families so that they remain able to care for their children. In the event of relationship breakdown in the home, reconciliatory processes for involved parties - where safe to do so - might also help to ensure young Black people are able to maintain support networks even if they are unable to live with their family or members of their network. In this context, plans to pilot 'Upstream' style school-based homelessness prevention interventions in several parts of England, as well as in Scotland, are especially welcome.

Third, where young people do become homeless, or remain at risk, there is a need for holistic solutions that are attentive to young Black homeless people's needs beyond obtaining suitable accommodation. Holistic solutions refer to measures that are attentive to the person as a whole who experiences homelessness as not just material lack but also emotional needs. While my findings indicate that the voluntary sector services are picking up these wider needs far more than the statutory sector – via social and mental health support, substance abuse rehabilitation, and educational and employment support - stakeholders noted that with insufficient resources the sector is struggling to meet need. The voluntary sector, and even more the statutory service, evidently have to ration resources to such an extent that it is negatively affecting provision. This is particularly evident in the overwhelmingly negative experiences of the statutory process. Successful implementation of holistic solutions requires above all else greater resources being available to service providers. While the voluntary sector seems, at present, better able to respond in a holistic way to young Black people's needs this should not absolve the state of responsibility for ensuring that these needs are met either via direct provision or through adequately resourcing voluntary organisations.

A final broader point to make relates to the findings on the racialisation of place whereby the conditions of the city leave young Black people more likely to be homeless and yearning for a place of their own. This demonstrates a need for service provision to include attentiveness to the outcomes a racialised distribution of harm produces for Black people in London. That is to say, as suggested by one of the stakeholders, that young Black people's experiences of homelessness should be understood in the context of broader racial disadvantage that might make it difficult to recover from destabilising events. If we know, for example, that

Black families are more likely to privately rent their homes - 36% of Black African, 36% of Black other and 20% of Black Caribbean compared to 16% of White Brits (MHCLG in Rogaly, 2021) - and thus are more likely to be affected by rising rents in London then relationship breakdown leading to homelessness might be understood in the context of an increasing financial burden on Black families that may strain relationships. Following this, racialised income inequalities might make it harder for young Black people to access affordable housing (Rogaly, 2021) when the family home is no longer viable. Indeed, such structural context counters the notion of inherent Black deficiency and reasserts the need for interventions that respond to structures that cause homelessness rather than just to the symptoms of homelessness like simply lacking shelter.

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# **Appendix 1: Key Informant Topic Guide**

#### About the research

Nature and purpose of research: study into young Black homeless people's experiences in London, exploring the idea of place and how we relate to places, interviews with young people and key informants Study conducted by I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University and funded by the Oak Foundation. Participation is anonymous – individuals or organisations will not be identified in research outputs Any questions?

Start recording and confirm consent on record

#### Introduction

Job title/role. How long in that position/organisation? Specific involvement in homelessness Aims of organisation?

#### Youth homelessness and service provision

Key trends in youth homelessness levels and why? Probe:

Trends in subgroups: race, types of homelessness,

What is the profile of people facing homelessness, has this changed significantly in the last few years? Nature/complexity of need

Changes if any in triggers for/drivers of homelessness? Probe:

PRS, relationship breakdown, family finances

What kind of issues are young people reporting/can be seen? Probe:

Access to housing, experiences of statutory homelessness process, types of accommodation offered, belonging, surveillance

What provisions does your organisation offer? How adequate (generally) is current provision for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

#### Housing crisis and policy

Explain my understanding of housing crisis: concept frequently heard in the media, combination of lack of social housing, high rents and house prices, high cost of living, refers to increasing issues over at least the past 5 years

How if at all has this crisis affected homelessness? What affects are expected in the next year?

In your view, what is it about London that makes it the epicenter of the crisis? Probe:

What kind of goals is the city geared towards? What interests are at the forefront of city management? How has London changed?

In your view, is the government doing enough to combat the crisis? Why/why not? What do they need to do?

#### Future role of homelessness organisations

What, if any, changes in provisions might your organisation need to make?

Is there anything else I've missed/should've asked/you'd like to add

Thanks.

End.

# **Appendix 2: Research Participant Topic Guide**

#### About the research

- Nature and purpose of research: study into young Black homeless people's experiences in London, exploring the idea of place, belonging and how we interact with places
- Study conducted by I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University and funded by the
- Oak Foundation. Participation is anonymous individuals will not be
- identified in research outputs
- Confidentiality responses are anonymous, you will not be named or
- identifiable in research outputs
- Do not have to share anything you don't wish to. Free to stop at any time.
- Any questions?
- Permission to record
- Start recording and confirm consent on record.

### **Introduction - How are you today?**

#### **Current living situation**

- Where in London are you living at the moment?
  - Have you always lived in London? If not, where else have you lived? [Or where you would you say you are 'from'?]
- Where do you live at the moment? Anyone else with you? [Probe with parents, hostel, sofa surfing, rented flat etc.)
- How did you access this accommodation?
  - O Do you think your race had an impact on this process?
- Living with anyone else
  - o Partners, children, siblings
- How long have you been living there? How long can you stay there? Probe: concerns about sustainability
- Are you happy with your accommodation? What are its pros and cons?
  - Condition, size, facilities, landlord, temp accommodation management, location, neighbourhood/community
  - Compared to previous accommodation
- Working/studying/training at the moment?
- Can I ask if you are on any benefits? If so which ones?

#### Housing and homelessness history

- Living situation before current accommodation?
  - o Pros and cons?
  - o How long were you there?
- What prompted the move? leave by choice, forced to move?
- Where were you living before that?
  - o Pros and cons?
  - o How long were you living there?

#### Homelessness

- Have you ever experienced homelessness or other severe housing
- challenges? [probe ever slept rough, stayed with friends/family because you had no home of your own, lived in overcrowded /unsafe/poor living conditions]
  - o [If relevant] What was the best/worst thing about these situations? How did they affect you? Did you consider yourself homeless at the time? Why/why not?
- [Only ask if responses to the above indicate they may be homeless (eg are sofa surfing)] Would you consider yourself homeless at the moment? Why/why not?

- Have you applied to your local authority as homeless at any point?
  - Outcome of application?
  - Experience of application process? Difficulties?
  - Did you feel your race had any effect on the process? What race/ethnicity were the people you encountered during this process?
  - o Would you have been treated differently if you weren't Black?
- Have you received support from anywhere else i.e., organisations, friends, family, partner?
  - o Did you feel your race had any effect on the support? Anyone you know effected?
  - o Difference from local authorities?
- Is support from LA/organisations/others adequate? Why/Why not?
- Has your experience of homelessness lead to any encounters with the police? Do you know of anyone for whom this is the case? If yes: o Frequency, location of encounters
  - Did you feel being Black had any effect on these encounters?

### Place and belonging

- Is there anywhere in London you'd say you're from/ where did you grow up/ feel from any particular area at all? Have you moved around much?
- What do you like about those places?
- Push factors away from where you're from? Pull factors to where you live now?
- Why do you/don't you associate with any particular part of London?
- Family, friends, dangers, ethnic background of people in the area, moved around a lot
- Do you feel a sense of belonging in London? Why/why not? o Has that changed in recent years?
- Does being Black impact this belonging? Have you experienced hostility towards this belonging because of your race?
- Probe: connection to community, maintaining relationships
- Do you wish to stay in London? Why/why not?
- Difficulties staying? Has your ability to live in London changed in the last few years?
- Does being Black impact wanting to leave/stay?
- You hear a lot about the housing crisis in London i.e., high rents, insecure tenancies, lack of social housing, cost of living crisis. Do you think this has impacted your experience of securing housing? How, if so?
- Does this impact Black people in any specific ways? Do the experiences of non-Black/white people differ in any way?

#### **Housing aspirations**

- What would be ideal accommodation for you [and your family/household if relevant]?
- Tenure [Probe: PRS? Social housing? Ownership?]
- Cost? [Probe: what would be affordable?]
- Location? Why? Probe: community, ethnicity, local connection, intrigue
- Space? Probe: large, apartment, house, bedrooms,
- In your view, is this ideal attainable? Why/why not?
- What factors do you think are preventing you from achieving this ideal? Probe: Income, rents, education level, government policy, local authorities
- Is there anything about being Black that affects this attainability?
- What is most important in making you feel at home?

#### **Ending and Thank you for taking part**

Age? Ethnicity? If it hasn't come up

[If early questions didn't elicit much] Can you describe a typical day in the life for you? What are your plans now? Are you getting support?

Is there anything further you'd like to say about race and belonging?



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**Published July 2024** 

I-SPHERE, Heriot Watt University

ISBN: 978-1-9161385-6-8

