

Working and homeless in Wales: exploring the interaction of housing and labour market insecurity



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CONTEXT

- Moving homeless adults into paid work is often considered an important part of the 'solution' to homelessness (Warnes and Crane, 2000; McNaughton, 2008).
- However, work does not always offer the means to escape poverty and housing insecurity (Ray et al. 2014; Hough et al., 2014; Scullion et al. 2018).
- Increasing concern about 'in-work homelessness' (Chakraborty, 2016).
- Recent surveys of the homelessness sector (Homeless Link, 2015, 2016) suggest that 9% of homeless service users are in employment (1/5 of young people living in homeless accommodation).
- New research from Shelter found that 55% of homeless families in temporary accommodation are in work (73% increase since 2013)
- Extent and nature of in-work homelessness is underexplored in the literature to date.

STUDY DETAILS

- Post-implementation evaluation of Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 (published 2018, final report here > <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2018/180719-post-implementation-evaluation-homelessness-legislation-final-en.pdf>)
- 154 interviews across 6 local authority areas with people presenting to their local authority as homeless (or at risk of homelessness)
- Interviews conducted October 2016-January 2017 in local authority offices, hostels, shelters, phone interviews.
- Main aim: gain knowledge about their lived experiences of accessing and navigating services and experiences of prevention and pathways to support (including views on perceived gaps in/benefits of support)
- **NB: In-work homelessness not a key focus of this research**

IN WORK AND HOMELESS: SAMPLE DETAILS

| AGE | GENDER | HOUSEHOLD TYPE | ETHNICITY & NATIONALITY | HOUSING SITUATION | WORK SITUATION |
|-----|--------|----------------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| 20 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Sofa surfing | Variable income (Zero hours contract) |
| 56 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | B&B | No details |
| 40 | M | LONE PARENT | WHITE, BRITISH | Private renting | Recently started new job (working before) |
| 27 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Rough sleeping and sofa-surfing | Agency work |
| 22 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Social renting | Low pay |
| 28 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Sofa surfing/sleeping in car | Just started a new job |
| 47 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Social renting (recently sofa surfing/sleeping in car) | Full time, support worker |
| 32 | F | COUPLE WITH CHILDREN | WHITE, BRITISH | Caravan | Care work and working in a pub, small hours, minimum wage |
| 55 | F | LONE PARENT | WHITE, BRITISH | Private renting | Full-time |
| 35 | F | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | PRS (overcrowding) | Works couple of hours/day to fit around child care |
| 21 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Hostel | Just moved into work |
| 52 | M | LONE PARENT | WHITE, BRITISH | B&B | No details |
| 20 | M | SINGLE | BLACK, BRITISH | Caravan | Full-time |
| 22 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Emergency accommodation | 20 hours/week |
| 35 | M | SINGLE | BLACK, AFRICAN | Hostel | Full time |
| 44 | F | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Living with friend | Full-time, minimum wage, chef |
| 27 | M | SINGLE | WHITE, BRITISH | Sofa-surfing, hotels | Full-time |
| 27 | F | LONE PARENT | WHITE, BRITISH | Stay with family (overcrowding) | No details |

EXPERIENCES OF 'IN WORK HOMELESSNESS' IN WALES

- Many participants struggled to survive on a low income:

[I was] walking from [tent to work] on the dual carriageway. That was a fair distance. It took me about an hour and a half, two hours every day, and sometimes I have a lift back, sometimes I don't. I was getting back, well, home to the field, stinking, smelling of rubbish. I've got nowhere to wash, nowhere to wash my clothes.

- Participants living in hostels found it difficult to cover increases in hostel rent:

I got a job and then it was a big building and the support, you know, you end up paying for the support and it was a lot. Unless I was a doctor I couldn't afford to live there.

I'm living in a hostel and I find fulltime job.... This hostel, if you want to stay there you pay £300 a week

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK & HOMELESSNESS

- In most instances, work had not caused a person's homelessness.
- But for some, it prevented them moving out of it, e.g. as housing options were further constrained by their need to get to work
- In particular, a lack of choice in rural areas was exacerbated by poor local transport infrastructure.

I had to take into consideration that I have to get to work, I don't drive so I have to get close to a train station or a bus station and I have to get close to a bus service for my daughter for school

POLICY AND SERVICE PROVISION

*We were offered temporary housing but they **didn't have anything in... [place of work]**. ...I work in a care home where I do late shifts and I also work in a local pub and sometimes I don't finish until 1:00am... So it means that I can't be walking to a couple of villages across and I can't afford taxis because both jobs I have are both minimum wage.*

*They said... if I don't have anywhere to live they can refer me to a hostel, which is the best they can do and I can appreciate that, but you know **when you're working in a professional place and you've got to wear a shirt and tie to work with shoes and ironed and pressed I don't really want to have floor space** - I don't even know if the shoes are still going to be there in the morning do you know what I mean?*

*They asked me where I was staying before and I said at my dad's [200 miles away] and they said that they were going to phone my dad and see if I could stay there, but **if I do that then I'd lose my job**. I can't afford to lose my job.*

GOING IT ALONE

- Many participants felt they were on their own (strategies included sofa-surfing, sleeping in cars/caravans, moving into unsuitable accommodation)

[W]e've actually found a house, even though I don't think it's suitable. It's got no central heating in it and it's got damp in it, my son's got asthma

- Whilst some acknowledged a higher level of 'need' amongst those who were not in work, others resented a lack of support:

I've got to say, the people that are working and in my position where you're a single mum and you're working full-time and you're trying to make ends meet, it's making things worse, you're having to do things off your own back and it's not fair

They're more inclined to house people that are on the dole, or on benefits, and young mums, and druggies, and all that sort of thing.

CONCLUSIONS

- Findings provide further evidence that a significant minority of those experiencing homelessness are in work ($\approx 12\%$ of this purposive (not representative) sample)
- No evidence that paid work is providing the 'solution' to homelessness, 'in-work and homeless' participants struggled to live on low, sometimes precarious incomes
- Hidden homelessness a common response to a lack of support for those who are in employment
- Need for further research which focuses specifically on the experiences of those who are in work and homeless > see upcoming findings from Jones, K et al. '*in-work and homeless in Greater Manchester*' project
- Need to explore full range of situations in which people may be in-work and homeless (recruitment from different sources is crucial)

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