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HIDDEN
HOMELESSNESS
USING RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL GOOD

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Introducing us.

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The 'hidden homeless':
what does this term mean?

The homeless journey is not linear and each person's journey is different.

Rough sleeping ← → Hidden homeless ← → Statutory homeless ← → Temporary accommodation ←

Many individuals will oscillate between various forms of homelessness, and come into contact with number of services at different points of their journey.

Why a focus on hidden homelessness.

'HOMELESS'

Appear in homeless statistics often because they are accessing homeless support services, classified as statutory homeless or identified by outreach workers on the streets.

THE KNOWN HOMELESS

THE HIDDEN HOMELESS

THE 'HIDDEN HOMELESS'

Hidden from homeless statistics and not currently receiving any formal homeless support or are dealing with their situation informally. Can take one or more of the various forms of homelessness and often transitional.
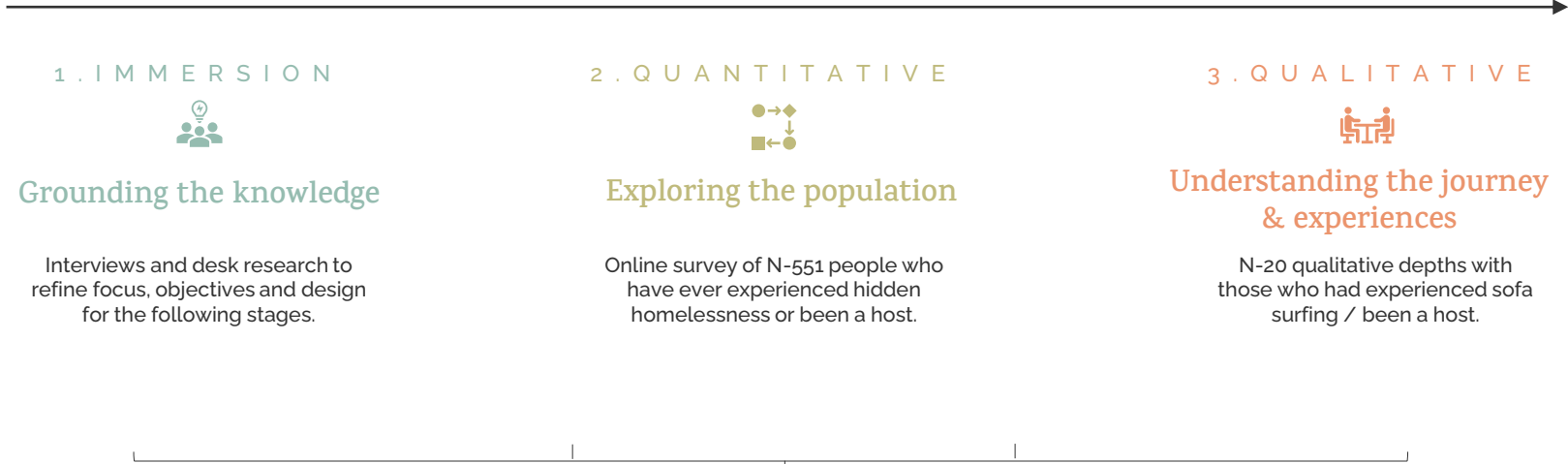
There is no current agreed definition of hidden homelessness, and definitions are often applied differently across sectors, largely due to the lack of known information about this population.

Our approach.

A multi-stage, integrated approach.

PARTICIPATORY

A co-production approach underpinned every stage

1. IMMERSION

Grounding the knowledge

Interviews and desk research to refine focus, objectives and design for the following stages.

2. QUANTITATIVE

Exploring the population

Online survey of N-551 people who have ever experienced hidden homelessness or been a host.

3. QUALITATIVE

Understanding the journey & experiences

N-20 qualitative depths with those who had experienced sofa surfing / been a host.

ADVISORY GROUP

Support from the sector in design & analysis

"*Research and policy interventions seem to focus on the more visible groups at the detriment of those who are hidden… This is particularly surprising considering sofa surfing is numerically the largest form of core homelessness.*"

Fitzpatrick et al., 2021

What is 'sofa surfing'?

Sofa surfing is having to stay on someone's sofa or floor on a short-term, insecure basis because there is nowhere else to go.

Those who are sofa surfing make up the largest proportion of this number: on any given night there are an estimated 71,400 households who are sofa surfing.

'IT WAS LIKE A NIGHTMARE'
– the reality of sofa surfing in Britain today

Ben Sanders, Sophie Boobis and Francesca Albanese

Crisis Together we will end homelessness

What we 'see matters'…

HUMANS ARE NOT ALWAYS RATIONAL

ANCHORING BIAS

We tend to rely too heavily on what we first see – the anchor – when making decisions.

AS RESEARCHERS

It's worth taking note of this !

The findings.

Relationships | 62%

- Breakdown of relationships
- Arguments with family/friends
- Being the victim of abuse
- Problems with neighbours

Financial | 61%

- Debt/financial difficulties
- Benefits not covering expenses
- Delays in benefits payments
- Sanctions / penalties

Housing | 59%

- Being evicted
- Feeling unsafe in accommodation / feeling threatened
- Not knowing where to go

Health | 30%

- Mental health problems
- Physical health problems
- Problems with addiction

Myriad factors lead to someone experiencing sofa surfing.

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But there is usually a trigger.

> **"** *For me personally, mental health issues and losing my job led to me experiencing homelessness. (F, 51)*

> **"** *My job moved quickly, and I didn't have anywhere lined up to stay. Rent was expensive and I had no references. (M, 32)*

Leading to increased vulnerability.

Sudden, severe situation

+

Lack of knowledge around support

=

Precarious situation

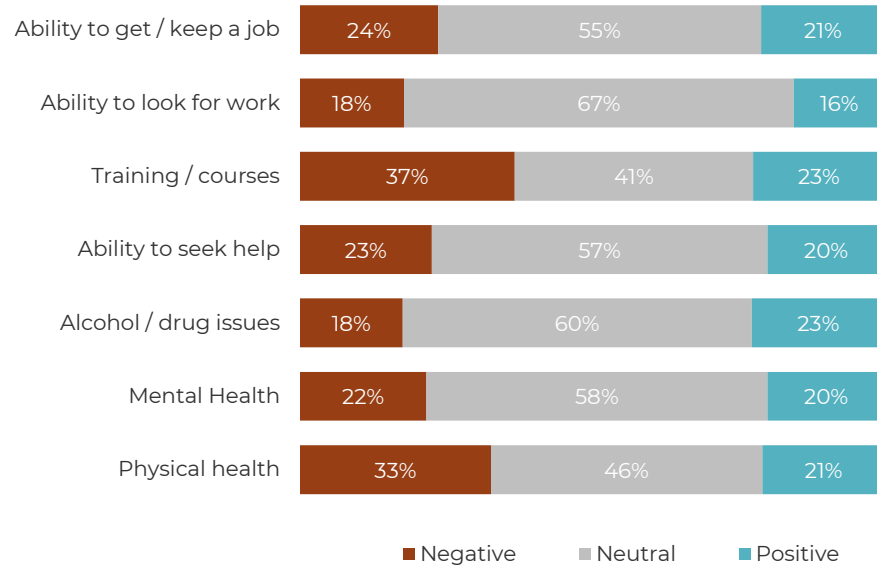# Insecurity can exist in seemingly 'secure' situations.

The external perspective

- Roof over their head
- Staying with friends / family
- Sense of comfort, sanctuary

The lived experience

- An insecure, secure situation
- Emotionally challenging
- Impacts to other areas of life

The knock-on impacts.

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Ability to get / keep a job	24%	55%	21%
Ability to look for work	18%	67%	16%
Training / courses	37%	41%	23%
Ability to seek help	23%	57%	20%
Alcohol / drug issues	18%	60%	23%
Mental Health	22%	58%	20%
Physical health	33%	46%	21%

■ Negative   ■ Neutral   ■ Positive

> *There always seems to be a catalyst, either losing a job, finishing a course, having mental health problems, death in the family etc. and these things just lead to a crossroads and you're not always able to find somewhere to live. It's a succession of vacuums and voids.*

> *Once I was evicted from my flat because the owner wanted to give it to her daughter who was going to university. I was working in a zero hours contract at the time and the money was fine for a while, but then the hours dried up and I couldn't afford to pay rent anymore. It was a perfect storm really.*

CASE STUDY

SPOTLIGHT ON JOHN

John is in his late forties and has experienced sofa-surfing on numerous occasions. Like many of the people we spoke to, there was usually a trigger that led to John not having somewhere permanent to live.

Alongside these trigger points lie a series of underlying issues which made it harder for John to gain stability, including insecurity of housing and a series of low-pay, zero hours jobs.

When, at the age of 35, he finished a university course and had nowhere to live and no income, it was an even more daunting reality.
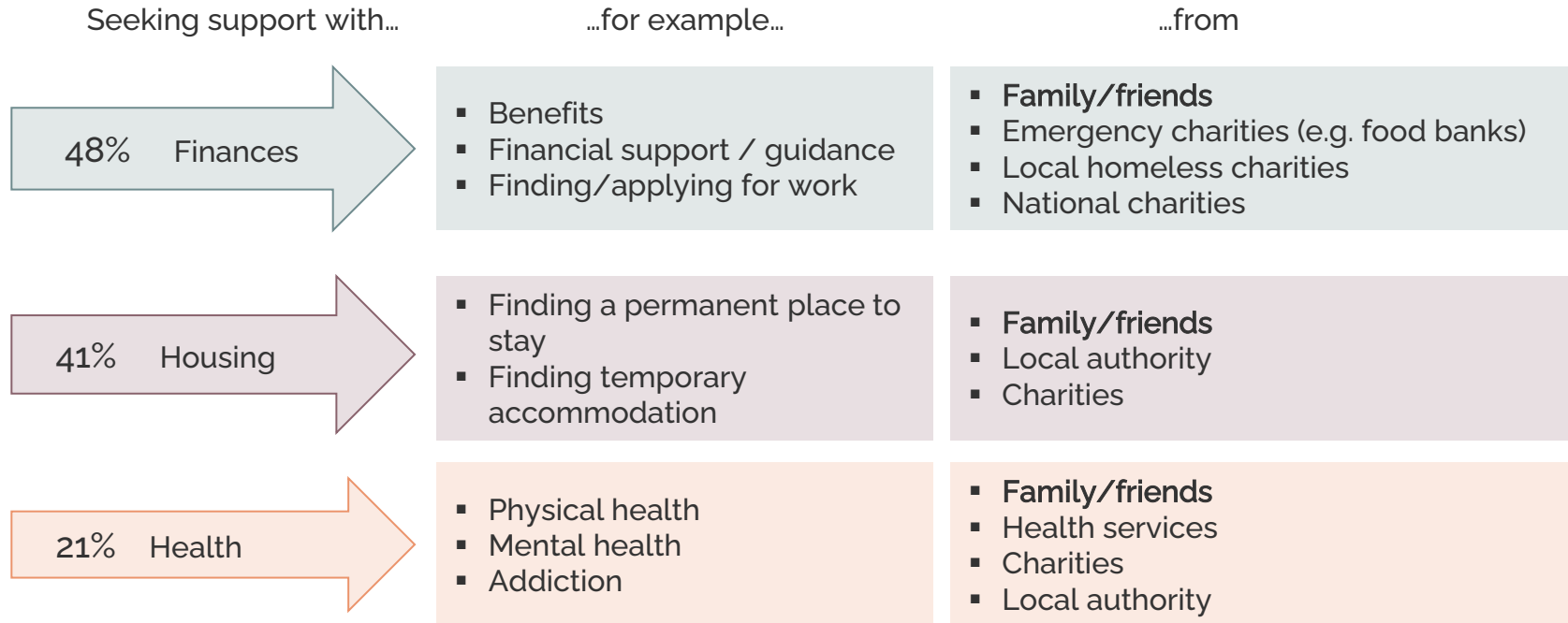
The role and impact of support.
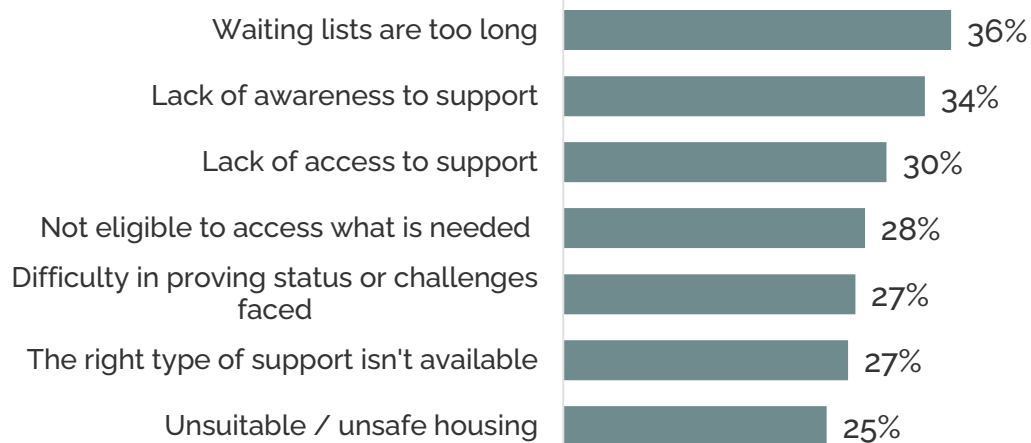
Characteristics	▪ Generally short-term, only sofa-surfing ▪ Few physical/mental health issues ▪ Doesn't self-define as homeless ▪ May be in work or studying	▪ Medium-term sofa-surfing ▪ May use other accommodation ▪ At least 1 significant issue ▪ Just coping financially ▪ May experience health issues	▪ Longer-term sofa-surfing and significant experience of other accommodation ▪ Multiple, significant issues
Support network	▪ Strong network of family/friends	▪ Loose support network	▪ Limited support network (already exhausted?)
Support needs	▪ Low perceived need for support ▪ Could benefit from some support to prevent recurrence	▪ May not feel eligible for support ▪ Would benefit from support for short- and long-term needs	▪ Acknowledge need for support, but may lack awareness ▪ Significant support needs

Family and friends are vital for various support needs.

Seeking support with...	...for example...	...from
48% Finances	• Benefits • Financial support / guidance • Finding/applying for work	• **Family/friends** • Emergency charities (e.g. food banks) • Local homeless charities • National charities
41% Housing	• Finding a permanent place to stay • Finding temporary accommodation	• **Family/friends** • Local authority • Charities
21% Health	• Physical health • Mental health • Addiction	• **Family/friends** • Health services • Charities • Local authority

Awareness of services and perceived eligibility low.

Challenges with accessing support

Challenge	Percentage
Waiting lists are too long	36%
Lack of awareness to support	34%
Lack of access to support	30%
Not eligible to access what is needed	28%
Difficulty in proving status or challenges faced	27%
The right type of support isn't available	27%
Unsuitable / unsafe housing	25%

"They don't care how long you've been waiting." (F, 35)

What we can learn from this.

System is complex and difficult to navigate

"I think I would have asked for help if I'd thought about it, but I didn't know what they could do, how to do it etc." (F, 20)

▶

Preventative services could be the solution

"They tend to provide remedial support - whether that's meeting your daily needs of housing or food, rather than helping people to stop getting into that situation in the first place." (M, 47)

▶

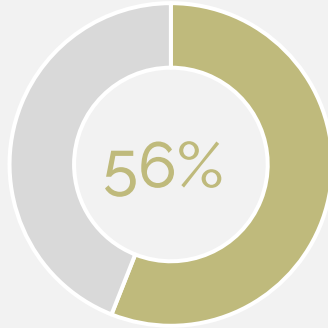**Support is more important now than ever**

"Because I can't afford the hostels I now sofa surf as a way to save money and it's often with strangers, which can be scary." (M, 49)
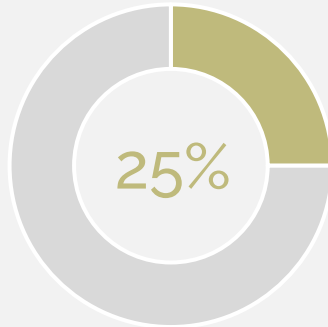
The host perspective.

68%

...of hosts had at some point, experienced sofa surfing themselves.

Host guests for up to a week or so

56%

Host guests for at least a month

25%

Hosts have to be reactive, but take an understanding, supportive approach.

"When someone's staying at your house, you can't just make food for yourself, even if you can't afford it you have to offer." (F, 38)

However they can be negatively impacted by the experience – emotionally and financially.

"I was just overwhelmed, I didn't know what support was available, and so I didn't look for any or try to find it. With emotional support I knew I could go to my GP, but I didn't want to trouble them. I don't think councils do tell people what's available. I've never seen anything that says 'if you're hosting someone who's sofa surfing, we can support you'." (F 51)

"The cost of living might impact on hosting as I may need to ask for a contribution from those staying 1 week +." (M, 41)

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The implications.

With thanks to...

Research respondents & participants	Those with lived experience (participatory group)	Charities & experts (advisory group)
Research funders	The MRS	Neil, and the Walnut Unlimited team

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O N E
Implications for policy makers

➢ Aim: focus resource on early intervention / prevention

▪ Short-term: better signposting, raising awareness

▪ Long-term: improving security of housing tenure, affordable housing. Fostering culture of asking for help early on

T W O
Implications for support services
(local authorities and charities)

➢ Aim: increase awareness of which services can help and who is eligible for those services

▪ Short-term: Greater support for hosts

▪ Longer-term: Support with early intervention

▪ Longer-term: Taking a personal, holistic approach to tackle multiple inter-related issues

Wider context: Cost-of-living increase

THREE
Implications for society

- ➤ Aim: increase awareness and challenge perceptions around seeking out help

- ▪ Short-term: be mindful of those around you who may need support; be increasingly empathetic

- ▪ Long-term: active education to change the social norms

FOUR
Implications for market research sector

- ➤ Aim: greater awareness of our own weaknesses

- ➤ Consider 'research for good'

Wider context: Cost-of-living increase

Our reflections.

Research gaps
1. We haven't added to the data on the size of the population
2. Greater work needs to be done on the definition
3. The potential role of 'big data'

Our approach
1. Opportunities that give ownership to those at the start of their careers excite and engage
2. We aren't experts in this field and we couldn't have done the research without the participatory and advisory groups
3. Iteration was vital

QUESTIONS?

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Thank you.

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