

'Hidden in Plain Sight' :
Homelessness Amongst Lesbian
and Gay Youth

William O'Connor & Donna Molloy

'Hidden in Plain Sight' :
Homelessness Amongst Lesbian and
Gay Youth

William O'Connor & Donna Molloy

November 2001

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY PRACTICE

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Background and objectives of the study.....	1
1.2	Scope of the research.....	1
1.3	Project Advisory Group	2
1.4	Research Strategy	2
	<i>Stage 1 – Review of existing literature</i>	2
	<i>Stage 2 – Area visits</i>	2
	<i>Stage 3 – Consultation with organisational representatives</i>	3
	<i>Stage 4 – Depth interviews with young people</i>	3
	<i>Stage 5 – Workshops with organisational representatives</i>	3
1.5	Sample design.....	3
1.5.1	Sample of organisational representatives.....	3
1.5.2	Stage 4 sample and recruitment.....	4
1.6	Conduct of the research	6
1.7	Data analysis.....	7
1.8	The use of qualitative data.....	7
1.9	The structure of the report.....	8
2	OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	9
2.1	Research on youth homelessness.....	9
2.1.1	The nature of youth homelessness	11
2.1.2	Causes of youth homelessness	12
2.1.3	Vulnerabilities faced by Homeless young people.....	13
	<i>Problems relating to background and childhood</i>	14
	<i>Dangers of the ‘homelessness scene’</i>	15
2.2	Research on Lesbian and Gay Youth	15
2.2.1	Estimating the prevalence.....	16
2.2.2	The causes of homelessness.....	17
	<i>Homophobia</i>	17
	<i>Mental health</i>	18
	<i>The nature of lesbian and gay communities</i>	19
	<i>The support for lesbian and gay relationships</i>	19
	<i>Differences related to gender or ethnicity</i>	20
2.2.3	Experiences of homelessness.....	20
3	PATTERNS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONGST LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH.....	23
3.1	Patterns of housing crisis	23
3.2	Types of departure from ‘home’	24
3.3	The causes of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth.....	26
3.3.1	Factors causing housing crisis linked to sexuality	27
	<i>Intolerance of sexuality at home</i>	27

	<i>Expectation of intolerance.....</i>	29
	<i>Bullying by peers in school or neighbourhood.....</i>	30
	<i>The behaviour and emotional health of young people.....</i>	31
	<i>Desire for independence.....</i>	32
	<i>The experience of young people from ethnic minorities.....</i>	32
3.3.2	Factors causing housing crisis which appear unrelated to sexuality..	33
	<i>Disrupted family backgrounds.....</i>	34
	<i>Disruptive parental behaviour.....</i>	35
	<i>Physical abuse.....</i>	35
	<i>Sexual abuse.....</i>	36
	<i>Religious and cultural expectations.....</i>	37
	<i>Bullying.....</i>	38
	<i>Leaving care.....</i>	38
	<i>The behaviour and emotional health of young people.....</i>	38
	<i>Feeling ready to live independently.....</i>	39
3.4	The role of sexuality in causing homelessness among young lesbians and gay men	39
4	THE EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS	43
4.1	Young people’s experience of housing crisis.....	43
4.2	The young person’s relationship with ‘home’	45
4.3	Difficulties faced by young homeless lesbians and gay men	48
	4.3.1 Issues that young people bring with them on becoming homeless	48
	4.3.2 The emotional and psychological impact of housing crisis	50
	4.3.3 Exposure to danger while homeless.....	52
	<i>Transitory or unsuitable relationships</i>	53
	<i>Sexual exploitation</i>	53
	<i>Prostitution.....</i>	54
	<i>Drug use.....</i>	56
4.4	Coping strategies	56
	4.4.1 Personal resilience.....	57
	4.4.2 Dependence on drugs and alcohol	57
4.5	Informal sources of support and help.....	59
4.6	Factors perpetuating housing crisis	60
5	ACCESSING AND USING SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS	63
5.1	Overview of service provision within study areas	63
	5.1.1 Housing & homelessness agencies	63
	5.1.2 Lesbian & gay service organisations.....	65
	5.1.3 Other types of services	65
5.2	Patterns of service use	66
5.3	The visibility of lesbian and gay youth in housing and homelessness agencies	68
	5.3.1 Avoidance of housing and homelessness services.....	69
	5.3.2 Use generic services without declaring sexuality.....	69
	5.3.3 Restrict service use to those agencies which are supportive of sexuality	70
5.4	The experiences of lesbian & gay youth in housing & homelessness services	71
	5.4.1 Positive experiences of services	71
	5.4.2 Neutral experiences of services.....	72
	5.4.3 Negative experiences of services	73
5.5	Other barriers to housing and homelessness services for lesbian and gay youth.....	76

6	PROVIDING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES TO LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH.....	79
6.1	Monitoring the sexual orientation of service users	79
6.1.1	The practice of monitoring	80
6.1.2	Young people’s views and experiences of monitoring	82
6.1.3	Conducting effective monitoring.....	83
6.2	Promoting equality within services.....	84
6.2.1	Sexuality awareness training.....	85
6.2.2	Creating a supportive organisational culture	87
6.3	Understanding and meeting young people’s needs	88
6.3.1	Types of services required to meet need.....	88
6.3.2	Barriers to providing services inclusive of sexuality	91
6.4	Specialist service provision.....	93
6.4.1	Young people’s perspectives	93
6.4.2	The views of organisational representatives	96
7	CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE STRATEGIES.....	99
7.1	The importance of understanding cause	99
7.2	Young people’s experience of homelessness	100
7.3	The use of services	101
7.4	Strategies for service delivery	102
7.5	Future research.....	104

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was undertaken by the *National Centre for Social Research* in collaboration with Stonewall Housing Association. Our thanks are due to Julia Shelley for her assistance and advice throughout the project, as well as to Jo Frazer, Uma Nathan and Jackie Fernandez. We would also like to thank Martin Jones and Gilly Green of the Ellen Gee Foundation with whom the original research proposal was developed, and the other members of the project advisory group for their guidance and support.

We are grateful to the many organisations that participated in the research and willingly gave of their time to assist us in gaining access to the young people who took part in the study.

We are especially indebted to Jane Ritchie, founder member of the Qualitative Research Unit at *Natcen*. Her advice and guidance was, as ever, invaluable.

Thanks are also due to other colleagues at *Natcen*, who helped with aspects of the research: Kay Parkinson for her conduct of a portion of the interviews; Josie Poulter for her insightful and reflective contribution to the data analysis; and other colleagues past and present, including Maxine Bailey, Vikki Rix, James Scott and Nicola Hosfield.

The evidence in this report is derived from interviews and group discussions. We are grateful to all who participated for the time they gave and for so openly sharing their experiences and opinions. We are particularly indebted to the young people for their willingness to discuss what were usually difficult and painful issues. We hope that we have done justice in the telling of their stories and that they will make the difference that so many of them dreamed they would.

Executive Summary

Concern about youth homelessness has led to a growth in recent years of research focusing on this area. While the studies to date have illuminated much about homelessness amongst young people, none of it has sought to understand what the causes of homelessness are for young lesbians and gay men. This study set out to investigate these, to explore the nature of homelessness as experienced by lesbian and gay youth and to consider broad strategies for tackling the issue amongst this minority group.

The causes of housing crisis

The research demonstrates that the role sexuality can play in the creation of youth homelessness is complex. Undoubtedly, in some young people's lives, the contribution of sexuality to housing crisis is unambiguous. That is not to say that sexuality per se produces housing crisis. Rather, other people's intolerance of sexuality can lead to young people leaving home. In addition, young people's own expectations of intolerance can bring about housing crisis, as can emotional or psychological difficulties in coming to terms with sexuality in a sometimes unsupportive environment.

The experience of other young people suggests that housing crisis can also be entirely unconnected to sexuality. In such instances, homelessness was generally attributed to a raft of other, perhaps more established, causes of housing crisis, the main ones being family breakdown, disruptive parental behaviour, physical and sexual abuse, leaving care and religious or cultural expectations. Homelessness amongst the young people interviewed sometimes resulted from a combination of factors both related and unrelated to a young person's sexual orientation.

Finally, even where the causes of homelessness appear unrelated to sexuality, homophobia in services (perpetrated by either staff or other users) often compounded the difficulties faced by young homeless lesbians and gay men and made it more difficult for them to access appropriate help and support.

The needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth

The findings both confirm existing evidence about the difficulties encountered by young people when they experience housing crisis and contribute to greater understanding about how such difficulties manifest for young lesbians and gay men. The problems faced by the young people were multiple and diverse. They included practical difficulties such as finding somewhere to sleep, getting enough food to eat, and staying clean and healthy. Dangers such as sexual exploitation, prostitution, and a dependency on drugs and alcohol – well documented amongst homeless people – were also found to be recurrent amongst young homeless lesbians and gay men. However, it was the relative ability of the young people to deal with the trauma of being homeless, alongside the psychological effects of earlier events in life, that determined the extent of difficulty or damage they experienced while homeless. This diminished young people's receptivity to help offered by friends, family or support services, which recurrently led to being homeless for longer, and becoming more vulnerable to danger.

Young people's use of services

The young people interviewed gravitated towards more specialised services or agencies exclusively dedicated to the needs of lesbian and gay youth during their time spent homeless. This targeting of supportive environments by the young people is undoubtedly the main reason behind why lesbian and gay youth are more visible in some agencies and not others.

As well as understanding causes of homelessness and describing young people's experience of homelessness, the research has gleaned a great amount about what young people feel they require from services. In addition, service providers have made clear recommendations about what services would better help homeless people in general, and specifically homeless lesbian and gay youth. These encompass the need for safe supported accommodation – both emergency and longer term – the need for emotional support, better after-care services (as well as some aftercare specifically for young lesbians and gay men), lesbian and gay peer support projects and telephone helplines and a mediation service to help lesbian and gay youth to re-establish contact with home where they wish to do this.

Developing specialist services for young lesbian and gay men

The emphasis placed by young people on the need for services that are dedicated to meeting the needs of young lesbians and gay men, or exclusively for their use, cannot be over stated. The strength of support amongst the young people was great and the benefits derived by those who used such services were manifold, including sanctuary from homophobic violence and abuse, the possibility of becoming ordinary and sharing experience, the opportunity to be more open and relaxed about sexuality, and increased knowledge of lesbian and gay life and community – including greater awareness of safer sex for young gay men. The greatest requirement was said to be for specialised or dedicated emergency accommodation. This is currently not provided anywhere in Britain.

Creating inclusive housing and homelessness services

This research has highlighted three main features that underpin the creation of more inclusive services. These are monitoring for the sexuality of clients; the implementation of sexuality awareness training for staff (and also perhaps users); and the development of wider agency policy and practice that enshrines the equal and safe treatment of lesbians and gay men within services – such as the proper implementation of equal opportunities policies. In addition to these, some broader policy measures – at local and national level - were also felt necessary to influence societal attitudes to homosexuality and ultimately make life more tolerable for all lesbians and gay men.

About the research

The research was based mainly in four urban areas – chosen to reflect diverse demographic circumstances, different levels of homelessness and varied lesbian and gay infrastructure. In each area, interviews and group discussions were conducted with homelessness agencies, housing providers and lesbian and gay community organisations to ascertain their knowledge of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. In addition, a cross-section of young lesbians and gay men aged 15 to 24, purposively selected from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances, were interviewed about their experience of housing crisis. A research team from the National Centre for Social Research carried out the study. It was funded by a grant from the Community Fund, through a grant to Stonewall Housing Association.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

Improve the quality of emergency and longer term accommodation

The difficulties experienced and anticipated by young lesbians and gay men in both statutory and voluntary sector accommodation are described throughout this report. This points to the need to improve existing services to ensure that they provide a viable and safe option to homeless lesbian and gay youth. The solution to homelessness for this group of young people lies not only in the provision of more emergency and other types of accommodation. It also requires significant improvement in the quality of existing services, so that they are accessible to young lesbians and gay men as they are for all young people, and that they provide safety from homophobic harassment and abuse. The benefits derived from specialist accommodation should not be underestimated in this regard, particularly emergency accommodation exclusively for young lesbians and gay men.

Make services more inclusive of lesbians and gay men

The report highlights that the more positive experiences of services are reported by young people where agencies and staff recognise that sexuality can create vulnerability, and which offer protection from homophobic harassment or abuse. This suggests a clear need to heighten awareness and understanding among service providers of how sexuality can create vulnerability and to ensure that there is a commitment to challenging and eradicating homophobia within services where it occurs. Practically, this might involve monitoring for sexuality, training for staff and other residents and working to establish sexuality as a cornerstone of equal opportunities.

Recognise the diverse and multiple needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth

The difficult backgrounds of some of the young people explain the multiple and complex needs of homeless young lesbians and gay men. In addition to the need for accommodation, these include a need for support around mental health issues and drug and alcohol dependency, help to acquire qualifications and to increase employability and independent living skills, and assistance in developing confidence and self esteem. These necessitate variety in service provision. Moreover, such needs can only be met by a gradual approach to addressing homeless young people's difficulties, requiring an investment of considerable time and resources. This may involve helping with personal problems and emotional issues first to create the foundations for later work to assist young people to achieve sustainable accommodation, education and employment. Delivering the wrong sort of help at the wrong time – for example, placing a young person dealing with substantial emotional and behavioural problems in services requiring self direction and discipline – can exacerbate the issues a young person may be facing due to their lack of readiness for this type of assistance. This will require funding bodies to appreciate and reward those services and projects which produce 'soft outcomes' such as confidence and self esteem, alongside those working towards more traditional 'hard outcomes' such as housing, training and work.

Adopt a holistic multi-agency approach to meet needs

This diverse range of needs will not be met by the services provided by housing and homelessness agencies alone and need the support of a wide range of different specialist services. Many of these already exist however where they work best, they require a strong element of communication and co-operation to ensure that resources are successfully targeted towards the young people who most need them. This necessitates a multi-agency approach, involving voluntary and statutory agencies – but with policies and practices that welcome and meet the needs of lesbians and gay men. The principles of partnership and joint working are of course at the heart of the new Connexions service which aims to bring together existing agencies in the public, private and voluntary sector to provide integrated support for vulnerable young people. This research highlights the relevance and appropriateness of this initiative.

Increase emphasis on prevention of housing crisis

A final area of priority should be the adoption of a more preventative approach in both policy and practice. The improvement of services is necessary to help solve or minimise the effects of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men when this occurs. Ultimately, however, preventing or alleviating the problem should itself be a policy objective. This necessitates targeting resources and attention towards ways of combating homophobia, which this research has shown, can be at the root of homelessness for young lesbians and gay men.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and objectives of the study

This report presents findings of qualitative research that explores the cause and nature of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. The research was carried out by the *National Centre for Social Research*, in collaboration with Stonewall Housing Association. It was funded by a grant to Stonewall Housing Association from the Community Fund health and social research programme. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- determine the causes of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men and consider the role of sexuality within this;
- explore the nature of homelessness experienced by young lesbians and gay men;
- examine contact with voluntary and statutory agencies and patterns of service use;
- consider broad strategies for tackling the problem of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth.

1.2 Scope of the research

To facilitate these objectives, the research was based in four cities within Great Britain: Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds and London. These were selected to provide diversity in terms of city size, geographical location, pervasiveness of homelessness, type of housing and homelessness services available, and the existence of lesbian and gay community organisations or commercial scene. Within each area, interviews were conducted with young lesbians and gay men, and with representatives from housing or homelessness agencies and lesbian/gay organisations. This facilitated the examination of both the young people's experiences and the 'organisational' views within the same geographical area and within a known context of local housing provision. However, it should be noted that research did not aim to evaluate service delivery across these areas. Such an evaluation would only be tenable once a proper understanding of the causes and needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth is established.

The range of possible ways of conceptualising homelessness can clearly present definitional problems. Because one of the aims of the study was to explore as much as possible the different ways in which homelessness can occur for young lesbians and gay men, a broad definition of homelessness was adopted for this research. Besides young people sleeping rough ('the roofless'), the research included those living in temporary accommodation such as hostels, squats or bed and breakfast hotels. It also included young people staying temporarily with friends and relatives who are unwilling or unable to accommodate them in the longer term.

The study focused on the experiences of young people aged between 16 and 24 who were currently homeless, or who had experienced a period of homelessness within the previous two years. In recognition of the different causes of homelessness among

young people and adults, lesbians and gay men above the age of 24, who may have had experiences of homelessness at a younger age, were not included in the study.

1.3 Project Advisory Group

This study was guided at all stages by an advisory group, hosted by Stonewall Housing Association. It comprised representatives from a range of organisations whose work was relevant to the research and individuals involved in research or policy related to homelessness. It comprised the following organisations:

Stonewall Housing Association
Albert Kennedy Trust
Cardiff Triangle Housing association
Centrepoint
Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Manchester Lesbian and Gay foundation
London Youth
Shelter
Stonewall Lobby Group
School of Social Sciences, University of North London
Ellen Gee Foundation

Members of the group attended four meetings held in London, which were based around the main elements of the research. As part of their role, they commented on the research approach, provided advice on topic guides used in interviews and workshops, and helped devise sampling strategies. In addition, they were presented with interim findings at various points over the course of the research, the discussion of which refined the scope of subsequent research activities.

1.4 Research Strategy

In order to achieve the objectives set down the study consisted of five stages.

Stage 1 – Review of existing literature

Stage 1 involved a review of the literature relevant to this topic. Given the dearth of literature focusing specifically on homelessness among young lesbians and gay men, the review focused on research and literature relating either to young lesbians and gay men or homeless young people generally. This enabled the development of research materials and approach, as well as setting the research findings in the context of existing research on homelessness and on lesbian and gay youth.

Stage 2 – Area visits

Initial area visits were carried out to provide information about local relevant organisations and services in each of the study areas, and to develop sampling strategies and topic guides for use in later stages of the research. Desk research and consultations with the advisory group yielded a list of key organisations in each area who were then consulted usually through an in-depth interview or mini-group

discussion. These initial exploratory interviews were invaluable in developing the research strategy. Some also yielded significant data on the causes of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth and were analysed alongside the Stage Three dataset.

Stage 3 – Consultation with organisational representatives

This stage consisted of one to one and paired interviews, and group discussions, with representatives of a range of housing, homelessness and lesbian/ gay organisations. The interviews included a range of subjects such as: details about the organisation, services provided and overview of client group, monitoring practices, perceptions of the prevalence and significance of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth and views about the most effective ways of meeting need.

Stage 4 – Depth interviews with young people

Having gathered organisational views about the causes and experience of homelessness and generated a map of service provision within each of the four fieldwork areas, Stage 4 comprised in-depth interviews with young lesbians and gay men who were or had been homeless. These interviews were biographical in nature and aimed to explore life histories in detail as much as possible, in particular pinpointing periods of housing crisis, implicit and explicit causes and consequences, as well as experiences of and use of support services.

Stage 5 – Workshops with organisational representatives

The final element of the research comprised workshops with organisational representatives in each of the main study areas. In each, key findings of the preceding stages were presented in order to generate reflections and policy recommendations.

1.5 Sample design

The ability to draw wider inference from qualitative research depends, to some extent, on the nature and quality of the sampling. The rationale in selecting those to be interviewed is to ensure diversity of coverage across certain key variables rather than to select a sample that is statistically representative of the wider population. Purposive sampling of this kind provides the opportunity to identify a range of factors, influences and experiences underlying the research question. This study required two distinct samples, both of which were purposively selected.

1.5.1 Sample of organisational representatives

Representatives from 45 organisations were interviewed at Stage 3 of the study, to which interviews from five other organisations conducted at Stage 2 were added in the final analysis, bringing the total sample size to 50. The organisations consulted in Stage 3 interviews were purposively selected to represent the diversity of services available in each of the study areas. Primarily these were drawn from the three types of organisations that have potential for contact with lesbian and gay youth. This included:

Housing providers – such as local authorities, housing associations and housing charities;

Homelessness agencies – including generic agencies, those dealing specifically with young people and those dealing with lesbian and gay clients;

Lesbian and gay organisations – for example lesbian and gay youth groups, peer support projects, advice and support helplines, exclusively lesbian groups and exclusively gay male groups.

In addition, in London particularly, a small number of organisations were included which do not fall into any of the above categories but were clearly of relevance to this study. These included, for example, organisations working with young men who sell sex and drugs agencies.

In each organisation consulted, the most appropriate representative(s) were identified and interviewed. These people fulfilled a range of duties and roles, though all had direct experience of working with young people.

The same rationale was used at Stage Five to invite organisations to the workshops held in each area. The sample included some of the same agencies that had been involved in earlier stages of the research either in providing data or helping obtain the sample of young people, but others were also included. It was intended that between six and eight representatives should be included in each workshop, although some involved fewer and some more individuals.

A full list of all the organisations consulted in the research is included in Appendix I.

1.5.2 Stage 4 sample and recruitment

The sample of young people interviewed in Stage 4 was obtained through voluntary and statutory organisations, most of who had been included in stages 2 and 3 of the study. Each organisation was asked to consult potential respondents on our behalf, to introduce and explain the study and to gain the young person's consent to participate in the research. Only then were the young people's details passed on to the research team. All appointments were arranged through the support organisation, unless the young people provided independent contact details and specifically gave permission for these to be passed on to the research team.

Recruitment of the young people was generally problematic. Often it took a long time between an organisation informing of a potential respondent and the young person actually being interviewed – sometimes up to three months. Even when an interview was arranged, there were recurrent difficulties at the last minute. This was undoubtedly related to the level of chaos in the young person's life. While some of the broken appointments were rescheduled, many were impossible to trace, the young person having moved on from the organisation that recommended them.

It had been hoped that friendship or social networks of the young people from the initial interviews could be utilised to 'snowball' a part of the sample. This proved impossible, either because the lives of those currently homeless were too chaotic to accommodate the task or because those who were now settled did not know of any

other lesbians and gay men who were, or had been, homeless. Other measures such as advertising in both the lesbian and gay press and *The Big Issue* were used. But they yielded little success. Undoubtedly, the fear of exposure within services, or perhaps the difficulty in recounting painful experiences lie somewhere at the root of this reticence to participate.

A total of thirty-three young people were interviewed at Stage 4. This was achieved by contacting more organisations than was initially envisaged and also by extending the areas in which the fieldwork took place to include Newcastle and Manchester. The young people interviewed came from the full range of different types of organisations involved in the study. Indeed, it was not uncommon to only successfully recruit one young person from a single organisation. The sample was purposively selected to ensure sufficient diversity in terms of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity and current housing situation. It is exhibited in Table 1.

Gender		Sexuality	
Male	16	Gay	15
Female	17	Lesbian	17
		Bisexual	1
Age		Ethnicity	
Under 16	1	White British	26
16-17	5	White European	2
18-20	14	Black African	2
21-22	7	Black Caribbean	1
23-24	6	Turkish/Irish	1
		African/Asian	1
Fieldwork area		Current Housing Status	
London	14	- Hostel/B&B	8
Manchester	6	- Friends/relatives	3
Leeds	5	- Shared supported accommodation	11
Bristol	4	- Supported lodgings	6
Glasgow	1	- Own flat	
Newcastle	3	-LA	1
		-HA	2
		-Private	1
		- Living with parents	1

Almost equal numbers of men and women were interviewed at Stage 4. While the young people were distributed between the ages of 16 to 24, there was more of a concentration in the ages 18 to 20. The majority of the young people the research came into contact were from this age group, and given the difficulties in recruitment, it was decided to include more young people from this age band. This could be an indication of the prevalence of homelessness at this time in young people's lives. This hypothesis, however, clearly needs investigation by statistical enquiry.

The study focused explicitly on young people who identified as lesbian and gay. The study literature did not make reference to young people who are bisexual or transgender. Although one of the young men identified during interview as bisexual, his interview was retained because it raised issues that were common to the young gay men interviewed.

Unsurprisingly the biggest number of young people interviewed were in London, which not only has the largest number of homeless people in the country but also the biggest lesbian and gay commercial scene and the greatest diversity in service provision. By contrast, accessing young lesbians and gay men with experience of homelessness in Glasgow proved extremely difficult. Only one young person was interviewed there.

Though the young people's housing situation at the time of interview is described in Table 1, the reality of the young people's housing experience was significantly more complex. If the broad definition of homelessness described earlier is applied to the distribution outlined, then 11 of the young people were homeless at the time of interview (those housed in Hostel/B&B accommodation and those staying with friends and relatives) and 22 were housed (those in shared supported accommodation, supported lodgings, their own flat or with their parents). Such categorisation, however, over emphasises the extent to which these various types of accommodation represent a stable base. It also masks the fluidity with which the young people may move between these different forms of accommodation and the 'distance' between them. Whilst the gap between 'homeless' and 'housed' seems substantial, in reality the difference between living in a shared supported tenancy and emergency hostel accommodation was very small for some young people interviewed, in terms of the stability or security it afforded them. Young people in some of the accommodation deemed 'housed' for example such as a shared supported house or flat, were clearly to cope in this situation, experiencing problems with other residents and thinking about moving on. The difficulty of identifying the point in a young person's housing career where housing crises began or became resolved will be revisited in Chapter 3.

1.6 Conduct of the research

All interviews, group discussions and workshops were exploratory and interactive in form, based on a topic guide that was developed in consultation with the advisory group. This listed the key themes to be covered, and the subtopics within each to be explored. They were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

As well as gathering data about the scope and activities of each organisation, the interviews and groups with organisations at Stage Three collected views about the significance of sexuality in the creation of housing crisis amongst lesbian and gay youth and perceptions of the prevalence of young lesbians and gay men within their client group. Current ways of meeting client need were also investigated, as were any specific measures in place for working with lesbian and gay youth. Finally, each organisation was canvassed for potential strategies and suggestions in meeting the needs of young homeless lesbians and gay men. The fieldwork took place between March and June 2000.

The interviews with young people generally began with brief coverage of respondents current circumstances, followed by detailed exploration of their life histories beginning with early childhood. This included where they were born, whom they grew up with and what home, school life and childhood were like. This approach enabled the identification of key events, issues or problems in people's lives, which may have contributed to periods of housing crisis. The evolution of the young person's feelings about their sexuality and the reactions of others around them were also explored. Finally, a full account of the young person's housing career and factors underpinning housing mobility was collected. Actual or potential sources of support or precipitators of change were also identified and explored. All the young people interviewed were given £15 as a gesture of thanks for their participation, which is common with research of this nature. The interviews were conducted between July 2000 and January 2001.

The workshops at Stage 5 began by providing participants with an overview of the main findings relating to the cause of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth. As a way of opening up the discussion, participants were then asked to comment on whether this resonated with their own experience of working with young lesbians and gay men. The remainder of the workshops focused upon four main service delivery issues: the visibility of young lesbians and gay men in services, young people's experiences of current provision, meeting the needs of young lesbians and gay men in housing crisis and enhancing the effectiveness of services delivered to lesbian and gay youth. This was achieved by presenting key findings from the research on each issue and then probing to generate possible solutions. The workshops were conducted in April 2001.

A copy of the topic guide used in each stage of the research is included in Appendix II.

1.7 Data analysis

Data from all stages of the study were analysed using 'Framework', a content analysis method developed at the *National Centre* for qualitative research data. It involves the systematic analysis of verbatim material within a thematic matrix. The key topics and issues emerging from the data were identified through familiarisation with depth interview and group transcripts. A series of thematic charts were then drawn up and data from each transcript was summarised under each topic. Data from each stage of the study was mapped within a different – although linked – set of thematic charts. These then formed the basis for detailed exploration of the charted data, exploring the range of views and experiences, comparing and contrasting individuals and groups and seeking explanations for similarities and differences within the data.

1.8 The use of qualitative data

Qualitative research was of particular value given the exploratory nature of the research. The interactive probing and questioning methods allowed flexibility in the structure and content of interviews, which facilitated exploration of individual circumstances and experiences in a way that was responsive to the accounts of

individual respondents. This was essential for the detailed investigative approach that the study required.

However, it is important to note that qualitative research samples are not designed to be statistically representative of the research population, and this means that statements about incidence or prevalence cannot be sustained. Similarly it is not possible to determine statistically discriminatory variables from qualitative data. Where relationships are described between, for example, circumstances and needs, the purpose in doing so is to present explanations identified explicitly or implicitly by respondents and hypotheses for further research.

1.9 The structure of the report

Throughout the report, verbatim passages from transcripts and case illustrations are presented. To preserve the anonymity of respondents, specific details - such as names or places - which might identify respondents, have been omitted or changed. Each person interviewed in the study has been given a fictitious name that is used consistently throughout the report to aid reference to their experience.

The report begins by discussing the findings from the literature review in order to provide context to the evidence collected in this study. Chapter 3 explores the patterns of homelessness experienced by young lesbians and gay men and the causes of these periods of housing crisis. The nature of the young people's homelessness is discussed in Chapter 4, in particular, where they stayed, their relationship with home and family, the vulnerabilities displayed by them, and how they coped with the hazards of this experience. Chapter 5 explores the young people's use and experience of different types of housing and homelessness services. Young people's use of services is also discussed here, as are the barriers they experienced in accessing them. Views on a range of issues central to the provision of housing and homelessness services to young lesbians and gay men are drawn out in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 reflects on the main conclusions of the research, and draws out the broad strategies for future provision of housing and homelessness services to lesbian and gay youth. The more time pressured reader may wish to begin here.

2 OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter aims to review the literature relevant to exploring the causes and experiences of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. Such a review may appear redundant given that one of the primary motivations for conducting the study in the first place was the lack of research generally in this country pertaining to homelessness among young lesbians and gay men. However, in order to contextualise the findings of this study, it was felt that a thorough review of relevant bodies of literature would be beneficial.

Clearly, reviewing the vast body of research on homelessness and housing issues in the UK is an elaborate task in its own right, as demonstrated recently (and effectively) by bibliographies commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Klinker & FitzPatrick, 2000; Klinker *et al*, 2000; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000). Equally, surveying the literature and research which have come to comprise the field of lesbian and gay studies is beyond the remit of this review (see for example: Minton, 1992; Abelove *et al*, 1993; Duberman, 1997; Sandfort *et al*, 2000). Nevertheless, this chapter does draw upon aspects of these two areas of scholarship. First, research pertaining to youth homelessness is explored, following which we consider the literature available on lesbian and gay youth. In both, we draw upon British research, where it exists. This is supplemented and compared with research from other countries – primarily North America but some Antipodean research is also included. Our aim in reviewing both sets of literature is simple: to understand what homelessness research can tell us about the experiences of young lesbians and gay men; and to glean from research on lesbian and gay youth where and how issues relating to homelessness or housing crisis manifest.

In both sets of literature, the review has faced a common difficulty. By the nature of the populations under discussion, studies have generally suffered substantial methodological criticism. In the main, this has concerned the sampling procedures adopted: in quantitative research, the absence of studies which have employed probability sampling techniques; and in qualitative research the dearth of studies that have used sufficiently defined purposive or theoretical sampling procedures. In both sets of literature, there is common acknowledgement of the difficulty in constructing representative or purposive samples of people who, on the whole, are less overt than members of the 'general population', less accessible than research participants generally are and who often wish to avoid the intrusive glare of researcher's gaze. Nevertheless, in the absence of more robust studies, we have included all relevant research regardless of the criticism laid against them because, at the very least, they raise issues that increase our understanding of the experience of either homeless young people, lesbian and gay youth, or both.

2.1 Research on youth homelessness

Concern about youth homelessness has led to a growth in research focusing on this area in recent years. Much of this explores the characteristics of homeless young people and their reasons for leaving home, in an attempt to understand the rising numbers of young people within the homelessness population (Carter, 1998; Craig &

Hodson, 1998). A further focus of this work is the nature and impacts of homelessness among young people to help inform service providers about the needs and vulnerabilities of this client group (Craig *et al*, 1996; Craig & Hodson, 2000).

Despite the existence of this dedicated body of literature exploring why young people become homeless, sexuality is rarely a consideration. Studies consistently cite factors underpinning youth homelessness such as 'family conflict', 'breakdown of family relationships' or 'problems at home' without any deeper analysis of the reasons for these difficulties (Pleace & Quilgars, 1999). In part, this is explained by the fact that much of the research has used a quantitative approach, which could be argued is an inappropriate method to explore the complex and multi-faceted issue of youth homelessness. However, even where studies have used qualitative methods, sexuality has been repeatedly overlooked. This omission is particularly notable in the light of the emphasis placed upon the heterogeneity of homeless young people in recent work (Blackman, 1998) and the increasing attention given to the implications of gender, ethnicity, and disability for young homeless people. The fact that literature considering 'difference' in relation to housing can still exclude sexuality is indicative of the extent of this oversight (Harrison & Davis, 2001). As Herdt (1989) highlights '*paradoxically gays present a social problem to society, but when particular social problems are studied, gays are often ignored*'. Moreover, not only is the role of sexuality in housing crisis under-researched but it is generally assumed that participants in previous research are heterosexual unless proven otherwise. Because demographic questions about sexuality are not standard in homelessness research (or indeed any other mainstream social policy research) it is assumed that findings refer only to heterosexual young people, even though many 'unidentified' lesbians and gay men may have participated in the research.

When sexuality is discussed this appears to happen in two main ways. Some studies make brief references to sexuality as a factor in household conflict, running away or leaving home, without any detailed exploration of the specific role played by a young person's sexual orientation in this process or the relationship between sexuality and young peoples' subsequent homelessness (Downing-Orr, 1996). Alternatively sexuality is often mentioned simply to highlight its omission from existing research and call for a more dedicated exploration (Evans, 1996; Carter, 1998; Rees & Stein, 1999).

The limited discussion of sexuality that does occur in the main body of literature on homelessness, however, does indicate that it may be a palpable cause of youth homelessness. Sexuality has been mentioned as a factor in leaving home by homeless young people and this factor has been reiterated by housing and homelessness service providers (Rees & Stein, 1999). Among homeless women, the proportions of lesbians, bisexuals and those unsure about their sexuality has been found to be over a quarter (Hendessi, 1992). There is also some evidence that the role of sexuality as a cause of housing crisis may vary across different ethnic groups. Among homeless people in London, for example, Asian young people have been found to be more likely to encounter problems associated with sexuality than other minority ethnic populations (Carter, 1998).

Whilst the literature on youth homelessness does not consider the experiences of young lesbians and gay men in any great detail, it is still worthy of consideration

because it provides a useful context for the current study in which to explore how the experiences of young lesbians and gay men differ from the experiences of other young homeless people. Lesbian and gay homeless youth clearly share many characteristics and circumstances with other young homeless people and was highlighted above may well form unobserved minorities within this research. A review of the more generic literature can therefore assist us in our understanding of the lives of homeless young people generally, in particular about the causes of youth homelessness and the effect it has on the lives of young people.

2.1.1 The nature of youth homelessness

The complexity of the relationship with 'home' appears to be one of the defining characteristics of youth homelessness. Young people who leave home will often maintain some links with their parents or carers and return home, typically circulating around their personal networks of family, friends and community. This has led to the suggestion that homelessness among young people is more 'hidden' because they are less likely to be sleeping rough or accessing homelessness services than older homeless people (Wiggans, 1989). The resistance amongst some young people to using mainstream housing services may be due to negative images of the culture of these services, concerns about the type of people who used them, fear for safety of person and property (Fitzpatrick, 1999), unwillingness to leave their local area and fear of the imposition of authority (Wiggans, 1989).

This tendency to return 'home' intermittently and rely on friends and family members rather than housing or youth services, complicates attempts to define youth homelessness. For example, the issue of where running away ends and homelessness begins is often unclear. Nevertheless, it is important to consider young people in both groups in any attempt to understand the factors causing homelessness. Research suggests that young people who run away from home are more likely to experience homelessness than those who do not (Rees & Stein, 1999). Young people who run away and young people who are homeless are often the same young people who are simply at different points within their housing career.

The nature of homelessness among men and women may differ. Traditionally far lower numbers of women than men have been reported among the visible homeless population prompting suggestions that homelessness for women is less public and more hidden than it is for men (Douglas & Gilroy, 1994). It has been argued that homeless women are less likely to sleep rough and use hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation than homeless men because they feel these to be unsafe. Consequently, women are more likely to be living in situations such as sleeping on the floors and settees of friends and relations or putting up with relationships they no longer want, that are unhealthy, or unsafe (Smith *et al*, 1996; Smith & Gilford, 1998; Jones, 1999; Smith, 1999).

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the nature of homelessness among Black and other ethnic minority young people. It has been suggested that homeless young people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be hidden and less likely to approach advice agencies than other homeless young people (Evans, 1996; Carter, 1998). This is contradicted, however, by evidence of a high number of rough sleepers among ethnic groups (Carter, 1998). This highlights the need for further work to gain

a better understanding of the causes and nature of homelessness and the services used by different ethnic groups.

2.1.2 Causes of youth homelessness

The causes of youth homelessness are often divided into 2 broad categories: individual and structural. Whilst individualistic explanations focus on the personal characteristics and behaviours of homeless people, structural explanations locate the causes of homelessness in the broader social and economic structures which affect peoples' vulnerability to homelessness (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000). This individual/structural division has been criticised as simplifying the inter-connectedness of these two types of factors (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000). Overall, there does not appear to be one predominant feature that contributes most to the leaving home process or subsequent homelessness. Instead the factors causing homelessness are varied, complex and multi-faceted (Shlay & Rossi, 1992; Van der Ploeg & Scholte, 1997; Pleace & Quilgars, 1999; Kennett & Marsh, 1999).

Both the circumstances under which young people leave home and the characteristics of homeless youth itself appear to have changed in recent decades. In the 1980's there was evidence that young people often left home lured by the prospect of work or greater independence and freedom (Safe in the City, 1999). However, there is now a consensus that young people leave home because they are forced rather than because of any positive choice. For most young homeless people, homelessness is seen as a preferable option to the situation they were previously living in and many feel that in reality they had no other option (Barter, 1996).

Family conflict and problems with carers is the most recurrently cited cause of youth homelessness (Evans, 1996, Nasser & Simms 1996; Downing-Orr, 1996; Craig & Hodson, 1998; Smith *et al*, 1998; Jones, 1999). Many homeless youth report childhoods that were lacking in affection, surrounded by indifferent and often violent adult figures (Craig & Hodson, 2000). Work in both the UK and US has found that these difficulties seem particularly likely for young people with 'disrupted' family histories such as parental separation, stepparents or periods with temporary carers (Susser *et al*, 1993; Barter, 1996; Evans, 1996; Kipke *et al*, 1997b; Smith *et al*, 1998; Safe in the City, 1999).

The term 'family conflict', however, can mask more serious underlying problems such as abuse. Reports of severe physical and emotional abuse in the family home or in care environments have been recurrent among homeless young people (Hendessi, 1992; Downing-Orr, 1996; Craig *et al*, 1996; Smith *et al* 1998; Safe in the City, 1999). Sexual abuse has also been reported in the UK (Hendessi, 1992; Craig *et al*, 1996) and the US (Robertson and Toro, 1998) although evidence regarding its prevalence among homeless young people varies. There is some evidence that incidence of sexual abuse is more common among homeless young females than males (Craig *et al*, 1996; Molnar *et al* 1998). Research also indicates that different types of abuse overlap. A child or young person experiencing physical abuse will almost certainly be suffering emotional abuse. Likewise those suffering from sexual abuse may also be subjected to physical force or threats of punishment (Hendessi, 1992; Barter, 1996; Craig *et al*, 1996).

Young people who leave home early because of the problematic backgrounds outlined above are clearly at risk of experiencing homelessness. This is for a number of reasons. Young people may run away or leave home with no preparation for where they might go (Rees, 1994). Family problems may result in a young person leaving home before they are ready for independent living or before they are able to support themselves. The difficult family background of many homeless young people means they may not be taught the skills required to enable them to live independently (Downing-Orr, 1996). Histories of family conflict means these young people are also less likely to receive support from their families to assist them in making a successful transition to independent living. Consequently, the young people who are most in need of support are least likely to receive it, and attempts at independent living may fail leaving these young people more likely to experience poverty and homelessness (Evans, 1996).

Young people with past experience of child protection and young care leavers have also been found to be at particular risk of becoming homeless (Biehal and Wade, 1999; Jones, 1999). The link between experiences of the care system and homelessness is explained by factors relating to both the characteristics of young people in care and the nature of the care system itself. Young people accommodated by local authorities have often developed emotional or psychological problems before entering care because of their experiences of family breakdown, neglect and abuse (Barter, 1996). They tend to possess poor family networks, have few marketable qualifications and are more likely to have experienced social problems as a result of unstable housing (Pleace & Quilgars 1999). In addition, care leavers are expected to move to independent living at a much earlier age than young people in the general population do. Transitions from school to work, as well as moves towards cohabitation and parenthood can all be accelerated. This can bring about a concentration of difficulties that make it hard for many young people to move successfully to independent living. Many care leavers are ill-prepared or unready to live independently and find it difficult to budget, to cope with their new found autonomy and isolation and the lack of structure and day to day support at such an early age (Biehal & Wade, 1999).

Those from black and ethnic minority households are also vulnerable to the factors causing homelessness which is reflected in their reported over- representation among Homeless young people (Nassor, & Simms, 1996; Carter 1998). Young black women in particular may be particularly vulnerable due to the 'treble discrimination and disadvantage' which they face (Kemp, 1999). Black and other ethnic minority young people are more likely to experience the problems that lead to homelessness. They are over represented among those in care (Kirby, 1994), and more likely to be unemployed, on low incomes or living in poor housing conditions (Evans, 1996). They are also said to be more at risk of encountering discrimination and harassment in mainstream services, which can prevent housing crises being resolved (Kirby, 1994; Evans, 1996).

2.1.3 Vulnerabilities faced by Homeless young people

Disentangling the impacts of homelessness from the causes of homelessness itself can be problematic. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, much of the research on homeless young people is cross sectional in design. Consequently whilst there is a

wealth of evidence documenting the characteristics of and disadvantages faced by homeless people, causal linkages between experiences and familial and youth problems cannot be established (Ringwalt *et al*, 1998). For example, studies finding that young people who are thrown out of home are more likely to abuse substances cannot determine easily whether this substance use *resulted* from their being thrown out of home, or whether they were thrown out *because of* this substance use.

A second difficulty is that homeless young people often experience multiple difficulties in addition to their homelessness, including substance abuse, poor physical and mental health. (Craig *et al*, 1996; Craig and Hodson, 1998; Jones, 1999; Wrate & Blair, 1999). These problems appear to have two main sources: one set appears to stem from the experience of a troubled family background, the effects of which continue to affect young people's quality of life long after they leave home (Barter, 1996); the second relates to the dangers posed by the homelessness 'scene' or 'lifestyle'. But it is often impossible to disentangle the specific impacts of homelessness amidst the multiple problems this group bring with them. For example, whilst on one hand homelessness can have negative physical and emotional impacts which manifest themselves in certain types of hazardous behaviour, this behaviour can also be the result of young people trying to deal with the emotional consequences of growing up in dysfunctional families (Klee & Reid, 1998; Fitzpatrick & Clapham, 1999). Whatever the cause, the effects of disturbed family background upon young people clearly create increased vulnerability to the dangerous situations encountered whilst homeless (Craig & Hodson, 2000).

Problems relating to background and childhood

The effects of growing up in a difficult or troubled family background upon young people are wide ranging. As noted above this experience can lead to multiple problems and risk behaviours which in turn can create further related problems over time. Homeless young people frequently indicate that they suffer from low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness due to not feeling loved or wanted by their parents. These feelings can result in obvious problematic behaviour and emotional problems, for example, running away, promiscuity, drug dependency, self-harm, and suicidality (Barter, 1996; Downing-Orr, 1996). In particular, the connection between abuse and psychological, emotional and behavioural problems has been well documented by research teams both in the UK (Downing-Orr, 1996) and elsewhere (Pears & Noller, 1995; Molnar *et al*, 1998).

Troubled experiences in childhood can increase the likelihood of young people finding themselves in dangerous positions while homeless. Low self-esteem can adversely affect young people's ability to cope in a dangerous situation (Downing-Orr, 1996). Work in the US suggests that young people with a history of abuse are at increased risk of experiencing further abuse while homeless. The behaviour developed by young people raised in abusive families means they are more likely to be rejected by conventional peers and to form ties with peers who may also be exploitative and abusive (Whitbeck *et al*, 1997). Experiences in childhood can also affect young peoples' ability to obtain help while homeless. Homeless youth who have had troubled familial relationships may have difficulty forming attachments with service providers which can limit their chances of fully utilising services (Kipke *et al*, 1997b).

Dangers of the 'homelessness scene'

Homeless young people face a wide range of potential dangers whilst they are homeless which can exacerbate and perpetuate housing crisis. The experience of homelessness can, for example, lead to offending, or introduce young people to substance use. Indeed, it can serve to worsen these problems where they already exist (Barter, 1996; Evans, 1996; Klee & Reid, 1998; Davis & Vander Stoep, 1997; Jones, 1999). Young people, who sleep rough risk exposure to violence both as spectators and victims. Moreover, because these young people may lack access to support services the risk that these incidents may have psychological consequences is increased (Downing-Orr, 1996; Kipke *et al*, 1997a; Blackman, 1998; Robertson & Toro, 1998). In particular, work in the US suggests that those who are under 16 are especially at risk from the negative psychological and physical consequences of life on the streets (Unger *et al*, 1998).

Homeless young people are also at risk of coercive sexual behaviour. Whilst there is some evidence of men experiencing this in hostels (Attenborough & Watson, 1997), this is seen to be a particular vulnerability for homeless women in mixed sex accommodation (Blackman, 1998). The presence of such dangers in emergency accommodation and rough sleeping are often used to explain women's 'invisibility' among the homeless population.

Prostitution is a further danger to which young people are exposed while homeless, although the chain of causation is not always clear. Whilst young people are undoubtedly at risk of being introduced or coerced into prostitution while homeless, young people may also engage in prostitution because of low self esteem resulting from abuse suffered at home or in care (Downing-Orr, 1996). A further danger to homeless young people is posed by the high levels of sexual risk behaviour found among this group (Craig *et al*, 1996). Research in Australia and the US has also consistently found that the sexual behaviour of homeless youth places them at increased risk of HIV infection (Rosenthal *et al* 1994; Pfeifer & Oliver 1997; Robertson and Toro, 1998).

Homelessness and poor housing have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. Like homeless adults, homeless youth appear to be at risk for a variety of medical problems. This is particularly evident among young people who are sleeping rough. They may have little money, eat poorly, lack access to health services, have little opportunity to maintain adequate personal hygiene and suffer disproportionately from traumatic injury, skin infestations, infectious diseases and nutritional disorders (Evans, 1996). The dangers of homelessness to young peoples' mental health are also acute. Depression and anxiety are the most commonly reported disorders and these can worsen over the duration of homelessness (Craig *et al*, 1996; Jones, 1999; Craig & Hodson 2000).

2.2 Research on Lesbian and Gay Youth

There is much within the literature on youth homelessness that has direct relevance to developing an understanding of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men. Our attention now turns to the body of research on lesbian and gay youth in an effort to gain further insight into their experiences of housing crisis. However, even

within this field there is little research that deals directly with issues of homelessness for young lesbians and gay men. Though recent times have seen the publication of research looking at issues of housing and homelessness amongst older lesbians and gay men living in the UK (Hubbard & Rossington, 1995; North British Housing Association, 1999), corresponding research on lesbian and gay youth is rare in general and non-existent in this country. Some research deals with issues of poverty and social exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men but does not deal specifically with issues of homelessness (Glasgow Women's Library, 1999). There is even some literature which explores issues of housing and homelessness for lesbians (Anlin, 1989) and gay men of all ages (Smailes, 1994) but this does not deal adequately with the experiences of young people, which we know from generic research can be significantly different from the experiences older homeless people (Fitzpatrick, 1999).

Instead, research on lesbian and gay youth tends to focus either on singular aspects of lesbian and gay life other than housing and homelessness - such as homophobia and bullying (Douglas *et al*, 1997) or suicidality (Bagley & D'Augelli, 2000) - or on a multiplicity of life issues of which housing or homelessness form a small part, if they are considered at all (Burbidge & Walters, 1981; Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Savin Williams, 1994; Gay & Lesbian Equality Network, 1995). Nevertheless, existing research does have much to tell us about the life experience of young lesbians and gay men, which goes some way to increasing our understanding of the probable causes of homelessness and the likely experiences of lesbian and gay youth who undergo housing crisis.

2.2.1 Estimating the prevalence

One of the main questions to dominate any discussion of homelessness within the literature relates to the prevalence of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. Unfortunately, very little concrete evidence exists about prevalence and discussions serve to underscore this fact, rather than provide any fresh insights (Kruks, 1991; Savin Williams, 1994; Ryan & Futterman, 1997). Indeed, such literature often merely catalogues the problems faced in gathering statistics about this group of young people who fall into two of the most difficult populations to survey. The limitations of gathering statistics by monitoring service users or other administrative data sources are also acknowledged - generally because of a presumption that stigma and fear surrounding sexuality will prevent homeless young people from disclosing their sexual orientation when they use a service (Kruks, 1991; Savin Williams, 1994).

Where estimates of prevalence are given, they are more often derived from simple random samples of lesbians and gay men, rather than from administrative records. British research, conducted in the early 1980's, estimated that 11 per cent of young lesbians and gay men experience housing crisis, with the incidence slightly higher for young women than for young men (14 per cent to 9 percent respectively) (Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Research conducted in Scotland in the 1990's suggested that one third of lesbians and gay men interviewed had to leave their family home as a result of their sexuality becoming known (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, 1997). A similar proportion of lesbians and gay men living in the Irish Republic admitted to leaving their family home with no certainty as to where they were going next. This estimate was doubled for those respondents classified as living in poverty (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 1995).

American research provides some further evidence of the prevalence of housing crisis amongst young lesbians and gay men, with some commentators estimating that as many as one in four young people sleeping rough are lesbian or gay (Renee Martin, 1996; Ryan & Futterman, 1997). Many reports estimate the numbers of homeless lesbians and gay men to be higher in large metropolitan areas, comprising as much as 25-30 per cent of homeless youth on Los Angeles and forty per cent in Seattle (Kruks, 1991). However, caution is urged at generalising from these percentages to other areas, given that increased migration of lesbians and gay men to urban areas may mean that they are over-represented amongst populations of homeless people there.

Outside this literature, there is little further research evidence relating to the prevalence of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men. While it is not the purpose of this current study to estimate this, it is clearly an issue of relevance to the provision of services to this group. To this end, further consideration is given to the issue of prevalence in later chapters of this report, in particular exploring the views of organisations about the feasibility of estimating it, the methods used by some and the difficulties or dilemmas encountered by others.

2.2.2 The causes of homelessness

In contrast to the generic literature on homelessness discussed earlier, it might be expected that literature on lesbian and gay youth is more conversant with the probable causes of homelessness among these young people. Curiously though, while generic literature omits almost any consideration of sexuality as a factor in causing housing crisis, lesbian and gay scholarship would have us believe that difficulties arising from sexuality constitute the *only* reasons why young lesbians and gay men become homeless. The factors causing homelessness mentioned earlier which are less obviously related to sexuality – such as criminality – or those not at all connected – such as childhood emotional, physical and sexual abuse – are all but absent from the research focusing on lesbian and gay youth. This could represent an overcompensation within lesbian and gay literature for the dearth of consideration shown to sexuality in the more generic literature on youth homelessness. Indeed, the factors mentioned do complement those reported in the generic research.

Homophobia

Homophobia refers to the hatred or fear of individuals because of their homosexuality. It can manifest in many ways from subtle remarks through to extreme violence. Such negative reactions to discovery or disclosure of sexuality is the factor cited most recurrently as the cause of housing crisis (Anlin, 1989; Tremble, 1993; Dempsey, 1994; Gay & Lesbian Equality Network, 1995; Ryan & Futterman, 1997; Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, 1997; D'Augelli, 1998; Steel, 1998; Stonewall Youth Project, 2000). This is said to happen either because home life is made so intolerable as to precipitate departure or because knowledge of the young person's sexuality prompts parents or other carers to forcibly eject the young person from their home (Kruks, 1991; Savin Williams, 1994; Ryan & Futterman, 1997; Steel, 1998; Stonewall Youth Project, 2000). Fear of discovery, and anticipation of subsequent harassment or violence from family or friends, also features as a reason for running away and becoming homeless (Kruks, 1991; Stonewall Youth Project,

2000). Running away can also be a self-protective act in response to anticipated disapproval or rejection from family (Dempsey, 1994).

Homophobia is commonly felt to have a direct influence on young people leaving or running away from their home environments, which has clear implications for their vulnerability to housing crisis. Within the family home, homophobic taunts or violence can be particularly disruptive for young people, especially where the source is someone who previously occupied a nurturing role. A recent American study found that among young people who disclosed their sexuality to their parents, one quarter were rejected by their fathers and ten per cent by mothers. Such responses often manifested in verbal and physical abuse (D'Augelli *et al*, 1998). Other American research also reflects this incidence of homophobic violence within the family home. A survey of 500 American youths found that 40 per cent experienced violent physical attacks of which 46 percent was directly related to their sexuality. A staggering 61 per cent of this violence occurred within the family home (Hunter, 1992).

Experiences of homophobia in the local neighbourhood - in the form of verbal threats or physical abuse - is also seen to be particularly damaging to young people (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Tremble, 1993; Savin Williams, 1994; Ryan & Futterman, 1997; D'Augelli, 1998; Stonewall Youth Project, 2000) and said to be a primary reason for young people running away. Several studies document a high prevalence of homophobic violence and harassment. A survey of 4,200 lesbians and gay men of all ages living in Britain found that 34 per cent of gay and bisexual men, as well as 24 per cent of lesbian and bisexual women had experienced at least one assault related to their sexuality in the past five years (Mason & Palmer, 1996). The risk was said to be considerably greater for younger respondents. This is supported by research conducted amongst lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in London. Of the 202 young people interviewed, 83 per cent reported verbal abuse and 47 per cent physical abuse. Here the proportions of reported incidents were similar for young men and young women (Galop, 1998). American research reports similar levels of verbal and physical abuse experienced within neighbourhoods (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995).

The impact of homophobic bullying in schools on the security of home and school environment has been highlighted (Douglas *et al*, 1997; Stonewall Youth Project, 2000). Recent British research suggests that truancy and absenteeism is common amongst lesbian and gay youth as a way of avoiding harassment and violence from both peers and teachers (Rivers, 2000). Homophobia experienced in the care system - either from other young people or from 'carers' is said to lead young people to depart the care system prematurely and risk becoming vulnerable to housing crisis (Ryan & Futterman, 1997).

Mental health

Very few commentators make any causal link between mental health difficulties and homelessness among lesbian and gay youth. However, in much of the generic research on youth homelessness, experiences of mental distress are seen to be at the root of many experiences of housing crisis, and to be a common factor for exacerbating the difficulties of young people who become homeless (Craig *et al*, 1996; Downing-Orr, 1996; Craig and Hodson, 1998; Wrate & Blair, 1999). The vulnerability of young lesbians and gay men to mental health difficulties is one of the

most widely researched areas of lesbian and gay life in recent years. Many commentators assert that the pressure to conform to heterosexual roles and values, as well as the struggle many youths endure in the face of homophobia leads to significant difficulty, including episodes of depression, low self esteem, and isolation (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Plummer, 1989; Dempsey, 1994; O'Hanlon *et al*, 1997; James, 1998; McFarlane, 1998; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Perry, 1999). The stigmatisation of gay identities can lead to feelings of self loathing or hatred which have grave repercussions for the mental health of young lesbians and gay men (Martin & Hetrick, 1988).

Nowhere is the impact of such distress more visible than in the prevalence of suicidality among young lesbians and gay men. Over the past few years, there has been a proliferation of research and commentary on the high prevalence of suicidal thoughts and acts among lesbian and gay youth relative to their heterosexual counterparts (Savin Williams, 1994; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; Grossman & Kerner, 1998; Ferguson *et al*, 1999; Herrell *et al*, 1999; Ramefedi, 1999; Bagley & D'Augelli, 2000). Estimates of attempted suicide in recent research range from 20 to a staggering 42 per cent. However, much of this research is located outside the UK. Little research on suicidality among lesbian and gay youth has been undertaken in this country, though research in the early 1980's estimated that one in five attempted suicide because of the difficulties inherent in growing up gay or lesbian (Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Despite the lack of recent British research, it is clear that young lesbians and gay men have increased vulnerability to episodes of mental distress - which could impact on the security of their housing.

The nature of lesbian and gay communities

Causes of homelessness are also felt to arise from the construction of lesbian and gay life and community. For instance, it is argued that the concentration of lesbian and gay communities in urban areas means that young lesbians and gay men are more inclined to migrate there in search of a more supportive environment. For those who are not assisted in this by family or friends, the move can sometimes result in housing crisis (Stonewall Youth Project, 2000). Some commentators suggest that the wish to find suitable partners, or more generally the search for adventure, also attracts young lesbians and gay men to urban environments and has a concomitant impact on vulnerability to homelessness (Tremble, 1993).

The support for lesbian and gay relationships

The lack of legal and general social support for lesbian and gay relationships is also believed to lead to vulnerability if those relationships experience difficulty or breakdown. For instance, the absence of partnership rights for lesbians and gay men can leave one or other partner vulnerable to housing crisis in the event of relationship breakdown (Anlin, 1989). Ignorance concerning the occurrence of domestic violence in same sex relationships and the general lack of support organisations to specifically deal with this phenomenon can result in victims experiencing housing crisis in an effort to escape from perpetrators of abuse (Steel, 1998)

Differences related to gender or ethnicity

Unsurprisingly, the paucity of research generally on homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth means that there is a complete absence of any research focusing on differences between young men and young women, or studies which focus specifically on the experience of young lesbians and gay men from specific minority ethnic groups. None of the research reviewed identified gender differences in causation, though clearly there are differences between how young men and women experience coming out (Schneider, 1989). However, several commentators discuss the especial difficulties faced by young people from ethnic minority groups who are lesbian or gay. This has been argued to produce additional burdens and problems (Plummer, 1989). These difficulties encompass developing a strong gay identity *and* a strong ethnic identity; conflict in allegiance between these two identities; and the potential to experience both homophobia and racism (Savin Williams 1994; Grossman & Kerner, 1998). Indeed, some argue that while white lesbian and gay youth can find support in lesbian and gay communities, the predominantly white nature of these communities mean that such support is often more difficult to obtain for youth from minority ethnic groups (Tremble *et al*, 1989). This can lead to ethnic minority lesbian and gay youths feeling excluded from both their communities of origin and the lesbian and gay communities. The social position afforded to women in some cultures, and particularly notions of female sexuality, is felt to make life especially difficult for young lesbian women. The arrangement of marriage in some cultures, particularly those with a predominantly Muslim faith, has also led young lesbians to leave home prematurely, which can result in homelessness (Steel, 1998).

2.2.3 Experiences of homelessness

Given the lack of research directly focusing on homelessness among lesbian and gay youth, it is perhaps unsurprising that little can be gleaned about how their experiences of the homelessness scene might differ from homeless young people generally. Some American research suggests that lesbian and gay youth do not fare well within the homelessness scene – coming in for as much, if not more, homophobic abuse than they did within their family or care home (Martin & Hetrick, 1988). These suggestions are supported by some commentators in England (Steel, 1998) but are not based on any sort of empirical research. Clearly one of the main functions of the current study is to explore this in more detail, as will be evident in subsequent chapters.

Much of the research that does focus on homeless young lesbians and gay men concentrates on their vulnerability. There are some reports that young lesbians and gay men face increased susceptibility to drug and alcohol dependency during periods of homelessness, chiefly as a result of rejection from family and peers (Dempsey, 1994; Renee Martin, 1996; Grossman & Kerner, 1998). The dangers of exploitation are recurrently underscored, particularly for young gay and bisexual men (Boyer, 1989; Kruks, 1991; Tremble 1993; Savin Williams 1994; Renee Martin 1996). The research available tends to emphasise the apparent necessity of prostitution for survival on the streets (Kruks, 1991). However, it also highlights more positive motivations for engaging in selling sex; recurrent mention is made of the excitement derived from the activity, the income generated, and the sense of camaraderie and mutual support that exists amongst networks of young men involved in selling sex (Tremble 1993; Savin Williams 1994; Renee Martin, 1996).

There are, then, lessons to be learned about the experiences of homeless lesbian and gay youth from both sets of literature. However, there are also many questions arising from this review. There is clearly a need to understand more about how homelessness is caused amongst young lesbians and gay men and the inter-relationship between sexuality and other factors that bring about housing crisis. Also, the literature is relatively light on the lesbian and gay youth's experience of homelessness. Likewise, the use of housing and homelessness services and experience of lesbian and gay youth within them is a relatively uncharted area within the literature available. These are the central questions with which the remainder of the report is concerned.

3 PATTERNS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONGST LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH

The next two chapters aim to explore the cause and nature of young people's homelessness. This chapter will examine why young lesbians and gay men experience housing crisis and the circumstances surrounding their departure from home. It begins by briefly describing the different patterns of housing crisis evident amongst the young people interviewed. It then explores the points at which young people leave 'home' and the whole range of factors that can underpin this departure. The reasons that young people leave home which are related to sexuality will be considered separately from those that are unrelated to determine the specific role of sexuality in causing homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men. The nature of the young people's housing crisis – that is the experiences they have once they have departed from home - will then be examined in Chapter 4.

3.1 Patterns of housing crisis

The heterogeneity of experience among homeless young people generally is well documented in the literature (Harrison & Davis, 2001). The experiences of the young people in this study do not differ from previous findings in this respect, the types of housing crisis they experienced appear equally diverse. Broadly, three main patterns of homelessness or housing crisis were experienced:

- **a single period of housing crisis**
The experience of some young lesbians and gay men is characterised by one easily identifiable period of housing crisis, amidst a long history of more stable accommodation. The length of these periods of housing crisis varied significantly, ranging from a couple of weeks to a number of years. Shorter periods of housing crisis were often the result of swift intervention either by friends and family or by housing and homelessness services. For example after being homeless for a fortnight when his parents threw him out of home, Jonah was swiftly housed in accommodation specifically for young lesbians and gay men. Longer episodes were generally characterised by periods of mobility between temporary accommodation offered by family members, friends, acquaintances, and emergency accommodation services, or sleeping rough.
- **several distinct periods of homelessness**
The experiences of other young people were marked by a number of different phases of housing crisis interspersed with periods of being housed. Here young lesbians and gay men drifted in and out of housing crisis for a number of years, often for a variety of different reasons. Alternatively, multiple periods of housing crisis can result from a young person repeatedly being forced to leave home and then invited back by parents. This is described further below.
- **a consistent lack of stable accommodation**
A third pattern is evident among young people with limited or no experience of stable accommodation usually from early in their lives. Whilst growing up, these young people had typically experienced high mobility with care being

transferred frequently between different people such as parents, step parents, grandparents, siblings and also between different care situations, such as foster homes and residential children's homes. Such instability often continued after the young person left home or care. In this respect, the transition to independent living was often problematic and equally mobile – the young people concerned moved regularly between hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, council flats, as well as between the houses of family members, friends and associates, or had periods of rough sleeping. Consequently, these young people seemed to face particular difficulties in securing stable housing upon leaving home or care and were often still trying to achieve this at the time of interview.

These descriptions undoubtedly simplify some young people's experiences. It is not always easy to establish, for example, the point at which a housing crisis is resolved. Situations which might be expected to represent the end of a period of housing crisis (and are classed as such in many definitions), such as moving in to a local authority flat, can still be perceived by young people as constituting housing crisis if they quickly face mounting rent arrears. As mentioned in Section 1.5.2, the high level of support some young people need in order to sustain a tenancy and live independently adds considerable fragility to their housing situation, even in situations where they might appear to be in stable accommodation. Whilst these limitations should be borne in mind, the above classification is useful in illustrating the different ways in which homelessness can manifest in the young people's lives.

This diversity of experience was further complicated by the fact that for some housing crisis was in the past, whilst others were still in the midst of housing difficulty. This had implications for the degree of reflectivity young people had on their experiences. Where experiences of homelessness were in the past, the young people were often more introspective about their experience, whereas when young people were currently homeless, it was sometimes difficult for them to make explicit connections between circumstance and events in their lives.

3.2 Types of departure from 'home'

Exploring how and why the young people left home involves identifying the specific point at which the break with home occurred. As noted previously, however, young people have sometimes experienced such instability that it is difficult to perceive the point at which this break happened. Consequently, the young person's definition of this point in their housing circumstances was used for the purposes of this study. The term 'home' includes a range of situations in which young people were living with parents, other family members, foster carers or in residential care homes.

Very broadly there appears to be four main ways in which the young people left home:

- **Being thrown out**
This usually involved being told very firmly to leave the house and not to return, or being physically ejected by a parent or guardian.
- **Running away**
Here, leaving home was a result of feeling that it is impossible to stay rather than because of any positive choice. This was usually in response to difficult or adverse circumstances at home which made life there unpleasant or intolerable.

- **Leaving voluntarily and then encountering difficulty**

Deciding to leave due to the 'pull' of outside factors (as opposed to being 'pushed' by difficulties at home). Young people chose to leave home but then encounter difficulty at a later date which cause housing crisis

- **Leaving care and then encountering difficulty**

Young people who leave residential care and encounter problems when living independently or in aftercare accommodation

Determining the point at which a young person leaves home is simplest if they do not return home a later date. However, some homeless young people return to their parent's home on numerous occasions after leaving or being thrown out. This is illustrated by the case of Stephen.

Stephan (18) told his father he was gay when he was 15 and he was told 'if you don't leave the flat now then I will personally put your head through the door'. However, after a couple of weeks he went back after his father apologised. When he was 17 he was thrown out again; his father didn't want him under his roof because of his sexuality. He was miserable living along in bed and breakfast and was glad to return home when his father asked him to do so a second time when he was interviewed. He was living in another bed and breakfast after being thrown out again. He was determined this time that was not going to go back because he felt he had grown up a lot and was now more self sufficient. (White British)

The question of when the break from 'home' occurs also lacks relevance for those young people who had never experienced stable accommodation. As discussed above, young people sometimes reported complicated housing histories. For these young people, the absence of any stable base whilst they were growing up makes it impossible to identify a point of departure. This is demonstrated by the story of Darren.

Darren (17) lived with his mum and brothers until he was 5. From the age of 5 to 11 he lived for periods with other family members including his aunts, uncles, grandparents and an older sister, occasionally going back to his mothers. Life was difficult at home because "I always saw my mum getting beaten up by every boyfriend she ever had'. He also stayed for a time with his father but left there because he was also violent to his partner. Darren thinks that he became 'a problem child' and when he was eleven he was taken into care for four years. When he was 14 he ran away from care and went back to his mum's however he left after he was badly beaten up by his brother. He then spent time in hostels and on a psychiatric ward after a suicide attempt. He then ran away to a large urban city in the North and stayed for a time with people he met there. He was living with a relative again at the time of the interview but thought he might move on from there soon. (White British)

Where relationships with parents become problematic at an early age or parents themselves experience difficulty with each other, young people come under the care of another close family member. Grandparents in particular may take this role. For

example, Seán described how he spent increasing amounts of time at his grandparents from the age of 8-9 years until *'in the end my nan and granddad were my mum and dad'*. In these circumstances, 'leaving home' was felt to occur when the young person departed this 'adoptive' home.

The ages at which the young people left home was very varied. For some, leaving home happened as prematurely as their early teens, though in general it happened in mid to late teenage years. There appeared little relationship between the characteristics of the young person and the time they departed from home. Young men and young women exhibited similar variety in the age at which they departed from home, as did young people from different ethnic minorities. There was some suggestion from organisational representatives that those from ethnic minorities – particularly South Asian – may be able to postpone the point of departure from home by promise of marriage and concealment of homosexuality. However, there was no evidence of this amongst the young people interviewed. There was some evidence to suggest that young people who experience violence and abuse as children – which is clearly unrelated to their sexuality – leave or are removed from home at an earlier age. Young people in this sample who ran away or were thrown out of home for reasons directly related to their sexuality did so from the age of 15 upwards.

3.3 The causes of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth

The causes of homelessness are generally related to two different sets of circumstances. The first relate to the young people's background, in particular, the experiences of young people at 'home' (or in care) that bring about a departure. The second relate to the experiences young people have when they become homeless which can prevent a young person from ever achieving stable accommodation again. The two sets of reasons can be very different. The causes of departure from home are considered in this chapter, while the factors perpetuating housing crisis or preventing it from being resolved will be discussed in the next chapter.

In order to explain the specific role that sexuality can play in youth homelessness it is useful to consider the factors linked to sexuality separate from those which are unconnected. This, however, exaggerates the division between these two sets of causal factors. Disentangling 'generic' reasons for housing crisis from those related to sexuality is further complicated by the fact that it is common for the same issue to appear in both sets of factors but for different reasons. The experience of physical abuse, for example, can be the result of intolerance of a young person's sexuality or can be completely unrelated to it. The following sections will explore the full range of factors - both related and unrelated to sexuality - that underpin the break from home among young lesbians and gay men. The final section of this chapter will then revisit the question of the specific contribution of sexuality to the housing crisis of young people in the light of this discussion.

It should be said that while there were some differences in the nature or severity of factors causing homelessness amongst young people from ethnic minorities – which is discussed further below – there appeared to be little difference between those reported by lesbian women and gay men. While the experiences of housing crisis were sometimes different, chiefly because men and women are subject to differing

vulnerabilities, young men and women exhibited very similar causes of housing crisis.

3.3.1 Factors causing housing crisis linked to sexuality

Amongst the organisational representatives interviewed there were widely differing views about the significance of sexuality as a cause of housing crisis. These ranged from those that perceived sexuality to be the main or only cause of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men to those that did not believe it to be a significant factor.

Sexuality was not viewed as an issue significant in the creation of housing crisis by some generic organisations. This was particularly the case in those areas where dedicated accommodation for young lesbians and gay men is not currently available. Here service providers sometimes said they had never come across young people who had had to leave home because of their sexuality. Consequently, sexuality was not perceived to be a particularly relevant factor in explaining the housing crisis of young people.

The importance of sexuality as a causative factor in the creation of housing crisis among young lesbians and gay men was emphasised by service providers from lesbian and gay organisations, as well as by those from generic housing and homelessness organisations who recognised lesbians and gay men within their client group. Being lesbian or gay was said to create difficulties at home for young people due the intolerance with which their sexuality was received by family, friends and other young people at school or in the local neighbourhood. This said, however, few organisations were able to provide the depth of explanation required to understand how this brings about housing crisis for young people. In general, their reports contrasted starkly with the richness of the data obtained from the young people, which as well as elaborating on how these factors cause housing crisis, also highlighted and explained a plethora of others. These are described below.

Figure 3.1 Factors causing housing crisis linked to sexuality

- Intolerance of sexuality at home
- expectation of intolerance
- bullying by peers in school or neighbourhood
- the behaviour and emotional health of young people
- desire for independence

Intolerance of sexuality at home

The clearest link between sexuality and housing crisis among young lesbians and gay men is when a young person leaves home as a result of intolerant or negative reactions to their sexuality. This intolerance was most dramatically displayed when young people were thrown out of home upon disclosure or discovery of their sexuality. This involved being told to leave or being physically ejected from the house. It was common for such 'evictions' to be accompanied by violence or verbal abuse and they were often sudden or unexpected – allowing the young person little

time to plan for the future. Organisational representatives recurrently cited this as a predominant cause of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men.

Where a young person's sexuality was discovered or revealed by someone else, the effects were also particularly dramatic. It was common for young people in these circumstances to be confronted by parents and told to leave home immediately, often with no apparent consideration or thought as to where they would end up, as Jonah's recollections illustrate:

'I was at college and I went home and... my stepfather was there, my mum was there, and ...they said Ben said you were gay, and at first I denied it, but my mum believed him because I think she always suspected that I was gay...My mum hit me... she sort of, you know, pushed me around. My stepfather ...threatened to kill me and... said horrible things like you can go to hell and ...it's disgusting and it's filthy...and then they just told me, you know, just leave and with no clothes, with nothing. I mean I had the clothes I was wearing and that was it, just me and my wallet and my bag'. (Male, 18, African/Asian)

Intolerance of lesbian or gay sexuality at home can lead to housing crisis when this causes a young person to leave or run away from home. This experience was recurrent among the young people in the sample, although how this actually occurred varied. Some of the young people had left home after an argument, confrontation or violent incident with a family member whilst others left secretly. Refuge was sometimes sought with friends, partners, partner's parents or other family members though some had simply left without any clear plan as to where they might go. This was usually because life at home had become unbearable for the young person. Even in cases where the young people did not have anywhere to go, leaving home and the unknown was felt to be a preferable option to remaining at home.

Intolerance and negative attitudes can make life at home difficult for young people whether they have disclosed their sexuality or not if family members have suspicions about the young person's sexuality. In this respect, young people reported name-calling or negative comments alluding to their sexuality even before they had disclosed their sexual orientation to family members. The decision not to disclose one's homosexuality when this was suspected was felt by some to create problems in their relationships with family members in later times.

Where suspicion was communicated by prejudice, the young people typically described feeling alienated and unwelcome at home. Alternatively, where a young person had disclosed their sexuality or someone else had revealed it family members, and was received negatively, it typically induced a change in the way the young person was treated or felt they were viewed by other people at home. For example, Jackie was ignored by her father for a month after he learnt she was a lesbian, while Maya described how *'I became like different, I wasn't one of the family any more'*.

Feelings of being unwanted at home were emphasised when young people experienced verbal or physical abuse in relation to their sexuality. Young lesbians

and gay men sometimes reported recurrent verbal abuse relating to their sexuality from parents, siblings and other relations. Reports of young people being punched, kicked, hit or pushed were common. For example, Liam who enjoyed 'girls stuff' when he was younger such as 'majorettes' and 'dance' was taunted for being a 'poof' and beaten by his mothers' boyfriends. Carl was beaten so severely by his father after disclosing his sexuality that he needed hospitalisation for two days. Sean's case illustrates these types of experience:

Sean (15) described how when he was living at home with his parents his sexuality would frequently be referred or alluded to in an offensive way. He remembered persistent derogatory remarks or comments. He described how *'my mum said things like put your trainers away, you stupid queer, and all things like that'*. This, coupled with the physical abuse he received, underpinned his decision to leave home *'I had a fight with my dad and he smashed my head on a window sill and that and so I couldn't take no more'*. (White British)

Life at home was sometimes made impossible because of attempts by family members to change a young person's sexuality or 'cure' them of non-heterosexual tendencies. Parents sometimes attempted to affect a change in the young person's sexuality by trying to set them up with members of the opposite sex. More exceptionally, parents or other family members encouraged the young person to get medical help or some type of therapy. Richard, who was thrown out when his parents discovered his sexuality, was allowed to return to the family home on condition that he went for counselling or some form of treatment to cure him of his homosexuality. In other situations, such as that faced by Jonah, parents devised their own methods to 'heal' a young person.

Expectation of intolerance

Home life is often difficult when young people feel that they have to conceal their sexuality. Some young people described feeling very uncomfortable and ashamed about their sexuality and felt unable to tell their family about this. This can be because of the homophobic behaviour or attitudes held by the young person's family or young people's assumptions about or expectations of this. For example, Richard knew from the age of twelve that his sexuality would cause problems when his father told him during a sex education discussion that he hoped he *'wasn't thinking about being gay'*. Alternatively, the young people expected a negative reaction because of the disapproving societal attitudes about homosexuality they had been exposed to whilst growing up. Either way, the expectation of intolerance was so great for some that leaving home was felt to be the only option available.

In exceptional circumstances, anticipation of a negative reaction to sexuality can be wrongly construed. Where young people had difficulty coming to terms with their sexuality, they sometimes projected these negative feelings onto others, which led unnecessarily to expectations of a negative response. This is demonstrated by Joe.

Joe, (21) dreaded telling his mum and step dad that he was gay because he did not think they would ever accept this. He described how he looked for evidence to support this assumption and ignored evidence to the contrary. For example, when Julian Clary appeared on the television screen and his mother demanded it be switched off, he assumed her antipathy to him was related to his sexuality. He ignored the fact she was a big fan of other television personalities who were known to be gay. With hindsight, Joe feels it would have been better to have discussed things with his parents. However, *'I'd made the decision that that's how they were going to react and that's how everybody else is going to react so I isolated myself off in a way, it wasn't them, it was me really'* (White British)

Bullying by peers in school or neighbourhood

Intolerant attitudes towards lesbian or gay sexuality were also experienced by the young people at school and in their local neighbourhood. The significance of bullying in making home life difficult for a young person was recurrently emphasised by organisational representatives. This chimes with the experiences of the young people who repeatedly spoke of homophobic abuse and bullying by their peers, neighbourhood 'friends' and classmates. It was common for young people to describe being taunted or beaten up because of other young people's knowledge about or suspicion of their sexuality. For instance, Seán described how local children would throw stones at the windows when his parents were out and try to get inside the house. He described how he was too scared to even to go out to the local shop and this made him feel like he was *'in prison'*.

School was another potential source of bullying and abuse related to sexuality. This was sometimes because young people confided in school friends who did not keep this confidence, or more exceptionally, when a same sex relationship with another young person at school was discovered. Harassment and abuse were pervasive in some young people's school lives. The young people reported a variety of responses from teachers and school authorities to this abuse, ranging from complete support and protection, to complete ignorance. It was sometimes suggested that teachers were aware of the extent of bullying but were unable or unwilling to do anything to help the young person. Stephen, illustrates the way in which being gay or lesbian can affect the quality of a young person's school-life:

'Towards my 12th birthday, I knew that I was gay...but I wasn't comfortable with it...the school made me see a counsellor, they thought something was wrong with me, and I just got very uncomfortable in school in general... I thought I was a freak... and I had the mickey taken out of me for so many things and been beat up so many times...when it comes back to me, it hurts...because I could have had a good school life' (Male, 18, White British)

Unsurprisingly, such experiences can affect school attendance. Some of the young people had not attended school for a number of years because of a fear of bullying. Others attended intermittently.

'I was getting bullied because I was gay...I was always coming home with black eyes...bruises, cuts, everything...so I didn't end up going in the end, I ended up bunking off school and then doing really bad things, getting in trouble with the police and things like that and that was it really' (Male, 19, White British)

There was also evidence to suggest that the experience of bullying adversely affected educational attainment. Young people interviewed who had experienced bullying at school because of their sexuality typically had few or no qualifications.

Bullying at school, when combined with homophobia in the home environment or local neighbourhood commonly induced a sense of hopelessness amongst the young people. This recurrently led young people to leave home in the hope of escaping the abuse. This is evoked vividly by Lisa:

'After a while it was getting so that anywhere I went...I was getting people shouting things at me. I couldn't get on the buses to go home without people starting. I couldn't walk around that area without people coming up to me and saying things. People in the block of flats near to where I lived knew as well...and I couldn't even go round my area, and that's when I thought I can't take it anymore because it was just everywhere... sod it, I can't deal with it, I'm going to leave' (Female, 16, White British)

The behaviour and emotional health of young people

Sexuality can be a cause of problems at home when it affects young people's behaviour or emotional health in a negative way. Young people who have difficulties in coming to terms with their sexuality can experience negative effects from this. Alternatively, negative reactions to sexuality from family members can be harmful to young person's health and wellbeing.

Coming to terms with sexuality can adversely affect health and behaviour. It has been argued elsewhere that depression and dependency on drugs or alcohol are associated with attempts to cope with or block out issues related to sexuality (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Plummer, 1989; Dempsey, 1994; Renee Martin, 1996; O'Hanlon, 1997; Grossman & Kerner, 1998; McFarlane, 1998; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Perry, 1999). This association was underscored by lesbian and gay youth workers interviewed. The young people added weight to this point and described how they used alcohol and drugs to try and help them cope with problems arising from their sexuality. This behaviour can have obvious implications for the quality of relationships at home.

The reactions of parents or guardians to sexuality can adversely affect some young people. The hurt and anger generated by parents' inability to accept their son or daughter's sexuality can create or exacerbate behavioural problems. This is illustrated by the explanation Zoë gave for her behaviour:

'Well, I just wanted her to just accept who I was...I kept ringing up loads of times when I was pissed and going on about it...was a way of getting back at her ...I wanted more love, I felt she pushed me out of things and that hurt me

and I just wanted to show her how much I was hurting and that... Like one time I just used to ring up and say, oh, I'm not on smack no more, and she went...why are you talking funny, I went, 'oh, because I'm on speed now', and just things like that. And I know everytime I got arrested and that, it hurt her' (Female, 18, White British)

There is some evidence to suggest that the cultural expectations and background of young people from some ethnic minorities can create increased difficulty for young people in coming to terms with sexuality, often with considerable implications for health and wellbeing. This is explained by Jackie below:

'I (didn't) want to be a lesbian, I wasn't comfortable at all with it, you know. I thought, what are you doing, you know, you can't be, it is so hard out there, it's hard being a Black person and a woman as well, you know, why are you making things more difficult for yourself and that's why I was smoking so heavily as well, it was my way out really. I do look back and think if I hadn't have smoked I wouldn't be here... I think I would have ended my life ... because I was so, so stressed out' (Female, 21, Black Caribbean)

Desire for independence

Young people who left home because of a desire for independence and to explore their sexuality away from home, exhibited perhaps the only positive link between sexuality and departure from home. Service providers from lesbian and gay organisations in particular highlighted this factor. Feeling constrained in local neighbourhoods – especially rural areas – or a perceived lack of opportunity to express sexual identity or behaviour culminated in a desire to move away to larger cities with more established lesbian and gay communities and commercial scenes. London and Manchester appeared particularly appealing to young people in this respect as it offered anonymity and a large gay scene.

'I think really why I left was I wanted to see a bit of the world, I wanted to go and do my own thing. I had come out and I just wanted to go and do whatever' (Male, 21, White British)

However, even here, there was some evidence to suggest that young people were also avoiding homophobia within home environments or neighbourhoods, or escaping the pressure of being the only identifiable lesbian or gay man known to their friends or family.

Whatever the impetus for leaving home, these young people sometimes experienced difficulty when they moved to larger cities, which led them into periods of housing crisis.

The experience of young people from ethnic minorities

The intolerance of homosexuality in some cultures – particularly those grounded in the Muslim Faith – was felt by organisational representatives to constitute the dominant cause of housing crisis amongst young lesbians and gay men from those

ethnic and cultural minorities. There was some suggestion that amongst minority ethnic groups housing crisis can occur when young lesbians or gay men can no longer postpone the pressure for marriage. In this respect, it was felt that young people either ostracise themselves to avoid bringing 'shame' on their family or are ejected by their family on disclosure of their sexuality.

The experiences of young people from such minorities provide some support for this view. They typically reported the most extreme reactions to their sexuality and featured amongst those who were thrown out of home for this reason. The young people offered two main reasons for what they recurrently felt was a more extreme reaction than had been received by the white young people they knew. The first related to the intolerance of homosexuality within the Muslim religion. Young people of Muslim faith were amongst those who reported the most zealous reactions to their sexuality, for instance by being threatened with death or being completely ostracised from family. In the latter instances, young people often learned after leaving home that families had informed neighbours and community members of their death.

'When I said I was...moving out, they start saying...there's no way you can live in this country without our permission to do things, we have to kill you...we can do something, we can give someone who is professional, money, a lot of money and they can kill you...so you will be dead and we have a nice name...I was so scared...I love my life' (Female, 19, Black African)

'When I told my dad I was gay, he said I'm dead as far as he's concerned because the religion says... I mean it doesn't say gay or anything like that but it's just all the sin things...Even my aunt refused to put me in her house when I said I was gay and my dad said I'm not having him if he's gay' (Male, 16, Black African)

The second related to an emphasis by parents on upholding traditional ways of living, as well as the family name and reputation, all of which were felt to contribute to building a better life in the UK. Some of the young people spoke of sudden attempts to arrange or force marriage when their sexuality was discovered or disclosed. For example, Jackie described how her father started to bring young men to the house after she revealed she was a lesbian. Similarly, Asif was told he was going to be married to a woman so that he could not bring shame to the family. When young people refused to acquiesce to their family's demands, they were often renounced to prevent any disgrace to the family name. In exceptional circumstances, families attempted to move the young person to another part of the UK or to send them back to their country of origin.

3.3.2 Factors causing housing crisis which appear unrelated to sexuality

The literature cites a wide range of factors causing homelessness among young people. These were discussed in Chapter 2 and include difficult and disrupted family relationships, parental behaviour and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. These causes of troubled childhood seem to be as common in the life histories of homeless young lesbians and gay men, as the literature suggests they are in the lives of heterosexual young homeless people. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest

that the ways these things occur in the lives of young lesbians and gay men is any different from the way in which they manifest in other young people's lives.

The following section will consider the factors causing homelessness among young lesbians and gay men, which appear unrelated to sexuality. These encompass the behaviour of parents or guardians, the behaviour of the young person and wider cultural factors. These will be considered individually although there was often considerable overlap between them.

Figure 3.2 Factors causing housing crisis which appear unrelated to sexuality

- disrupted family relationships
- disruptive parental behaviour
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- relationship breakdown
- religious and cultural expectations
- bullying
- the behaviour and emotional health of young people

Disrupted family backgrounds

Instability in care arrangements and family composition was a recurrent factor in many of the life histories of homeless young lesbians and gay men. As mentioned earlier, mobility between parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and siblings whilst growing up was common. Such disruptive family backgrounds were linked with the breakdown of parental relationships, and the subsequent formation of new partnerships, or remarriage. In these circumstances, problems with stepparents were recurrent and it was common for young people in this situation to feel that their presence in the household was resented by their stepparent. Similarly, the relationship between a young person and their natural parent was sometimes complicated upon the arrival of a new partner. Here, young people sometimes described feeling that they were *'in the way'*. In more exceptional circumstances, young people recounted episodes where stepparents were violent, aggressive and abusive.

'They didn't like us, none of her boyfriends, they hated us... we used to get beaten up... My mum said 'we're a package I've got kids so just take it or leave it' and they took it...so it were awful' (Male, 17, White British)

The perception of a childhood lacking in love and affection was common amongst the young people interviewed. In the extreme, this was demonstrated by young people who felt that their parents *'hated'* them or by those who had little or no contact with either parent for long periods whilst growing up. The case of Jason, described below, is an illustration of this type of background.

Jason (22) lived with both his parents until he was eleven. His father worked away and he 'wasn't around much' and Jason saw him rarely. His mother had children when she was very young, found it difficult to cope, and Jason felt they never bonded. He feels she favoured his sisters and treated him in a way that was 'not very nice'. His parents split up when he was eleven and he went backwards and forwards between both parents for a few years but felt unwanted by both of them. He was taken into children's home when he was thirteen and remained in residential care until he was eighteen. He had very little contact with either parent until he was twenty and felt that 'they just didn't care'. (White British)

In situations, where young people have already left the care of parents because of family difficulty to stay with other family members, the failure of these care arrangements typically propelled the young person into housing crisis. For example, the death of a grandparent can leave the young person without any 'home', if they are unwanted by parents or do not want to return to the parental home.

Mobile and disrupted family backgrounds were common among some young people from ethnic minorities, a result of war in their country of origin, as well as emigration to the UK.

Disruptive parental behaviour

The behaviour of parents, stepparents or carers recurrently made life at home difficult for young lesbians and gay men, in that it destabilised young people's experience of childhood. Young people recounted the difficulties of living with parents who had severe alcohol and drug dependencies. There was also mention of the effect of parent's mental distress – such as depression or mood swings. In some cases, young people spoke of parents who had a history of self-harm or suicidality. Such behaviour was said to make life at home intolerable.

'She'd really depress me...her moods would just go up, her moods are really changeable, really drastically, you know, you wouldn't know from one minute to the next whether she was going to be nice or horrible or - I felt uncomfortable around her because of that' (Female, 18, Turkish/Irish)

Living with the repercussions of parents who were persistent offenders was also mentioned as a reason for leaving home.

Finally, domestic violence between parents was a recurrent feature in some of the young people's lives and commonly included violence against the young person or siblings if they are present or intervene when it occurs. Where this happened, it caused young people to leave home prematurely or without any knowledge of where they would go.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse whilst growing up was common amongst the young people interviewed. Parents and stepparents were the main perpetrators in this respect,

although among the young men in the sample, brothers or foster carers were also implicated. Where brothers consistently perpetrated abuse, the failure of parents to intervene was seen to imply acquiescence in this treatment of the young person. Sometimes young people left home following one severe incident of abuse. In other situations, the cumulative effect of years of abuse developed into a strong compulsion to leave.

This abuse can be connected to the sexuality of the young person as has been illustrated by the discussion in Section 3.3.1, however, in other cases it was clearly unrelated to sexuality. Indeed physical abuse by family members often predated any awareness by either the parent or the young person of their sexual orientation. The reasons behind specific incidents of physical abuse are so varied that they belie attempts at explanation. Young people described being beaten at the slightest provocation such as arguing with a parent's viewpoint or forgetting to put sugar in a cup of tea. Some simply described their childhood as a time when they were '*hit for a lot of things*'.

Sexual abuse

The experience of sexual abuse during childhood was extraordinarily common amongst the young people interviewed. As noted earlier in the report, the numbers of young people concerned are not in themselves significant because of the purposive basis of sample selection in qualitative research. However, the recurrence with which sexual abuse was spoken of during interviews would suggest that there is a strong association between being a homeless lesbian or gay man and the experience of sexual abuse during childhood. These suggestions, however, are very tentative and need to be validated, where this is possible, by some sort of statistical enquiry.

Sexual abuse was evident among both men and women, sometimes for very long periods and from very early ages. The perpetrator was always male, usually either an immediate member of the family - such as a father, stepfather, grandfather or brother - or a close friend of the family. Sexual abuse obviously makes home life impossible for young people and can lead to a sudden departure from home. In some situations, social services became involved and removed the young person from home to a children's home, foster carer, adolescent unit, hospital or refuge of some sort. This was sometimes the result of the young person themselves informing of the abuse or indicating distress in other ways, such as self-harm or attempted suicide. More exceptionally young people left or were ejected from home because they were not believed when they told someone about ongoing sexual abuse. Emma, for example, was thrown out of home because her parents did not believe that her brother had been sexually abusing her.

The role of sexual abuse as a cause of housing crisis among young people is also linked to its devastating effects on family relationships. This is particularly so in situations where young people felt that other family members did not do enough to prevent the abuse from happening. Feelings of resentment were common, especially towards mothers. There were some reports of mothers who chose to cut off contact with a young person when sexual abuse was discovered because of a wish to continue their relationship with the perpetrator of the abuse. Alternatively, as

Louise suggests below, this can be due to family members' own difficulties in coming to terms with the abuse a young person has suffered and feelings of guilt that this engenders:

'They didn't want to accept that they played a part in letting it happen, they didn't like what I said about what had gone on in the family... but my mother said it's because they were all shocked but they're all coming round to it now like, even then, they should have been there for me when I needed them. It was them who got me into that mess, I mean I was an innocent kid, what could I have done?' (Female, 19, White British)

Informing people outside the family of sexual abuse sometimes led to young people being ostracised by their families. For example, where a young person involved the authorities in an attempt to bring an end to abuse, this was typically disruptive of family relationships. Helen, who testified against her father in court, felt that her family resented her taking action that had resulted in him being given a prison sentence on two occasions.

Relationship breakdown

The breakdown of partnerships and relationships had sometimes brought about housing crisis for young people. There was no evidence to suggest that this occurred any differently for gay and lesbian youth than for other young people. Homelessness amongst those young people interviewed followed the breakdown of previous same sex and opposite sex relationships.

The breakdown of a relationship was sometimes accompanied or precipitated by domestic violence. For example, Leanne left her husband after he became violent and abusive towards her. Likewise, Joe ended a relationship because his partner was violent towards him and had caused him significant physical harm on a number of occasions. It has been argued elsewhere that the lack of support organisations dealing specifically with same sex domestic violence can compound the problems of lesbians and gay men dealing with partner abuse and lead to housing crisis (Steel, 1998). The evidence in this study neither confirms nor refutes this. Clearly, separate focused investigation is required.

Religious and cultural expectations

Problems arising from religious and cultural expectations are often linked to sexuality as has been discussed, however, they can also be related to more general lifestyle issues. Some of the young people reported a perceived lack of freedom and conflict with parents regarding their friends, way of life, dress and schoolwork. For example, Jonah described how he was constantly pressurised to spend more time reading the Koran, wear long clothes and stay at home instead of going out with friends. Such examples echo the findings of previous work, which has highlighted the potential for conflict to arise between 'home' and 'host' cultures. This can create significant pressures at home, which are very distinct from the difficulties brought about by the young people's sexuality. Having said this, the extreme difficulties resulting from sexuality experienced by some ethnic minority young people should not be underestimated.

Bullying

The bullying experienced by young lesbians and gay men can be related to sexuality as described in Section 3.3.1, however, it can also be about other issues. The stories of the young people in this sample who experienced bullying at school that was unconnected to their sexuality are reminiscent of the long established causes of bullying among young people, all related to being perceived to be or look different. For example, Denzel was recurrently bullied because of his race and accent at school. Alba felt she was bullied because her mother made her wear *'weird clothes and geeky glasses'*. Where young people grew up in residential care described, bullying sometimes related to their lack of a family home. For instance, Liam described how he was constantly taunted with comments that implied he was *'put in a children's home because your mum doesn't love you'*. In similar ways to those described earlier, bullying often made remaining at home untenable.

Leaving care

As indicated at the start of this chapter, the homelessness of some young lesbians and gay men had resulted directly from their experiences of leaving the care system. It was common for young people to be referred to temporary hostel accommodation upon leaving children's homes or adolescent units. This sometimes lasted for long periods of time without an offer of permanent accommodation. Alternatively, where young people had moved on to permanent accommodation on leaving care – or after a brief time in hostel accommodation – they were sometimes unable to sustain this and ended up in emergency accommodation or sleeping rough. The failure of support mechanisms to assist in the transition to living independently was sometimes the cause of this. Anna described how unhappy and alone she felt in her council flat. She felt this had led her to *'get in with a bad crowd'*, become addicted to heroin and losing her flat. In circumstances such as these, the inability of the young person to live independently caused the arrangements to fall through. The placement of several care leavers together within the same aftercare accommodation without adequate support appeared to be the most difficult situation to sustain, as exhibited by the remainder of Jason's story:

Jason (22) left residential care when he was eighteen and expected that he would be helped to find a flat. However, he was referred to a shared house provided by social services aftercare. This household was very chaotic and every night was 'a wild party time'. Eventually the house was closed down and he was evicted with no further support other than a cheque for a deposit on a flat. He went to stay with a man he met in a pub, but left because this man expected sexual favours in return for the accommodation. He then met another young homeless man who introduced him to the rent scene in London. He spent over a year living in bed and breakfast accommodation paid for by the money he earned selling sex. (White British)

The behaviour and emotional health of young people

In addition to the range of reasons given above which underpin the early departure from home of young people there are also a number of factors specifically relating to the behaviour of the young person. These include behavioural, mental health or emotional problems and drugs or alcohol dependency. Clearly, however,

behavioural difficulties and mental distress are rarely unrelated to other issues in a young person's life. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that where they occurred in the young people's lives that they were merely symptomatic of other issues, such as physical or sexual abuse. They may also, as discussed earlier, be related to difficulties in coming to terms with sexuality. Thus, while the behaviour or emotional state of a young person may contribute to their leaving home, it can be argued that the real cause of departure was violence or abuse that gave rise to such instability. Moreover, when emotional distress or behavioural problems were an issue for the young person when they departed from 'home', then they often continued to cause difficulty during the time spent homeless. Their role, in this respect, is considered further in Chapter 4.

Where mental distress was characterised by suicidal behaviour or self-harm, this sometimes led to the institutionalisation of the young person in general or psychiatric hospitals, and adolescent units. Housing crisis for these young people resulted from the difficulties experienced after discharge from these places, especially when the young person felt they could not return to the parental home.

The types of behavioural and emotional problems described above were more evident among the group of young people, referred to earlier with little experience of stable accommodation. These young people had often experienced particularly troubled and disrupted backgrounds. The issue of causation is particularly complex in some of these cases. Whilst the behavioural and emotional problems experienced by this group had undoubtedly created or exacerbated their housing difficulties, this housing instability had also contributed to these behavioural and emotional difficulties. This issue will be returned to in Chapter 4.

Feeling ready to live independently

Much more exceptionally young people left home because they felt ready to take this step. Even when leaving home is a positive choice, however, this can be a route into housing crisis when accommodation arrangements for these young people fail, or because of the difficulties they encounter in living independently. This can be for reasons outside the young person's control. For example, Juliet became homeless when she was evicted from a local authority property that she had rented from a neighbour who had accumulated rent arrears.

3.4 The role of sexuality in causing homelessness among young lesbians and gay men

This chapter illustrates that the role of sexuality in the departure of young lesbians and gay men from home is complex and varied. The contribution of sexuality to the housing crisis of some young people is unambiguous. That is not to say that sexuality per se produces housing crisis. Rather, other people's intolerance of sexuality can lead to young people leaving home. Alternatively, young people's own expectations of intolerance can bring about housing crisis, as can emotional or psychological difficulties in coming to terms with sexuality in a sometimes unsupportive environment. The experience of other young people contrast with this and suggest that their sexuality was entirely unconnected to their experience of

housing crisis. In such instances, homelessness was generally attributed to a raft of other, perhaps more established, causes of housing crisis. Finally, homelessness amongst the young people interviewed sometimes resulted from a combination of factors both related and unrelated to a young person's sexual orientation.

Three case studies given below illustrate the differing roles that sexuality can play in housing crisis further. A fuller account of Liam's experience, mentioned above, illustrates how housing crisis can be entirely unrelated to sexuality.

Liam (18) was taken into care at the age of seven because his father sexually abused him. Whilst in care, he lived in numerous children's homes and with different foster families. He developed behavioural problems and described himself as very violent and aggressive. This resulted in frequent movement between different carers. Upon leaving care, he had been helped to obtain a supported tenancy but abandoned it because he found it difficult to maintain: *I ran up great big debts and owed thousands of pounds.* He went to stay with a boyfriend, but when this relationship deteriorated, he sought refuge in emergency hostel accommodation. He had been there for a number of months at the time of interview. He felt that his housing crisis *'It's mainly all related to the way my dad treated me and the abuse'* (White British)

In other circumstances, sexuality constituted the main or only reason that young people become homeless. This is exemplified by Richard, whose only problems at home and with his family were directly related to their intolerance of his sexuality:

Richard (23) grew up with both parents and siblings in a relatively affluent household in a Northern city. He had always dreaded his parents finding out he was gay, believing his father to be very homophobic. When he turned 17 he arrived home from work one day to find all his belongings packed and his father demanding he leave. Someone had told his family that he was gay. He went to stay with a boyfriend he had not know for very long but hated being away from home. His parents agreed to allow him to return home if got 'help'. He went home and began a relationship with a woman that lasted for over two years. He felt the situation was *'a farce'*, but was much happier back at home with his family. However, his attempts to suppress his sexuality became increasingly difficult. He was seen in a gay bar by one of his father's friends, which resulted in him being thrown out a second time when he was 21. He was homeless for a couple of months before he obtained housing association accommodation. At the time of the interview he was living with his partner. (White British)

The relationship between sexuality and leaving home is clearest when the sexuality of the young person is the only reason for their departure from home. Identifying the specific contribution of sexuality, however, in many cases is extremely complex. Frequently, sexuality is only one factor entangled within a range of others, which all contribute to the young person's housing crisis. In these situations, determining the exact link between the young person's sexual orientation and leaving home is significantly more complex. Incidences of physical abuse, for example, can be related both to sexuality and to other factors at the same time. Whilst coming out can lead

young people to experience physical and verbal abuse, such abuse was sometimes directed at young people - either previously or simultaneously - for reasons unconnected with the young person's sexuality. Thus whilst disclosure of sexuality can result in physical and verbal abuse, it can also exacerbate such abuse where it already exists. It is difficult in those situations to assign homelessness as either connected or unconnected to sexuality.

Similar complexity is evident in other circumstances. Arguments at home - about lack of money, unemployment, lifestyle or friends - may appear to be unrelated to sexuality, however, the young people sometimes felt that discomfort with sexuality was an undercurrent within them. For example, Denzel was thrown out of home apparently because of his lack of contribution to the household - either financially or in doing household chores. He did speculate, however, whether his eviction was related more to his mother's suspicions about his sexuality and her disappointment at his non-disclosure.

'It's one of those ones where you know... because I won't tell her and she's like, well, listen, if you ain't got no trust in me and you're not going to tell me, get out of the house, but she hasn't said it like that, she's like no, you just get on my nerves and you're not pulling your weight, you're not doing the right thing sort of thing, just leave' (Male, 20, Black Caribbean)

When family members responded particularly negatively to a young person's sexuality as in the case of some young lesbians and gay men from minority ethnic groups, this may not be the only reason for the young person's decision to leave. The case of Asif below illustrates how non-acceptance of sexuality can be inseparable from religious and cultural tensions about a young person's lifestyle and adherence to the family religion:

Asif (16) was thrown out of home when he was fifteen. The increasing number of arguments he had with his father made life at home impossible. Although he had not revealed his sexuality at home he felt that this was at the root of many of these as he felt his father *'wanted me to be like other boys'*. He felt uncomfortable at home because all his family were straight and he knew the family religion would make his sexuality difficult for them to accept. Equally, though, he resented the pressure placed on him to adhere to his religion. *'It was the religion what really pissed me off... he wanted me to go to the mosque and pray and believe things I didn't really want to believe ...and I thought I can't take it any more so I left the house'* (Black African)

To summarise, the role of sexuality as a factor in the young people's housing crisis ranged from being a predominant or driving factor, to one which was peripheral or unrelated to the housing situation of the young person. When sexuality does play a role this is often because of a negative reaction to a young person's sexuality by those around them. This chapter has described the intolerance of lesbian and gay sexuality experienced by the young people which manifested in emotional, verbal and physical abuse at the hands of family, 'friends' and other people at school and in the local neighbourhood. In addition, the ways in which a young person's own reaction to being lesbian or gay can contribute to homelessness have also been outlined. Whatever the precise role of sexuality in different situations, however, what is clear

is that tension stemming from a young person's sexuality can incite, be combined with or intensify other problems which result in young people becoming homeless. In addition, young lesbians and gay men are vulnerable to the same problems and difficulties that cause homelessness among all young people. The next chapter considers the experience of young lesbians and gay men during the time spent homeless.

4 THE EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS

Any attempt to understand homelessness among young people must focus on two aspects of their experience. The first of these, the circumstances underpinning a young person's departure from home, has been explored in the previous chapter. The second of these areas is the lived experience of homelessness itself. How this combines with the issues a young person may already face, or bring with them, when they become homeless will be the overall focus of this chapter, which will consider what housing crisis was like for these young people. It will encompass the conditions in which the young people were living, the nature of the relationship maintained with home and the emotional and psychological health of the young people. These factors will be considered alongside the dangers that young people may encounter whilst homeless. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the main factors that perpetuate the housing crises of young lesbians and gay men or prevent these from being resolved.

4.1 Young people's experience of housing crisis

This section will explore the situations in which the young people were living during periods of housing crisis, the issues or difficulties that were experienced and how the young people felt about them. Broadly speaking, housing crisis presented a range of problems or difficulties for the young people. These relate to practical difficulties such as lack of comfort or privacy, financial shortage, lack of facilities to maintain personal hygiene, as well as emotional problems associated with living away from home.

The broad definition of homelessness used by this study meant that there was considerable diversity among the young people in the types of housing crisis they had experienced. These included temporary periods staying with family members, friends or acquaintances, using a range of different types of temporary accommodation and rough sleeping. When the young people left 'home' to stay with other members of the family these were most commonly siblings, but also included aunts, uncles, grandparents and more distant relations such as a partner's family. Young people using these sources of accommodation may stay with the same individual for a number of months whilst trying to find permanent accommodation. At the other extreme young people may become involved in what some of the organisational representatives described as '*sofa-surfing*' or situations where a young person moved around staying with someone different on an almost daily basis.

Staying temporarily with family members or friends during a period of housing crisis was often difficult for the young people because of lack of space, living conditions and financial issues. Young people in these circumstances were often sleeping on sofas, camp beds, chairs or on the floor in cramped conditions. When sleeping arrangements that were designed to be temporary are used longer term this sometimes affected physical health.

Lack of privacy was a central concern for young people who were sleeping in communal areas such as living rooms. These arrangements led to interrupted sleep

and young people were regularly woken when people walked through the area where they were sleeping. Staying in communal areas also posed problems around getting changed and some of the young people described having to wait until others had left the house before they were able to get out of bed and get dressed. Similarly young people who had stayed in dormitory accommodation in hostels described a similar lack of privacy and difficulty in sleeping.

Living in these conditions might pose difficulties for most young people, however this situation can be particularly awkward for young lesbians and gay men if they are also trying to conceal their sexuality. Living in a small space with someone who is unaware, or believed to be unaware, that a young person is lesbian or gay can be a source of stress, as Seán indicates in his description of staying with his brother:

'It was tiny, it weren't even a studio flat. I slept on like this pull-out chair thing every night and my brother slept like right next to me... it weren't even made for one person, I don't think, and like I didn't know he knew I was gay at the time so I had to try and hide that all the time. I was always scared that he was going to go through my stuff and find out' (Male, 15, White British)

Financial issues were another source of difficulty for young people living in these circumstances. Very few of the young people were working or had any means of independent income when they left home. The only exceptions to this were those young people who had begun working before the break from home occurred. Money and contributions to the household sometimes caused tension and arguments between the young people and people who were accommodating them temporarily. Denzel, for example, described the daily 'stress' that resulted from his inability to assist financially when he moved in with his sister who had three children and was very short of money herself.

The level of cleanliness or lack of facilities such as washing machines and hot water in some types of temporary accommodation was also a source of discomfort for some. This was recurrent among highly mobile young people who moved frequently between friends and acquaintances. These young people often stayed in accommodation lacking facilities such as squats or council flats belonging to other young people who also lacked independent living skills. Young people described flats that were '*filthy*', where there was '*never anything to eat*' and no facilities to cook with or where they felt the use of amenities such as hot water was prohibited.

Emotional difficulties experienced whilst staying with friends or family during periods of housing crisis can generate and reinforce feelings of being unloved among young people. Some felt unwanted whilst living with friends or family members.

Consequently, it was common for young people to sleep rough rather than be a burden on friends or family. Those who did had slept in a variety of places including parks, woodland and beside major landmarks. When sleeping rough, young people sometimes relied on friends for help, who may or may not have known that they were homeless. For example, whilst sleeping rough, Zoë often went to her friend's house for food. However, she always pretended that she had somewhere to stay because she was too ashamed to admit that she was sleeping

rough. In other cases young people felt sleeping rough was a better option than returning home or approaching their family. Young people, who left home on bad terms, had been thrown out or left to escape abuse, sometimes slept rough rather than return home.

The lack of opportunity to maintain personal hygiene was obviously an issue for young people who were rough sleeping. Young people described how they *'hated waking up feeling dirty all the time'*, and one young man felt that he *'had been looking like a tramp recently'*. Washing facilities seem to be more accessible for those young people who gravitate towards major cities whilst homeless. For example, the young people who went to London whilst they were homeless quickly discovered homeless centres where showers, lockers and washing machines were freely available.

More exceptionally, some young people perceive some positive aspects to being homeless. The freedom and independence that accompanies leaving home was highlighted by some as *'like a little adventure like I can go and stay here, go and stay there'*. However, even where young people enjoyed the freedom that accompanied leaving home some admitted that in reality what they wanted was stability and *'a normal life'*.

4.2 The young person's relationship with 'home'

The nature of the relationship that the young people maintain with 'home' and parents or carers both during and after periods of housing crisis is extremely complex and varied. It covers a whole spectrum of contact including complete estrangement from the entire family, infrequent and occasional contact and regular telephone calls and visits. Both those young people who left home because of their sexuality and those who left for other reasons experienced this range of different levels of contact with their families. Unsurprisingly, the quality of this relationship is closely linked to the circumstances under which the young person leaves home initially.

- **No contact with home**

At one end of this spectrum are those young people who have no contact whatsoever with parents or other family members both during and after periods of housing crisis. This situation can occur when the circumstances surrounding a young person's departure from home have been particularly dramatic and conflict-ridden. Some of the young people who had experienced harassment or abuse because of their sexuality typically no longer had any contact with their families, but it was the family, rather than the young person, that usually enforced this estrangement. Maya, discussed earlier in the report, whose family threatened to have her killed, is an example of this. Such an exile was not always permanent or, in some cases, took time to develop after a young person's departure from home. Some of the young people who were told to leave when their sexuality was discovered had returned home on later occasions. However, after further arguments and being told they were not welcome, contact with their families was finally broken. Other young people had continued to see their families until their parents realised that the young person's sexuality was an unalterable fact and contact then ended at this point.

Sexuality is however not the only reason for the termination of a young person's contact with their families after they leave home. Physical and sexual abuse is also a significant factor in this respect. This was sometimes because young people are removed from their families by social services and contact is not re-established after this point. For example, Liam who was taken into care at the age of seven had not seen his father since then. He had no desire to do so as he was very angry with him *'I don't keep in contact with my dad...If I see him at all I'm going to hit him over the head with a baseball bat'*. In other cases, the young person's disclosure of abuse had led to estrangement from parents and family. Maria's mother, for example would not see her or allow her or to have any contact with her brother. She was angry that Maria had told a hostel worker that her mother had abused her, which had resulted in her brother being put on an 'at risk' register. In another case, Emma, a young woman who was abused by her brother, felt that her parents were unable to accept this and that they avoided her so that they did not have to deal with this situation.

- **Contact with some family members only**

Some of the young people retained contact with some family members, even though they no longer had any contact with others. Most commonly, young people were estranged from fathers but maintained contact with their mothers or other family members. This situation may occur when the young people had left home because of their father's extremely adverse reaction to their sexuality. The reasons that relationships with mothers may be more likely to sustain seem varied. The reaction of a mother to their son or daughter's sexuality was sometimes less negative than that displayed by their fathers. Indeed this pattern is supported by other research (D'Augelli *et al*, 1998). However, even when mothers found it equally difficult to accept that their son or daughter was gay or lesbian, they seem less able or inclined to break off contact entirely with the young person. Young people in these situations reported that their mothers were often concerned with practical issues such as whether they had enough money, clean clothes and were eating properly. In these situations, contact with mothers was usually kept hidden from the young person's father. Some young people telephoned or visited their mothers when their father was out or were forced to meet them away from family home because their fathers would *'freak'* if they knew of this contact. This was the situation that Richard was faced with when his father threw him out because of his sexuality:

'My mum rang me at work once, without my dad knowing, told me not to tell my dad she'd rung because if he knew...that mum had rung me at work he'd have gone fucking mental' (Male, 23, White British)

Contact with brothers and sisters was sometimes maintained even when the young people were no longer in touch with their parents. This was more often the case when siblings were older and lived away from home. Older brothers and sisters were a recurrent source of help and support for the young people whilst they experiencing housing crisis. When brothers and sisters were younger, however and still living under parental authority it could sometimes be difficult for the young people to maintain this contact.

- **Irregular and infrequent contact**

Irregular or infrequent contact with parents mainly consisting of occasional telephone calls or visits was a feature of some young people's experience. Sometimes the young people had no desire to see their parents and only did so when they went home to visit brothers and sisters. Sarah, for example, only tolerated her mother - who she said was an alcoholic and violent - so that she could occasionally see her brother and sister.

- **Frequent contact**

The nature of the relationship with home seems particularly complex in situations where young people are in frequent contact with parents whilst experiencing housing crisis. This situation clearly diverges from traditional images of 'homeless' people who are estranged from their families and have no one to whom they can go for shelter. Whilst some young people clearly have no other option but to stay away from home, others reject the option to return home to live with parents for a variety of reasons.

This is illustrated by the pattern some of the young people displayed of moving around between friends and acquaintances whilst leaving belongings with a family member. Young people sometimes maintained a base at the home of a family member where possessions and clothes are stored and would return there intermittently to get clean clothes or other items but would usually live and sleep elsewhere. In some cases visits home would only happen when it was known that the house was empty, for others these were scheduled visits during which time would be spent with parents and siblings. Carl, for example, returned to his father's house occasionally to get fresh clothes and food, but would not sleep there because it brought back bad memories of the abuse that he had suffered. As the case of Seán illustrates sometimes parents can continue to provide a range of assistance and support to young people who are homeless:

Seán (15) had lived mainly with his grandparents from the ages of eight and nine. He did not like staying at his parent's house because of the relentless bullying he had received about his sexuality both from other young people in the area and from his parents. Since his grandparents death he had spent nine months moving around between friends, partners and acquaintances. However, Seán was in close contact with his parents who regularly gave him money, bought him clothes and were about to take him away on a family holiday. He returned home frequently, particularly when he needed help such as if he became ill. However, although his parents had asked him to return home, he refused '*because they live in that same house' where 'if I walk out of the front door ...there's like a stone thrown at my head or something'*. (White British)

The nature of the relationship that young people maintain with home during and after periods of housing crisis can be subject to change and the young people sometimes moved between the categories outlined above over time. For example, young people who had infrequent or no contact with their parents when they first left home, developed closer relationships with their parents when their housing crisis became resolved and they have obtained independent accommodation. In other

cases, however the nature of a young person's relationship with home seemed more static and showed no likelihood of changing. Young people who were estranged from their families because of a particularly negative reaction to their sexuality or whom left home to escape abuse sometimes could sometimes not foresee how the relationship with their families could be rebuilt.

4.3 Difficulties faced by young homeless lesbians and gay men

The young people faced multiple difficulties and were trying to deal with a range of emotional, psychological and practical problems during their housing crisis. The origins of these problems and issues seem to be threefold:

- the problems that the young people bring with them when they become homeless;
- the emotional and psychological impact of housing crisis;
- and the dangers that young people might encounter whilst they are homeless.

These three are very interrelated and difficulty in one of these areas increases the likelihood that a young person may develop problems in the other categories. For instance, low self esteem and unhappiness resulting from a difficult childhood can make a young person more susceptible to dangers they may encounter whilst homeless such as being introduced to drugs by other young people in hostel accommodation. This section will consider each of these sets of difficulties in turn.

4.3.1 Issues that young people bring with them on becoming homeless

The circumstances under which young people leave home can lead to significant vulnerability. The feelings of loneliness and rejection experienced by young people in housing crisis can give rise to a strong emotional need. This situation does not appear to be linked to the level of contact that young people retained with home after becoming homeless, but was more closely related to the quality of their relationship with family members. Some of the young people craved and searched for love and affection, as either a result of being deprived of this whilst they were growing up, or the sudden termination of nurturing relationships. Consequently, the young people sometimes seemed unable to perceive the danger inherent in some situations and some had put themselves in jeopardy due to this need for love and affection. For example, it was common for young people to go out to pubs and bars when they were feeling down, looking for someone to talk to or who might take an interest in them. While this sometimes led to supportive outcomes, it also recurrently led to dangerous and exploitative situations.

The need to block out the past was another evident vulnerability. A common theme discussed in the interviews with the young people was the desire to escape reality. Those who had experienced the most troubled upbringings sometimes felt that their lives were unbearable. This can result in a constant search for ways to blur or obliterate their experiences and the difficulties of life. As will be explored below, this can easily create dependency on drugs or alcohol.

Low self-esteem and self confidence was strikingly recurrent among the young people interviewed. This was clearly linked to many of the difficult relationships and negative experiences they had been exposed to whilst growing up. At the most extreme, these circumstances created a lack of hope among the young people and a loss of interest in the future. Anna, for example, felt that she had began to stop caring in situations of potential danger because she was no longer concerned about what happened to her. A similar sentiment is echoed by Zoë:

'I got real depressed and I started hating myself and that and I wasn't bothered what I looked like or where I was or anything. I don't know, because it was the life I was in and I felt like it wasn't a life' (Female, 18, White UK)

At its extreme, this low self-esteem manifested in self-harm and suicidality. Some of the young people had tried to physically harm themselves whilst homeless in response to the situation they found themselves in. These actions included cutting themselves, taking tablets and suicide attempts. Some young people felt that self-harm provided a way of alleviating whatever pain they were experiencing. As Maria, who used to cut herself regularly described, *'I think it just made me feel better really....it just made things easier I think'*.

The specific causes to self-harm or suicidality is somewhat difficult to unravel. As suggested in the literature, this type of behaviour seems to be much more closely linked with negative childhood experiences such as abuse, violence family breakdown and parental rejection, than with the experience of housing crisis alone (Barter, 1996). In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2, self-harm and suicide can be a manifestation of the difficulties young people experience in coming to terms with their sexuality (Savin Williams, 1994; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; Grossman & Kerner, 1998; Ferguson *et al*, 1999; Herrell *et al*, 1999; Ramefedi, 1999; Bagley & D'Augelli, 2000). Furthermore, Chapter 3 described how discomfort with sexuality and difficulty in coming to terms with being lesbian or gay sometimes led some of the young people to suicidal thoughts or actions.

The link between difficult childhoods and self-harm and suicidality appeared very strong among the young people. Here there is an obvious link between suicide or self-harm and trying to cope with the effects of an abusive or difficult childhood, as Sarah illustrates vividly:

'The childhood memories, they were getting to me, I started to have nightmares...I'd just get up in the night and start cutting my arms up, in shock. I started to realise what he'd done and it was like...I was back there, I was going through it again and feeling it again, and I thought it was my fault and I turned the anger on myself' (Female, 19, White British)

Feeling unloved, disrupted family relationships, the experience of being bullied and feeling without friends can all lead young people to attempt suicide. Josh's explanation for his suicide attempts illustrates a number of these factors.

'I done it when I was young, it was very like no-one, I used to think no-one loves me, I ain't got nobody, I ain't got no friends, I hardly even do nothing for myself, so it was like I just didn't want to live' (Male, 19, White British)

When the young people had moved beyond self-harm and attempted to end their life this was usually because they felt they could no longer cope. At best, they wanted to draw attention to this, and at worst, did not want to continue living and had hoped to die. Debbie, for example, described a repeated cycle of *'taking tablets and overdoses and stuff and ending up in hospital and not caring whether I died or whether I lived'*. Likewise, Stuart illustrates how the issues a young person carries with them from the past can continue to affect their desire to live:

'I started thinking about me past thinking about my Mam you know and if she had been alive would she have liked me and...thinking about...Dad because mine hated me. I wasn't in control of myself, I was so depressed...the night I tried to kill myself I was like I want to die, I generally felt I wanted to die at that time' (Male, 21, White British)

Young people who had harmed or tried to kill themselves in some way whilst homeless, often had previous experience of this from their time at home or in care. Thus, whilst self-harm can continue during housing crisis, these patterns of behaviour often seemed rooted in a young person's experiences before they left home. This may suggest that these behaviours are less likely to be a result of housing crisis alone and often stem from more serious issues preceding a young person's departure from home. There is some evidence to suggest that the regularity and severity of self-harm amongst the young people may reflect the extent of 'difficulty' in a young person's background. This said, while self-harm and suicidality appeared rarely linked to homelessness alone, as Maria illustrates, the experience of housing crisis can undoubtedly exacerbate and worsen these problems:

'I don't think I was particularly balanced before I even left home but I think that being in the hostels did make it worse... it just depresses you more and more and more as you're going along really until you crack up.... I'm surprised I'm still here really, to be honest'. (Female, 18, White British)

4.3.2 The emotional and psychological impact of housing crisis

How young people feel about the experience of housing crisis and the effects this has upon them, is closely linked to the circumstances under which they leave home. Young people who have never experienced stable accommodation, for example, felt differently when homeless, to those young people who were experiencing housing crisis for the first time. This section will explore the main the emotional and psychological effects of housing crisis for young lesbians and gay men.

The extent to which some of the young people were trying to deal with other issues or problems in their lives makes it difficult to isolate the impacts of housing crisis alone. Whilst some young people face predominantly a 'housing crisis' when they leave home, others face an array of emotional, behavioural and psychological crises in addition to this. Given the severity of the circumstances under which some of the young people become homeless, it is unsurprising that some are damaged by these

experiences. To describe the situation faced by some of these young people simply as a 'housing crisis' seems something of a misnomer, given that difficulties with accommodation is often only one aspect of a complex situation, and sometimes viewed as the least important by young people. Indeed, the housing crisis experienced by some of the young people was peripheral to everything else that was going on in their lives.

The emotional and psychological impact of housing crisis was often inseparable from the impact of being estranged from home for some young people. This was particularly the case for those who have been thrown out of home or asked to leave because of their sexuality. The feelings of these young people about housing crisis and the effects of this are impossible to separate from their feelings about the severance of ties with their family. This is usually because housing crisis represents and is a constant reminder of their rejection by their family.

Being forced to live alone because of intolerance of sexuality by loved ones can be very traumatic for young people. This can be particularly difficult for young people to cope with because it symbolises a rejection of the young person themselves and withdrawal of love, acceptance and the parental relationship. Understandably, some young people had difficulties coming to terms with this and talked of how they still loved their parents and were tormented with trying to understand 'why have they done this to me'. This is vividly described by Stephen:

'It might have had a few psychological effects on me, like being alone and thinking about the past, it can be quite scary... it's just like how things were all that time ago you were 8 years old and daddy was there to give you a cuddle...knowing that that was there then...and it just breaks you down inside now because you look and you think what has gone wrong? and why am I on my own?' (Male, 18, White British)

Other young people, however, took a much more pragmatic view and tried to justify their parents' reactions to their sexual orientation

'I can see what he's trying to say, like he's never going to have grandchildren from me and things like that but, at the end of the day, I'm his son and I'm his blood and he should like accept it' (Male, 19, White British)

Some young people found it difficult to forget the things that had been said at the time they left home. This was particularly evident among those who had experienced extreme harassment and abuse because of their sexuality.

Feelings of fear, insecurity and vulnerability whilst homeless were recurrently mentioned by the young people. In particular the young people reported feeling frightened about the future and what was going to happen to them. This was especially evident among the young people who had had to leave home suddenly because they were thrown out. For some, these feelings were due to suddenly realising how dependent on other people they had become. Jackie, for example, who was staying with a friend after being thrown out by her family because of her sexuality, spoke of how this friend was her only barrier against sleeping rough:

'I felt really insecure because who knows, I could have turned round and had a big argument with Helen and she could have kicked me out and it's like where am I going to go because I know for a fact that I could not survive on the streets' (Female, 21, African Caribbean)

Young people who had become homeless after leaving the care system also described feelings of vulnerability. In these cases the ending of social services support often left the young people feeling very isolated and alone in the world. The difficult situations some of the young people faced after becoming homeless also heightened the feeling that *'you are really on your own out there'*. For example, Jason, described earlier, recalled how *'horrible and alone'* he felt on those nights when he did not earn enough money from selling sex and could not afford to pay for bed and breakfast accommodation.

Feelings of loneliness often resulted from young people missing family friends and the life they had previously known. This was sometimes the case even when the young people had left situations that had been difficult or damaging for them, and particularly common when departure was sudden. In this respect, it sometimes appeared that being thrown out or making a snap decision to leave allowed the young people concerned little time to come to terms with the reality of being away from home. Young people described how unhappy and upset they felt on a daily basis. Stephen, who was staying in bed and breakfast accommodation after being thrown out by his father, spoke of how he found it extremely upsetting to go home to an empty room every night without his family around.

Longing for home and family was sometimes so strong that young people who left home because of harmful experiences risked returning. This is illustrated by the case of Helen:

Helen, (16) had been sexually abused by her father throughout her childhood. She had *'wanted to leave home for as long as I was able to think about leaving home'*. Despite this, however, when she enlisted the help of social workers and finally left she found it very extremely difficult. *'I'd always wanted to leave home but it never...you know, occurred to me that it was actually going to happen. So leaving all my friends, family, my life, my whole life, my schooling, my job, my sister, just everything I've known, I've ever known, That's why I wanted to go back'*. Because of this uncertainty she returned on several occasions to the abuse she had left behind. (White British)

Young people were sometimes untroubled about leaving parents or stepparents but found separation from siblings very painful. The relationship with siblings was often undamaged by the circumstances surrounding the young person's departure from home. However, contact with brothers and sisters was sometimes disallowed by parents and this was a source of much pain for the homeless young person.

4.3.3 Exposure to danger while homeless

The vulnerabilities outlined above sometimes coincide with the danger young people may encounter while they are homeless. These include damaging or abusive

relationships, sexual exploitation and being introduced to or becoming dependent on drugs or alcohol. The problems that young people encounter prior to becoming homeless increase their susceptibility to dangerous situations. Different hazards are obviously closely linked to one another, in that attempts by the young people to deal with abusive relationships and prostitution can lead to taking drugs and so on. Carl illustrates the way in which homelessness can expose young people to many of these dangers:

'If I wasn't homeless I wouldn't have got into drugs which I am now, if I hadn't have been homeless I would have been still at my mum's today and I wouldn't have had like the rape...I'm assuming that I wouldn't because I wouldn't have been in that situation, so that wouldn't have happened. I wouldn't have rented myself out for those, you know, few weeks every few months, and I wouldn't have lived in hostels either' (Male, 23, White UK)

Transitory or unsuitable relationships

Young people who are homeless may enter into fleeting or unsuitable relationships in search for somewhere to stay. These relationships include both those that are damaging to the young person in some way and more much benign relationships that the young people simply would not have entered into if they had more choices. In the worst cases, some of the young people had entered into relationships they already knew to be abusive as a way of escaping housing crisis.

Housing crisis can lead to the pace of relationships being accelerated and young people moving in with partners before they felt ready for this step. Some young lesbians and gay men who were in very casual relationships were forced to move in with partners when they became homeless.

When he was thrown out of home, Richard (23) moved in with a boyfriend that he had only been seeing for a couple of weeks. He was not very serious about the relationship and admits he moved in purely because he had nowhere else to go. Perhaps because of this, the situation quickly became difficult. He remembers being *'desperately unhappy, I hated it...every minute of it. I hated where he lived, I hated his house, and it got to a point where I just didn't want to be with him'*. (White British)

In the worst of these cases these relationships become violent or abusive. Young people sometimes continued to live with partners that were abusive to them because of their need of accommodation. Sam, for example, remained with a boyfriend who had beaten and hospitalised him on a number of occasions because he did not feel that he had any other option.

Sexual exploitation

There was recurrent mention by the young people of situations in which they had exchanged sex in return for accommodation. Because of this, the young people in general seemed particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Both the young men and young women had been in situations where they were coerced into having sex. This is hardly surprising given the combination of emotional need, low self-esteem and desire to escape reality through alcohol and drugs.

With the sole motivation of securing a place to stay, the young people often agreed to have sex with people they met in pubs and bars. Justin, like many others, likened this situation to prostitution: *'there were times...that I was still sleeping with people for a roof over my head, so I was still being bought if you like'*. However, this perception was not universal. Other young people ended up in situations where they were offered somewhere to stay and later discovered that they were expected to have sex with the person accommodating them. Here young people either acquiesced or had to reject the offer of accommodation. Jason, for example, described how he had to leave the house of a man who offered him accommodation after *'fighting him off for three days'*.

Where young people used alcohol or drugs to cope with being homeless – discussed below – this sometimes led to them being in exploitative situations. Some young people recalled situations where their judgement had been significantly impaired and this had allowed other people to take advantage of them. Debbie, for example, frequently went out to pubs and nightclubs in an attempt to block out her homelessness. She had been both raped and assaulted after going home with people whom she did not know very well.

Sometimes the extent to which a young person is being exploited or coerced is difficult to assess. When people are living in situations where they feel a debt to someone who is providing them with food and somewhere to stay and then they may offer sexual favours in return for this. For example, some of the young people offered to have sex with people to whom they felt obliged. While these situations might be perceived to be exploitative, the young people concerned did not always subscribe to this view. Indeed, some described that they had sex with people voluntarily out of a genuine desire to repay the kindness they have received.

'I found sometimes I was having sex with Derrick, but that was like just because we got back like really drunk and...I was paying me way... so I wasn't like freeloading off him. It sort of felt like I had owed him something...Derrick's constantly after sex, so it sometimes felt like that I did owe him something. So I'd like have sex with him' (Male, 17, White British)

Prostitution

It was common for the young gay men to have been involved in prostitution and selling sex. Though prostitution was reported amongst the young women interviewed, it was much less recurrent. Some of the young men had only sold sex very occasionally, others had done this on a daily basis and were still doing so at the time of interview. The types of prostitution that the young men were involved in varied from selling sex to different people on an almost daily basis to selling sex to the one individual for a long period.

The primary motivation for selling sex was financial. The young people engaged in these activities to generate money for temporary accommodation – such as hotels or bed and breakfasts – or to pay for alcohol or drugs. Lack of awareness of the possibilities of claiming benefit while homeless led some young people into prostitution. For example, Justin became involved in selling sex because he thought

was unable to claim benefits of any kind. He felt that this was the only way he could earn the money he needed to survive although in hindsight he felt that this *'wasn't very good and mentally messed me up'* but that *'it was the only option at that time'*.

It was common for the young men who were involved in selling sex to have been introduced to it by other people they met when they became homeless. It was exceptional for them to have been involved in prostitution before they had become homeless.

Some of the young men exchanged sex for accommodation as well as money. These arrangements were usually longer term. Joe, for example, lived with a man who offered him food, accommodation and money in return for having sex with him three nights a week:

'The arrangement was I got so much money each week, did him about 3 nights a week and then I could just go out and do whatever I wanted. It was awful, it was really bad' (Male, 21, White UK)

While the need for a place to stay or, more recurrently, the need for money while homelessness can lead to people into selling sex, it does not entirely explain this behaviour. Not all of the young people with such needs who encountered people involved in prostitution subsequently became involved in this themselves. Previous experience of sexual abuse was suggested by some service providers to lead some young lesbians and gay men to become involved in selling sex. It was argued that young people who are sexually abused in childhood become used to making sexual exchanges at an early age and so may continue these patterns whilst homeless. There was some evidence for this suggestion in the young people's stories, in that the young people who had been involved in selling sex were often the same people who had been sexually abused as children, and suffered considerable problems with self esteem and self confidence as a result. Maria, for example, who was sexually abused by her uncle, felt that it was this experience that underpinned her involvement in selling sex:

'I don't think it was all about money...because...I never ended up with any more money anyway... I just always took something before I went out so I wasn't really bothered. And then it was like a cycle because the more you did it the more drugs you needed to take so you never had any extra money...I think the way I looked at it was, oh, stuff like that has been happening for so many years anyway (so) you might as well do it and get paid for it now. Because it wasn't really any different from being at home' (Female, 18, White UK)

It is difficult to explain with any certainty why some of the young people managed to avoid becoming involved in prostitution whilst homeless. As suggested above, selling sex can be linked to low self esteem and damaging childhood experiences such as sexual abuse. It is likely that those not involved in prostitution had not encountered the same levels of emotional distress as those who did sell sex. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the access to appropriate services at an early stage of housing crisis can decrease the chances of a young person becoming involved in dangerous activities - such as prostitution. Those who regularly sold sex

tended to be young people with longer or multiple periods of housing crisis who had either abandoned contact with housing and homelessness services, found them inaccessible or had avoided contact with them. By contrast, those who experienced shorter periods of housing crisis had often benefited from early and effective intervention by services and had rarely, if ever, been involved in prostitution.

Drug use

Drug use among the young people was recurrent. This may precede and contribute to a young person's housing crisis and be related to negative experiences whilst growing up such as abuse. This may also be related to difficulties faced by the young people in coming to terms with their sexuality. The high prevalence of drug use amongst young lesbians and gay men has been suggested elsewhere (Dempsey, 1994; Renee Martin, 1996; Grossman & Kerner, 1998). While some of the young people had begun using drugs before they left home, others first encountered drugs when they became homeless, which suggests that drug use can also be caused by housing crisis.

The young people often encountered other young people who used drugs whilst they were homeless. This was particularly mentioned in connection with hostel accommodation. Some of the young people had begun using drugs whilst resident in hostels and felt that if they had not become homeless then they would never have begun to take drugs. In this respect, beginning to use or experiment with drugs was a result of being influenced to take drugs by other young homeless people:

'I was offered somewhere to stay for a couple of days I also started - I hadn't before in my life took any drugs and I was offered some Ecstasy which at first I was very reluctant to take... I don't want to take this, I don't want to take this. Eventually I did. (Male, 24, White British)

'Brian made me take my first E, we were sat there and this guy was handing out E's and ... speed and all the rest of it and, well, I'd never took nothing, except...I'd done speed in Manchester. Brian made me take half an E, he said if you don't take it I'm going to spike you, so I took half an E. (Male, 21, White British)

4.4 Coping strategies

Disentangling how young people cope with their housing crisis from how they cope with their other crises can be problematic. This is for two reasons. Firstly, young people may be trying to cope not only with their housing crisis but also with other patterns of behaviour, such as selling sex, they have developed while homeless. Secondly, as mentioned throughout this chapter, some of the young people were facing other more significant issues, which overshadowed their housing crisis. In these cases it is impossible to separate how young people cope with housing crisis from how they cope with sexual abuse, violence or family rejection. Young people in these situations have to try to cope with a complex blend of different issues simultaneously. Consequently, the coping strategies described in this section relate to how young lesbians and gay men cope with housing crisis *and* all of the other issues going on in their lives whilst they are homeless.

4.4.1 Personal resilience

Concentrating on the good things in life had clearly helped some young people to cope with the negative events and emotions they experienced. The young people sometimes identified one person in their life – usually in the past – who underscored for them that they could be loved or were worthy of love and it was this belief that often kept them going. Young people described forcing their mind to focus on ‘*other things*’ such as self-identity, aspirations and the future. The desire and determination to become independent and self-reliant was of considerable help in helping young people to cope, as Debbie illustrates:

Debbie (20) never thought she would make it to twenty-one. She grew up with her mother who was violent and an alcoholic and she repeatedly ran away during her childhood. She had spent time in care and a long period of being homeless, which consisted of moving frequently between friends and short-lived relationships. She felt she had coped with her difficult experiences through ‘*wanting to make something of myself ...that one goal of just succeeding at something*’ and the realisation she could only rely on herself to instil meaning into her life. ‘*Doing something for me and not for anybody else, because the way I see it is I've never got anything in return emotionally from anybody else and there's only me that can do that for me now... I've got to put something back into my life, nobody else is going to hand it to me on a plate*’. (White British)

When young people had a particular interest or passion in their lives then this was often used as a support or a way to block out negative thoughts and memories. For example, Justin loved music and described how this kept him going and helped him to forget. For other young people this was facilitated by keeping occupied such as by reading or going out.

4.4.2 Dependence on drugs and alcohol

The desire to escape reality shared by many of the young people has been mentioned, as has the likelihood of them coming into contact with other young people who are using drugs and alcohol whilst they are homeless. In the light of these factors, it is hardly surprising that drugs and alcohol were recurrently used by the young people as a way of dealing with and forgetting about the issues they faced. Josh, described using them ‘*because I wanted to forget about everything, I wanted everything to go over my head and I just wanted to enjoy my life*’. The patterns of alcohol use among the young people ranged from social drinking to drinking heavily ‘*every night*’ and was often combined with heavy dependence on cigarettes. The young people were using a range of different types of drugs including cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines and heroin. Levels of drug usage were very variable. Some of the young people used drugs recreationally and in this respect may not differ significantly from young people generally. However for others, levels of problematic drug use and dependency were high, some of the young people had been addicted to Class A drugs such as heroin for a number of years, and had a daily habit.

Alcohol was recurrently used as a way to escape the reality of homelessness. For example, Joe who slept rough in London for about six months described how he went to sleep drunk every night as a way of numbing himself. Alternatively, it was

an antidote to worry or anxiety. Anna, who was about to be evicted from her council flat because of rent arrears, spoke of how the situation had led her to drink more and more:

'I feel as though I'm getting out of it so I'll just have a good time like...because I know it's going to happen...just forget about it that way for the time being, deal with it as and when it happens' (Female, 23, White British)

More commonly, drugs and alcohol were used to ease the diverse range of problems and issues young people faced stemming from the experiences of 'home'. They were frequently used as a way of blocking out the pain young people felt in response to the reaction of their families to their sexuality. Richard, for example, described how he used alcohol as a way of coping with the way his family responded when he found out that he was gay:

'I used to get so pissed off with him [his father] I used to drink...it was the only way I could get him out my mind, because I used to sit thinking how can they do this to me, they say they love me but they do this... I used to drink all the time... I felt wonderful when I was pissed, couldn't give a shit, wake up next morning... back to reality then, get pissed again, start again' (Male, 23, White British)

Dependency on drugs and alcohol as a way of coping was also evident among young people who had experienced physical and sexual abuse. It was clear that young people used drugs to help them deal with the memory of negative experiences. Similarly, Emma who was sexually abused by her brother perceived drugs as '*my way of escaping*' because '*I hated the reality that I was in*'. Becky described heroin as '*my lifeline*' and felt that without this she could not have coped with the physical and sexual abuse inflicted on her by both her grandfather and stepfather.

Drugs and alcohol were also used by young people as a way of coping with the situations they had found themselves in whilst homeless, such as selling sex. Jason, who had sold sex regularly, described how he went to the pub every night, and regularly took ecstasy and speed to '*block out the pain from renting*'. Those young people who exchanged sex in return for somewhere to sleep frequently used drugs and alcohol as a way of making this experience easier. Joe, mentioned earlier, illustrates this vividly:

'I was drinking a hell of a lot. And the nights that I didn't have to do him I still got myself plastered as the arrangement was I slept in the same bed as him and then I was tanked up before I went to bed...It was disgusting... I knew I was better than that, been brought up better than that.' (Male, 21, White British)

Some of the young people with equally difficult backgrounds to the ones described above, had not used drugs or alcohol as a way of coping whilst homeless. It is difficult, however, to do more than offer tentative suggestions as to why some young people develop patterns of drug use or drug dependency and others do not. It is possible this may be linked to the social networks young people develop and the

likelihood of encountering other young people using drugs whilst homeless. Some of the young people with patterns of problematic drug use, for example, described being '*pushed into*' taking drugs by peers. Alternatively, there was some evidence to suggest that strong views about the danger of drugs meant that they were not perceived as a coping strategy. Sometimes this was because young people had bad experiences with drugs in the past and were resolute not to experiment with them again.

4.5 Informal sources of support and help

The help and support that some of the young people had received whilst homeless was felt to have made a crucial contribution to their ability to cope. This support was sometimes provided by formal services, however in other cases it was obtained from friends or individuals young people met during their housing crisis. Young people's use of housing and homelessness services will be explored in Chapter 5, this section will discuss more informal sources of help and support.

As is evident from the discussion so far, friends and family were an important and recurrent source of assistance to the young people. The ability to cope was repeatedly said to hinge on this help and support. These individuals provided both emotional support and practical help such as money, food and transitory accommodation.

This seems to contradict the view held by some service providers that young lesbians and gay men are often left without friends and support networks as a result of disclosing their sexuality. There was little evidence of the young people being ostracised by their friends after revealing their sexuality. Anna, for example, talked about the 'social support' she obtained from her friends and how important it was to know '*you're not on your own, you've got places to go, you've got someone to talk to.*' As will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, lesbian and gay friends were also a particular source of information to the young people about accessing housing services perceived to be lesbian and gay friendly or which offered accommodation targeting at young lesbians and gay men. Young people had sometimes obtained stable accommodation because other young people had put them in touch with housing services.

Supportive lesbian and gay adults provided another source of help. The young people most frequently met these individuals through the gay scene or services. Sometimes the young people initially met these individuals in a professional capacity but remained in contact with them after the professional relationship had ceased. These people seemed to have adopted an informal mentor or guardian role towards the young person. This sometimes consisted of providing accommodation and emotional support without asking for anything in return from the young person. For instance Helen, whose case was described earlier in the chapter, first met Laura when she had contacted a young woman's support group to help her deal with the sexual abuse she was suffering from her father. She was still living at home at this point but discussed with Laura how much she wanted to leave. Even when Laura moved to a different job she remained in touch and when Helen was sixteen helped her leave her parents' house. She took Helen to her own home and allowed her to stay there until she found accommodation.

Transitory and exploitative relationships - discussed in Section 4.3.3 – were also seen by the young people to have supportive elements. Even those arrangements that were sexually exploitative were still valued by the young person as a source of accommodation and stability.

4.6 Factors perpetuating housing crisis

This section aims to explore the factors that can prevent a young person's housing crisis becoming resolved. Young people were often homeless for a number of years and faced persistent difficulties in gaining stable accommodation. Others were homeless for short periods, but it was clear had faced a number of different hurdles in their quest to find a home. As is suggested by this, young people may continue to be homeless for a complex blend of different reasons. As with the circumstances causing young people to become homeless, the reasons that young people become homeless and the reasons why they stay homeless, can be related to the sexuality of the young person or can be wholly unrelated.

The factors that bring about homelessness and the reasons why young people stay homeless are not always the same. Young people who leave home for reasons totally unconnected to their sexuality found that their experience of housing crisis was complicated for reasons directly related to their sexual orientation. One way in which this can happen is through the experience of homophobia in services, which will be considered in Chapter 5. This can result in young people leaving services and ceasing to receive the help they need. For example, some of the young people had left hostel accommodation to sleep rough or stay with friends or acquaintances. In addition the experience of homophobia itself can exacerbate other vulnerabilities or distress that a young person may already be suffering. This can make it difficult or impossible for the young person to focus on trying to resolve their housing crisis.

Homophobic abuse can prevent housing crisis being resolved when it causes young people to flee from allocated housing. Some of the young people had experienced homophobic abuse from people in the neighbourhood where they were housed. This issue was highlighted by housing providers who bemoaned the lack of available social housing in areas known to be safe for young lesbians and gay men to live. Some of the young people had received homophobic abuse whilst living in council property. This involved graffiti being painted on outside walls, offensive letters or objects being pushed through letterboxes and flats being burgled and vandalised. Sam, for example, had been placed in a local authority flat following some time spent in a hostel. However, he was regularly physically assaulted and verbally harassed by those who lived near him because of his sexuality. He explained how sometimes he had found them lying in wait for him outside his home.

Another way in which the sexuality of the young person can prolong their housing crisis is when this creates difficulties in places they are staying after they leave home. Staying with family members or friends after leaving home can be difficult for young people as a result of their sexuality. This was common where young people expected a negative reaction to their sexuality and attempted to conceal their sexuality. This meant they had to cope with the suspicions of other people and the fear of harassment or abuse. This caused young people to move on from otherwise

supportive environments. For example, Seán – described at the outset of the chapter – eventually left his brother’s flat because he found it too difficult to conceal his sexuality. Following this, he spent considerable time on friend’s floors and couches, as well as periods where he slept rough.

Many of the factors perpetuating the housing crisis of the young person, which appear unrelated to their sexuality, have been raised throughout this chapter. In particular these include the way in which young people leave home and the vulnerabilities that their experiences may leave them with such as emotional, psychological and behavioural problems and drug and alcohol dependency. These can prevent a young person’s housing crisis being resolved in various ways. Many of the young people, for example, reported suffering from depression and were receiving medical help with this. This seemed to have sapped the ability and inclination of the young people to take action to try and resolve their housing crisis in some cases. Some of the young people who were staying temporarily with friends or family members and were unhappy with these arrangements appeared to have done little to try and access alternative accommodation.

The low self esteem and self confidence resulting from many of the young people’s experiences – both prior to and during the period spent homeless – sometimes made it difficult for them to mix with other people or to form trusting friendships or relationships. This inability to socialise with and trust others sometimes prevented young people from developing social networks, which as the previous section has suggested may help alleviate or overcome housing crisis. The experience of bullying at school in particular can affect young people’s ability to form relationships in later life. Stephen for example felt that *“I’ve lost a part of myself because of what has happened to me through the years...all my confidence and my self-esteem and the respect I had for myself...has gone”*. This can have long term implications for young people’s self confidence and ability to socialise.

Behavioural problems such as violence and aggression can also perpetuate a young person’s housing crisis. Some of the service providers felt that the problems that the young people may experience often manifests in aggressive behaviour that can create and prolong housing difficulty. Some of the young people clearly recognised that their behaviour was rooted in their troubled upbringing. Jason who was sexually abused as a child told of how *‘I spent a long time very angry because of everything I’ve been through’*. Violent or aggressive behaviour can affect the young people’s receptivity to help that offered from other people or through housing and homelessness agencies. It can also result in young people being evicted from agencies or housing projects.

One of the clearest factors prolonging the housing crisis of the young people is the lack of preparation made for leaving home. This is often a consequence of the suddenness of the departure and the young age at which some of the young people leave home. This lack of preparation increases the likelihood of young people moving to unstable or fragile situations, which easily break down and are unlikely to provide a base from which the young person can resolve their housing crisis.

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, some of the young people had left home and began to live with friends who did not possess adequate space or

resources to house them. Similarly, the tendency of some of the young people to move in with partners whom they might not have chosen to live with if they had not been homeless is relevant in this context. The tensions this situation can create can make these arrangements very fragile and liable to disintegrate. Debbie, for example, felt that the main cause of her prolonged housing crisis had been the transience of her relationships. *'I just became homeless and homeless again...after again, because I wasn't picking the right partners, I was just finding anybody to sleep with just to get a bed for the night'*. The remainder of Liam's story demonstrates the way in which moving on from an unstable relationship can perpetuate a young person's housing crisis:

Liam (18) went to stay with his boyfriend he had known for two weeks after running away from a flat where he had run up debts because *'I needed somewhere and quick,'* He felt his boyfriend soon lost interest in him and wanted him to leave. His partner began to come home from the gay bar where he worked and taunt him with his infidelities *'he didn't care, he kept coming back then it's, oh, I pulled this over the bar and I pulled that over the bar'*. When the relationship deteriorated further due to violence, Liam finally left and went to a direct access hostel. He felt he was now *'really homeless'* and saw no way out of the situation *I just feel like is this nightmare going to ever end? it never ends, that's what I feel like, it will just go on and on and on.* (White British)

This chapter highlights the range and scale of the problems and vulnerabilities faced by young lesbians and gay men who become homeless. It is this complex package of issues that the young people bring with them and present with when they access housing and homelessness agencies. The focus of this report now turns to the experiences of these young people in accessing and using support organisations.

5 ACCESSING AND USING SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The previous two chapters have described both the causes of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men and the difficulties faced by them during housing crisis. This chapter now explores the young people's access to and use of support services.

The purpose here is not to evaluate service delivery across these fieldwork areas. Such an evaluation would only be tenable once a proper understanding of the causes and needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth has been established – which is the main aim of this study. The focus, therefore, is on understanding how young people use existing services, and the kind of experiences they have in doing so.

This chapter, then, begins by reviewing the nature of services available to the young people within the fieldwork areas. It then identifies distinct patterns within the young people's use of services, and explains what factors govern this. It explores the differing views that exist about the prevalence, or lack thereof, of lesbian and gay youth within mainstream housing and homelessness agencies and considers some possible explanations underpinning these. Young people's experiences within housing and homelessness services are also discussed, with particular focus on whether their sexuality has acted as a barrier or a facilitator to their use of various services. Finally, a range of other barriers to accessing services is identified.

5.1 Overview of service provision within study areas

The organisations consulted during Stage 3 of the research were purposively selected to represent the diversity of services potentially available to young people within the study areas. They themselves recurrently mentioned using these organisations (not surprisingly given that we had made contact with them through such agencies) and suggested others that they had used within those cities. Before going on to discuss issues related to service use, an overview of these services is outlined.

The variety of need presented by the young people was considerable, as has been demonstrated by previous chapters. Consequently, the types of services that were used by young people belong to a variety of different sectors and perform very different functions. They include both voluntary and statutory agencies; organisations which deal exclusively with homeless people, such as hostels or day/drop-in centres; agencies which provide supported and unsupported housing to young people, such as housing associations; and organisations that provide advice and support to young lesbians and gay men – specifically on housing issues, on other issues which may be related to homelessness, such as drug use or prostitution, or on more general issues concerned with being young and gay or lesbian – such as peer support groups or advice lines.

5.1.1 Housing & homelessness agencies

The young people used a variety of housing and homelessness organisations including mainstream social housing providers, supported housing, housing advice centres and helplines, as well as hostel and bed & breakfast provision. Amongst the

types of housing and homelessness services available, the nature of help and support on offer varied considerably. It ranged from organisations that just provide accommodation to those which represent a more holistic approach to tackling housing crisis, and so offer a wide range of services, including keyworking, counselling and other therapies, advice and support on education, employment opportunities and benefits, as well as mediation services to re-establish contact with home and family.

In all of this, three different sorts of housing and homelessness agencies are evident:

- *Exclusively lesbian & gay housing services*
The priority for these agencies is young people who are lesbian and gay (although some do work also with bisexual and transgendered young people). Their approach is generally one that recognises that sexuality can be a source of vulnerability to homelessness for young people. Services are specifically designed with a view to meeting the needs of young lesbians and gay men. All of these organisations provide some form of supported accommodation exclusively for young lesbians and gay men, though none, as yet, provide exclusive emergency direct access accommodation.
- *Services for lesbians and gay men hosted by generic organisations*
These services generally operate as a component part of larger, more mainstream, housing and homelessness organisations. However, their remit is to deal with the needs of lesbian and gay clients within those organisations – either by the provision of specific services, or by offering tailored advice which can help the young person better negotiate the range of services offered by the agency. Consequently, they generally have a keen awareness that sexuality can produce a vulnerability to housing crisis. Where they provide accommodation, a portion is often specifically reserved for use by young lesbians and gay men but many also support lesbian and gay clients in mixed accommodation settings. They often work in co-operation with lesbian and gay service organisations, both to inform the provision of services, as well as to generate appropriate referrals.
- *Generic housing and homelessness organisations which do not provide services specifically for lesbians and gay men*
The final, and by far the largest type of housing and homelessness service, are those that do not provide any dedicated service for lesbian and gay youth. These services may sometimes provide services for other minority groups – such as young people from ethnic minorities, or young drug users. Alternatively, they may provide a standard service that is seen to cater for the general needs of all young homeless people. A diversity of views about the vulnerability of lesbian and gay youth to housing crisis is evident among these agencies: some acknowledge the potential for increased vulnerability to homelessness due to being young and gay or lesbian; others appear relatively unconvinced or unaware of the role it might play. Where there is an understanding of risk such services may sometimes provide informal support to young lesbians and gay men, generally – though not always – spearheaded by a lesbian or gay member of staff. However, this type of ad hoc arrangement can often fall through if that member of staff moves on from the organisation. Alternatively, such agencies will liaise with lesbian and gay service organisations to provide advice and

support on housing issues. Where views expressed fail to recognise a vulnerability, the nature of services offered generally reflects this.

There are clear regional differences in the distribution of these three different types of services. As already mentioned the most common in all areas were those agencies that do not provide any specialised services to lesbian and gay youth. All three types of services feature in both London and Manchester – with London offering more variety in each. Bristol does not have a housing or homelessness organisation that is exclusively lesbian and gay, but does have a generic agency which provides housing to many different types of young people, including dedicated accommodation for young lesbians and gay men. Newcastle is host to one housing project that deals exclusively with young lesbians and gay men. Leeds and Glasgow do not have any services dedicated to meeting the housing needs of lesbian and gay youth. This diversity in provision can have substantial implications for how effectively a young person's needs are met and this is the focus of much of the discussion in subsequent sections of this report.

5.1.2 Lesbian & gay service organisations

There was also difference in the types of lesbian and gay services available to young people in each of the fieldwork areas. Cities like London and Manchester, both with a large and diverse lesbian and gay community and commercial infrastructure, offered young people the most variety of services including different types of lesbian and gay advice lines, peer support groups, campaigning organisations, general and sexual health organisations and, as mentioned above, lesbian and gay housing organisations. Other cities lacked this diversity in the types of services offered to lesbian and gay youth, due to the size of these communities, and also to an apparent lack of funding. Bristol, Leeds and Glasgow all have advice lines that are under-resourced, which rely primarily on voluntary effort to remain operational. Even where they do function, they are generally resourced to open only in the evenings, in some cases, only once a week. Peer support projects in these cities were similarly felt to be under constant pressure of closure due to what was described by organisational workers as a persistent lack of statutory funding for these services outside cities like London and Manchester. Representatives from community organisations recurrently mentioned the financial strain of running a service without dedicated funding and warned of the insecurity this created for services that were viewed to be vital for support and care of lesbian and gay youth. Indeed, in the course of this research, Freedom – a peer support project in Bristol – had to suspend its activities when a three year grant they were in receipt of had come to an end without any other funding available to replace it.

5.1.3 Other types of services

The young people had used a variety of other services in the course of their lives. As discussed in earlier chapters, some of the young people interviewed had histories of care – and contact with social services or other statutory agencies was retained by some. Others were in contact with a variety of voluntary organisations that they drew upon for support on a range of issues. There was mention of, and recurrent use by some, of support organisations for those who have been in care; organisations that provide or facilitate counselling programmes for young people; drug and

alcohol support agencies; organisations that support young people who are selling sex; more generic youth charities that provide advice and mentoring to young people; mental health support agencies; employment and skills agencies and children's rights groups.

5.2 Patterns of service use

There was much variety in the extent to which the young people drew upon the services described above. The diversity of housing and homelessness agencies on offer combined with the various forms and types of lesbian and gay service organisations that exist throughout the fieldwork areas, meant that very few young people had described the same package of care. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the needs identified by the young people – discussed in earlier chapters – clearly necessitate the involvement of a variety of agencies in meeting them.

Interestingly, the use of lesbian and gay services was by no means universal amongst the young people: some were long-term and frequent users of such agencies; others more infrequent users and identified times in their lives when they were more or less important. Some had never contacted or used lesbian and gay community services. The propensity to use lesbian and gay operated services appeared unrelated to the dominant cause of housing crisis in a young person's life. In areas of similar provision, young people whose housing crisis was unrelated to sexuality were as likely to use such services as those who felt their homelessness was directly related to their sexuality. Neither is any relationship evident between use of such services and a young person's confidence in their sexuality, given that young people exhibiting varying levels of comfort with their sexuality used such agencies.

By contrast, there were very clear patterns in how the young people used housing and homelessness agencies. The most surprising of these is that none of the young people interviewed only used housing or homelessness services dedicated to lesbian and gay youth. Rather, they either used generic services only, or used a combination of generic and specialised services. Understanding why such patterns of service use exist can help us to comprehend more about how young lesbians and gay men fare in housing and homelessness services, as well as explaining the routes they take to approaching some types of services and not others, and their motivations for doing so. For instance, amongst those who used solely generic services there were a number of factors which underpinned this. First, these young people sometimes lived in areas that did not have any specific services – such as Glasgow or Leeds. However, others lived in areas that did offer specific services for lesbian and gay youth yet did not use them. This was sometimes a result of low awareness that such services existed. For example, Anna who had a history of housing crisis was unaware of the existence of a housing agency specifically targeting young lesbians and gay men, even though it was located in the same office block in which she was currently undertaking a work placement as part of New Deal for Young People.

Another factor that appeared to dictate young people's use of different types of housing and homelessness services was the level of confidence they had in their sexual identity. Young people, who were not entirely comfortable with being gay or lesbian, or about mixing with other lesbians or gay men, displayed some reluctance at contacting or being housed within specific services.

Finally, the impression among some young people that specific services were over-subscribed prevented them from making contact with such agencies even where they knew they existed.

Amongst those who reported using both specific and generic services, three clear patterns are apparent:

- The first relates to young people who now appear to use specific services only but who had used generic services in the past. Underpinning this transition is an increase in the young person's awareness that such services exist. This can happen in a few different ways: through advice and support from friends; through the help of peer support projects; or by contact with (and subsequent referral from) a generic service organisation. Differing motivations for making the transition are also evident. It can be the result of a young person's attraction to dedicated accommodation on learning of its existence – arising from a whole variety of experiences and circumstances. It can also be due to homophobia experienced in generic services, which prompts or necessitates the young person to search for more suitable or safe environments. These and other motivations for choosing specific housing and homelessness services are discussed in more detail in Section 6.4. Also represented amongst those who make a move from generic to specific provision are young people who move between different areas of provision, for instance, from an area without specific provision to an area where it does exist. Darren first experienced housing crisis in his hometown in the North of England, remaining there for a short while in a hostel for young people. He later moved to London where, after some time spent sleeping rough, he was housed in specific supported accommodation.
- Second, young people sometimes make contact with specific accommodation at the outset and then move into generic housing. This can happen when dedicated housing services are over-subscribed – as often appeared to be the case – and the young person is referred to a generic housing provider for emergency accommodation. For instance, Jackie contacted a specific housing provider in London when she was forced to leave her family home following her father's refusal to accept her sexuality. Because of a lack of vacancies, she was referred to a generic hostel, where she stayed for a short time before moving on to supported accommodation. Discomfort with the nature of specific accommodation can also prompt a move from specific to generic services. Alba was offered supported accommodation with a specific agency but turned it down because she felt she would be *'like giving in to segregating people; it's like sectioning myself off into a community that's only for gay people'*. These and other attitudes relating to the provision of specific accommodation are discussed later in Section 6.4.
- Third, young people can move back and forth between specific and generic provision at various points throughout their time spent in housing crisis. This primarily relates to high mobility – where young people move with great frequency between cities with different levels of choice in provision. Thus, when cities offer specific housing or homelessness services, they will utilise them. Where this is not the case, they will typically use the generic agencies on offer. Debbie spent her time when homeless moving between Manchester and most of

the towns and cities in the Northwest of England. When in Manchester she was often in supported specific accommodation, when elsewhere she used generic hostels – sometimes women only or other times mixed gender hostels.

These differing tendencies in use of housing and homelessness services appear unrelated to the cause of homelessness in young people's lives. One hypothesis sometimes offered during organisational interviews was that young people whose homelessness is directly related to sexuality are more inclined to use specific services only and vice versa. However, the experiences of the young people do not support this. Rather, the causes of housing crisis among those using generic services were many and various – some attributable to sexuality, others not. In some instances, those using generic services were homeless because of a variety of factors, of which sexuality was one. Similar variety is evident amongst those who reported using both specific and generic services. However, as mentioned above, young people who moved from generic to specific housing services sometimes did so because of harassment or abuse within generic services. This would suggest that while the cause of homelessness does not affect patterns of service use, the experiences of young lesbians and gay men within services does have an impact on where they go for support. This is discussed further in Section 5.4 below.

5.3 The visibility of lesbian and gay youth in housing and homelessness agencies

Given the patterns in service use evident amongst the young people, one might assume a familiarity within generic services with lesbians and gay men as clients, with their difficulties and concomitant needs. However, amongst the organisational representatives interviewed there was a great diversity of opinion about the prevalence of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men and – as has been discussed in Chapter 3 – about the significance of sexuality as a causative factor in the creation of housing crisis. It was clearly not the objective of this current study to validate any predictions of scale offered by the organisations. Nevertheless, considerable difference in the reports of prevalence given by organisations clearly necessitated an investigation of why this might occur. These views were generally associated with the type of provision offered by the housing or homelessness agency: generic providers were less likely to be convinced of either significance or prevalence; while those who offered some type of specialised service for young lesbians and gay men or who were exclusively devoted to meeting the needs of lesbian and gay youth, were more convinced of the role of sexuality in the creation of housing crisis, and similarly reported a high incidence of housing crisis amongst young lesbians and gay men generally.

The general view, apart from a minority of generic services who were unconvinced of significance or prevalence, was that homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men was largely hidden or at the very least, less overt than it is for other young homeless people. Recurrent comparisons were made between homelessness among young lesbians and gay men and homelessness among women generally and homelessness among ethnic minorities, which is commonly felt to be less overt or less likely to result in street homelessness (see for example, Evans, 1996; Carter, 1998; Jones, 1999; Smith, 1999). Three reasons were offered about why young lesbians and gay men might be less visible in generic services than other young homeless people:

5.3.1 Avoidance of housing and homelessness services

The first suggestion was that young lesbians and gay men are less visible because they do not access any housing or homelessness services – whether they be dedicated to their needs or not. This was grounded in the belief that because of potential homophobia, lesbian and gay youth will only approach services when they have exhausted all other alternatives. Instead, young people were said to rely upon informal support from other people. This was sometimes provided by friends and family members. Alternatively, supportive arrangements were struck with people unknown to the young person prior to becoming homeless. These were usually other lesbians and gay men, though not exclusively. These relationships were seen by organisational workers to be quite supportive in nature, where the person became a type of ‘informal guardian’. As discussed in the previous chapter, the young people themselves – both male and female - recurrently described such arrangements and generally viewed them in a positive light. It was often this that postponed young people’s contact with support organisations, becoming street homeless or entering into more vulnerable relationships or enterprises in exchange for accommodation. Alternatively, these people can ensure that the young people make contact with appropriate service organisations, as is demonstrated by another extract from Asif’s story:

When Asif (16) left home, he slept rough for two weeks in a park in central London. It was winter and he described those weeks as a very cold, desolate and lonely time. He rarely had food and remembers that he was hungry all the time. He did think of contacting Social Services but did not know how to go about this. One day, Asif met David in the park. David talked to him and asked him about what had happened. He offered Asif a place to stay temporarily until he was able to get further help. Though wary of David’s motives, Asif accepted and moved into David’s spare room that day. With David’s help, he was able to get in contact Social Services. (Black African)

Invariably, these arrangements came to an end – either because the young person wished to move on and find a place of their own to live, or because their hosts’ circumstances changed. For example, Jackie had to leave the flat where she was staying when her friend’s partner moved in, the flat being too small to accommodate three people.

The money gained from exploitative relationships or selling sex was regarded as another factor that kept young people from accessing services. As discussed in the previous chapter, these arrangements can often mean a young person is provided with accommodation or can make enough money to acquire their own accommodation though, in both situations, the type of accommodation is rarely secure.

5.3.2 Use generic services without declaring sexuality

Fear of disclosure or discovery of sexuality is at the root of the second explanation offered for why young lesbians and gay men are less visible in generic services. It was recurrently acknowledged that the level of homophobia that young people could potentially experience in housing and homelessness services, or have already

experienced in the course of their lives, can make them less likely to be open about their sexuality when using generic services. Interestingly, some organisations did not feel that such concealment was possible within their current working practices. Underpinning such views was the belief that though it might take some time for a young person to feel comfortable enough to be able to discuss their sexuality with a worker, that over time the fear would lessen. Others clearly believed that *'you would know whether someone was gay or lesbian'*. Such claims were recurrently called into question during interviews with young people. Former clients of such organisations described how they had successfully concealed their sexuality while in contact with the services, either because they felt it unsafe to be open about their sexuality with staff or other clients, or because they were not yet at a stage where they were comfortable about expressing their sexuality to other people.

Alternatively, it was suggested that young lesbians and gay men remain hidden in mainstream services because agencies do not always probe enough about the reasons why young people are approaching them for help. This refers to the common practice of attempting to determine the cause of a young person's homelessness when they first approach an organisation. While a worker might establish that a young person's homelessness was related to family conflict, it was not always seen as necessary for workers to probe any deeper than this. Thus, explanations relating to sexuality – for example, that the conflict within the home was related to a young person's sexuality – would remain uncovered. There was considerable feeling that organisations should consider this as a possibility when dealing with cases of family conflict and investigate accordingly – whether they suspect housing crisis to be somehow related to sexuality or not. This said, some organisational representatives questioned whether such probing should happen without appropriate training for the worker and effective support networks for the young person.

5.3.3 Restrict service use to those agencies which are supportive of sexuality

Organisational representatives, in each of the fieldwork areas, spoke of the ability of young homeless lesbian and gay youth to discern which services were more likely to be supportive of their sexuality. This might mean a service that exclusively deals with young lesbians and gay men. Alternatively, it could refer to a generic service that has a reputation for providing good services to lesbians and gay men (sometimes because of the presence of a proactive lesbian or gay worker). In any case, it was felt that young people would target such services as soon as they became aware of them in an effort to avoid any potential of abuse or harassment because of their sexuality, or to escape such circumstances where this was already occurring. Organisational workers alluded to an informal network of support and advice that existed, not just amongst homeless lesbians and gay men, but among all homeless young people. It was this *'word on the street'* that transmitted messages between homeless young people about the safety and efficacy of certain services. The young people's stories lend strong support to this suggestion. As described earlier, transition from generic to specific services typically occurred on the advice or intervention of 'friends' – who were often other homeless people.

5.4 The experiences of lesbian & gay youth in housing & homelessness services

Much has already been said in this report about young people's fear of or actual experience of homophobia, either within services or in life generally. This section takes a closer look at the role sexuality has played in young people's experiences of housing and homelessness services.

The young people described a variety of experiences within the housing and homelessness services they used. This encompassed young people who felt that being gay or lesbian had helped them access services, those who felt their experience of services was unaffected by their sexuality, and youths who reported considerable negative reaction to their sexuality, either by peers and fellow clients, or sometimes from the people delivering such services.

5.4.1 Positive experiences of services

Positive experiences typically occurred in services that recognised how sexuality can be a source of vulnerability for housing crisis. These were either services that offered dedicated services to young lesbians and gay men or more generic services that exhibited an understanding of the difficulties faced by homeless young lesbians and gay men. Here the young people generally described effective standards of care and support, coupled with a clear recognition of the particular vulnerabilities faced by homeless lesbian and gay youth. Such affirmations were also used to describe interactions with other clients of such services. Very few, if any, homophobic experiences were reported by the young people using these services. This was sometimes because the other clients and staff were lesbian or gay themselves. Where the client group was more varied the young people felt that clear intolerance of homophobia backed up by organisational policies and working practices prevented most abuse or harassment on the grounds of sexuality. If it did occur, homophobic abuse was openly challenged by workers.

Tom (17) was beaten up and thrown out of home by his parents because he told them he was gay. For a while he moved from friend to friend, and also spent some time sleeping rough. One night he met a young person in a local nightclub who had just been given short-term accommodation in a housing project exclusively for lesbians and gay men. Tom approached the agency and after a couple of months of moving from place to place was allocated a shared supported flat. He likes living where he is now because he can be around other people like him. He also feels he is able to talk to his key worker about the time when he was homeless and also about being gay (about which he feels he has a lot more to learn). (White British)

Some young people even went so far as to describe their sexuality as an advantage within some of the agencies they had used, a sort of passport to better or speedier service that they felt would otherwise not have been accessible or available to them. Those who made this point all had experience of specialised services in London. They highlighted how such services were generally supportive of lesbian and gay youth. It was also suggested by some – in stark contrast to many other young people

- that generic services were reticent about being seen as unsupportive of lesbian and gay youth and therefore dealt more favourably with them.

'I think it has been more of a bonus. I think it has helped my housing situation... Everybody is so worried about equal opportunities and they've got to get it right...I've got away with murder, just for the fact that I am gay' (Male, 21, White British)

These young people were sometimes uncomfortable with their own sexuality relative to many of the other young people interviewed and there was evidence to suggest that this contributed to an expectation of poor or inadequate treatment because they were lesbian or gay. In this respect, it is possible that the receipt of service that affirmed homosexuality – at a time when they themselves were not accepting of it – may have made them feel that they were being offered something that they perhaps should not have been. Such experiences, in any case, were uncharacteristic of those described by other young people – particularly those interviewed in areas without any specific services. Here encounters were at best neutral and profoundly negative at their worst.

5.4.2 Neutral experiences of services

Those who felt that their experience of services was unaffected by their sexuality were typically users of generic services. Here there was a recurrent view that sexuality had not dictated the services from which help was sought, nor had it affected the level or quality of help and support they had received. Indeed, there is little about these young people's experiences that would suggest that they were regarded more or less favourably than other young homeless people. Notwithstanding this, there is some evidence to suggest that the both the attitude of the young person and the identity that they project to other homeless young people can lead to a less antagonistic experience of services. These young people were sometimes more covert about their sexuality than others interviewed – not necessarily to the point where they actively hid it from other young people or staff – but sufficient enough so that they did not present themselves as a potential target to other service users. Generally, they only disclosed their sexuality to others when they were asked – and they felt comfortable in doing so.

Stephen (18) is currently living in a large men-only hostel after being thrown out of home by his father for the third time. Each occasion has been related to his father's difficulty in accepting that he is gay. He hates where he lives now and said that he spends most of his time concentrating on how he can get out of there. He is very distrustful of the other people in the hostel and does not want them to find out anything about him, least of all his sexuality. He is afraid that other people will react badly if they knew he is gay. He described how he concealed his sexuality from staff and other users because he did not want to put himself in a '*difficult situation*'. He is fairly open in other parts of his life '*but these people I've got to live with*'. He explained that if other people knew about his sexuality, then it could be '*a bit frightening, if they're not nice then they might do something and I don't want to put myself in that situation*'. (White British)

Such concealment can be an effective survival mechanism for young people but is clearly a tacit acknowledgement that were they more open about their sexuality that this could lead to difficulties within the housing and homelessness agencies that they use. Moreover, a young person's discomfort with their own sexuality, and that of others, can underpin many strategies of concealment, as is evident from Anna below:

'There are some people like who, you know, they just ask for it really...if I was a lad and I walked past a gang of lads giving it all that camp, then yes...you would get shit...I know this girl...she has got a completely bald head, and she shaves her eyebrows, and she wears big boots and looks like a proper bother girl...she's like expressing herself and that, but...some people do like ask for that a bit, they moan about it but...if you're going to walk around making a point...of making yourself look different, then you are going to get seen different and you are going to get treated different'
(Female, 23, White British)

Conversely, and contrary to what Anna suggests, being more open or even bravado about one's sexuality also elicited a neutral response from staff and clients – though it must be said that it was also at the root of many negative responses, as is discussed further below. Young people sometimes were very open about their sexuality as a way of diffusing any negativity that could arise should others discover it. These were often the more confident young people, though not necessarily the older of them.

Less commonly, a young person's own reputation for violent or aggressive behaviour, or their status within their peer group, protected them from any harassment or abuse relating to their sexuality. These were generally young people who had a long history of involvement with the homelessness scene, were from care backgrounds, and/or had experiences of other forms of institutionalisation, such as prison.

5.4.3 Negative experiences of services

Wholly negative reports of encounters with housing and homelessness services emerged almost entirely, though not exclusively, from users of generic agencies. Such experiences typically involved homophobic harassment, bullying or even violence. The abuse was sometimes emotional or psychological, at times it was physical or involved damage to personal possessions. Sexual abuse, though it did occur, was less common as an experience within services. Incidents ranged from subtle occasional affronts, to more constant insidious abuse. Where violence was perpetrated, it was sometimes quite severe.

'I was in there [supported accommodation] for like 6 months and there was one kid, he used to live next-door to me, he just hated me, he hated, well, no, he hated my sexuality, that's what he hated, he didn't hate me, he hated my sexuality. I had this calendar up that ... [name of lesbian and gay organisation], had done and it has got like 2 men kissing, women kissing, whatever on it. We had a massive row about it, you know, and sort of everybody was having a go at me and it was like, you know. ... I'll keep myself to myself like you lot should be doing really, you know. I don't butt into your relationships, you know, don't come into mine. And there's a kid

called Jake, he's like, he was having a pop at me, and I moved out... and I was just like I'm not going back, I'm really not going back, I got really freaked out' (Female, 20, White British)

'I liked it there [in the hostel] though but I had to move out because I were getting picked on because of my sexuality, they knew what I was...it were a big building with loads of separate flats and you used to get people smoking, joining in, and I used to keep myself to myself but then I started smoking with them and I told them what I was and it just all come out and then because they didn't like it, I used to get people banging on my door, see, come out, you poof, I want to batter you. So I had to move out...it scared me' (Male, 17, White British)

While it was not unusual for the young people to recount episodes of homophobic bullying or abuse from other users of services, they sometimes implicated agency staff within such activities. This happened in number of ways. Staff were seen to actively contribute to other users' homophobic abuse. Alternatively, the way in which service was delivered or the reasons why young people were excluded from some agencies was perceived to communicate an intolerance of lesbians and gay men. Finally, young people also reported that whilst in some agencies the staff themselves were not active contributors to homophobic abuse or harassment, they were often knowledgeable of its existence and were reluctant to confront it. Juliet's experience is an example of this:

Juliet (now 24) says she knew she was a lesbian since the age of twelve. She spent most of her teenage years in residential care but decided that she could not come out in that environment because *'it was too dangerous...I would have gotten my head kicked in all the time'*. When Juliet left care she entered into mixed supported accommodation project. She described how during the time spent there, her sexuality *'exploded...it just all came out'*. Though many of her peers were supportive, a staff member displayed severe discomfort with her sexuality. On one occasion she was told by him that it would be better if she found somewhere else to live because her *'difference'* was causing problems within the project. (White British)

Where young people experience homophobia within services, they appear in the main to have two choices. The first course of action can be to remain within the service. Persistent insecurity was a common result of this, characterised by a fear that harassment or abuse could potentially happen at any time. This can lead to the adoption of strategies similar to the attempts at concealment described above. Here young people may attempt to isolate themselves from their peers in an attempt to avoid harassment. It was not uncommon for the young people to avoid any sort of communal environments or events in order to protect themselves from aggravation. More exceptionally, some went to great lengths to project a heterosexual identity as a way of guarding themselves against homophobia. For example, Darren experienced persistent abuse following disclosure of his sexuality to some other users of a hostel he was staying in. He described repeated incidents of verbal and physical abuse. In desperation, he began to sleep with women in the hope that his peers would discontinue their abuse.

Perhaps more positively, there are some examples of where young people have successfully challenged the perpetrators of homophobic abuse or harassment and, as a result, have retained their use of a service. Young people described instances where they persevered with their use of a service, without compromising their lifestyle or identity, even though attitudes were sometimes intolerable. While it was rare for this to result in a completely tolerant environment, it appeared that determination in one's views and beliefs ultimately paid off in greater acceptance, or at the very least, lesser hostility. Nevertheless, the huge personal cost of such resolve should not be underestimated

The second course of action is to leave a service as soon as any form of homophobic abuse or harassment begins. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, this can be one of the factors that can perpetuate homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. Whether it is or not primarily depends upon the destination of the young person upon leaving the service. Some young people appear to make a successful transition between a 'homophobic' service and a 'safe' service. These are the young people - described at the outset of the chapter - who make the transition between generic services and those organisations who provide specialised or specific services for young lesbians and gay men. Such transitions are facilitated by sympathetic workers in generic organisations, by friends or by the intervention of a lesbian and gay peer support group or advice service.

However, others are less fortunate and departure from a service can lead to significant difficulty. Rough sleeping can be a way to avoid the harassment and abuse that characterises some generic hostel provision. Where this has occurred, the young person has generally felt that the street is a safer place for them to be than the agency that they have left behind. Another approach at this point can be to rely on more informal sources of support - such as friends, relatives, family members or the kind of informal guardians described earlier - in an attempt to avoid any contact with services, where they might encounter homophobic abuse. In some cases, the homophobia experienced in services was so severe as to precipitate a return to the family home from which the young person was ejected or from which they escaped. For example, the harassment that Helen experienced in the women's refuge where she stayed caused her to return home to her parents home, where upon she was subjected to the same sexual abuse which caused her to flee in the first instance. Likewise, abuse related to his sexuality caused Josh to abandon his hostel place and return to his father's house, which he had previously left to escape the persistent physical abuse that had characterised much of his teenage years.

An entry into prostitution or other forms of exploitative relationships can also be triggered by experiences of harassment and abuse within housing or homelessness services. In much the same way as these activities prevent young people from accessing services at all, they can also represent a welcome retreat from hostile service environments. Finally, as explained in the previous chapter, entrance into transient or casual relationships was common and this was another way in which young people escaped homophobic abuse in services.

5.5 Other barriers to housing and homelessness services for lesbian and gay youth

It is obvious from what has gone before that the potential for homophobia in services - or the direct experience of it - is not only a significant barrier to accessing services for young lesbians and gay men, but is also an important factor which shapes their service use. However, there are also other factors that influence young people's use of services. These are sometimes barriers which have special significance for lesbian and gay youth, such as:

- *The interpretation of priority need*
There were recurrent views among organisational representatives that young lesbians and gay men would not be considered a priority for re-housing under the definitions contained within the 1996 Housing Act. While everyone can apply for council housing, a duty to rehouse only applies if the person is considered homeless and in priority need. Being young and single (which most services view young lesbians and gay men to be) is by itself not a reason to be considered in priority. This can mean that young people are left without proper accommodation. However there is evidence that some young people do not even have an assessment of their current housing situation to determine priority. Some recounted episodes where they had contacted local authority housing offices only to be told that nothing could be done for them. In a few extreme cases, the young people were told to return to the family home - even though they had explained the hostility they experienced there. This situation was particularly catastrophic for Maya, when as well as being denied access to local authority housing services, the housing officer rang her family and told them to come and fetch her. This led to her being returned to a dangerous, if not life threatening, situation.
- *Rehousing policies*
In some areas, council and housing association re-housing policies were criticised because they located homeless young people in areas that were deemed unsafe for lesbians and gay men. Organisational representatives in Bristol, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow particularly raised this as an issue. Interestingly, this was not an issue raised by organisations in London, perhaps because the anonymity of life in London affords some protection to lesbians and gay men in the neighbourhoods they inhabit. In any case, it was suggested that the lack of sensitive rehousing policies would make some local authority and some housing association accommodation less attractive to lesbian and gay youth. Indeed, young people from some of the cities mentioned above recounted episodes of quite severe homophobic abuse in some areas. Organisational representatives underscored the importance of identifying safe neighbourhoods for lesbians and gay men, and suggested that local authority and housing association allocation policies should target such areas in matching lesbian and gay clients to suitable accommodation.

Others barriers appear unrelated to the young people's sexuality and are most likely common to all young homeless people. These encompass:

- *The limited supply of accommodation services*
Both organisational representatives and young people alike spoke of the general

difficulty in accessing emergency and short term supported accommodation because the level of demand generally outstripped supply. This was felt by organisational representatives to be particularly difficult in London. There was recurrent mention among the young people of being denied access to services – both dedicated and generic – and being placed on waiting lists. It was highlighted that such waiting periods could be long, during which young people could face the possibility of getting involved in '*dangerous situations*'. There was some belief amongst organisational representatives that the number of hostel beds available in large cities was insufficient. Allied to this was a perception that the level of hostel provision exclusively for young people in some cities was inadequate when compared with the number of hostel spaces for homeless people generally.

- *The hostile environment of hostel accommodation*
It was argued that young people may be put off accessing hostel accommodation, not because of any prior knowledge of how lesbians and gay men fare within such services, but because of a general impression gained about the safety of these services. There was a recurrent view among organisational workers that hostels can be a threatening environment for any young person. It was suggested that chaotic drug use, violence and theft were all commonplace within the hostel system and that this would prevent some young people from making contact. Many young people confirmed this, arguing that '*there is always trouble in hostels*' or pointing to particular hostels that they avoided, not because they were unsafe for lesbians and gay men, but that they were perceived as unsafe for all young people.
- *Fear of judgement*
It was suggested by some organisational workers that young people - and homeless young people in particular - had a fear of bureaucracy or officialdom and for this reason would be disinclined to use housing or homelessness services. It was felt that homeless young people would avoid contact with statutory and voluntary services if at all possible to avoid any judgement being made about the reasons they became homeless or their lifestyle during their period of housing crisis. There was little evidence to suggest this amongst the young people – but perhaps this general fear is overshadowed for lesbian and gay youth by anxieties about how their sexuality will be regarded within such services.
- *Attributes other than sexuality*
Finally, organisational representatives argued that access to some services would be denied young lesbians and gay men, not because of their sexuality, but because of other attributes and characteristics. Many organisations consulted have specific guidelines about what sort of young people they are willing to accept. For example, young people with high support needs, such as young people with mental health difficulties, learning disabilities, or who have chaotic drug use, are denied entry to some services. Similarly, young people who have a history of aggressive behaviour or arson are excluded from many services. Others agencies refuse to accommodate those known to be engaged in criminal activity, which often includes those involved in selling sex.

There are, then, different patterns of service use amongst young people, and very different experiences within housing and homelessness agencies. In addition, both organisational representatives and the young people themselves have highlighted a range of barriers to receiving adequate support, as well as avenues that facilitate access to appropriate levels and types of support. Clearly, there are lessons here for the provision of housing and homelessness services to lesbian and gay youth, not least in the value of choice in the type of service or accommodation provided. This and other key issues in the provision of services to homeless lesbian and gay youth are the focus of the next chapter.

6 PROVIDING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES TO LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH

This chapter explores what emerged in the course of the research to be the primary issues for consideration in the provision of housing and homelessness services to young lesbians and gay men. In so doing, it builds upon the descriptions and explanations of the causes and experiences of housing crisis offered earlier in the report, as well as young people's access to and use of services, explored in the previous chapter. These discussions in and of themselves have highlighted many issues of importance for the providers of housing and homelessness services. This chapter aims to discuss both the strategies that can lead to enhanced quality and experience of services for lesbian and gay youth, as well as the ways in which service providers can increase their understanding of the needs and circumstances of young homeless lesbian and gay youth.

In considering these twin objectives, the chapter draws upon the views of both the young people and the organisational representatives. It begins by discussing the practice of monitoring for sexual orientation of service users, following which strategies for enhancing equality of opportunity within housing and homelessness organisations are considered. An overview of the main types of services felt required to meet the needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth is outlined, as well as the main barriers perceived in providing them. The chapter ends by describing the diverse views surrounding the provision of specialised services for young lesbians and gay men, as well as some strategies for the potential integration of such services into current local provision.

6.1 Monitoring the sexual orientation of service users

Chapter 2 highlighted a lack of research about the prevalence of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men, as well as a dearth of evidence, in this country at least, about the proportion of homeless youth that identify as lesbian or gay. Similarly, the previous chapter has explored the apparent lack of visibility of lesbian and gay youth within generic housing and homelessness agencies and suggested reasons why it may be more difficult for young lesbians and gay men to be open about their sexuality with agency staff or other users. The combination of both these issues has been used as justification by some for the view that homelessness is not an issue for young lesbians and gay men. The evidence given in this report clearly belies this assumption. Nevertheless, where this view prevails, it has implications for the nature of support available for young lesbians and gay men, as well as for the efficacy with which mainstream services can meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth.

Undoubtedly, some tangible indication of prevalence would be useful – not only in offsetting such views but also in helping to plan, deliver and evaluate services. Since methodologically robust surveys of lesbian and gay youth or homeless young people are at best difficult and at worst impossible, the search for proof of prevalence has generally favoured the use of administration data. However, monitoring the sexual orientation of service users is not without its difficulties and, consequently, was the

subject of much debate throughout the study, both amongst organisational representatives, and the young people themselves. This section, then, explores the occurrence of monitoring sexual orientation amongst the housing and homelessness organisations within the fieldwork areas and explores the views underpinning this. It also examines the young people's experiences of and opinions about disclosing their sexual orientation to service providers. Taking both current practice and views expressed into account, some strategies are suggested for increasing the effectiveness of monitoring systems, where they are operated.

6.1.1 The practice of monitoring

Housing and homelessness organisations consulted during the research divide fairly straightforwardly between those that do monitor for sexual orientation and those that currently do not. Those that do have some monitoring procedure are generally, but not exclusively, those agencies that provide dedicated services for young lesbians and gay men. Typically, organisations that monitor the sexuality of clients have a greater awareness of the significance of sexuality as a cause of housing crisis. There was, however, some difficulty in determining whether this understanding led to the introduction of monitoring or whether appreciation of the role of sexuality as a causative factor in housing crisis was gained through the introduction of monitoring.

Different systems for monitoring were evident amongst the agencies consulted. Some log the sexual orientation of the young person, while others only record sexuality as the cause of housing crisis or, where relevant, list support around sexuality as a client need. It was exceptional for organisations to have a system that included all of these practices. Further variety is evident in the way monitoring data is collected: some ask monitoring questions as part of a face to face interview, while others administer a self completion questionnaire – though admitted that varying levels of privacy were awarded young people whilst completing such documents. In some agencies, monitoring information is collected informally over the entire period of contact with the young person, though many admitted that this process was generally neither systematic nor comprehensive. Indeed, there was some admission that where monitoring systems were in place that these were not always implemented meticulously, especially in mainstream agencies where the collection of information at times appeared to be perfunctory and did not always seem to have a clear impact on the type of service received by the young person.

A variety of justifications were offered by agencies to support a decision to monitor for sexual orientation. These encompassed:

- **The administration of dedicated services**
Monitoring was considered a necessity here to ensure the appropriate allocation of services targeted specifically at young lesbians and gay men.
- **Identifying client need**
Where agencies were aware that being young, homeless and gay or lesbian had concomitant care and support requirements, sexual orientation was typically one of the issues covered during initial assessments of a young person's needs. This information was then used to construct a tailored package of care and support for each young person

- **The promotion of equal opportunities**
In certain instances, the practice of monitoring for sexual orientation resulted from the adoption of monitoring practices for a range of equality measures – such as monitoring for gender, ethnicity and disability – rather than any particular view about why clients should be asked about their sexuality.
- **The creation of a supportive culture**
There was some belief that just by asking about sexual orientation during an assessment interview, or on an equal opportunities monitoring form, sent positive messages to young lesbians and gay men that an agency was both gay friendly and supportive of young lesbians and gay men. It was also felt to convey to young people that an agency had some understanding of how sexuality could be a cause of housing crisis.
- **The requirements of funding providers**
Some specialised services relied on monitoring to justify the continued receipt of funding for their services.

Amongst those organisations who do not currently monitor for sexual orientation, different levels of consideration were given to the issue. Some of these organisations had monitored for sexuality in the past but had discontinued the practice. Others had given the matter thought but had decided against monitoring. There were some that had evidently never conceived of the possibility of monitoring for sexual orientation. These were generally the most resistant to any form of monitoring client's sexuality, though not usually to other monitoring exercises, such as those for gender, race or disability. Amongst these organisations there was sometimes a conflict between the position of the organisation and the perspective of the representative. This happened when those interviewed felt that the organisation should monitor for the sexual orientation of clients, whereas the organisation did not have any such policy. It was less common for those who did monitor to think that they should abandon the practice.

There were many different justifications offered to explain why housing and homelessness agencies should not monitor the sexual orientation of clients or to explain why previous monitoring practices had been discontinued. Recurrent here was the view that such practices were unwarranted given an apparently low prevalence of homelessness among lesbian and gay youth, and a lack of evidence that sexuality was a significant cause of housing crisis or could have implications for how services are delivered. Where organisations held this view, there was generally a belief that lesbians and gay men were not a significant constituency within their client group. However, given that there was a general acknowledgement that lesbian and gay youth are inclined to conceal their sexual orientation, it is difficult to see how such low incidence or significance could be established without having some systematic practice of monitoring.

The lack of any requirement by social housing funding bodies – such as the Housing Corporation and Scottish Homes – to collect data on the number of lesbians and gay men using services was offered by some as a reason for not monitoring. In this respect, the burden of gathering data specifically monitored by funding agencies was

perceived as too great to allow organisations the liberty of monitoring for 'optional' or 'extra' criteria.

Other explanations presented were related to a perceived difficulty in asking young people about their sexual orientation. Such inquiry was seen by some to be too intrusive or personal and so distinguished it from other monitoring criteria – such as disability or race – which were felt to be different because they were seen to be visible characteristics. Similarly, the decision not to monitor was sometimes the result of a view that organisational staff would be too embarrassed to ask young people about their sexual orientation during assessment interviews. Staff in many agencies were considered ill equipped to have such discussions with young people.

A concern for confidentiality of data was raised by some organisational members as a justification for not monitoring the sexuality of clients. The potential for discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation led such organisations not to collect this data, even though they collected other 'sensitive' data but did not perceive any potential for harassment in this respect

Finally, there was some belief that monitoring systems forced young people to commit prematurely to a fixed sexual identity. This appeared to be governed by an assumption that all young people were heterosexual unless proven otherwise and that it would be better for them to enjoy the relative safety of a heterosexual identity for as long as possible. Also underpinning this view was the idea that homosexual identity did not become fixed until a person reached their late twenties and that any attempt to monitor sexual orientation at any earlier age would result in inaccurate data.

6.1.2 *Young people's views and experiences of monitoring*

There has been recurrent mention throughout the report of the difficulties faced by young lesbians and gay men in being open about their sexuality – be that with peers, family members, or with professionals. It is unsurprising, then, that views about disclosure of one's sexual orientation to housing or homelessness agency staff were generally guided by a fear of reprisal. In the main, opinions expressed about the appropriateness of monitoring were based upon concern that disclosure of sexuality within services could lead to harassment, abuse or even violence. Disclosure of sexual orientation within services dedicated to lesbians and gay men was not perceived as a source of danger and, therefore, monitoring systems within these organisations generally went unchallenged. Indeed, there was widespread appreciation of the need for specific services to monitor clients' sexual orientation in order to allocate appropriate accommodation or to demonstrate a need for their services. Some also felt that monitoring for sexuality prevented dedicated services being misused by heterosexual young people.

By contrast, it was exceptional for young people to be open about their sexuality in generic housing and homelessness services, particularly when they first came into contact with such agencies. There was a recurrent view that disclosure contributed to vulnerability within these services. Even if violence or abuse did not follow from disclosure, the fear of it occurring was too great for some to justify any openness about being gay or lesbian. Insecurity about the storage of monitoring data and

about access arrangements further contributed to a general distrust of monitoring systems. There was, in the main, little understanding about why generic agencies may wish to know their sexuality. Unlike dedicated services where disclosure was seen to be imperative, sexuality was seen as irrelevant to one's treatment by generic services, especially where it was not perceived by the young people to be the reason why they became homeless. It was common for young people to feel that the question was too intrusive or too personal, as Tom put it: *'you can't go round telling everyone your sex life'*.

Those that were open about their sexuality in mainstream services were usually very confident about their sexuality. This was sometimes because they were older and had become more accustomed to living openly as a lesbian or a gay man. Nevertheless, there were also some younger respondents who exhibited extraordinary confidence in their sexual identity. It was common for these young people to declare their sexuality on first contacting an agency – whether a monitoring system existed or not – in the belief that it was better to know whether it was going to create difficulty before developing a dependence on the service. Some of these young people were those who had a long history of service use and, usually, of homophobic abuse within them. It appeared sometimes that previous intolerance had led young people to be more rather than less open in the hope that they could be aware of and thus evade any potential sources of abuse. Finally, where it was explicit that monitoring was linked with the provision of some care or support, young people were more generally more open about their sexuality.

6.1.3 Conducting effective monitoring

The value of monitoring was underscored by many organisational representatives – especially at the Stage 5 workshops. Here, there was a keen awareness that monitoring was one of the only ways to highlight the demand for services by young lesbians and gay men. Similarly, the potential for it to create greater awareness of the presence of lesbians and gay men in mainstream housing and homelessness services was recurrently emphasised.

However, concern was also voiced about many aspects of how monitoring currently happens. The purpose of monitoring systems was repeatedly questioned by organisational representatives. Where monitoring was linked with the planning, delivery or evaluation of services, it was typically seen to be of great utility. However, where it was completed without any obvious link to services, it was seen to be ineffectual. There was, in the main, very low awareness amongst the young people about why an organisation might want to monitor their sexuality. Where it had occurred, it was an issue that sometimes prompted concern amongst them. Young people mentioned that such practices rarely dissuaded them of their fear that abuse or harassment would ensue once their sexuality was known. Consequently, there was more acceptance of monitoring exercises that were accompanied by clear explanations of why they were needed. For example, where knowledge of sexuality would affect where a person would be housed, the young people were less resistant to disclosure. Resistance was greatest where there was no clear link between monitoring activity and the delivery of services. There was a strong suggestion that monitoring should only be carried out when accompanied by clear comprehensible explanations of why it was needed.

The need for staff training on sexuality issues, as well as an active commitment to equal opportunities, were seen by some organisational representatives as necessary prerequisites for the success of any monitoring practice. Without them, it was felt that staff would not be properly equipped to inquire about a young person's sexuality, much less deal with the potential implications of such questions. Young people too felt that monitoring was more acceptable where it was clear that organisation respects diversity and tackles any occurrences of discrimination. For instance, where the young people felt that agency staff could or would offer some protection against potential harassment, they were inclined to be less guarded about their sexual orientation. Both these issues are discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The importance of confidentiality within monitoring systems was repeatedly underscored by those interviewed – but particularly by the young people. Indeed the strength with which this was expressed recurrently emphasised that much of the resistance to the practice of monitoring was rooted in the fear of harassment, abuse or unfair treatment on the basis of sexual orientation.

The young people expressed a clear preference for monitoring that took place as part of a face to face interview, rather than that which relied on a pro forma. This reflects the young people's desire to anticipate and guard against any potential negative reaction to a disclosure of sexual orientation. Consequently, an interview situation was generally seen to present an opportunity to assess how safe it was to disclose information about sexuality. However, even in these circumstances disclosure was not guaranteed. Rather, it was heavily dependent on when and how questions about sexuality were asked. Many expressed a wish for discussion of sexuality to take place later in assessment interviews, rather than at the outset. There was also a view that the attitude of the interviewer was crucial to whether young people would be open about their sexuality with agency staff. Where questions were asked in a joking manner, or in a way that assumed heterosexuality, young people were less likely to be open about their sexuality. Here, the value of empathy on the part of the interviewer was emphasised by some.

Finally, there was some scepticism about whether any monitoring system – however well implemented – would portray a true estimate of the numbers of homeless young people who are lesbian or gay. Persistent negative societal attitudes were seen to influence young people's confidence in and openness about their sexual identity. In this respect, a focus on gathering statistics as a way of measuring need or outcome was seen to be limited and there was some wish to develop more holistic ways of estimating the demand for services and measuring their performance.

6.2 Promoting equality within services

The potential for homophobia within mainstream housing and homelessness services was viewed by organisational representatives as one of the key challenges for service provision. Consequently, the need to promote equality of opportunity within these services was a common concern. The focus on mainstream agencies – especially statutory housing and homelessness organisations – reflected a general view amongst organisational representatives that homophobia was endemic within them. Also,

because such generic organisations were often the first point of contact for young people when they became homeless, it was argued that homophobic experiences could make young people reticent to use these agencies again – even when there were no obvious alternatives. As explained in the previous chapter, unfair treatment in mainstream services – by other users or staff – typically led young people to move towards more dedicated or specialised services where they were available. In the absence of such specialised provision, or where young people were unaware of the existence of such services, rough sleeping or involvement in hazardous situations, such as prostitution, was often the only option available. Thus, tackling homophobia within mainstream agencies is obviously an important step to improving the lives of homeless lesbian and gay youth.

The promotion of equal opportunities within specific services was not a cause of concern amongst those interviewed. Rather, agencies with dedicated provision for young lesbians and gay men were generally seen to constitute models of good practice because they demonstrated an understanding of homophobia and its effects on service users. Also, provision was usually supported by a raft of policies and practices which enshrined the equality not just of lesbians and gay men, but also other types of minority youth.

This section focuses on a perceived need to enhance the equality of lesbian and gay youth within mainstream housing and homelessness agencies. The provision of sexuality awareness training is considered, following which broader strategies for creating an organisational culture which supports lesbian and gay youth are explored.

6.2.1 Sexuality awareness training

One of the main strategies suggested to increase awareness about the needs and circumstances of young lesbians and gay men, and challenge homophobic attitudes, behaviours and beliefs was the widespread initiation of sexuality awareness training. Though clients were seen to be the main protagonists of homophobia – by the young people as well as organisational representatives – it was felt that training of agency staff would go some way towards preventing homophobic abuse, dealing with it when it occurs, or at the very least, alleviating its effects. This approach was supported by the experiences of some mainstream agencies that had received sexuality awareness training. The general view here was that staff and services had benefited greatly from the experience, that facilities had been made more accessible to young lesbians and gay men, and that their resultant experience of the service was one that, in the main, was devoid of homophobic abuse.

In creating a more supportive culture within agencies for young lesbians and gay men, it was felt that training should have three primary objectives:

- **to raise awareness**
It was suggested that any programme of training on sexuality issues should have at its core a discussion or programme of events that would make staff aware of how discrimination and homophobia operate, as well as the policies and practices which can perpetuate or prevent them. The main function of this was to highlight how homophobia can impact upon service users, though

clearly it could also bring to light and challenge homophobia in other contexts. The education of staff about how sexuality can make young people vulnerable to housing crisis was also felt to be an important component of such programmes. Finally, it was argued that increasing awareness about the circumstances and needs of young lesbians and gay men would better enable housing and homelessness services to deal with such young people if and when they encountered them.

- **to challenge attitudes**

There was a recurrent view that training would allow staff to reflect upon and express their own attitudes to lesbians and gay men and to homosexuality generally. In so doing, it could create an opportunity for open and frank discussion of the beliefs governing such views, and development of strategies to ensure that all staff have a commitment to promoting equal opportunity in general and to challenging homophobia in particular.

- **to offer practical guidance**

There was much criticism of equal opportunities training which comprised vague discussions of the principles of equal opportunities without offering staff any real way of incorporating this into their work practices. In this respect, the need for training programmes to offer practical advice and guidance about how to put equal opportunities into practice when dealing with clients or delivering services was repeatedly emphasised.

There was considerable scepticism about whether mainstream agencies would sign up to sexuality awareness training. Consequently, there was felt to be a clear role for Government in taking the lead to ensure that housing and homelessness agencies demonstrate how they promote and maintain equal opportunities. At present, only agencies in Scotland are subject to such a requirement following the extension of equal opportunities to include sexuality in the Scotland Act 1998, and the launch of the Equality Strategy by the Scottish Executive. Agencies in England and Wales are under no obligation to promote equal opportunity on the basis of sexual orientation. Legislative change was believed to be the most effective way of ensuring that this becomes common practice. In absence of this, it was suggested that local authorities should issue directives that would compel services funded with public monies to initiate sexuality awareness training. The far reaching effects of such directives can have upon management and delivery of local services was highlighted by comparisons with such initiatives as 'Best Value' and health and safety requirements.

Similar concern was expressed about the funding of training in the absence of any statutory commitment to equal opportunities on the basis of sexual orientation in England and Wales. Grant funded initiatives such as the Community Fund's Support of the Citizenship 21 project, administered by Stonewall or 'Beyond Barriers' in Scotland, were mainly welcomed. However, though the voluntary sector was generally seen to be the best vehicle for the provision of sexuality awareness training, through the development of specific equality training agencies - as has been the case in relation to gender, disability, and race - there was believed to be a clear role for central and local government in the funding of such initiatives.

6.2.2 Creating a supportive organisational culture

There was some belief that training, in and of itself, would not be sufficient to change practice or to challenge homophobia. Indeed, the need for training to be part of a more holistic strategy, which would encompass every aspect of service delivery and organisational policy, was recurrently mentioned. A number of initiatives were felt to enhance the effect of good quality training and enshrine equality of opportunity into the working practice of an agency:

- **Establishing sexuality as a cornerstone of equal opportunities policies**
The inclusion of sexuality in all equal opportunities policies – on equal footing with other criteria such as race, gender and disability – was seen to be a crucial way of changing the culture of mainstream housing and homelessness agencies. The importance of a clear articulation and communication of policy on this issue, to people at all levels of an organisation, was also underscored.
- **Commitment to implementing equality standards**
Having equal opportunities policies was generally seen to be the first step towards achieving equality. However, unless they were properly implemented, it was felt that such edicts were worthless. There was recurrent mention of the importance of ensuring staff at all levels of the organisation commit to equal opportunities and implement anti-discrimination policies in a consistent way. To demonstrate this, it was felt that staff should be seen to act quickly and decisively in challenging homophobia – in the same way that they would respond to racism or sexism. Having a staff team which reflected the diversity possible within an agency’s client group was felt to be one practical way of demonstrating a commitment to equal opportunities.
- **Promotion of work with lesbian and gay youth**
Another suggested way of supporting young lesbians and gay men within mainstream services was for an agency to publicise its willingness to, or experience of, working with lesbian and gay youth. There was some belief that this would encourage more lesbians and gay men to use mainstream services – or make themselves more visible to workers when they are using such agencies. Indeed, there was considerable evidence to suggest that young people themselves target such agencies, either because of such publicity or because learn about them through word of mouth. However, there was concern that this strategy should only be implemented where there were sufficient resources and training to meet the demand that such promotion might create – otherwise it could be in danger of raising young people’s expectations of an agency unnecessarily.
- **Forging links with lesbian and gay organisations**
Co-operation between mainstream housing and homelessness services and lesbian and gay organisations was a recurrently proposed as a way of making agencies more aware of the needs and circumstances of young lesbians and gay men, and consequently, making those agencies more hospitable to these young people. Moreover, where these links worked well, they often developed into more formal collaborations. It was in this way that many

generic housing providers became convinced of the nature of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men and, consequently, of the need to provide some sort of dedicated housing. It may be that such a strategy could help the development of specialised housing and homelessness services in cities where they do not exist at present. This is discussed further in Section 6.4.

- **Establishment of good practice guidelines**

One suggested way of ensuring that organisations measured up to such equality standards was to develop and implement a sector wide set of guidelines for 'good practice' in relation to sexuality. It was argued that the development of a code of practice that would demonstrate a commitment to equality would enable organisations who wanted to make their services more accessible to young lesbians and gay men to do so. Service delivery could then be subject to regular audits to ensure that an organisation is meeting and maintaining equality standards. It was unclear who would be responsible for drawing up or enforcing such set of requirements, or whether it should be a statutory requirement or a voluntary endeavour. Nevertheless, if developed, it was felt that it would aid young people's identification of agencies that were aware and understanding of issues of sexuality, and so help them to get the support they needed, while avoiding agencies that are perhaps less hospitable of young lesbians and gay men.

6.3 Understanding and meeting young people's needs

Although this study has not aimed to evaluate how young people's needs are met, there was recurrent mention of, as well as vivid examples which illustrated, the types of services which best suited the needs of young people. It is important to say at the outset that none of these services were in any sense new or revolutionary. Rather, almost all are currently available, albeit in short supply or limited to some parts of the country. This section then outlines what sorts of services were of use, or were suggested to be of use, to the young people – as well as briefly highlighting some of the barriers that may challenge their creation.

6.3.1 Types of services required to meet need

There was universal agreement amongst the service providers and the young people that the key need was for safe, affordable and accessible housing. Whilst there were differing views about the best way of providing this – which are discussed in the Section 6.4 below – the lack of good housing stock, or the difficulty in matching young people with the most appropriate housing solution, was generally understood to be at the root of many of the young people's difficulties. It should be said however that the provision of housing did not always represent the end of difficulty for the young person. Rather, the impact of housing on the young person's life or crisis was often largely dependent on the diversity and scale of other problems they were experiencing. The circumstances of some young people's lives were such that the provision of housing was all they needed in order to get their lives back on track. This was particularly the case for those young people who had only experienced one period of housing crisis, often due to suddenly being thrown out or forced to leave home as a result of harassment or abuse. In other situations, the young people's

difficulties were much more profound – either because of problems that preceded their housing crisis or trouble encountered since becoming homeless – and this meant that the provision of housing, in and of itself, did not always lead to a resolution. The different circumstances and outcomes of the two cases below illustrate this.

Anna, now aged 23, left home at 17 for a variety of reasons all of which she considered to be unconnected to her sexuality. She stayed with a friend for a short while who got her a private flat in the same building. Anna remained there for about a month but was evicted when she did not pay the rent. After '*a long time*' moving between friends, staying in squats or sleeping rough, Anna – with some help from a housing advice centre – got a flat with her local council. She lived there for a year but '*did a runner*' because she was being threatened with eviction, again due to rent arrears. She explained that the little money she had during that time was supporting her chronic heroin addiction. After moving between friends and acquaintances for a time, she moved into a hostel for six months and after that into the council flat she was living in at the time of interview. However, she was at the time being threatened with eviction again because of unpaid rent. At the time of interview she was wondering how long it would be before she had to find somewhere else to stay. (White British)

Jonah (18) was kicked out of home when his parents discovered he was gay. He moved between different friends for a while during which time he contacted several housing advice centres and housing associations. After a short time, he was offered supported lodgings with a gay male couple. He stayed there for a few months and now lives in other supported accommodation specifically for lesbians and gay men. At the time of the interview, he was studying for A level examinations. (African/Asian)

The emphasis on safe and supported accommodation was recurrent throughout the research. The greatest need was perceived by some organisational representatives to be for dedicated direct access emergency accommodation – which at present does not exist anywhere in the UK. Given the general hostility experienced by lesbian and gay youth within generic hostels – examples of which have been outlined earlier in this report – there were recurrent appeals for adequate resources to fund specialised emergency accommodation. Some organisations that work with lesbian and gay youth admitted that their faith in current generic emergency provision was such that they would recommend young people to exhaust any other potential source of accommodation rather than approach hostels. Though there were examples of supportive generic hostels amongst the organisations consulted by the research and by those encountered by the young people, this admittance in itself is a damning indictment of the treatment of lesbian and gay youth within direct access hostels. There was also strong support amongst the young people for specific accommodation – usually either direct access or supported housing – and the reasons for this are discussed in greater detail in the Section 6.4.

Organisational representatives also voiced much support for provision of supported short-life tenancies to young lesbians and gay men - either dedicated or provided in a more mixed setting. Where young people were housed in unsupported accommodation - such as local authority flats - this was believed to require 'floating' or peripatetic support from statutory or voluntary housing resettlement workers.

There was also much discussion amongst organisational representatives of the need for housing providers - especially local authorities - to consider the safety of certain neighbourhoods when allocating housing to young lesbians and gay men. Such concern is clearly supported by the experiences of those young people who suffered harassment and violence in the housing they were allocated.

The need for emotional support - mainly through counselling, mentoring and befriending services - was repeatedly highlighted by the organisational representatives but was particularly underscored by the young people themselves. Counselling services offered much needed help to young people, in coming to terms with sexuality, with people's reactions to it, with other aspects of their lives which had been difficult or painful (either related or unrelated to sexuality), or in helping to cope with housing crisis or the transition back to independent living. The benefits of mentoring relationships with older lesbians and gay men that enable young people to gain a positive representation of their sexuality, and to be exposed to successful lesbian and gay lives was particularly underscored.

There was much support amongst the young people for better after-care services that would enable them to make a successful transition to independent living. This was exhibited by the difficulties experienced by some young care leavers - outlined earlier in the report - in finding stable accommodation once the leave or are discharged from the care system. Some of the young people interviewed felt that there was perhaps a need to develop aftercare services specifically for young lesbians and gay men, where as well as learning how to cope with the practical and financial aspects of life, young people could be supported in the development of skills that could lead to a happy life as a lesbian or gay man.

The role of lesbian and gay support organisations - particularly peer support projects and telephone helplines was also mentioned by both the young people and organisational representatives. These services were seen to provide much needed support for young people who had difficulty coping with their sexuality, as well as helping young people to develop positive lesbian and gay identities - which clearly increased young people's self confidence and self esteem.

Finally, there was a suggestion amongst some organisational representatives of the need for some kind of mediation service which would help young lesbians and gay men to retain or rekindle contact with family in situations where this was desired by the young person concerned. While the young people themselves rarely articulated such a need, there was evidence to suggest within some of their accounts that resettlement could have been aided, or made less traumatic, if they had received some assistance in contacting or dealing with family members - particularly parents.

6.3.2 Barriers to providing services inclusive of sexuality

In discussions with organisational representatives, there emerged a variety of factors that affected the provision of services to homeless young lesbians and gay men – or to lesbian and gay youth more generally. Some barriers operated in all types of organisations. These were generally the more practical barriers that affected the provision of services, or the scope of provision. They encompassed:

- **Funding**
The resourcing of services that aim to meet the needs of lesbians and gay men was generally considered difficult. Here, the lack of statistical data about prevalence of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men – complicated by the invisibility of young people within mainstream services – meant that it was hard for agencies to justify the allocation of funds to services or initiatives which met the needs of lesbians and gay men. Clearly, a proper system of monitoring would overcome this barrier, but as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the implementation of such systems presents many challenges. Another suggested reason for the lack of funding concerned the priority shown to lesbian and gay issues by funding organisations. It was argued that in an environment where there are often competing priorities for limited funding, allocating resources to lesbian and gay youth was generally not politically expedient, especially in the light of pervasive negative societal attitudes about homosexuality. While this was by no means considered to apply to all funding bodies, it was perceived by some agencies as the only reason why certain funding bodies had refused to grant resources to services that would meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth. Consequently, there was some suggestion of the need for a designated body to fund voluntary endeavours that would help lesbians and gay men, or for existing funders to designate part of their budget specifically for lesbian and gay issues.
- **The impact of Section 28**
There was a recurrent view that Section 28, and the debates surrounding the issue, had an adverse effect on the provision of services at local level to lesbians and gay men. Section 28 prohibits local authorities in England and Wales from promoting homosexuality as a ‘pretended family relationship’. Although the provision of housing services is clearly outside its jurisdiction, its existence was said by many to induce a fear of providing, funding or supporting services that were seen to cater for or favour lesbian and gay youth.

Other barriers seemed to affect mainstream housing and homelessness agencies only. These generally concerned a lack of knowledge about the significance of sexuality to the creation of housing crisis, the types of attitudes held by mainstream organisations about homosexuality or about providing specialised services, and perceptions about the nature and scope of provision already available to meet the needs of young lesbians and gay men.

- **Lack of information**
The general lack of information about the significance of sexuality for the creation of housing crisis and the circumstances of homeless young lesbians

and gay men was seen to constitute one of the main barriers to the provision of services cognisant of the needs of lesbian and gay youth. The relative invisibility of young people in some services – as discussed in the previous chapter – coupled with a lack of publicity about the issue – had meant that many service providers had not considered how accessible their services were to young lesbians and gay men. While it is of course possible that some agencies may never come in to contact with homeless lesbian and gay youth, such a view is complicated by the evidence surrounding invisibility presented in the last chapter, which suggests that young people may be using mainstream services without the knowledge or awareness of agency staff. In this respect, raising awareness, in the ways suggested earlier, is clearly an important way of making services more accessible.

- **The self-supporting nature of lesbian and gay communities**
The belief that sufficient services already exist to meet the needs of young lesbians and gay men was another reason why some mainstream housing and homelessness organisations did not feel their activities necessarily needed to be inclusive of young lesbians and gay men. In London, the high profile of some specialised accommodation services, or the provision of dedicated housing by some large housing associations, led some providers to assume that there was already enough provision for lesbian and gay youth. The experiences of the young people clearly contradict this: it was common for young people to report that the specific services they had contacted were oversubscribed – some to the point that their waiting lists were also full. Outside London – especially in areas without any sort of specialised or dedicated provision – the view that the lesbian and gay community was self-supporting or self-sustaining was used to justify why mainstream services did not need to consider how their services addressed the needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth.
- **Perception that already provide ‘equal’ treatment for all clients**
A perception within some mainstream services that they are accessible to all clients – irrespective of gender, race, age or sexuality – was sometimes a reason why services appeared ill-equipped to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth (as well as the needs of other minority groups of homeless young people). While some services with this mode of practice formed successful collaborations with more dedicated agencies to meet the needs of specific client groups, it was clear that in other agencies the practice of ‘equal treatment for all clients’ often meant that the specific needs of some young people – such as lesbians and gay men – were not sufficiently recognised or addressed.
- **Discomfort with issues of sexuality**
A discomfort in dealing with issues of sexuality was felt to underpin some agencies' reluctance to consider the needs of lesbian and gay youth. This was expressed in two ways. Staff within some organisations felt that the attitudes of colleagues, and sometimes managers, prevented an organisation from recognising or addressing the needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth. Alternatively, in some cities, it was common for particular agencies to be

identified by others in the field as organisations that would be inhospitable to lesbians and gay men because of the views and attitudes held by staff.

6.4 Specialist service provision

Throughout the research, any discussion of the provision of housing or homelessness services for young lesbians and gay men invariably involved some reflection on the relative merits of different types of provision. In the main, this deliberation centred on whether services were best provided in a specialist setting - reserved exclusively for young lesbians and gay men - or whether generic services - agencies which provide services to all types of young homeless people, without targeting any particular constituency - were more appropriate. Specialist provision generally encompassed accommodation - either emergency, short term and more exceptionally, longer term housing. As described in the previous chapter, where such accommodation was provided, it was generally by agencies that deal exclusively with young lesbians and gay men or by large housing associations who reserve some of their housing stock specifically for lesbian and gay youth. The provision of accommodation in this way attracted a wide diversity of opinion, both amongst the young people interviewed - some of whom were past or current users of specific services - and amongst the organisational representatives. This section, then, reviews the main tenets of this discussion, describing the advantages and disadvantages of specialist provision as articulated by those consulted in the research.

6.4.1 Young people's perspectives

There was strong preference amongst the young people interviewed for specific supported accommodation - both direct access emergency accommodation and short term supported housing. The utility of such services was valued equally by those with current or past experience of such services, by those who were aware of such services but had not had the opportunity to use them, and those who were unaware of them but had examples of such services described to them during the interview. This support was strongly associated with the experience of homophobic abuse, harassment and violence within more generic housing and homelessness services. The potential for such accommodation to act as a sanctuary from homophobic abuse was clearly the main reason underpinning young people's support for it.

'If I lived with straight people, obviously you're bound to get one who's homophobic, it always happens, so that's probably why I would like to live with gay people because they know the way you are...you can get straight people who are gay friendly and who wouldn't care...but I know me, I always get the bad luck, I will end up moving in somewhere with straight people who are homophobic' (Male, 19, White British)

Some current or past users spoke of the enormous relief with which they were able to dispense with the practices of concealment or pretence they had used to survive or protect themselves within generic services.

'It would just make you a bit more relaxed...it's better because, you know what it's like, you go into an environment, it's hard to make a connection

with people...I want to keep to myself until I'm approached, do you know what I mean, like when I feel comfy in myself with that person...I suppose it's like a connection, isn't it, it's like everybody would be a bit more relaxed with each other...where you're not wary like when you're going into a mixed hostel or whatever and you're having to sound people out' (Female, 23, White British)

The possibility of becoming 'ordinary' within specialised services also underpinned much of the support for such services. This view was recurrent amongst those who had felt judged within mainstream services because of their sexuality, or who felt it had made them appear or feel 'different' or 'special'. In this respect, the benefits of shared experience were clearly valued. Current or previous users of such services highlighted the utility of being around young people with similar life histories and difficulties. This was sometimes described as being around people who were 'on the same wavelength' but it related generally to the value placed upon not always having to explain to other users or staff the story of being gay or lesbian and the effect it had on one's life. For young people with experience of these services, this shared experience was the cornerstone of quite strong friendships or even relationships that developed while using such services. Non users equally relished the opportunity such services would provide for meeting other young people in a similar situation to themselves, and also mentioned that they could be a useful vehicle to forming supportive friendships and relationships.

'I suppose its just like feeling safer and, you know, more relaxed...you can be yourself...it's just like total friendship, all of us and, like I say, it works so well, do you know what I mean? It's totally wicked, I love it. It is, compared honestly to things before and places I've lived before and everything else, it's just spot on really' (Female, 24, White British)

'I think it's more understanding and sort of like the same issues would come up with everybody and you'd get a lot of understanding. It's finally finding people that understand you, who are the same as you and who see things how you see it...I seem to get closer to people who are lesbian than people who are straight, so I think that it's a good thing, as well for security reasons and friendships. I think there's a lot more closeness that there is in normal [housing], when one person is straight and one's not straight' (Female, 19, White British)

Specialised accommodation was also felt to afford an opportunity to be relaxed or open about one's sexuality and be an environment in which young people could discuss and experiment with identities, relationships and sexual activity without fear of ridicule or abuse.

'I was really lucky to get this place...I wouldn't like to live in a straight house purely because I know it would be a lot of grief for me. It's like, you know, Alan [his flatmate] has his boyfriend to stay, you know. When they get up in the morning, they come out, come to the bathroom, you know. If I was in a straight house or they were in a straight house, I don't think a lot of straight guys would like seeing two guys come out of the bedroom in the morning...it's just easier because we are obviously of the same sexuality, you

know, that there's no, you know, it just feels normal' (Male, 22, White British)

There was recurrent mention - by users of specific services - of their role in educating about lesbian and gay lifestyles. This encompassed such questions as what it means to be lesbian or gay, issues of gay history and community, and more practical skills such as how to negotiate or survive the gay and lesbian commercial scene or how to develop happy and safe sex lives. This was in addition to the usual life skills which housing and homelessness services attempt to impart upon their users in preparation for independent living. Young people who were placed in supportive lodgings, or had developed mentoring relationships, with older lesbians and gay men, placed particular emphasis on this, as illustrated by Jonah below:

'I had to sort of help out with the cooking, when Richard and Mark [foster carers] were cooking, I had to sort of help and then doing the washing up...yes it was good and they sort of taught me a lot. I had so many questions to ask and I could just speak to them and say anything to them and I could ask them anything, the things I couldn't ask anyone else, you know, and they would tell me and talk to me about it...like things about sex and the gay scene...because I didn't know anything...you don't get sex education for gay men or anything like that' (Male, 18, African/ Asian)

The value of increased support, understanding and empathy from staff in such services was recurrently mentioned by the young people interviewed. Here the positive contribution of lesbian and gay workers was underscored. Users of such services pointed to the benefits of a worker having first hand knowledge of what it means to come out, about discrimination and homophobia and about the difficulties of being young and gay or lesbian. In addition, it was felt that workers in specific services were guaranteed to be non-judgemental about sexuality and were less likely to blame all the young person's difficulties on the fact that they were lesbian or gay. It was clear that workers within such services had sometimes become role models for the young people concerned because they were living proof that it was possible to succeed as a lesbian or gay man and live without constant difficulty or distress.

It should be said that similar praise was voiced for lesbian or gay workers who were employed within mainstream housing and homelessness services. Indeed, they sometimes appeared to be even more venerated because they were often the only other gay person known to a young person either within that agency, or more exceptionally, within the young person's life. Also, there was recurrent acknowledgement that heterosexual workers can also fulfil many of these roles. Indeed, some young people recounted very positive and affirming experiences with heterosexual workers. However, there was a general view that such experiences were less guaranteed in these circumstances, with some suggestion that trusting relationships developed more quickly with lesbian or gay workers.

There was some resistance to the idea of specific services amongst some of the young people interviewed. Invariably, this was expressed by older respondents, those who felt themselves more resilient to harassment, or those who were exhibited a forthright confidence in their sexuality. There were some that viewed specialised services as too segregated and that they did not offer enough opportunity to mix

with young people who were not lesbian or gay. However, even where there was opposition, there was some admission that other young people – who were younger, less confident or less resilient - would derive clear benefits from specialised accommodation.

Finally, there was, occasionally, a lack of preference for either specialised or generic accommodation. In this respect, it was argued that good accommodation depends on the congeniality of people one resides with rather than on their sexuality. Where this was expressed young people felt that there was equal danger in both types of accommodation of being placed in uncomfortable or inhospitable situations. Nevertheless, some young people who espoused this view also felt that, on the whole, specialised accommodation was less of a gamble and therefore represented the safer choice. More exceptionally, some young people were opposed to sharing accommodation with anyone – regardless of their sexuality – and wanted to live alone.

6.4.2 The views of organisational representatives

Organisational representatives were, in the main, more divided about the benefits of specialist provision than the young people interviewed, with quite entrenched views for and against specific housing and homelessness services. In exceptional cases, representatives could see the case for and against specialised services. Where the benefits of specific service provision were espoused, they generally encompassed the types of benefits outlined by the young people above, such as guaranteeing safety from harassment bullying and discrimination, engendering peer support, alleviating isolation and promoting a sense of belonging, as well as providing young people with potential role models. The perception of these benefits amongst the organisational representatives interviewed was of a similar order and nature to how they were described by the young people, and so will not be repeated again here. One further benefit, not mentioned by the young people, was the potential for such services to build young people's self confidence and self esteem, and to empower them to deal with homophobic attitudes and behaviour in the wider world:

'I'm certainly not into living in ghettos but I think people gain an awful lot of power and confidence from being around people who are in similar sorts of crises. It's a bit like Women's Aid refuges, I mean, nobody can understand better perhaps than another woman who has been through a similar sort of situation...I think it's like building up a defence system, isn't it, or building up your own confidence to a point where you can say to the world, yes, hey, this is me, this is who I am and this is how I'm presenting, and I think for 16 year old lesbians and gay men that's probably quite a useful devise for them to have' (Small housing association, some dedicated housing)

Where opinion was opposed to the provision of specialised accommodation for lesbian and gay youth, it generally concerned:

- **Preparation for living in 'integrated communities'**
In stark contrast to the view illustrated above, there was some scepticism that specialised services do not adequately prepare young people for living in the 'real world'. There was recurrent mention here of the potential for such

services to 'ghettoise' young people. This was felt to be particularly problematic when young people move on from specialised accommodation and may be unprepared to live in more mixed settings.

- **Avoidance of discrimination/homophobia**
This view was expressed by individuals who felt that the creation of specific services did little to tackle the protagonists of homophobia within mainstream agencies. Allied to this was the belief that separating off provision for lesbians and gay men meant that the culture of mainstream agencies would not be challenged or changed. However, these views were somewhat mitigated by the acknowledgement that specific services sometimes helped to change attitudes in generic provision through the formation of collaborative working practices.
- **The potential for harassment**
The fear that specialised accommodation could attract homophobia and abuse from others in the neighbourhood was recurrently mentioned, particularly by representatives from smaller cities outside of London. There was also some evidence to suggest that the anonymity provided by large cities like London, or the cosmopolitan nature of some neighbourhoods, renders such harassment less likely or less expected. In any case, it was felt that the potential for such harassment meant that these services did not necessarily provide young people with greater safety.
- **Limited diversity**
There was concern amongst some organisational representatives that services dedicated to the needs of young lesbians and gay men would not be equipped to meet the needs of other minority groups of young people, such as young disabled people or young people from ethnic and cultural minorities. It was suggested that if lesbian and gay youth occupied the majority position within a service, they might be less accepting of other minority young people, even if they were lesbian or gay.
- **Proper utilisation of resources**
Where organisational representatives were unconvinced of the significance of sexuality for the creation of housing crisis, or of the prevalence of young lesbians and gay men amongst the population of young homeless people, they were often sceptical that dedicated resources would be adequately used. However, this concern is perhaps diminished by the fact that almost all of the dedicated services that were consulted during the research, or that the young people mentioned using, were over-subscribed.

The more pragmatic approach articulated by some organisations in Stage Three of the research was that there is room for both types of provision. In this respect, it was felt that having both specific and generic services available would mean that local services would be more equipped to meet a diversity of need. This was seen to facilitate the creation of a more tailored package of support to homeless young people than is generally available in most areas of the country at present.

When this view was presented to organisations during the workshops at Stage Five of the research, there as considerable support generated for the position. Moreover, such a strategy was felt to fit within current modes of practice for homelessness and housing agencies, which were perceived to be characterised by close co-operation between generic agencies and smaller more specific organisations. In order to for specialised services for lesbians and gay youth to operate effectively as part of a range of local services available, clear interagency communication and co-operation was felt to be imperative. This would facilitate young people's movement back and forth between specific and generic provision as needed. It was also felt that such a model of delivery would facilitate greater awareness within mainstream agencies of the needs and circumstances of young homeless lesbians and gay men, which could bring about a change in the culture of such organisations. If this was to happen, it was argued that it could lead lesbian and gay youth to be less fearful of mainstream services, and consequently, more open and visible.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE STRATEGIES

This chapter reflects on the main conclusions of the research and puts forward suggestions for future service provision, policy and research in this area.

7.1 The importance of understanding cause

The literature discussed at the outset of the report gave strong indications about the potential causes of homelessness amongst young lesbians and gay men. It suggested that the reasons for housing crisis amongst young lesbians and gay men could potentially be rooted in a variety of reasons both connected and unconnected to their sexuality. This theory has been strongly validated by the experiences of the young people. The reasons for homelessness explained in this report include a diverse range of inter-related and interconnected factors encompassing family background, intolerance of a young person's sexuality, and the pressures of their wider social and school life. These factors did not appear to differ between the young men and young women interviewed; the same range of factors being mentioned by both. The complexity of these circumstances add weight to the argument put forward in recent research that the factors causing homelessness are multi-faceted and there is no one factor which creates youth homelessness or makes it inevitable. It is suggested that a whole range of factors contribute to homelessness and that these will be present to a greater and lesser degree in the circumstances of each young homeless person. (Van der Ploeg & Scholte, 1997; Pleace & Quilgars, 1999; Kennett & Marsh, 1999)

It would be an understatement to say that the role sexuality can play in the creation of youth homelessness is complex. That said, however, there do appear to be three distinct patterns evident within the young people's experiences. The first concerns young people who become homeless due to factors that appear unrelated to their sexuality –the main ones being family breakdown, disruptive parental behaviour, physical and sexual abuse, leaving care and religious and cultural expectations, though there are several others. These issues are very similar to those cited in the literature as being the main causes of homelessness among young people generally.

The second pattern is evident amongst those young people who have had a relatively stable and secure upbringing but have been forced to leave home simply because they are lesbian or gay. They appear to differ from other homeless young people in that they have not, in the main, experienced the same type of traumatic upbringing. These young people may grow up in comfortable, happy, households, which have been shattered by the reaction of other people to their sexuality, or by the young people's own fear of potential reactions. It seems likely that these young people would perhaps not have become homeless if they were heterosexual.

The final pattern is evident amongst young people whose experience spans both of those described above. These young people had difficult upbringings, often abusive, and sometimes spent time in care. However, they also experienced or expected homophobia from parents, guardians, other family members or friends that contributed to them becoming homeless. Unsurprisingly, in these circumstances, it is difficult to ascribe causation to either sexuality – or 'other' more established causes

of homelessness. A problematic family background can compound the rejection felt by a young person because of their sexuality. Alternatively, homophobic abuse can be regarded as merely another form of abuse to which the young person is subject. Either way, the co-existence of these two sets of circumstances can have profound implications for the young person's welfare.

The debate about causation is not merely theoretical or an attempt to develop some notional theory of blame. Rather, these different patterns of causation present service providers with a clear set of challenges. Those whose homelessness is unrelated to their sexuality have often experienced the most disturbed and troubled lives. Because of this they are likely to have developed particularly complex needs and problems, all of which need to be addressed if they are to achieve stable accommodation. It is unlikely that the solution to these young people's problems lies solely in the provision of accommodation. The evidence suggests that what is needed by this group is a multi-agency approach able to deal with the diverse range of issues potentially faced by these young people. This approach goes beyond the remit of homelessness agencies and may need to involve social services, lesbian and gay organisations, drug, alcohol and mediation services to name but a few – and is more suited to the more holistic 'one stop shop' type of provision which has become increasingly popular in recent times. In addition, service providers need to be acutely aware that while the cause of homelessness may be unrelated to sexuality, homophobia in services can lead to further distress amongst these young people, which may make it more difficult to provide lasting solutions to their housing crisis.

Those whose homelessness is strongly related to their sexuality necessitate a very different response. Because these young people are less likely to have experienced the kind of traumatic upbringing described above, they have a less complex range of needs and problems. Their key need is usually housing, though they may also need support around sexuality (professional or peer led), perhaps some coaching in independent living skills or some emotional support to deal with severed family relationships. If these young people are provided with a stable supported base from which to rebuild their lives, then the evidence suggests that it is unlikely they will experience housing crisis again. However, it is important that such interventions occur soon after these young people become homeless, else the dangers of the homelessness scene can quickly exacerbate their problems and consequent needs.

Finally, the implications for delivering services to young people who have become homeless because of issues both related and unrelated to their sexuality will undoubtedly be multifaceted. The complexity of difficulty amongst these young people will almost certainly necessitate a diverse range of support services far beyond just the provision of accommodation.

7.2 Young people's experience of homelessness

The difficulties faced by the young people were multiple and diverse. This study has attempted to categorise and classify them however, in reality, they rarely fall into neat lists. The experiences young people had while they were homeless were related to three areas of their lives: the experience of difficulty or trauma prior to, or at the point of, leaving home; the emotional and psychological impact of housing crisis itself; and the hazards presented by being homeless in a large city. These three are

very interrelated. The level of difficulty a young person experiences whilst growing up or the circumstances surrounding their departure from home can have profound implications for their psychological wellbeing during the time they actually spend homeless. This in turn can make it difficult for the young person to deal with not only the practical issues raised by being homeless but also the psychological and emotional ramifications of being without a home. Furthermore, how the young person fares in relation to these can have implications for how they negotiate the hazards inherent in being homeless: such as sexual exploitation and dependence on drugs and alcohol.

The emphasis placed by the young people on the psychological crises that they go through whilst homeless is striking, as is the conflicting and contradictory emotions with which they regard 'home' and family'. While not underestimating the practical difficulties inherent in being homeless - such as having enough to eat or finding shelter that is safe from harm - it was the relative ability of the young people to deal with the trauma of being homeless, and the implications of the events that had caused them to become homeless, that often led to a more or less difficult or damaged experience during the time spent homeless. It was often this that diminished young people's receptivity to help offered by friends and family or by support services, which recurrently led to being homeless for longer, and becoming more vulnerable to danger.

7.3 The use of services

The difference in the types of provision offered within the areas covered by the research clearly has profound implications for how well individual needs can be met. While it was not the function of this study to evaluate services, it is clear from the young people's experiences, and the views of organisations, that having multiplicity in provision is one way of increasing the possibility of ensuring a young person's needs are met.

The young people's experience of services highlights the suitability of some service environments relative to others. More positive experiences are associated with agencies that recognise the role of sexuality in the creation or perpetuation of housing crisis, and offer protection from homophobic harassment or abuse. Conversely, where experiences of housing or homelessness services were deleterious, it was often because of overt homophobia, manifested in harassment or violence. The experience of homophobia in accommodation services or fear of intolerance can have three different, but equally undesirable consequences for young lesbians and gay men:

- **They do not use these services:** this may mean they decide to sleep rough or stay with friends rather than access existing provision or that they remain in difficult or dangerous households.
- **They leave services without their needs met:** young lesbians and gay men may leave services without having received help and without anywhere safe to go.
- **They remain in services and suffer homophobic abuse and harassment:** where young lesbians and gay men decide to stay in services, the

experience of abuse or harassment may exacerbate their problems or needs (such as low self esteem and drug or alcohol use).

This point is important because it means that even where a young person's homelessness is unrelated to sexuality, their experience of services and the 'homelessness scene' can mean that their housing crisis is perpetuated because they are lesbian or gay. For example, there are instances where a young person had run away from home because of sexual abuse, became homeless, and only then encountered harassment or abuse because of their sexuality, either in emergency accommodation or from other homeless young people on the street. In addition to dealing with the ramifications of sexual abuse, these young people also have to cope with homophobia from other young people and, sometimes, from agency staff.

It is unsurprising given such experiences that young people generally gravitate towards more specialised services or services exclusively dedicated to the needs of lesbian and gay youth during their time spent homeless. This targeting of supportive environments by the young people interviewed is undoubtedly the main reason behind why lesbian and gay youth are more visible in some organisations and not others. It clearly presents a challenge to organisations that feel they do not have any lesbian and gay clients to ask themselves why that might be and to take steps to remedy the situation.

There are of course other barriers to service use. These encompass the interpretation of priority need which can exclude young, and apparently single, people. This may change with the introduction of new homelessness regulations in England and Wales that are expected to ensure priority for all those homeless young people aged under 18 and all care leavers under 21. The proposed amendments to the code of guidance on the Housing Act 1996 are particularly welcome because they specifically address the difficulties faced by young lesbians and gay men. The guidance suggested asks local authorities to 'consider whether applicants who have suffered, or who are at risk of harassment or violence on account of their gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion or sexual orientation are vulnerable'. It goes on to suggest that 'those who are vulnerable in this way will have priority need for accommodation'. If properly implemented, this guidance could not only assist young lesbians and gay men to find safe accommodation but could also require local authorities to monitor sexuality because, without doing so, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain vulnerability in this regard.

7.4 Strategies for service delivery

As well as understanding causes of homelessness and describing young people's experience of homelessness, the research has clearly gleaned a great amount about what young people feel they require from services. In addition, service providers have made recurrent recommendations about what services would better help homeless people in general, and specifically homeless lesbian and gay youth. These encompassed the need for safe supported accommodation – both emergency and longer term – the need for emotional support, better after-care services (as well as some aftercare specifically for young lesbians and gay men), lesbian and gay peer support projects and telephone helplines and a mediation service to help lesbian and gay youth to re-establish contact with home where they wish to do this.

Unsurprisingly, almost all of these services exist. However, many are limited to London or Manchester and are all but absent from other cities covered by the research. Even where they are available, they are usually oversubscribed. Alternatively, the services that operate more universally – such as lesbian and gay peer support projects – often do so on a ‘shoestring’ budget, in many cases, devoid of any statutory funding. There is a clear need for more consistency of service across Great Britain and more established funding mechanisms for lesbian and gay service organisations.

The emphasis placed on the need for services that are dedicated to meeting the needs of young lesbians and gay men, or exclusively for their use, cannot be over stated. The strength of support amongst the young people was great and the benefits derived by those who used such services were manifold, including sanctuary from homophobic violence and abuse, the possibility of becoming ordinary and sharing experience, the opportunity to be more open and relaxed about sexuality, and increased knowledge of lesbian and gay life and community – including greater awareness of safer sex for young gay men. In cities without any sort of specialised accommodation – even that provided as part of a larger, more generic service – it is clear that homeless young lesbians and gay men are without a service that can potentially meet many of their immediate needs.

The greatest requirement was said to be for specialised or dedicated emergency accommodation. This is currently not provided anywhere in Britain. Without it, young lesbians and gay men often avoid using mainstream hostels – which can sometimes lead them into dangerous or exploitative situations. Alternatively, where young people use direct access hostels, they are recurrently exposed to homophobic abuse and harassment. Dedicated emergency provision could potentially have all the benefits of the type of specialised accommodation described earlier. While it would be inaccurate to suggest it would solve all the young people’s difficulties, given the complexity of need outlined above, it would certainly make a significant contribution to doing so. Perhaps its main selling point is that it would offer protection to young people from the homophobia they currently experience in many direct access hostels, by providing them with the option of a safe, supportive environment. This is often the first step in assisting the young person to deal with the issues that caused their homelessness, and to develop strategies for returning to independent living.

However, it is clear that the development of specialised services is not the only solution to the difficulties faced by homeless lesbian and gay youth. Rather, there must also be a way of tackling homophobia where it exists within mainstream services and making those services accessible to young lesbians and gay men who either wish to use them or have no other choice but to use them because of their location in the country. This research has highlighted three main features that underpin the creation of more inclusive services. These are monitoring for the sexuality of clients; the implementation of sexuality awareness training for staff (and also perhaps users); and the development of wider agency policy and practice that enshrines the equal and safe treatment of lesbians and gay men within the service – such as the proper implementation of equal opportunities policies. These strategies are clearly interdependent, for example, training is the key to proper monitoring

strategies and the development of more inclusive organisational culture. In turn these three are the key to unlocking resources both within an agency and sector wide. Their value cannot be underestimated.

However it would be naïve to think that these three strategies alone will solve the difficulties experienced by lesbians and gay men within services. Societal attitudes to homosexuality can fuel the homophobia within services, by users as well as staff. Equally, Government policy can infer that it is acceptable to treat lesbians and gay men differently than heterosexual young people. In this respect, the repeal of Section 28 in England and Wales, and the extension of equal opportunities in local and central government policy to include sexuality, should be a paramount policy priority.

7.5 Future research

Given that this is the first study to explore fully the experiences of homeless lesbian and gay youth in Britain, it seems timely to suggest other areas of the young people's experience that warrant further investigation. Clearly, there is a need to quantify some of the experiences and views presented in this report. However, while this study would certainly aid in the development of suitable interview instruments, it is unlikely that representative samples could be obtained, for reasons mentioned recurrently in the report. However, several research areas present themselves as worthy of further qualitative investigation. For instance, the reliance on selling sex and other forms of exploitative relationships is an area in which there has been little research to date and it would certainly be beneficial to the welfare of these young people to understand more about how and why this occurs. Likewise, the preponderance of drug use amongst the young people may suggest that there are reasons related to sexuality that contribute to such behaviour. This has yet to be explored within a UK context. The transition into adulthood for young lesbians and gay men from ethnic minority groups has been shown here to be particularly difficult, especially where those cultures expect adherence to particular traditions and ways of being. Research with ethnic minority young people would help to shed more light on the difficulties inherent in such circumstances and the concomitant support needs of those young people. The incidence and experience of sexual abuse among young lesbians and gay men also warrants further exploration, as do the needs of these young people. Finally, the inclusion of sexuality as a consideration within mainstream, locally based, evaluations of housing and homelessness services would help develop further awareness of how young lesbians and gay men fare in these services. Equally, evaluative work with agencies dedicated to the needs of young lesbians and gay men would assist in greater understanding of the delivery and impact of these services.

REFERENCES

Abelove H, Barale M & Halperin D (eds) (1993) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.

Anlin S (1989) *Out but not Down- the housing needs of lesbians* London: Homeless Action.

Attenborough J & Watson J (1997) Staff Perception of Sexual Behaviour in a London Hostel for Homeless Men. *Sexual and Marital therapy* Vol 12, No 2.

Bagley C & Tremblay P (1997) Suicidal Behaviours in Homosexual and Bisexual Males. *Crisis* Vol.18 No.1.

Bagley C & D'Augelli A (2000) Suicidal Behaviour in Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth. *British Medical Journal* Vol. 320.

Barter C (1996) *Nowhere to hide – Giving young runaways a voice*, Centre point/NSPCC.

Biehal N & Wade J (1999) 'I thought it would be easier' The early housing careers of young people leaving care, in Rugg J (ed) *Young people, Housing and Social Policy*, London: Routledge.

Blackman S (1998) Disposable Generation, An ethnographic study of youth homelessness in Kent. *Youth and Policy*, (Special edition on Youth Homelessness and Social Exclusion), Spring, no 59.

Boyer D (1989) Male Prostitution and Homosexual Identity in Herdt G (ed) *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, New York: Harrington Park.

Burbidge M & Walters J (eds) (1981) *Breaking the Silence: Gay teenagers speak for themselves*, London: Joint Council for Gay Teenagers.

Carter S (1998) *Hidden Crisis: a study of black and minority ethnic homelessness in London*. London: Frontline Housing Advice.

CHAR (1988) *Housing for Lesbians and Gay men - report of conference held on 1st October 1998*, CHAR: London .

Craig TKJ, Hodson S, Woodward S & Richardson S (1996) *Off to a Bad Start - A longitudinal study of homeless young people in London*. London: The Mental Health Foundation.

Craig TKJ & Hodson S (1998) Homeless youth in London: I. Childhood antecedents and psychiatric disorder. *Psychological medicine*, 1998, 28.

- Craig TKJ & Hodson S (2000) Homeless youth in London: II. Accommodation, employment and health outcomes at 1 year. *Psychological Medicine*, 2000, 30.
- D'Augelli A (1998) Developmental Implications of Victimization of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youths in Herek, GM (ed) *Stigma and Sexual Orientation – Understanding Prejudice Against Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals*, London: Sage.
- D'Augelli A, Hershberger S & Pilkington N (1998) Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth and Their Families: Disclosure of Sexual Orientation and its Consequences. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* Vol 68, No 3.
- Davis M & Vander Stoep A (1997) The Transition to Adulthood for Youth Who Have Serious Emotional Disturbance: Developmental Transition and Young Adult Outcomes. *The Journal of Mental Health Administration* Vol 24, No 4.
- Dempsey C (1994) Health and Social Issues of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Adolescents. *Family & Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* No.75.
- Douglas A & Gilroy R (1994) Young Women and Homelessness, in Gilroy R & Woods R (eds) *Housing Women*, London: Routledge.
- Douglas N, Warwick I, Kemp S & Whitty G (1997) *Playing it Safe – Responses of Secondary School Teachers to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pupils, Bullying, HIV and AIDS Education and Section 28*, London: HERU, Institute of Education.
- Downing-Orr K (1996) *Alienation and Social Support. A social and psychological study of homeless young people in London and Sydney*. Aldershot: Avebury
- Duberman M (ed) (1997) *Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York: New York University Press.
- Evans A (1996) *We don't choose to be homeless - Report of the National Inquiry into Preventing Youth Homelessness*, London: CHAR.
- Fergusson D, Horwood J & Beautrais A (1999) Is Sexual Orientation Related to Mental Health Problems and Suicidality in Young People. *Archives of General Psychiatry* Vol.56.
- Fitzpatrick S (1999) Hidden Homelessness among Young People, *Youth and Policy*, Vol. 59.
- Fitzpatrick S and Clapham D (1999) Homelessness and Young People in Hutson S & Clapham D (eds) *Homelessness: Public Policies and Private Thoughts*, London: Cassell.
- Fitzpatrick S Kemp P & Klinker S (2000) *Single Homelessness, an overview of research in Britain*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Galop (1998) *Telling it like it is...Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Speak Out on Homophobic Violence*, London: Galop.

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network & Nexus Research Co-operative (1995) *Poverty - Lesbians and Gay Men: The economic and social effects of discrimination*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

Glasgow Women's Library. (1999) *Poverty and Social Exclusion of Lesbians and Gay Men in Glasgow*, Unpublished report.

Grossman A & Kerner M (1998) Support Networks of Gay and Lesbian Youth. *Journal of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity* Vol 3, No. 1.

Harrison M & Davis C (2001) *Housing, Social Policy and Difference*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Hendessi M (1991/2) Sexual Abuse, Homelessness and Young Women. *Youth Social Work*, Winter.

Hendessi M (1992) *Four in Ten*, London: CHAR.

Herd G (1989) Gay and Lesbian Youth, Emergent Identities, and Cultural Scenes at Home and Abroad in Herd G (ed) *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, New York: Harrington Park.

Herrell R, Goldberg J, True W, Ramakrishnan V, Lyons M, Eisen S & Tsuang M (1999) Sexual Orientation and Suicidality. *Archives of General Psychiatry* Vol.56.

Hershberger S & D'Augelli A (1995) The Impact of Victimization on the Mental Health and Suicidality of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youths. *Developmental Psychology* Vol.31 No.1.

Hubbard R & Rossington J (1995) *As We Grow Older - A study of the Housing and Support needs of Older lesbians and Gay Men*, London: Polari Housing Association.

Hunter J (1992) Violence against Lesbian and Gay Male Youths in Herek GM & Berrill KT (eds) *Hate Crimes - Confronting Violence against Lesbians and Gay Men*, London: Sage.

James SE (1998) Fulfilling the Promise: Community Response to the Needs of Sexual Minority Youth and Families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* Vol 68, No 3 .

Jones A. (1999) *Out of sight out of mind? The experiences of homeless women*. London: Crisis.

Kemp PA (1999) The Characteristics of Single Homeless People in England in Burrows R, Pleace N & Quilgars D (eds) *Homelessness and Social Policy*, London: Routledge.

Kennett P & Marsh A (1999) *Homelessness: Exploring the New Terrain*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Kipke M, Simon T, Montgomery S, Unger J & Iversen E (1997a) Homeless Youth and Their Exposure to and Involvement in Violence While Living on the Streets. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 20.

Kipke M, Palmer RF, LaFrance S & O'Connor S (1997b) Homeless Youths' Descriptions of their Parents Childrearing Practices. *Youth & Society*, Vol 28, No 4, June 1997.

Kirby P (1994) *A Word from the Street - Young People Who Leave Care and Become Homeless*, London: Centrepont.

Klee H & Reid P (1998) Drug Use among the Young Homeless: Coping Through Self-Medication. *Health* Vol 2, No 2.

Klinker S, Fitzpatrick S, Mitchell F, Dean J & Burns N (2000) *A Review of Single Homelessness Research*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Klinker S & Fitzpatrick S (2000) *A Bibliography of Single Homelessness Research*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

Kruks G (1991) 'Gay and Lesbian Homeless/Street Youth: Special Issues and Concerns' in *Journal of Adolescent Health* Vol. 12, No.7.

Lock J & Steiner H (1999) Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth Risks for Emotional, Physical, and Social Problems: Results from a Community-Based Survey. *Journal of Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*. Vol 38, No 3.

Martin DA & Hetrick ES (1988) The Stigmatisation of the Gay and Lesbian Adolescent. *Journal of Homosexuality*, No.15.

Mason A & Palmer A (1996) *Queer Bashing: A national Survey of Hate Crimes against Lesbians and Gay Men*, London: Stonewall.

McFarlane L (1998) *Diagnosis: Homophobic - The Experience of Lesbians, Gay Men & Bisexuals in Mental Health Services*, London: PACE.

Minton H (ed) (1992) *Gay and Lesbian Studies*, New York: Harrington Park.

Molnar B, Shade S, Kral A, Booth E & Watters J (1998) Suicidal Behaviour and Sexual/Physical Abuse among Street Youth in *Child Abuse and Neglect* Vol. 22, No 3.

Nassor I & Simms A (1996) *The New Picture of Youth Homelessness in Britain*, London: Centrepont.

North British Housing Association (1999) *The Housing Needs of Older Lesbians and Gay Men in the North East*, Preston: NBHA.

O'Hanlon K, Cabaj R, Schatz B, Lock J, & Nemrow P (1997) A Review of the Medical Consequences of Homophobia. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association* Vol 1, No 1.

Pears J & Noller P (1995) Youth homelessness: Abuse, gender, and the process of adjustment to life in the streets. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. Vol 30, No 4.

Perry C (1999) *A Qualitative Study of the Life Experiences of Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Warrington and Halton: Implications for Service Providers*, Cheshire: CPHRRU.

Pfeifer RW & Oliver J (1997) A Study of HIV Sero-prevalence in a Group of Homeless Youth in Hollywood, California. *Adolescent health*, 20.

Pilkington N & D'Augelli A (1995) Victimization of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth in Community Settings. *Journal of Community Psychology* Vol 23.

Pleace N and Quilgars D (1999) Youth Homelessness in Rugg J (ed) *Young people, housing and social policy*, York: Centre for Housing Policy.

Plummer K (1989) Lesbian and Gay Youth in England in Herdt G (ed) *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, New York: Harrington Park.

Ramafedi G (1999) Sexual Orientation and Youth Suicide. *Journal of the American Medical Association* Vol. 282.

Rees G (1994) *Hidden Truths Young people's experiences of running away*, London: The Children's Society.

Rees G & Stein M (1999) *Still Running: Children on the streets in the UK*. London: The Children's Society.

Renee Martin S (1996) A Child's Right to be Gay: Addressing the Emotional Maltreatment of Queer Youth. *Hastings Law Journal* Vol.48.

Ringwalt L, Greene J & Robertson M (1998) Familial Backgrounds and Risk Behaviours of Youth with Thrownaway Experiences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21.

Rivers I (2000) Social Exclusion, Absenteeism and Sexual Minority Youth. *Support for Learning: British Journal of Learning Support* Vol. 15 No. 1.

Robertson, MJ & Toro PA (1998) *Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention and Policy: 1998 National Symposium on homelessness research*.

Rosenthal D, Moore S & Buzwell S (1994) Homeless Youths: sexual and drug related behaviour, sexual beliefs and HIV/AIDS risk. *AIDS Care*, Vol 6, No. 1.

Ryan C & Futterman D (1997) *Lesbian and Gay Youth: Care and Counselling*, Philadelphia: Hanley & Belfus.

Safe in the City (1999) *Taking risks: An Analysis of the Risks of Homelessness for Young People in London*, London: Safe in the City.

Sandfort T, Schuyf J, Duyvendak JW & Weeks J (eds) (2000) *Lesbian and Gay Studies – An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach*, London: Sage.

Savin Williams, R (1994) Verbal and Physical Abuse as Stressors in the Lives of Lesbian, Gay Male and Bisexual Youths: Associations with School Problems, Running Away, Substance Abuse, Prostitution and Suicide. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol 62.

Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (1997) *Obtaining a Fair Deal*, Briefing paper No.20.

Schneider M (1989) Sappho was a Right-On Adolescent: Growing up Lesbian in Herdt G (ed) *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, New York: Harrington Park.

Shlay AB & Rossi PH (1992) Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 18.

Shelter (1996) *Young People and Homelessness*, London: Shelter.

Smailes J (1994) The struggle has never been simply about bricks and mortar – lesbians experience of housing in R Gilroy & R Woods (eds) *Housing Women* London: Routledge.

Smith J, Gilford S & O'Sullivan A. (1998) *The Family Background of Young Homeless People*, London: Family Policy Studies Centre.

Smith J, Gilford S, Kirby P, O'Reilly A and Ing P (1996) *Bright Lights and Homelessness: Family and Single Homelessness among Young people in our cities*, London: YMCA .

Smith J & Gilford S (1998) Not Only Street Sleepers Are Homeless: Issues of Gender and Ethnicity in Researching Youth Homelessness', *Youth & Policy*, No. 59.

Smith J (1999) Gender and Homelessness in Hutson, S. & Clapham D (eds) *Homelessness: Public policies and private troubles*, London: Cassell.

Steel, M. (1998) Out in the Cold. *Diva*, May issue

Stonewall Youth Project (2000) *Out in the Cold: An action research report on the housing needs of LGBT youth in south east Scotland*, Edinburgh: SYP.

Susser E, Moore R & Link B (1993) Risk Factors for Homelessness, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 15, No 2.

Trenchard L & Warren H (1984) *Something to tell you...The experiences and needs of young lesbians and gay men in London*, London: London Gay Teenage Group.

Tremble B, Schneider M & Appathurai C (1989) Growing Up Gay or Lesbian in a Multicultural Context in Herdt, G (ed) *Gay and Lesbian Youth*, New York: Harrington Park.

Tremble B (1993) Prostitution and Survival: Interviews with Gay Street Youth *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* Vol 2, No 1.

Unger JB, Simon TR, Newman TL, Montgomery SB, Kipke MD & Albornoz M. (1998) Early Adolescent Street Youth: An overlooked population With unique Problems and Service Needs, *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol 19, No 4.

Van der Ploeg, JD & Scholte EM (1997) In Search of an Explanation: Theories of Homelessness in *Homeless Youth*, London: Sage.

Wiggans A (1989) Youth Work and Homelessness in England. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol 11.

Whitbeck LB, Hoyt DR, & Ackley KA (1997) Abusive Family Backgrounds and Later Victimization among Runaway and Homeless Adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, Vol 7 No 4.

Wrate R & Blair C. (1999) Homeless Adolescents, in Vostanis P & Cumella S (eds) *Homeless Children*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. ORGANISATIONS WHO ASSISTED WITH THE RESEARCH

London

- Albert Kennedy Trust
- Barnardo's Young Women's Project
- Blackliners
- Camden Accommodation Scheme
- Camden Council (Homeless Person's Unit, Housing Advice & Re-housing)
- Camden U25 Advice Centre
- Centrepont (Berwick Street & Rolling Shelter)
- Circle 33
- London Connection
- New Horizon
- North London Line
- PACE
- Patchwork Community Housing
- Staying Out
- Streetwise Youth
- Stonewall Housing

Leeds

- Barnardo's Night Shop
- Leeds Action to Create Homes (LATCH)
- Leeds City Council (Housing Policy)
- Leeds L&G Switchboard
- Leeds Housing Advice Centre
- Leeds Independent Living Team
- Leeds Young Person's Housing Team
- Leeds Safe House
- Yorkshire MesMac
- The Rydings Association

Bristol

- Bristol City Council, Housing Access Team

- Bristol Cyrenians
- Bristol L&G Switchboard
- East Bristol Housing Association
- Freedom Youth
- The Hub
- THT West
- NCH Action for Children
- Priority Youth Housing
- Social Services Aftercare
- YWCA

Glasgow

- Archdiocese of Glasgow
- BI-G-Les
- Blue Triangle Housing Association
- City Centre Initiative
- Council for Young Homeless People
- Glasgow City Council Housing Services
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Hamish Allen Centre
- James Mclean Project
- Quarrier's Stopover
- Glasgow City Council Social Work Homeless Team Services
- YMCA

Manchester

- Albert Kennedy Trust
- City Centre Initiative
- Manchester Methodist Housing
- Peer Support Project
- Safe in the City

Newcastle

- Outpost Housing Project
- Mesmac North East

APPENDIX II. TOPIC GUIDES

HOMELESSNESS AMONG LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH

Stage Three Topic Guide for Interviews with organisations

Stage three involves interviews with a variety of organisations within each study area – (social) housing providers, homelessness agencies and lesbian and gay organisations. The aims of this stage of the research are:

- to explore the activities/functions of the organisation and its role within local service provision;
- to discuss the organisation's view of the nature of homelessness among young lesbians and gay men within their local area;
- to gather perspectives on service provision relating to housing or homelessness for young lesbians and gay men within the local area;
- and to explore the impact of national and local policy on the provision of housing related services to young lesbians and gay men.

Remind about: the National Centre;
 who sponsored the study
 relationship with Stonewall Housing,
 tape recorder & confidentiality

1. **Background details of respondent(s)**

- Position/role in organisation
- Activities in which involved
- Length of time with organisation
- What field moved from

2. **Background details of the organisation**

Do not ask if organisation was interviewed as part of Stage Two

- Size of organisation
 - no of staff
 - no of departments
 - functions of departments
- Main objective
 - aims and principles

- History, how organisation evolved
 - reasons for foundation
 - any significant changes since established (e.g. in objectives, client group, resources, organisational structure, related policy etc.)
- Services
 - scope of provision
 - how services are delivered (*probe for the following*)
 - helplines
 - face to face case work/key-working
 - group work
 - peer support
 - provision of housing/financial help
 - referrals to other agencies
 - any others

- **FUNDING**

- how the organisation is financed

3. **Local organisational infrastructure**

- **HOW ORGANISATION'S SERVICES FIT WITH OTHER PROVISION TARGETING SAME CLIENT GROUP**

- Nature of co-operation with local:
 - statutory organisations
 - voluntary organisations

4. **How clients encounter the service**

- How client group obtains information about the organisation/available services (e.g. word of mouth, advertising, publicity)
- How clients come to use service (referred/ self/ drop in etc)
 - are there avenues from which clients are not accepted
- Explore how clients move through the service
 - how needs identified
 - how decide what is appropriate for client

5. **Client group**

- **NATURE/ ATTRIBUTES (E.G: AGE, GENDER, ETHNICITY, SEXUALITY, BACKGROUND ETC)**

- **MONITORING OF CLIENT GROUP**

- *what monitor for at present & future plans (probe esp. sexual orientation)*
- *explore decision-making around the decision to/not monitor for SO*
- *discuss pros and cons of monitoring SO*
- *if a housing provider, awareness of other HP's who do monitor*
- *what monitoring information is used for/whether contributes to larger monitoring exercise*

- **ORGANISATIONAL PRIORITIES**

- *types of client most oriented towards*
- How do they find out the needs of their client group
 - internal and external sources of information about (e.g. profiles, formal and informal needs assessments, speak outs, research reports etc..)
 - level of information available
(ensure you make plans to pick up all recent monitoring statistics at end of interview, also any relevant local research should be sourced)
- Key problems and issues presented by client group

6. **Lesbian and gay homelessness**

- **Whether encounter lesbians and gay men in housing crisis within their client group**
 - *(for homeless/housing orgs)*
visibility/prevalence of lesbians and gay men within their client group generally
whether difficulties surrounding sexual orientation seen as a 'priority need' under Housing Act
 - *(for lesbian/gay orgs)*
significance of housing related issues among client group
- Perspectives on whether young lesbians/gay men are more/less vulnerable to housing crisis than others
 - explore how/why
 - whether/how different for lesbians than for gay men
 - whether/how different for older lesbians/gay men

- Explore what perceive as the specific issues that lead young lesbians and gay men into housing crisis
 - (Spontaneous first, then probe for the following, with each explore whether an issue for young gay men, for young lesbians or both)*
 - sexuality
 - own difficulties in coming to terms
 - other people's reactions
 - family conflict
 - homophobic harassment/bullying/violence
 - physical/sexual abuse
 - drug/alcohol dependency
 - poverty/depravation
 - leaving care
 - health/mental health issues
 - other issues

- ***the nature of homelessness among lesbian/gay clients encountered***
 - (i.e. whether overt such as rough sleeping or more hidden such as staying with friends or hanging on in the parental home)*
- Identify what perceived as the key needs of young lesbians and gay men in housing crisis

7. Service provision for lesbian and gay youth in housing crisis

- Identify types of services that are appropriate to meet needs identified in Section 6 above
 - note: do not confine to housing issues only*
- Existence of such services within the local area at present
- Strengths/weaknesses of current service provision in meeting the needs of lesbian and gay youth
- What specifically would they like to see delivered
- What helps and hinders service provision for young lesbians and gay men
- Explore how barriers to service provision for young lesbians and gay men in housing crisis can be overcome

- Whether provide training for staff on issues surrounding sexuality
 - if yes, explore type/content/usefulness
 - explore decision-making to/not to train

For housing providers only

- explore whether sexual orientation features within the organisation's:
 - equal opportunities policy
 - harassment policy
 - eviction policy
 - staff safety policy
- investigate decision-making around decision to/not to include
- if included – whether/how is this is actively implemented

Generic V Specific service provision

- Necessity/appropriateness of services to cater specifically for young lesbians and gay men in housing crisis
- Discuss the following services in relation to how best they can be provided
 - In each case, explore whether these services should be devoted solely to lesbian and gay youth, or whether they are best provided within a more generic setting*
 - housing provision
 - hostel accommodation
 - housing advice
 - key-working
 - counselling/emotional support
 - aftercare
 - housing/homelessness related services in general

8. Impact of policy on local provision

The purpose here is to examine how legislative and policy priorities impact upon local provision of services to lesbian and gay youth generally, and specifically in relation to housing

- National Legislation (England, Wales & Scotland)
 - generic legislation
 - Housing Act
 - Children's Act
 - Police Act 2000 (Scotland only)
 - any others
 - lesbian & gay specific
 - Section 28
 - proposed guidelines to replace Section 28
 - Age of consent
 - any others
- Local priorities or initiatives in relation to lesbian and gay youth
 - local government
 - health authority/board
 - rough sleepers initiative
 - social inclusion partnerships (Scotland only)
 - voluntary sector or network priorities
 - others

9. Next Steps

Explain further stages of the study

Stage 4: interviews with young people

Stage 5: workshops with organisations

(if relevant, discuss)

- whether can assist in accessing potential respondents for Stage 4
- possible involvement in workshops at Stage 5

Before leaving, make sure you have gathered monitoring statistics if available, as well as any other local research/information available that is relevant to the research objectives.

**P5946 HOMELESSNESS AMONG LESBIAN & GAY YOUTH
TOPIC GUIDE July 2000
YOUNG PEOPLE**

OBJECTIVES

- to explore life histories in detail
- to determine factors which are relevant to becoming homeless;
- to gather reflections on their experience(s) of homelessness;
- to examine contact of and use of statutory and voluntary agencies;
- to understand the needs of homeless lesbian and gay youth;

INTRODUCTION

- introduce *National Centre* and study
- confidentiality
- timing

1. PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Age

Nature of current housing status

- if housed, who lives with, how long lived there

Summary of current activity (work/education/other)

Sources and level of income

2. LIFE HISTORY

Encourage detailed coverage of circumstances and key events / periods

Each episode of housing crisis uncovered should be explored fully using Section 3

Childhood & family background

- where born
- family composition
- family circumstances (emotional, economic, stability and mobility)
- extended family (geographic and emotional proximity)
- any experiences of care

School life/education

- where went to school (mobility, stability)
- experiences of / memories of school
- whether made friends, whether a happy time
- any experiences of bullying
- experiences of exclusion or absence temporary or permanent

- relationship with teachers
- when left school/ further education
- any qualifications

Working history

- whether worked, when started
- types of jobs
- how long stayed in jobs
- feelings about jobs

Leaving home / leaving care

- when, what precipitated
- experiences and feelings
- how well prepared

Friendships

- important friendships and relationships as growing up
- whether local network of friends, what based around, how (easily) made
- whether still in contact, still important

Further relationships

- boyfriends/girlfriends/partners
- living together
- relationship breakdowns and separations

Home moving /stability

- experiences of moving
- where from/to
- what precipitated
- who with

3. HOUSING CRISIS

Use this section to explore each period of housing crisis unveiled above

Cause

- how it came about
- explore fully events surrounding the beginning of housing crisis

Nature

- what was happening
- living arrangements
- mobility
- everyday activities

Feelings

- how felt about themselves
- how felt others saw them

Effect

- main difficulties experienced
- how life had changed

Coping strategies

- how managed during that time
- personal resources
- informal sources of help
 - who helped them
 - what role they played in life
 - whether remained in contact with anyone from home/family background
 - how made a difference
- formal sources of help
 - which services used
 - why those services (why not others)
 - how made a difference

Overcoming crisis

if in the past

- whether / how event or period ended
- anything they tried to do / managed to do
- what precipitated change
- what prevented change
- what made things worse

if current

- what could bring an end to housing crisis in the future

If now housed

- general feelings about current housing situation
- if specific housing (ie with other L/G/B YP) – views about
- if generic – views about suitability/need for specific housing

4. SEXUALITY

Use this section to explore the evolution of the young person's sexuality

First emergence

- own responses

Sexual experiences since

Relationships since

Identity

- whether have a particular way of describing sexuality now
- when formulated
- how comfortable & for how long

- how clear
- any changes over time
- impact on their lives

Coming out

- out to whom/in what situations
- situations in which reluctant to come out
- own feelings about coming out (whether 'fully' out or not)
- (in situations when have come out) other people's responses to sexuality
- explore specifically impact of being out on accommodation held

Housing

- Whether sexuality has impacted on housing at any point in the past
 - security of housing status
 - access to accommodation
 - safety of housing
 - other aspects

5. ACCESSING SUPPORT & HELP

Overview of service provision

- knowledge of different places/services available to help with housing crisis
 - homelessness agencies
 - housing associations
 - local authority housing services
 - lesbian and gay services
 - other services
- who runs them
- what do they do
- attitudes towards/perceptions of different services available
- how did/can they help
- what prevents them from helping
- how felt was treated by services used
- encourage YP to compare & contrast different services

Sexuality

- whether ever asked by agencies about their sexuality
 - if asked, explore in what way & responses given
 - feelings generally about being asked by agencies
- if L/G/B, how comfortable being out in services used
 - factors that make this easy/difficult

If has a key worker

- explore whether the sexuality of key worker is important

6. POTENTIAL HELP & SUPPORT

What would have made a difference at times when have experienced housing crisis

What specifically would they like to see delivered

Explore what could / should be done

- to help people in same situation
- to help people avoid being in that situation
- what needs to change
- what difference would it make

What needs to be learnt from their experiences

Before leaving: Ask respondent if they know of any other YP who would be suitable for the study. If so give them questionnaire and letter to pass on to their friend/ acquaintance

P5946 HOMELESSNESS AMONG LESBIAN & GAY YOUTH

STAGE 5 TOPIC GUIDE – Strategic Groups

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (5mins)

- *Introduce National Centre and study*
- *Confidentiality, tape recording, timing*

- *Outline purpose of the session*

- *Participant introductions*

1. THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH

A very brief presentation regarding the main findings relating to the causes of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth

PRESENT SLIDE (5 mins)

- General comments/ observations on the findings relating to causation **(10 mins)**

INTRODUCTION TO KEY SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES (main focus)

Explanation that there are many service related issues arising from fieldwork with young people and service providers; we are going to focus on the four key ones

2. THE VISIBILITY OF YL & GM IN HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS SERVICES (20 mins)

PRESENT SLIDE

- Does lack of visibility inhibit service provision; how
- Do steps need to be taken to increase visibility; what are these (probe for public profile of organisation; training issues; monitoring)
- What difference would this make?
- How can such change be implemented? Who are the key actors?
- Other suggestions/solutions

3. EXPERIENCES OF CURRENT PROVISION (20 mins)

PRESENT SLIDE

- Any further insights into causes of negative experiences?
- How important is change in this area?

- Suggestions for ways of overcoming the problems faced by YL & GM in current provision; what practically can be done?
(probe re suggestions for changing attitudes of staff, residents, organisations policy etc)
- How can organisations make themselves more appealing to lesbian/gay clients
e.g. views on sexuality training for staff/ residents
 what form should this take
 who should provide it
 ways of ensuring this is provided comprehensively
- Other Suggestions/solutions
- Who should take responsibility for driving this change

4. MEETING THE NEEDS OF YL&GM IN HOUSING CRISIS (20 mins)

PRESENT SLIDE

- Any services not mentioned already which would meet the needs of this group
- What would they do
- How would they help
- How would the types of services described be best provided (probe especially for generic versus specific)

5. ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES DELIVERED TO LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH (20 mins)

PRESENT SLIDE

- How do barriers to effectiveness compare with other young homeless people
- Are there specific issues relating to sustaining housing/service use amongst young lesbians and gay men
- What can be done to increase the effectiveness of services to young lesbians and gay men
- What key improvements could be made to existing services (if any)

6. Concluding comments (5-10 mins)