

Tackling housing insecurity: a qualitative study

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Introduction

In the UK today, many families live with housing insecurity - they do not have a stable, safe or affordable place to live.

Housing insecurity can encompass a range of situations, including:

Rent burden - spending a significant portion of income on rent, making it difficult to afford other necessities.

Eviction risk - facing the threat of being forced out of one's home due to unpaid rent or other violations of a lease agreement.

Overcrowding - living in a space that is too small for the number of people residing there.

Poor housing quality - living in a dwelling that is unsafe, unhealthy, or in disrepair.

A shortage of social homes, rising rents, the cost-of-living crisis and the growing unaffordability of home ownership all mean that more and more families are experiencing housing insecurity and many are living in temporary accommodation.



About our study

Data generation

We carried out over 70 interviews with children, parents and local authority colleagues across South Yorkshire, the North West and London.

We asked about:

- current experiences of housing
- factors driving housing insecurity
- local authority approaches to tackling housing insecurity and supporting families.

Analysis

- Framework analysis (Ritchie et al., 2014)

A rigorous, cross-sectional approach to thematic analysis

- Narrative portraits (Rodrigues-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020)

We 'select and rearrange extracts from interviews to create portraits that offer a glimpse into subjects' lives' (p.3)

Foregrounds participants' voices - put the personal & the social in the same space

Local authority perspectives

Drivers

- Cost of living crisis/low incomes
- Affordability and quality of private rented sector
- Forced evictions (Section 21- termed 'no fault evictions')
- Lack of social housing / reduced housing stock
- Relationship breakdown and domestic abuse
- Some groups disproportionately affected e.g. ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, prison leavers, those fleeing domestic abuse, but housing insecurity is becoming a more widespread issue

Strategies

- Mixture of prevention and crisis management strategies but crisis often prioritised due to lack of resources and scale of need
- Homelessness prevention examples: family support, mediation with landlords, support with rent arrears, home visiting to check house quality and need for repairs, elective licencing, downsizing policies, house building
- Crisis management examples: moving families to hotels or temporary accommodation (often multiple times and out of area), children/family worker to mitigate impact of housing insecurity

Life in bed and breakfast accommodation – Chris and family

Chris, his partner, and their four children (aged 1-13) had to move out of their private rented accommodation when their landlord served them with a section 21 no fault eviction.

They lived in bed and breakfast accommodation for two months. The family had been allocated two rooms (on different floors) but they often all slept in one room:

So I know that we were given two rooms and the council said you've got to use rooms because they'll be paying for both rooms. We'd sometimes, my partner would sneak down with the other two and we'd go into the one room because we just felt safer, especially at weekends when it was more noisy outside, she just felt more safe just being with me and being in the same room.

They had to rush when using the bathroom:

The rules were 15 minutes in the bathroom, no more than 15 minutes, which erm, can be hard when you've got children, you know, trying to bath them or whichever.

They also felt unsafe in the city centre location:

Now there's a big bin there, which the B&B use [...] but the amount of people that kick it during the night or the amount of screaming, shouting going through the whole night from drunk people to these working ladies not getting paid or, or just slagging people off [...] it all obviously frightened my little girl most weekends so that's one of the reasons why we slept upstairs as well all in one room, because you could hear it.

Contending with temporary accommodation – Ariam and Soliana

Ariam and Soliana are sisters. They live with their mum and younger sister. They are currently in temporary accommodation, living in one room in a hostel where they have shared use of bathrooms, kitchen and dining area. They have been at the hostel for more than two-and-a-half years.

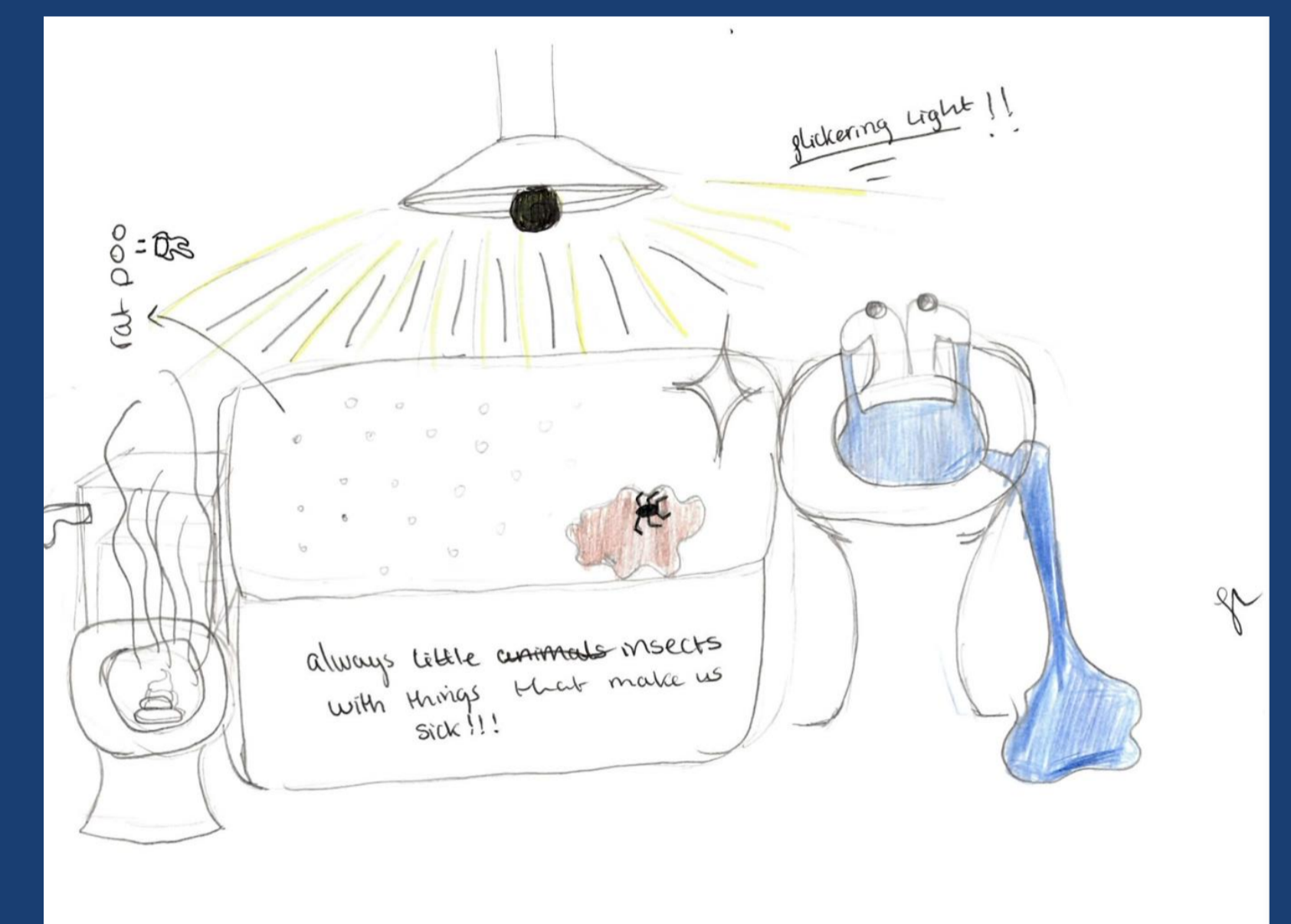
There is a park close by that they visit and enjoy, and it is easy to get to the shops. They didn't change schools when they moved to the hostel and the journey to school is long, involving two buses – although neither complained about this.

Overall, both girls feel very negatively about their current living situation. They really dislike having to share bathroom facilities.

Ariam: sometimes the toilets are stinky, and our room is right in front of the toilet and then we smell it from our rooms, so we have to clean it up ourself.

Soliana: When you just wanna like maybe have a shower, like you just can always get the disgusting smell. There's maybe poo rubbed all over, maybe dirt or leaves, it's not nice.

see the picture Soliana created below



Key messages

Housing is a human right. Safe, stable and secure housing is a key foundation for families' health and wellbeing. There is a housing insecurity crisis in the UK. We need:

- **More social homes & more affordable homes**
- **Renting reform** (increased security of tenure, restrictions on rent and better enforcement of housing quality standards)
- **Multi Sector partnership** at a national and local level with shared responsibility for preventing housing insecurity
- **Welfare benefits** that enable people to afford essentials and social participation
- **Early interventions** to prevent homelessness

References

Ritchie et al. (2014) *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers*. Second edition / edited by Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carol McNaughton Nicholls, Rachel Ormston. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Rodriguez-Dorans, E. and Jacobs, P. (2020) 'Making narrative portraits: a methodological approach to analysing qualitative data', *International journal of social research methodology*, 23(6), pp. 611–623. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2020.1719609.

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