

# The Seeds of Exclusion 2009

Published July 2009 by The Salvation Army,  
with the University of Kent and Cardiff University



This new report builds on the first study of *The Seeds of Exclusion*, published in July 2008, by extending the sample size and including analysis by age and by region<sup>1</sup>. The study is based on in-depth interviews and validated questionnaires involving 967 homeless people<sup>2</sup> at Salvation Army centres within the UK and Ireland conducted by the University of Kent and Cardiff University between January 2006 and April 2009.

These new findings extend our understanding of the drivers and consequences of social exclusion and of the complex needs of homeless people using Salvation Army social and community services. The study reveals that the experiences and needs of homeless people vary by age and by region, and identifying and understanding these characteristics can help with better targeting of services.

#### Research and analysis:

Dr Adrian Bonner, Reader,  
University of Kent,  
Claire Luscombe, The Salvation Army

#### Research design and clinical supervision:

Dr Marianne van den Bree,  
Reader, Cardiff University,  
Professor Pamela Taylor,  
Cardiff University

## KEY POINTS

### Underlying drivers of social exclusion

- Relationship breakdown is the main reason given by respondents for their homelessness (43%), followed by financial issues (22%), drugs (21%) and alcohol (16%).
- In-depth interviews and screening revealed that 96% of respondents were unemployed, 80% screened positive for one or more substance misuse issues and 59% screened positive for anxiety-related symptoms.

### Childhood experiences

- Negative experiences in childhood have a significant bearing on experiences in adulthood. Those who had poor relationships with their parents during childhood (31% with mother or 45% with father) were more likely to have been homeless as children. Overall 26% of respondents had been homeless as a child with more than half (54%) of these being homeless for at least one year.
- Traumatic childhood experiences including abuse and neglect factored significantly in the responses, with the highest levels found in Scotland, Dublin, Belfast and the North West of England. Just under a third (30%) of the sample said they were neglected, with the 18-25 age group showing an unusually high level at 94%.

### Substance misuse issues

- Only a quarter of those with alcohol and drug issues had accessed support services in the last three months. Alcohol abuse is high across all age groups, but peaks in the 18-25 year-olds at 66%. However, this group was the least likely to think that they had a problem.
- Drug dependency was higher in the under-45s, peaking in the 26-35 age group (67%). The regions with the highest levels of drug dependency were Dublin (66%) and Wales (64%), while the lowest level occurred in the Midlands (40%).

### Mental health issues

- A large proportion of clients had serious and mostly untreated mental health issues. More than a third of respondents had attempted suicide at least once, with women (53%) more likely to have attempted suicide than men (34%). These levels were highest in Wales (42%), Belfast (41%) and the North West of England (40%) and were three times lower in London (13%).
- Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents had two or more complex needs, with half (51%) of the 18-25 age group (highest), and 13% (lowest) of the 56+ age group experiencing this. These findings also varied by region, with Wales (55%) at the highest level and the Midlands (25%) at the lowest.

## Background

The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social welfare in the UK and Ireland, and is the single largest provider of accommodation for homeless people, with 57 hostels offering more than 3,200 beds for men, women and families, supported by more than 1,000 staff.

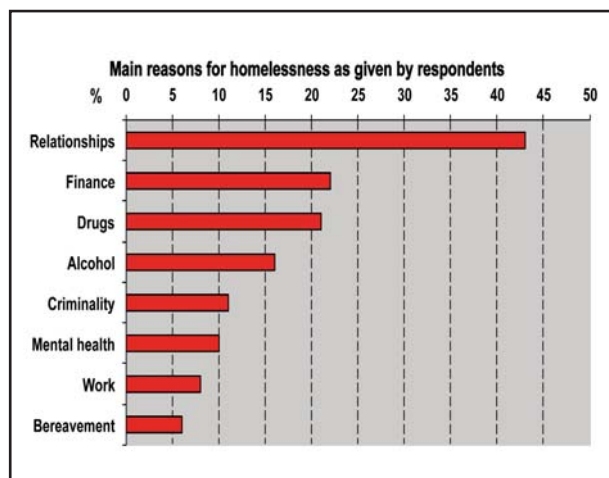
*The Seeds of Exclusion 2009* report investigates the complex needs of people using Salvation Army homeless residential and day-centre services in the UK and Ireland.

The study involved self-reporting, screening and diagnostic assessments<sup>3</sup> of respondents to review their early life experiences, the nature and quality of their relationships now and in childhood, the main reasons for their homelessness, their mental health issues, levels of substance use and abuse, and their use of statutory support services.

This new *Seeds of Exclusion* report will help The Salvation Army to better target its resources as a Christian church and social welfare provider offering caring, practical, holistic and life-enhancing services to all without discrimination. We share our findings to encourage debate, to increase understanding of key issues affecting the health of society as a whole, and to inform those designing policy, delivering and funding services and programmes to address social exclusion and homelessness.

## Identifying the underlying drivers of social exclusion

According to those interviewed, the main reason for their homelessness was **relationship breakdown** (43%). More than half of those interviewed in Belfast (51%), the Midlands (51%) and the North West of England (50%) revealed this as the main reason for their homelessness – compared with just over a third of respondents in Dublin (34%) and London (38%).



While relationship issues figured predominantly in the responses given, another picture emerged, reflecting the extent and complexity of need, when

respondents were the subjects of diagnostic assessments and screening.

When self-reporting, 21% of respondents attributed their homelessness to drug misuse and 16% to alcohol misuse. **However, 80% of respondents were found on screening to have one or more substance misuse problems.** When asked, 10% revealed mental health issues as a reason for their homelessness. **However, 59% screened positive for anxiety-related symptoms and 36% had attempted suicide at least once.**

Only 8% of respondents revealed unemployment as the main reason for their homelessness, yet **96% were unemployed.**

**The inconsistencies between the information given by respondents, and that revealed through screening and assessments, emphasise the importance of using appropriate surveys to gain an accurate understanding of the needs of vulnerable people and how services might best address them.**

**Financial issues** as a contributing factor were significantly higher in London (38%) than in other parts of the UK and Ireland. In Belfast this figure was just 12%. Around a third of clients aged 46 and over reported financial problems as a main reason for homelessness: 36% of those aged 46-55 and 31% of those aged 56 and over.

The vast majority of respondents (96%) were **unemployed**, while 6% had never worked. Just over a third (37%) had no qualifications, although the proportion was lowest for the 18-25 year-olds at 34% compared with at least 40% for older clients, rising to 49% for the 56 and over age group.

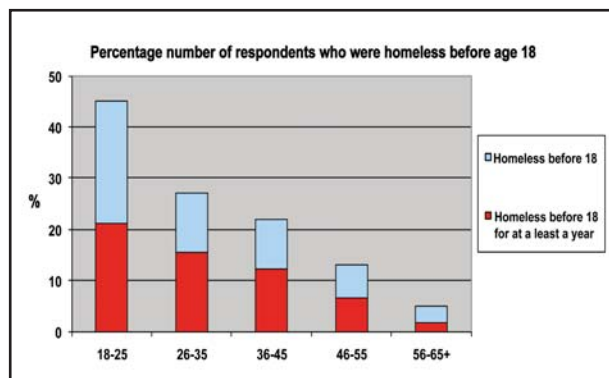
**Current and past relationship problems** are a characteristic of people who use the homelessness services provided by The Salvation Army. The majority of respondents lack positive relationships with either friends or family depriving them of valuable social networks.

**Overall, half (51%) of respondents spent most of their time alone**, though this was less than a third of respondents (30%) in the 18-25 age group compared with 65% in the 46-55 age group. Those making the **transition** from a relatively controlled environment<sup>4</sup> into independent living in a community are at particular risk with 22% of respondents having been in a controlled environment within the previous month.

Almost a third (30%) **slept rough** in the month before accessing Salvation Army services, with the highest proportion occurring in London (46%) compared with the lowest proportion in Scotland (at 17%). Those in the 36-45 age group were more likely to be sleeping rough at 39% than the other age groups.

## Childhood experiences have repercussions in adult life

Many respondents had difficult experiences as they were growing up. Those who had poor relationships with their parents (31% mother or 45% father) in childhood were more likely to have been homeless as children, which in turn is associated with higher levels of alcohol and drug dependency.

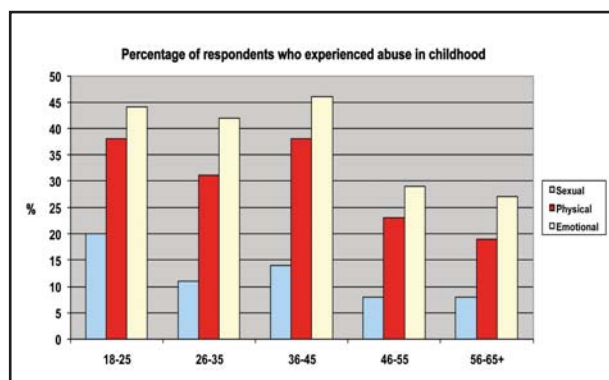


Half the sample (51%) grew up in a non-traditional family<sup>5</sup>. Among the 18-25 age group nearly three quarters (73%) were raised in a non-traditional family compared with a third (33%) of the 46-55 age group.

Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents were homeless before they were 18, with more than half (54%) of this sample reporting being homeless for at least one year. Just under half (45%) of the 18-25 age group were homeless at some point in childhood. The proportion fell with each successive age group. Three quarters of the clients in Dublin (73%) who had been homeless as a child had been homeless for at least a year, followed by 62% of clients in Scotland and 60% in Belfast.

Neglect and emotional abuse during childhood were associated with poor outcomes in adulthood.

Traumatic experiences during childhood reported by respondents included sexual abuse (3%), physical abuse (25%) and emotional abuse (30%), with the highest levels found in Belfast, Dublin, Scotland and the North West of England. Of those abused 68% said the perpetrator was a parent, 10% a step-parent, and 8% a relative.



While just under a third (30%) of the sample said their needs were neglected, an unusually high level of the 18-25 age group reported neglect (94%) with the next highest level occurring among the 36-45 age group (46%).

## Only a quarter of those with substance misuse problems are accessing services

While 80% of respondents have one or more substance misuse problems, only a quarter (24%) had made contact with drug and alcohol services in the last three months. More than a third of respondents (38%) screened positive for both alcohol and drug dependence.

While 59% of the respondents who drink alcohol are dependent, only 25% consider themselves to have a problem. Of those who drink 26% do so more than four times a week, 20% have six or more drinks daily or almost daily, while 34% have on average 10 or more drinks on the days they are drinking.

Seven out of ten respondents have used drugs. While more than half (55%) of these who have used drugs are dependent, just under a quarter (24%) think they have a problem, and 60% have not received treatment for drug issues.

Alcohol abuse was high across all age groups, but peaked for the 18-25 year-olds (66%). However, this group were the least likely to think they had a problem. Drug dependency was highest in the under-45s, peaking at ages 26-35 (67%).

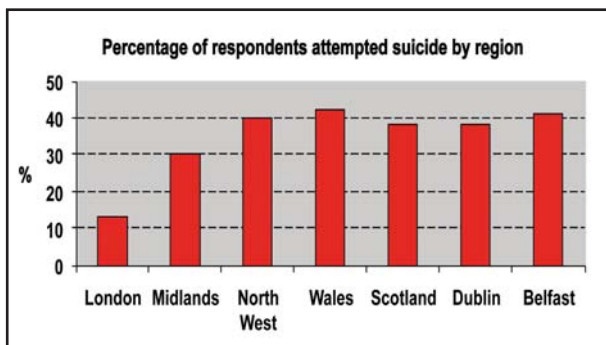
There were also strong regional variations. Levels of alcohol dependence among respondents were highest in Belfast (74%) and Wales (71%), more than double the proportion in London (30%). Drug dependency among respondents was highest in Dublin (66%) and Wales (64%), with the lowest proportions in London (42%) and the Midlands (40%).

While a quarter of respondents were using services for alcohol and drug misuse, just 10% of respondents in Belfast were using these services compared with three times that number in London (30%) and in Wales (28%).

High alcohol and/or drug dependency scores were associated with both violent and non-violent crimes, mental health issues, increased suicide risk and relationship problems.

## A large proportion of clients have serious and largely untreated mental health issues

More than a third of clients (36%) had attempted suicide at least once, with 6% in the last month. Women (53%) were more likely to have attempted suicide than men (34%). Regionally the highest levels of attempted suicide were around 40% in Wales, Belfast, the North West of England, Scotland and Ireland and were three times as high as in London (13%).



In the North West of England 16% of clients were deemed to have a high suicide risk, followed by 12% in Belfast and compared with 2% in London. Of those interviewed, 41% in Belfast and 39% in the North West revealed that they had experienced strong feelings of hopelessness within the last month, compared to the lowest rate of 8% in London.

A high proportion of clients had post-traumatic stress disorder (31%) and there was a link between this and having attempted suicide in the last month.

This update of *The Seeds of Exclusion* refines the measure of complex needs to include current high suicide risk and current self harm. Of those interviewed 74% experienced two or more complex needs, with the 18-25 age group having the highest level when analysed by age (51%) and the 56 and over age group the lowest level (13%). When analysed by region, Wales (55%) had the highest and the Midlands the lowest level (25%).

Around six out of ten (57%) respondents had paranoid personality disorder and 16% had significant personality disorders. These traits were linked with criminal involvement and drug and alcohol abuse.

As in the original study, 25% of respondents were on prescribed medication for mental illness, whereas only 14% considered that they were receiving mental health care. In Belfast a high proportion of respondents said that they were on prescribed medication (31%) but only 14% considered themselves to be receiving mental health care.

## CONCLUSION

By extending the sample size and analysing the data by age and by region, this study builds on the first edition of *The Seeds of Exclusion* and substantiates the earlier findings. The use of validated assessments has enabled us to understand the nature of the complex multiple needs of people seeking support from The Salvation Army.

The experiences and needs of homeless people vary markedly, revealing a different profile for London

than for the rest of the UK and Ireland, and for the 18-25 age group than for the rest of the sample. Differences such as these highlight the importance of targeting services more effectively.

Once again our findings indicate that increased vulnerability to social exclusion and becoming homeless is likely to develop in early childhood and to impact on later life.

In the first edition of *The Seeds of Exclusion*, The Salvation Army stated its intention to:

- Support and sustain children and families
- Support people in transition
- Support vulnerable people
- Speak out for marginalised people
- Commit to further research

The Salvation Army's increased focus on support for children and young people across the wide range of its community-based projects in the UK and Ireland will complement the Government's<sup>6</sup> strategy to break the cycle of exclusion across generations.

The Salvation Army's new *Hostel Plus*<sup>7</sup> strategy will create a culture of opportunity to otherwise marginalised people. Designed to offer opportunities for people to move on with their life, it will enable participants not only to address the complex issues they face, but also to build healthy relationships and increase their employability.

This research indicates that The Salvation Army has a well established infrastructure for supporting people who are not in the job market. In view of the present economic downturn and rising unemployment in the UK and globally, clearly there is pressing need to be prepared to support those who lose their jobs and increase their resilience by helping to maintain their social networks and family support. Underpinning this support is the need for an understanding of mental health, propensities to addictive behaviours and barriers to employment.

To complement this research into the needs of socially excluded people, ongoing research into the existing and future provision of appropriate services provided by The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland, across its community and church-based programmes, will be outlined in a future report.

The Salvation Army's response to this research can be found at [www.salvationarmy.org.uk/seeds](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/seeds)

Detailed information, methodology and statistical analysis, along with relevant government documentation, is available at [www.kent.ac.uk/chss/abg/exclusion](http://www.kent.ac.uk/chss/abg/exclusion)

### Footnotes

- 1) The initial sample covered six regions of Great Britain and was extended this time to include Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
- 2) The original sample involved 438 homeless people in various regions of Great Britain
- 3) A battery of self-reporting screening and diagnostic assessments under the supervision of a forensic psychiatrist
- 4) Controlled environments include prison, mental and general health services and the Armed Forces
- 5) Non-traditional family means any family composition other than the biological mother and father
- 6) 'Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion' (Cabinet Office, September 2006)
- 7) Hostel Plus is The Salvation Army's response to and implementation of the Department of Communities and Local Government's 'Places of Change' strategy

The Salvation Army is an international Christian church and registered charity.

Registered charity numbers 214779, 215174, and in Scotland SC009359, SC037691, and in Ireland CHY6399