



Centre for  
Homelessness Impact

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# Ethnic inequalities and homelessness in the UK

by Professor Nissa Finney

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## About the author

Professor Nissa Finney is Professor of Human Geography at the University of St Andrews. She has published and taught widely on ethnic inequalities, residential mobility and housing, neighbourhood change and segregation. Nissa is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, former Chair of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Population Geography Research Group, member of the ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) and founding member of the ESRC Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE). On ethnic inequalities, Nissa's work has brought new understandings about differential opportunities and experiences of ethnic groups in residential choices, underlying processes of racism and discrimination, and policy narratives that marginalise groups and places.

## About the Centre for Homelessness Impact

The Centre for Homelessness Impact champions the creation and use of better evidence for a world without homelessness. Our mission is to improve the lives of those experiencing homelessness by ensuring that policy, practice and funding decisions are underpinned by reliable evidence.

### Person-first language

**This report uses person-first language, putting a person before their circumstances. This is to avoid defining an individual by homelessness, which should be a temporary experience.**

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## Foreword

Many myths abound about homelessness. One of the most salient myths is that homelessness affects us all equally. It does not. That saying 'we are all two pay cheques away from homelessness' is simply wrong. The evidence tells us that risks of homelessness are skewed very heavily towards people who experience poverty and adversity, and subsequent trauma, especially in childhood.

Homelessness is therefore a manifestation of inequality: perhaps its most extreme form. This inequality is compounded by ethnic inequality in the United Kingdom. There is significant over-representation of people from ethnic minorities among people experiencing homelessness. Why is this? It is not ethnicity itself that drives the differences in homelessness but the way that different ethnic groups are positioned in society.

The picture is not uniform and varies by both geography and among people from different racial groups. Representation of Black people experiencing homelessness is three times higher than we should expect in the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber, North East and South East England given their population size. People of Mixed ethnicities in the Midlands and in London are significantly over-represented among people impacted by homelessness. And the number of Caribbean or Black people affected by homelessness in Scotland is more than twice the proportion we might expect according to population size.

So what might work to address such stark inequalities? Regrettably, as in so many areas of homelessness, there is a data and evidence void in the UK on ethnicity and homelessness. There is a pressing need for robust evaluation of interventions to relieve and prevent homelessness among people from ethnic minorities.

Evidence from other fields does, however, provide pointers to where we might start. Tackling poverty and underlying disadvantage is one of the most obvious, as is addressing racism and discrimination, focusing on systemic inequalities in housing provision and building trust between people from ethnic minorities who are affected by homelessness and providers of services. It is also important to develop culturally competent and locally specific services and to attend to the specificities of mental ill-health for ethnic minority groups. Lastly it is critical to improve the data infrastructure and evidence base on ethnicity and homelessness. Administrative datasets on homelessness in England and Wales should collect more granular detail on ethnicity, as is the case in Scotland, to enable comparison of outcomes for a wide range of ethnic groups to enable better planning of services.

This policy paper makes an important contribution to the task. Only by generating better evidence can we deconstruct the myths that permeate homelessness. This matters because unless we understand the problem - clearly, accurately and dispassionately - we will be held back from identifying and building support for its solutions.



Dr Ligia Teixeira

Chief Executive, Centre for Homelessness Impact

## Recommendations

1. Governments to bring race equalities approaches into homelessness programmes.
2. UK constituent country governments and local authorities to routinely assess homelessness by ethnic group and build this monitoring into homelessness plans.
3. Research funding to enable inclusion of homelessness in large-scale national surveys together with mixed methods studies, including to provide understanding of experiences of racism.
4. UK Government's Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) programme to pay attention to ethnic differentiation in data linkage and provision, and the Race Disparity Unit to pay attention to homelessness.
5. Consideration to be given to ethnic-specific interventions such as:
  - co-production approaches (e.g. Community Coalitions) to the development of culturally relevant and appropriate local strategies;
  - delivery of services in-place in diverse communities;
  - nurturing of informal support within diverse communities;
  - provision of services in multiple languages other than English;
  - availability of alternative approaches to healing;
  - development of a Racial Equality Toolkit for homelessness practitioners;
  - regular training in anti-racist practice.

## Introduction

Homelessness is a major social concern in the UK<sup>1</sup>, and in a period of political turbulence, health crisis and large increases in the cost of living, risks of exacerbation of homelessness are heightened. This report is concerned with how experience of homelessness differs across ethnic groups in Britain, why this is and what interventions might be appropriate to mitigate a homelessness ethnic penalty. Although there is some understanding of disadvantage in housing faced by ethnic minority groups<sup>2</sup>, scant evidence exists on how homelessness is patterned by race in the UK<sup>3</sup>.

This Policy Paper summarises evidence on rates of homelessness<sup>4</sup> across different ethnic groups and what is known about what might mitigate ethnic inequalities in homelessness. It brings together analysis on homelessness, race equality and data infrastructure policy issues and points to areas for intervention and further research. This paper can inform central and local government<sup>5</sup>, research audiences, service providers and commissioners concerned with the potential disparities in experiences, and impacts of, homelessness amongst people of different ethnicities.

This paper finds stark, regionally specific, ethnic inequalities in homelessness in Britain. It concludes that there is a pressing need for race equality approaches to be brought into homelessness programmes nationally and locally, together with investment to address the void in data and research on race and homelessness in the UK.

<sup>1</sup> As illustrated by the most recent homelessness monitors published by Crisis: Watts et al 2021, Watts et al 2022

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Shankley and Finney (2021); Lukes et al (2019)

<sup>3</sup> CHI EGM (2022)

<sup>4</sup> The available evidence on rates is based predominantly on statutory homelessness data and therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions about how different ethnic groups may be affected by forms of hidden homelessness.

<sup>5</sup> This report is relevant for the Scottish Government Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, Ending Homelessness in Wales High Level Action Plan, the Welsh Government's Expert Review Panel on homelessness, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Ending Homelessness Together homelessness strategy and the UK government's Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy. It is salient for policy action on race equality, including as a response to Inclusive Britain, the UK government's 2022 response to report from the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities, the Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030 and the Welsh Government Race Equality charter.

## Background: ethnicity, race and inequality

Ethnic diversity has always been a characteristic of UK society. However, it is since the large scale immigration of the period following World War II that racial diversity increased significantly in modern times<sup>6</sup>. These were predominantly labour migrations, and predominantly from British colonies or former colonies<sup>7</sup>. Ethnic diversity in contemporary Britain is a colonial legacy.

In the UK, terminology of ethnicity rather than race tends to be used. 'Race' terminology has been critiqued for implying fixed, biologically-driven differences between people. Ethnicity differs conceptually in referring to multifaceted, self-determined identity emanating from cultural, religious and national affiliations.

Tables 1a and 1b summarise the populations of ethnic groups in Britain for England and Wales (1a) and Scotland (1b) separately<sup>8</sup>. In England and Wales, 78.3 percent of the population is White British and the largest ethnic minority groups are Other White (5.8 percent of the population), Indian (2.8 percent), Pakistani (2.3 percent) and Black African (2.3 percent).

<sup>6</sup> See Lukes et al (2019) for a summary of trends in international migration and how these coincide with changes in housing, migration and citizenship laws

<sup>7</sup> See Byrne et al (2020) for a summary and further references. Available open access at: <https://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/research/publications/ethnicity-and-race-in-the-uk/>

<sup>8</sup> It is necessary to show separate tables for England and Wales and for Scotland because the data are produced by the national statistical offices which use different categories of ethnic group, to reflect the different population compositions and political interests. For example, National Records of Scotland data use a category for 'White Polish' but this is not present in the England and Wales Office for National Statistics Ethnic group categories. Data are presented for the full detail of ethnic group categories.

The distribution of ethnic groups varies considerably between regions: Wales and the North East of England have particularly low proportions of ethnic minorities (7.8 percent and 6.9 percent) and London has particularly high proportions of ethnic minorities (56.6 percent). In London, the largest ethnic minority groups are Other White (14.6 percent of London's population), Black African (7.9 percent), Indian (6.7 percent) and Bangladeshi (3.8 percent). In Scotland (Table 1b) 92 percent of the population are White Scottish/White British<sup>9</sup>. The largest ethnic minority groups are White Other (1.9 percent of Scotland's population), White Polish (1.2 percent), Pakistani (0.9 percent), Indian (0.6 percent) and Chinese (0.6 percent).



<sup>9</sup> In Scottish Official Statistics 'White Scottish' and 'White Other British' are separate ethnic categories.

Table 1a: Ethnic group populations, England and Wales (%)

Country or Region	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Other Asian	Black African	Black Caribbean	Other Black		White & Asian	White & Black African	White & Black Caribbean	Other Mixed	White British	White Gypsy/ Irish Traveller	White Irish	Other White	Arab	Other
England and Wales	1.04	0.59	2.80	2.26	1.29	2.28	1.02	0.22		0.51	0.27	0.52	0.53	78.35	0.03	0.59	5.84	0.43	1.44
England	1.07	0.60	2.93	2.36	1.32	2.37	1.07	0.23		0.52	0.28	0.53	0.54	77.57	0.03	0.61	6.04	0.45	1.49
North East	0.34	0.28	0.67	0.80	0.54	0.85	0.07	0.04		0.34	0.15	0.09	0.21	93.05	0.02	0.15	1.55	0.41	0.45
North West	0.77	0.56	1.66	3.29	0.72	1.47	0.40	0.11		0.30	0.21	0.42	0.30	85.27	0.03	0.49	2.82	0.50	0.69
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.38	0.34	1.29	4.44	0.68	1.00	0.41	0.12		0.43	0.21	0.49	0.31	84.43	0.03	0.32	3.67	0.43	1.04
East Midlands	0.35	0.58	4.09	1.21	0.74	1.56	0.70	0.18		0.34	0.20	0.60	0.25	82.11	0.00	0.46	5.72	0.31	0.60
West Midlands	1.53	0.45	4.37	4.56	0.85	2.25	1.86	0.20		0.48	0.20	0.68	0.35	75.98	0.02	0.54	4.07	0.47	1.11
East	0.59	0.33	1.76	1.48	1.10	1.51	0.56	0.21		0.57	0.34	0.56	0.54	82.57	0.02	0.68	6.15	0.14	0.90
London	3.80	1.40	6.95	3.01	3.60	7.88	3.49	0.72		1.02	0.56	0.89	1.40	43.35	0.02	1.31	14.56	1.03	4.99
South East	0.28	0.54	2.19	1.28	1.37	1.24	0.44	0.12		0.53	0.26	0.36	0.54	83.62	0.06	0.56	5.46	0.29	0.84
South West	0.16	0.28	0.84	0.24	0.70	0.56	0.31	0.07		0.34	0.15	0.40	0.34	89.97	0.03	0.33	4.37	0.18	0.74
Wales	0.39	0.44	0.54	0.44	0.63	0.63	0.19	0.14		0.24	0.12	0.22	0.27	92.20	0.03	0.25	2.33	0.24	0.68

Source: Annual Population Survey, Mid year population estimates, and Census 2011 data; Office for National Statistics. Population estimates by ethnic group, England and Wales (Experimental Statistics) 2019: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/datasets/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupenglandandwales>. Census 2021 ethnic group data were not available at the time of writing. Based on total England and Wales population of 59,439,700. Figures show ethnic group population of the area as a proportion (%) of total area population.

**Table 1b: Ethnic group populations, Scotland (%)**

White: Scottish	84.0
White: Other British	7.9
White: Irish	1.0
White: Gypsy/Traveller	0.1
White: Polish	1.2
White: Other White	1.9
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	0.4
Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British	0.9
Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British	0.6
Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British	0.1
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	0.6
Other Asian	0.4
African Scottish or African British	0.6
Other African	0.0
Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British	0.1
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	0.0
Other Caribbean or Black	0.0
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	0.2
Other ethnic group	0.1

Source: National Records of Scotland Census 2011 Table KS201SC. Based on total population of 5,295,403. Figures show ethnic group population in Scotland as a proportion (%) of total Scottish population.

Socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups in Britain are stark and persistent<sup>10</sup>. Table 2 shows, for example, poverty rates by ethnic group. This matters for understanding homelessness given that poverty is a known correlate of homelessness<sup>11</sup>. It is clear that risk of poverty is unequal across ethnic groups: four in ten Pakistani households, three in ten Bangladeshi households and a quarter of Black African households are in poverty compared to around one in ten White households.

<sup>10</sup> Jivraj and Simpson (2015); Byrne et al (2020)

<sup>11</sup> Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018)

**Table 2: Probability of being poor, by ethnic group**

Ethnic group	% Poor
Pakistani	40.3
Bangladeshi	31.8
Black African	26.6
Black Caribbean	21.5
Mixed	20.8
Other	20.7
Indian	20.3
White Irish	16.7
White British	14.3
Other White	12.5

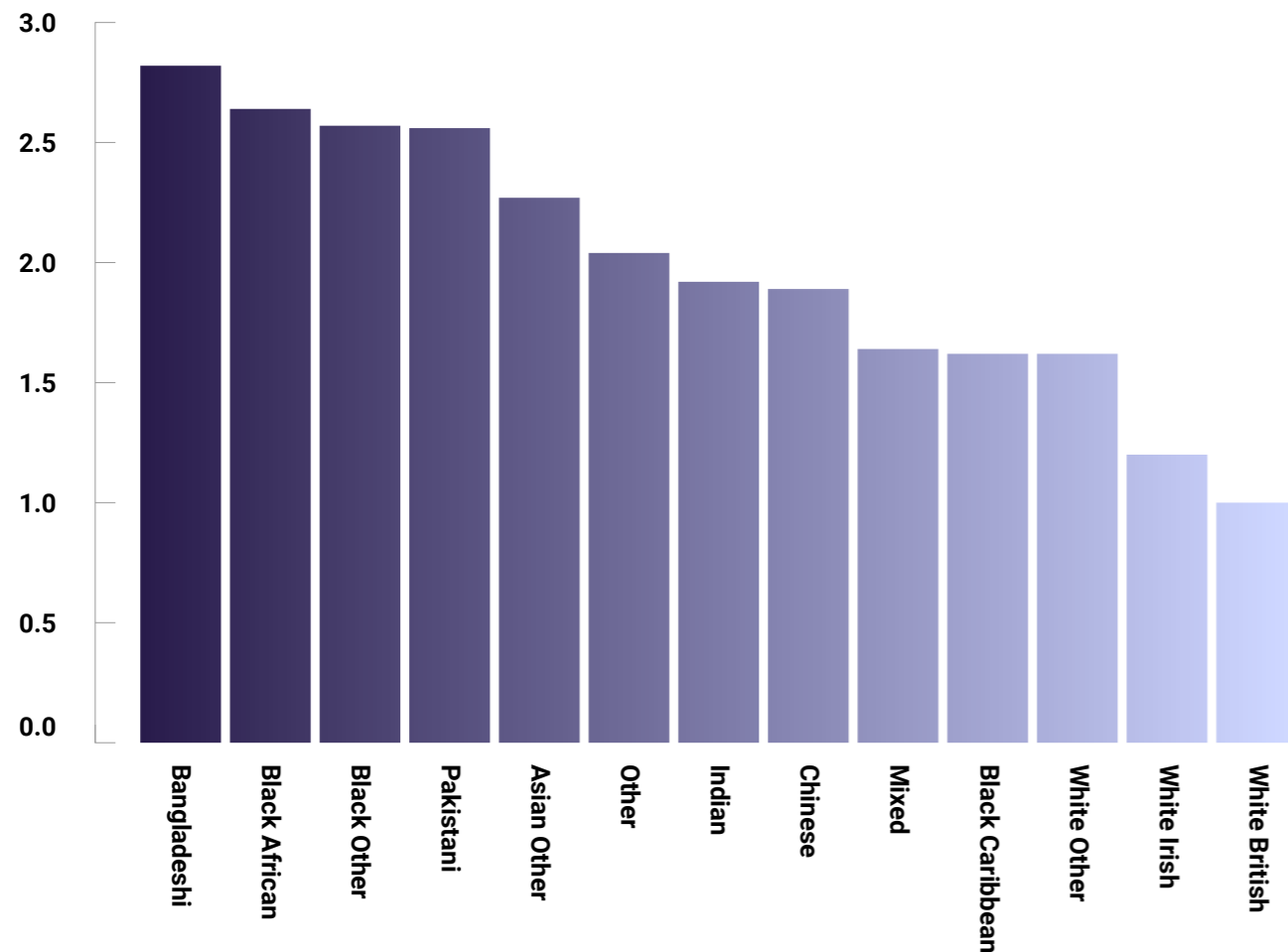
Source: Finney et al (2015) Table 3 using Understanding Society Wave 3 (2011-12) based on samples from UK. Survey respondents were classed as being Poor if their gross equalised household income was less than 60 per cent of the median. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/how-are-poverty-ethnicity-and-social-networks-related>.

Figure 1 shows, for ethnic groups, the likelihood of experiencing housing disadvantage, defined as being overcrowded based on the bedroom standard, having no central heating or sharing a kitchen or bathroom with another household. It demonstrates that all ethnic groups were more likely than the White British to experience housing disadvantage. Bangladeshi, Black African, Black Other and Pakistani were all more than twice as likely as White British to experience housing disadvantage. This includes overcrowding which may be an indication of hidden homelessness in some ethnic minority households<sup>12</sup>. These data illustrate the disadvantages faced by ethnic minority people, and there now exists strong evidence of ethnic inequalities in various life domains that are known correlates of vulnerability to homelessness, including health, employment and housing<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Netto (2006)

<sup>13</sup> For more in-depth presentation of the circumstances of ethnic groups in the UK see Simpson and Jivraj (2015) and Byrne et al (2020).

Figure 1: Likelihood of experiencing housing disadvantage, by ethnic group



Notes: Author's adaptation from Lukes et al (2019). A household is disadvantaged if they are overcrowded based on the bedroom standard, have no central heating or share a kitchen or bathroom with another household. The model controlled for occupational social class and age of the household reference person, tenure of the dwelling, household and accommodation type. Source: Office for National Statistics 2014; 2011 Census Microdata Individual Safeguarded Sample (Regional): England and Wales. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 7605, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN7605-1>. Values can be interpreted as the likelihood of housing disadvantage relative to the White British who have a standardised likelihood of 1. All ethnic groups Odds Ratios are statistically significantly difference from White British, 0.001 level.

## Drivers of ethnic inequalities

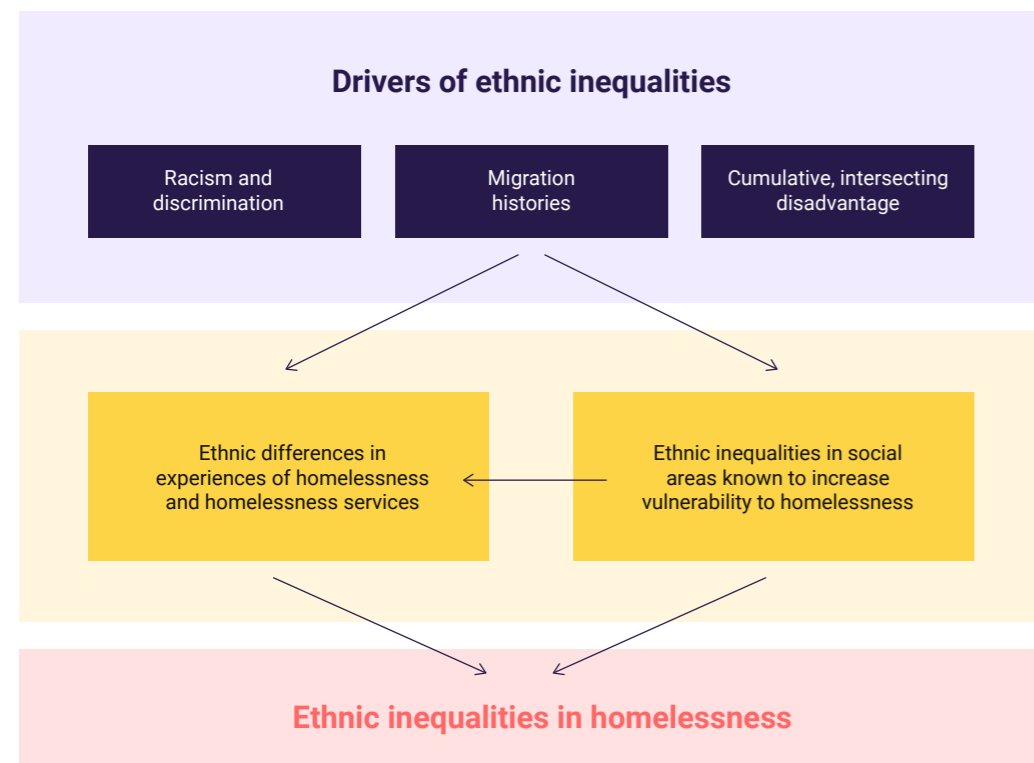
For ethnic minorities, the known pathways to homelessness for the general population operate within the additional context of ethnic inequalities. Thus, it is important to outline the drivers of ethnic inequalities because they are likely also to be drivers of homelessness; understanding their causes enables attentiveness to differential experiences of homelessness across ethnic groups. It is not ethnicity itself that drives the differences in homelessness but the way that different ethnic groups are positioned in society.

The drivers of ethnic inequalities in the UK can be grouped into three broad arenas of explanation: migration history and integration; racism and discrimination; and cumulative, intersecting disadvantage. Migration (immigration) history can shape experiences of homelessness for ethnic minorities for migrants and descendants of migrants (most ethnic minorities in Britain are not immigrants). This is because adapting to a new society can be challenging; building social and economic capital and social embeddedness and navigating new social structures and expectations is demanding. This is particularly the case in the context of experiences of racism and discrimination which often characterise the experiences of ethnic minorities<sup>14</sup>. Socioeconomic and cultural marginalisation intersect and are compounded by racism which manifests as disadvantage for many ethnic minority people in ways that can be cumulative through the life-course and between generations.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes and Shankley (2020); Lawrence (2021)

Much emphasis has been placed in policy responses of recent years on the responsibility of ethnic minorities to integrate and bring themselves out of socio-economic disadvantage<sup>15</sup>. There have also been calls for recognition of and attention to structural racism<sup>16</sup>. Addressing homelessness requires not only individual behaviour change but structural intervention. This is illustrated in Figure 2: ethnic inequalities in homelessness are underpinned by the drivers of broader ethnic inequalities and operate through differential experiences of homelessness and homelessness services, and through the intersection of ethnic disadvantages which increases vulnerability to homelessness.

**Figure 2: conceptual diagram of how drivers of ethnic inequalities shape ethnic differences in homelessness**



<sup>15</sup> Such as: Casey (2016), CRED (2021), Inclusive Britain (2022)

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence (2021); Byrne et al (2020)

## Prevalence of homelessness across ethnic groups

Since the Equalities Act 2010 there has been a duty that any public sector body “must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome”<sup>17</sup>. This requirement necessitates public sector organisations to understand both the inequalities of outcome in relation to its remit and how its operations might exacerbate them. Inequalities are assessed on a number of Protected Characteristics which include race. This has led to a proliferation of ethnic monitoring by public bodies over the last decade, including local authorities and housing providers. Thus, we are able to assess the prevalence of homelessness across ethnic groups.

Table 3 shows, for each region of England, the proportion of the statutory homeless in each ethnic group (percentages owed a prevention or relief duty by a local authority)<sup>18</sup>. For England as a whole, three quarters (75 percent) of statutory homeless are White, 11 percent Black, 7 percent Asian, 4% of mixed ethnic groups and 4% identify with another ethnic group. What is clear from Table 3 is that this distribution of homelessness (duties) across ethnic groups varies considerably across the country with the high proportions of homeless in ethnic minority groups being particularly marked in London.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/1>

<sup>18</sup> Selected indicators of homelessness are presented, for broad ethnic groups. Not all indicators of homelessness in official statistical releases are available with an ethnic group breakdown.

**Table 3: Statutory Homeless, by ethnic group and region of England**

Total owed a prevention or relief duty, by ethnic group (England 2020-21)						
N	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Total
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>189,350</b>	<b>28,400</b>	<b>17,080</b>	<b>17,080</b>	<b>9,330</b>	<b>253,280</b>
London	15,780	15,650	5,880	5,880	3,920	44,530
Rest of England	226,180	12,760	11,200	11,200	5,410	261,370
<b>Region</b>						
North East	14,280	330	390	390	370	15,520
North West	31,400	2,430	2,290	2,290	1,430	38,390
Yorkshire and The Humber	21,710	1,440	1,910	1,910	940	26,680
East Midlands	16,690	1,460	1,280	1,280	390	20,510
West Midlands	16,820	2,600	2,280	2,280	850	23,830
East of England	20,770	1,630	1,160	1,160	420	24,760
<b>Region</b>						
London	15,780	15,650	5,880	5,880	3,920	44,530
South East	28,820	1,890	1,420	1,420	630	33,650
South West	23,080	970	470	470	390	25,440
<b>% of cases in area</b>						
	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>74.8</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>253,280</b>
London	35.4	35.1	13.2	13.2	8.8	44,530
Rest of England	86.5	4.9	4.3	4.3	2.1	261,370
<b>Region</b>						
North East	92.0	2.1	2.5	2.5	2.4	15,520
North West	81.8	6.3	6.0	6.0	3.7	38,390
Yorkshire and The Humber	81.4	5.4	7.2	7.2	3.5	26,680
East Midlands	81.4	7.1	6.2	6.2	1.9	20,510
West Midlands	70.6	10.9	9.6	9.6	3.6	23,830
East of England	83.9	6.6	4.7	4.7	1.7	24,760
<b>Region</b>						
London	35.4	35.1	13.2	13.2	8.8	44,530
South East	85.6	5.6	4.2	4.2	1.9	33,650
South West	90.7	3.8	1.8	1.8	1.5	25,440

Notes: author's calculations based on DLUCH & Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government Official Statistical Release: Statutory Homeless Annual Report, 2021-22, England. Table A8 (Local Authority Detail). Detailed ethnic groups have been aggregated. Those with unknown ethnic group are excluded (9% of total statutory homeless). Table shows percentages owed a prevention or relief duty by a local authority.

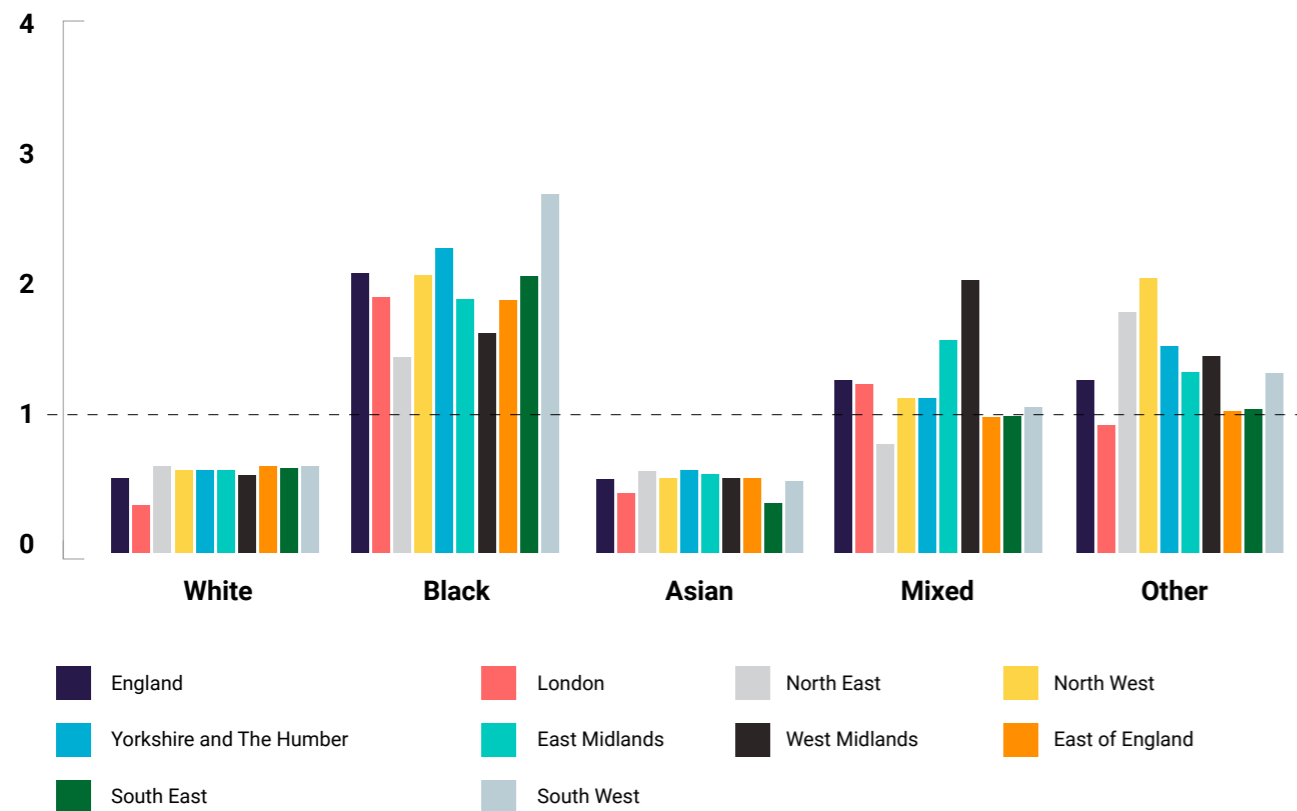
To enable an assessment of whether these differences constitute inequality it is necessary to assess the levels of homelessness in relation to the population size of each ethnic group. This is shown in Table 4 and in Figure 3 which present ratios of statutory homeless (duties) to the population for each ethnic group. Where a value is above 1 this indicates over-representation of that ethnic group among the statutory homeless in that region. Clear ethnic differences are seen: Asian and White populations are under-represented among statutory homeless in all regions of England (with the exception of Asian population in Yorkshire and the Humber where the proportion who are homeless matches the proportion in the population). In contrast, Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups are over-represented among statutory homeless in all regions of England (as indicated by those owed a prevention or relief duty by a local authority). For Black people, over-representation is particularly marked in the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and South East where more than three times the proportion of people than expected according to population size are homeless. For those identifying with Mixed ethnic groups, over-representation among statutory homeless is notable in London and particularly in the East and West Midlands. For those identifying with an Other ethnic group, over-representation among statutory homeless is striking in the North West of England.

**Table 4: Over and under-representation among statutory homeless, by ethnic group and region of England**

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other
<b>ENGLAND</b>	0.90	3.03	0.77	1.90	1.89
<b>London</b>	0.60	2.87	0.68	1.85	1.68
<b>North East</b>	1.00	1.56	0.79	0.90	1.66
<b>North West</b>	0.96	2.58	0.73	1.57	2.71
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	0.95	2.97	0.87	1.85	1.76
<b>East Midlands</b>	0.95	2.44	0.77	2.55	1.78
<b>West Midlands</b>	0.93	2.18	0.72	2.85	1.65
<b>East of England</b>	0.97	2.56	0.74	1.30	1.19
<b>South East</b>	0.96	2.81	0.74	1.63	1.45
<b>South West</b>	0.98	3.23	0.56	1.37	1.26

Note: Author's calculations. Statutory homeless sources as in Table 3; populations as in Table 1a. Calculated for each ethnic group as % statutory homeless (ethnic group as % of cases, by region) divided by % of population (ethnic group as % of population of region). Ratios above 1 indicate over-representation of ethnic group among statutory homeless in the region; ratios below 1 indicate under-representation in relation to population size.

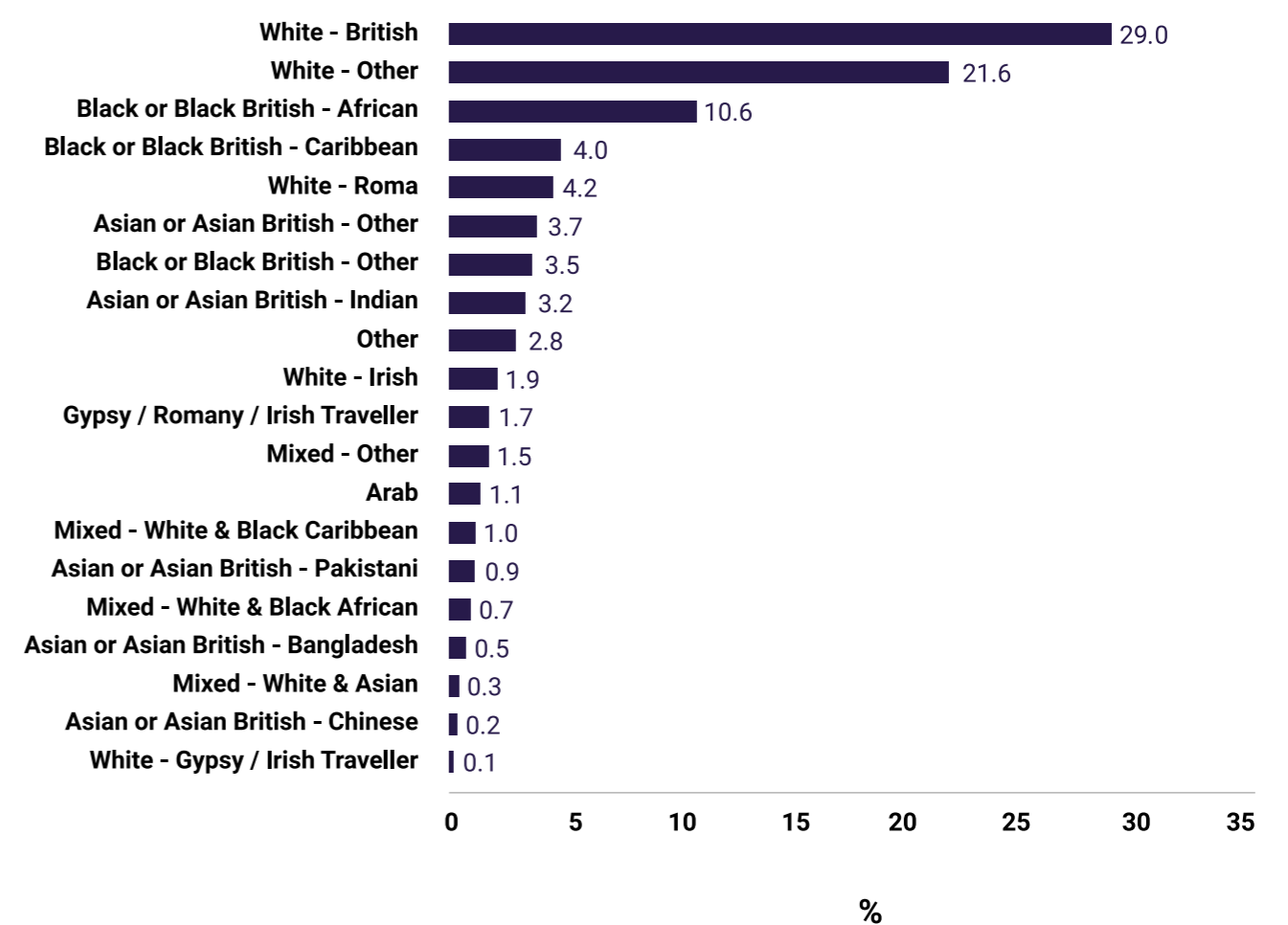
Figure 3: Over and under-representation among statutory homeless, by ethnic group and region of England



Note: Author's calculations. Statutory homeless sources as in Table 3; populations as in Table 1a. Calculated for each ethnic group as % statutory homeless (ethnic group as % of cases, by region) divided by % of population (ethnic group as % of population of region). Ratios above 1 indicate over-representation of ethnic group among statutory homeless in the region; ratios below 1 indicate under-representation in relation to population size.

Data are available for London on the ethnicity of those sleeping rough (Figure 4). The ethnic group distribution of those sleeping rough varies from the ethnic group distribution of London's population (Table 1a): White British and Asian ethnic groups are under-represented among people sleeping rough in London whereas Black African, Caribbean, White Other, Roma and Gypsy Traveller groups are over-represented among people sleeping rough in London.

Figure 4: People seen rough sleeping 2021-22 in Greater London, by ethnic group



Source: Greater London Authority CHAIN Annual report 2021-22. <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>



It is clear that ethnic disadvantage in homelessness is prevalent

Table 5 and Figure 4 show the proportion of people experiencing homelessness by ethnic group for Scotland and the ratio of homeless to population size to indicate which ethnic groups in Scotland are over-represented among those considered to be homeless or threatened with homelessness. Homelessness, here, is indicated by applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. White Scottish, White Other British, White Irish, Asian and Mixed ethnic groups are under-represented among homeless in Scotland. White Other, White Polish, African, Caribbean and those identifying with an Other ethnic group are over-represented among people experiencing homelessness: in Scotland twice the proportion of Caribbean people as would be expected according to their population size are homeless; for Other ethnic groups this is four times the number. Other ethnic groups in Scotland include, for example, Arab, Roma and Gypsy Traveller populations.

It is clear that ethnic disadvantage in homelessness is prevalent, and that the patterns are specific to particular ethnic groups and regions of Britain. Published data are limited in analyses they allow on ethnic groups; it is notable that Scottish data on homelessness offer more information on ethnic groups than is the case for England. For example, Scottish data report trends and causes of homelessness by ethnic group. Analyses (not shown) indicate, in Scotland, the stability of the patterns of ethnic group proportions of homeless over time (since 2002); that street homelessness is most common for White Irish and White Other British; and that Asian households are the most likely to experience homelessness as a results of violent household disputes.<sup>19</sup>

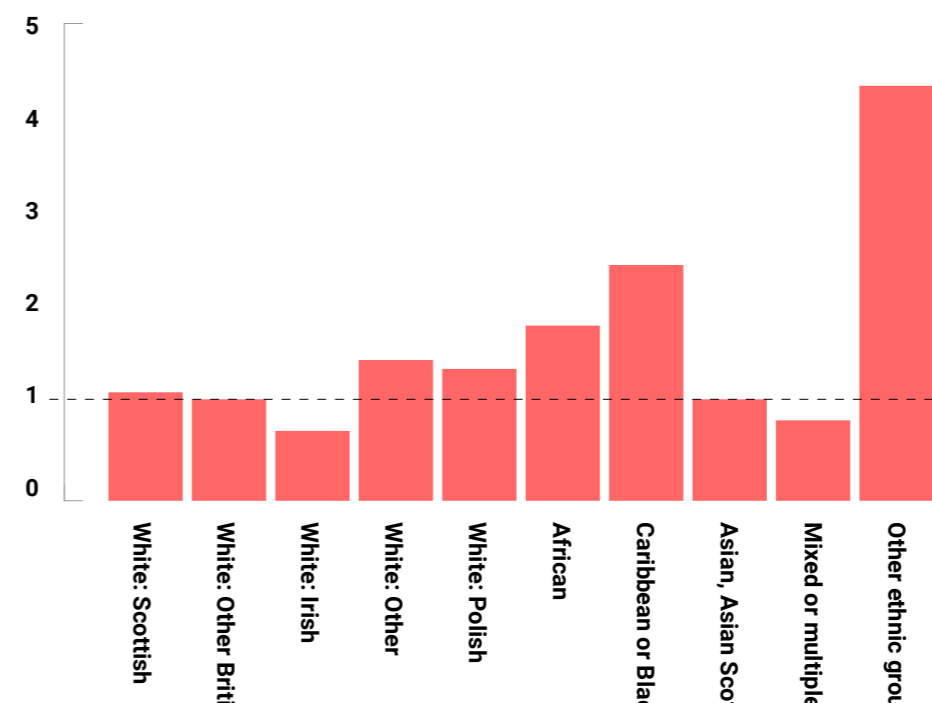
<sup>19</sup> Scottish Government (2022) Homelessness in Scotland: 2020-21 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2021-22/>

**Table 5: Homelessness in Scotland by ethnic group, and over and under-representation**

Ethnic Group	Homeless	% of homeless	% of population	ratio homeless to population
White: Scottish	21064.00	81%	84	0.96
White: Other British	1826.00	7%	7.9	0.88
White: Irish	146.00	1%	1	0.56
White: Other	667.00	3%	2	1.27
White: Polish1	384.00	1%	1.2	1.22
African	262.00	1%	0.6	1.67
Caribbean or Black	60.00	0%	0.1	2.29
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	354.00	1%	1.6	0.85
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	69.00	0%	0.4	0.66
Other ethnic group	1329.00	5%	1.2	4.23

Notes: author's calculations. Homelessness data from Scottish Government Homelessness in Scotland Equalities Breakdown 2020 to 2021, Table 7: Applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. Population data as in Table 1b. Ratio calculated for each ethnic group as % statutory homeless (ethnic group as % of cases, by region) divided by % of population (ethnic group as % of population). Ratios above 1 indicate over-representation of ethnic group among statutory homeless in Scotland; ratios below 1 indicate under-representation in relation to population size.

**Figure 5: Over and under-representation among homeless in Scotland, by ethnic group**



Notes: author's calculations. Homelessness data from Scottish Government Homelessness in Scotland Equalities Breakdown 2020 to 2021, Table 7: Applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. Population data as in Table 1b. Ratio calculated for each ethnic group as % statutory homeless (ethnic group as % of cases, by region) divided by % of population (ethnic group as % of population). Ratios above 1 indicate over-representation of ethnic group among statutory homeless in Scotland; ratios below 1 indicate under-representation in relation to population size.

## Interventions to reduce ethnic inequalities in homelessness

“Factors associated with homelessness for people of colour include barriers to housing and economic mobility, racism and discrimination within homeless services, and involvement in multiple systems, including criminal justice...researchers and policy-makers need to address homelessness with attention to racial justice.”<sup>20</sup>

This section reviews evidence to identify potential solutions and interventions to reduce the incidence of homelessness among ethnic minority people. A comprehensive definition of homelessness is taken, (to include people sleeping rough and statutory homeless<sup>21</sup>). From the review it is evident that there is a paucity of evidence specifically on the effectiveness of homelessness interventions for ethnic minorities<sup>22</sup>, particularly for the UK. Thus, this review draws on evidence from other national contexts and from other sectors of public provision. Seven areas of action are identified: tackling poverty and underlying disadvantage; focusing on systemic inequalities in housing provision; addressing racism and discrimination; building trust in and between communities; developing culturally competent and locally specific services; attending to the specificities of mental ill health for ethnic

<sup>20</sup> Olivet et al 2021, page 82

<sup>21</sup> Following for example Keenan et al, Crisis homelessness monitors. Statutory homeless are those who have had an application to be recognised as homeless or threatened with homelessness accepted by a local authority and are thus legally entitled to advice and assistance free of charge under the provisions of the Housing and Homelessness Acts

<sup>22</sup> Research underway at the CaChE and iSPHERE will begin to address this evidence gap



minority groups; and improving the data infrastructure and evidence base on ethnicity and homelessness.

## Tackling poverty and underlying disadvantage

It has long been recognised that homelessness “is the consequence of a range of social and economic problems, requiring multi-pronged strategies extending beyond the delivery of housing services to address diverse, and often complex, individual needs”<sup>23</sup>. Explanations of homelessness consider structural (social circumstances within social systems) and individualistic (personal vulnerability and behaviours) drivers, and how they work together. Recent reviews have, however, emphasised the need for homelessness interventions to address structural causes of homelessness, and not become overly focused on approaches targeting individuals<sup>24</sup>. Multi-agency interventions addressing systemic as well as individual problems are widely advocated for addressing homelessness generally, including for ethnic minority people.

Recent findings of particular relevance for addressing ethnic inequalities given the disproportionate experience of poverty among ethnic minority groups in Britain, have emphasised poverty as a fundamental driver of homelessness. A study using UK survey data concluded that “homelessness is not randomly distributed across the population, but rather the odds of experiencing it are systematically structured around a set of identifiable individual, social and structural factors most of which, it should be emphasised, are outside the control of those directly affected....action on addressing child poverty ought to be an overriding policy priority in this field<sup>25</sup>”. Poverty is associated with homelessness via, for example, health (physical and mental), access to housing systems and domestic violence.

<sup>23</sup> Netto (2006), page 582

<sup>24</sup> Mackie (2015)

<sup>25</sup> Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018), pages 113-114

Tackling socioeconomic inequalities between ethnic groups is a foundational step to addressing homelessness

The British Cohort Study (1970) has been used to model how poverty intersects with other life circumstances to lead to differential risk of experiencing homelessness and allows a limited analysis of the risk of homelessness for ethnic groups<sup>26</sup>. For example<sup>27</sup>:

- For a white male who had a relatively affluent childhood in the rural south of England, an unproblematic school career, went to university and graduated at 21, who was living with his parents at age 26, with no partner relationship and no children, the predicted probability of homelessness by age 30 is 0.6%.
- For a mixed ethnicity female, who experienced poverty as a child, was brought up by a lone parent, left school or college at 16, had spells of unemployment, and was living as a renter with no partner but with her own children at age 26, the predicted probability of homelessness by age 30 is 71.2%.

Similar conclusions are drawn from studies in the USA. Black adults have been found to be 1.4 times more likely to have been homeless than white adults with most (80 percent) of this inequality in lifetime homelessness explained by Black adults having a greater risk of having experienced traumatic events, having been in prison and having lower incomes, reinforcing the conclusion of the need to address socioeconomic inequalities between ethnic groups as a foundational step to addressing homelessness.

<sup>26</sup> Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) predict homelessness using a range of demographic and socio-economic variables available in the BCS70. The models presented do not show a statistically significant (95% level) relationships between ethnicity and homelessness when co-variables are included. This is likely to be a result of other indicators such as income, employment and health accounting for differences between ethnic groups combined with small sample sizes of ethnic minorities in the survey that mean indicators of statistical significance should be treated with caution.

<sup>27</sup> Examples taken from Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018), page 112.

Examples based on analysis of the British Cohort Study 1970 data for GB 1970-2000. Analysis of more recent experiences of homelessness is not possible with these data as questions on homelessness have not been asked since 2000.



## Focusing on systemic inequalities in housing provision

A recently published international scoping review assessed the evidence for the effectiveness of providing secure, stable and permanent housing for people who have experienced homelessness. It found that “The overriding consensus was that housing stability brings a raft of benefits to formerly homeless individuals and public savings to the community”<sup>28</sup>. A similar conclusion might be drawn from the success of the Covid plans for rapid rehousing<sup>29</sup>. Given the well evidenced ethnic inequalities in housing and housing deprivation<sup>30</sup> this points to a fundamental need to address housing security both to prevent homelessness and to respond to it.

An example of a housing intervention found to be successful for ethnic minorities is a Housing First scheme in Toronto. Randomised Controlled Trials were employed to assess the effectiveness of generalised interventions to address housing stability together with ‘attention to racial justice’. The intervention found that the use of rent supplements, intensive case management, anti-racism and anti-oppression practices improved housing stability and community functioning for ethnic minority people affected by homelessness<sup>31</sup>. Core to the intervention was a ‘participant-driven treatment plan’ within an anti-racist service delivery approach which was based on principles of empowerment, education, advocacy and alliance building. Staff were provided with regular training in anti-racist practice including “breaking the silence about racism, addressing racism and discrimination, and examining power inequalities”<sup>32</sup>. Provision of the service in multiple languages other than English and availability of alternative approaches to healing (such as art and music therapy, Chinese medicine, yoga) were found to be important to the success of the intervention for ethnic minority people.

<sup>28</sup> Carnemolla and Skinner (2021), page 518

<sup>29</sup> Watts et al (2021)

<sup>30</sup> For example, Shankley and Finney (2020), Lukes et al (2019)

<sup>31</sup> Stergiopoulos et al (2015, 2016)

<sup>32</sup> Stergiopoulos et al (2016), page 4



## Addressing racism and discrimination

Racism is endemic to ethnic minority people's experiences of homelessness: in experiences of discrimination in housing systems<sup>33</sup>, in accessing services<sup>34</sup>, in characterising early life experiences and in shaping public perceptions. Experiences of racism can intersect with other disadvantages<sup>35</sup> to compound experiences of homelessness.

A US study found experiences of racism to be prevalent among Black people who experience homelessness. Particularly, experience of overt racial discrimination in early life was common, and structural racism was seen to be a factor in causing homelessness and perpetuating it<sup>36</sup>. A Canadian study of older people formerly impacted by homelessness in supportive housing found that "those belonging to minority groups experienced exclusion based on their identities"<sup>37</sup> with verbal harassment being a common experience.

Racism in wider society may contribute to negative perceptions of ethnic minority people who experience homelessness particularly given that "victim blaming is an area in which much of Western society excels"<sup>38</sup> although in the USA it has been found that Black and male persons experiencing homelessness are perceived as more dangerous, but not more blameworthy. Nevertheless, perceived dangerousness and blameworthiness both led to a desire to socially distance from ethnic minority people affected by homelessness<sup>39</sup>. In the UK, it has been found that stigmas of homelessness and ethnicity can together reinforce negative perceptions and experiences<sup>40</sup>.

There is limited evidence on how experiences of racism in the UK affects risks of homelessness, experiences of homelessness or interventions to reduce homelessness. This is a notable evidence gap given the prevalence of racism and its known detrimental effects<sup>41</sup>.

33 Verissimo et al (2021)

34 Kapadia et al (2022)

35 Verissimo et al (2021)

36 Paul et al (2020)

37 Burns et al (2020), page 304

38 Dorling (2020), page 7

39 Markovitz et al (2021)

40 Reilly and Williamson (2022)

41 See Byrne et al (2020)



## Building culturally competent and locally specific services

It has been identified that, for people experiencing homelessness, barriers to accessing services include "lack of access to culturally competent services, experience of judgement and stigma in places of care, and fear and distrust of providers"<sup>42</sup>. In a context of ethnic socio-economic inequalities and higher risks of poverty, systemic housing disadvantage for ethnic minorities, and widespread experience of racism, the evidence points to the need for homelessness interventions that are culturally competent and locally specific. Four elements of these interventions can be highlighted: paying attention to the local contexts of interventions; generating informal social support in-place; building trust in communities; and implementing meaningful consultation and engagement.

A number of studies point to the need to tailor interventions to particular localities, and to be attentive to the population and social dynamics of places so as to better understand needs and implement initiatives directly. This may be particularly pertinent for ethnic minority communities in the UK which tend to be geographically clustered<sup>43</sup> including in large urban centres in London and the Midlands where there are notably high rates of homelessness for some ethnic minority groups. "People need practical help and support to prevent homelessness or to rapidly end homelessness should they experience it"<sup>44</sup> and this is often best delivered in-place. The example of Ladies Night for women affected by homelessness in San Francisco that offered services through a regular drop-in service<sup>45</sup>. Success of this initiative, including for ethnic minority women, was the provision of the service in the place where the women were, which aided the building of trusting and respectful relationships.

In allocation of housing for ethnic minorities, it is important to recognise that "accommodation in housing and areas perceived to be safe from racial harassment was an important consideration for people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities"<sup>46</sup>; risk of experiences of racism and further marginalisation should be taken into account in accommodation offers.

42 Magee et al (2008), page 119

43 Catney (2020)

44 Pleace (2019), page 5

45 Magee et al (2008)

46 Netto (2006), page 593

A strong vein of evidence relates to the importance of informal social support both for preventing homelessness and supporting people who experience homelessness<sup>47</sup>. In the UK there has been found to be a lack of informal support for those who are affected by homelessness and socially isolated such as new migrants including asylum seekers and refugees, and ethnic minority people (overwhelmingly women) fleeing domestic abuse<sup>48</sup>. Social relationships are known to buffer homelessness; interventions to develop support networks within communities are to be advocated<sup>49</sup>. Among people experiencing homelessness, 'peer navigators' within the community have been found to be beneficial for homeless people to navigate support systems including housing and health care<sup>50</sup>.

In many areas of service provision a challenge lies in overcoming mistrust in services and service providers from communities who are excluded and where experiences of racism – historically and presently – predominate. An extensive systematic review of the success of accommodation-based homelessness interventions found that “for those implementing programmes, it was important to invest time in developing a culture together to build trust and solid relationships... staff need time to develop trust and relationships with services users”<sup>51</sup>.

In a UK context, outreach work is advocated as an important approach for serving groups that are not accessing services<sup>52</sup> and, more generally, engagement and consultation with service users is encouraged. Recent initiatives have considered co-production approaches in which service users are actively engaged in the development of policies and initiatives thereby developing interventions that are appropriate and, through the process, building trust and receptiveness in communities<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, 'Community coalitions' have been found to be effective in addressing racial exclusion in homelessness<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Cummings et al (2022)

<sup>48</sup> Netto (2006), Bowstead (2015)

<sup>49</sup> Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018)

<sup>50</sup> Hargrave (2021), SPARC programme, USA

<sup>51</sup> Keenan et al (2021), pages 2-3

<sup>52</sup> Netto (2006)

<sup>53</sup> Archer and Anton (2022)

<sup>54</sup> Parsons et al (2021)

A project in Richmond City, Virginia, USA sought to build partnerships from existing community leadership, with housing and health providers, service users and academics with the aim of developing and implementing culturally relevant and appropriate local strategies. An important element of the coalition was training members on how race inequalities (together with gender and age) affect housing (and health) outcomes including the use of a Racial Equality Toolkit<sup>55</sup> to train coalition members in how unintended consequences, bias, and discrimination can be present in the structures and mechanisms of housing services.



<sup>55</sup> Nelson et al (2016)

## Attending to the specificities of mental ill health for ethnic minority groups

It has been established, in the UK and elsewhere, that for an identifiable group of those experiencing homelessness mental ill-health is a significant driving factor<sup>56</sup>. If we take this together with knowledge of higher risk of mental ill-health for some ethnic minority groups,<sup>57</sup> this points to a need to specifically focus attention on how mental ill-health can be a cause and consequence of homelessness for ethnic minorities in Britain. In the USA, the SPARC programme found that barriers to culturally informed mental health care contributed to increased rates of homelessness among ethnic minority people<sup>58</sup>. Other studies have found that ethnic minority homeless people “experience additional barriers in accessing appropriate and timely housing and mental health care”<sup>59</sup>. Stigma relating to ethnicity and homelessness has been found to have intersecting detrimental effects on mental health<sup>60</sup>. A recent review by the NHS Race and Health Observatory found “clear barriers to seeking help for mental health problems rooted in a distrust of both primary care and mental health care providers, as well as a fear of being discriminated against in healthcare”<sup>61</sup>. Insufficient evidence exists about the associations between mental ill-health, mental health care and homelessness for ethnic minorities in Britain.



<sup>56</sup> England et al (2022)

<sup>57</sup> Kapadia et al (2022)

<sup>58</sup> Hargrave (2021); see also Olivet et al (2021)

<sup>59</sup> Stergiopoulos et al (2015), page 2

<sup>60</sup> Reilly and Williamson (2022)

<sup>61</sup> Kapadia et al (2022), page 4

## Improving the data infrastructure and evidence base on ethnicity and homelessness

There are two reasons for the paucity of evidence on the relationship between ethnicity and homelessness in Britain: lack of attention within policy and research, and data deficiencies that deter detailed analysis. On the former, this review seeks to raise ethnicity and homelessness up the policy and research agenda. On data deficiencies, it is important for homelessness and ethnicity to be well-considered in wider initiatives to improve homelessness data quality and data linkage.

The data presented in this review, and used in the studies considered, are sufficient for evidencing ethnic inequalities but they have many deficiencies. Administrative datasets have insufficient geographical detail for local service planning. Lack of harmonisation across UK constituent countries can pose challenges for comparison. For England and Wales, standard reporting of homelessness and ethnicity through equalities monitoring is limited. In Scotland there are richer data allowing analysis for a wide range of ethnic groups, for change over time and for a number of indicators of homelessness and ethnicity including causes of homelessness.

A clear problem, with administrative data and particularly with survey data, is the invisibility of some populations including Roma and Gypsy Traveller groups<sup>62</sup>. Likewise, insufficient detail can be garnered for Other and Mixed groups which is problematic given the high rates of homelessness among these populations. The evidence base needs to bring together improved quantitative data with qualitative research and testimony including practitioner expertise and experiences of ethnic minority homeless people.

<sup>62</sup> De Noronha (2022)

## Conclusion

The evidence reviewed shows stark ethnic inequalities in homelessness in Britain. While over-representation of ethnic minorities among those who are statutory homeless is the case across the country, this is particularly marked for Black people in English regions in the south (South West, South East, London) and north (Yorkshire and the Humber, North West); people of Mixed ethnicities in the Midlands (and also in London, the North West and Yorkshire and Humber); and people in the Other ethnic group in the North West of England. In Scotland twice the proportion of Caribbean people as would be expected according to their population size are homeless; for Other ethnic groups this is four times the number. The levels of, and geographical variation in, ethnic inequalities in homelessness suggest that UK constituent country governments and local authorities should routinely assess homelessness by ethnic group and build this monitoring into homelessness plans.

Seven areas of intervention have been identified from a review of evidence: tackling poverty and underlying disadvantage; focusing on systemic inequalities in housing provision; addressing racism and discrimination; building trust in and between communities; developing culturally competent and locally specific services; attending to the specificities of mental ill health for ethnic minority groups; and improving the data infrastructure and evidence base on ethnicity and homelessness. Overall, there is a need for governments to bring race equalities approaches into homelessness programmes.

Racism within structures and mechanisms of service provision was a strong theme in the evidence review. In the UK, there is limited evidence specifically on how experiences of racism affect risks of being homeless, experiences of homelessness or interventions to reduce homelessness. This is a notable evidence gap.

In the context of poor data and evidence we can look to approaches to race and homelessness in other countries, and in the UK to how ethnic inequalities in other services are being approached. Examples have been seen from homelessness interventions in the US and in access of ethnic minorities to healthcare in the UK. In general, it has been found to be important to pay attention to the local contexts of interventions, to generate and nurture informal social support in-place in diverse communities, and to develop meaningful consultation and engagement. Examples of successful ethnic-specific interventions include co-production approaches and 'Community Coalitions', provision of services in multiple languages other than English, availability of alternative approaches to healing, use of Racial Equality Toolkits and training in anti-racist practice. What works for all also works for ethnic minorities but there is a need for targeted initiatives if ethnic minority over-representation in homelessness is to be redressed.

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