



TENANCY & CITIZENSHIP

Homelessness

Candidate Name:

SCN:

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Aims of the Module

This module is aims to:

- explore the importance of having a home.
- discuss your perceptions of homelessness.
- examine the causes and consequences of homelessness both on the individual and the community.
- give information on what to do if you find yourself homeless

What is a home?

A home is a surprisingly difficult thing to describe. The dictionary definition is fairly simple:

Home (*noun*) - the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household.

but in reality a home is more than a building or a place to leave your things. Most people have a strong (hopefully positive) emotional attachment to their homes, usually because of the memories and associations that they hold with their place of residence. Much of this course is related to acquiring and maintaining a place to stay but there are aspects with a focus on creating a home and a community which is, in truth, a much more invested process.

(Group) activity:

On your own write down the things you most associate with a home. Try to aim for three or more things. Think about the physical appearance of a home, the emotional associations and the activities you can do there.

Once everyone has something written down make a collage of everyone's thoughts and discuss it as a group. Consider the following questions and write the answers below:

- Are all of the answers similar?
- Are any unexpected?
- What seem to be the most important/common ideas?

Finally, as a group or alone, consider why it is important to have a **home and a community** rather than just a **house**. It is more work but there are greater benefits. Write some notes on this.

What is homelessness?

The word 'homeless' evokes such a strong image for most people. It might be a particular person that you have in mind, a general concept or perhaps even personal experience that you think of but any which way everyone has an opinion about what it is to be homeless. The most common image of a homeless person is that of a 'rough sleeper' – a person who sleeps on the streets and, seemingly, has no accommodation at all. The truth, however, is much more complicated than this and only about 8% of those who make a homeless application within Scotland have slept rough in the three months before their application (Scottish Government, June 2017).

Legal Definition

By law, a person is considered homeless if they:

- have **no accommodation** at all.
- have a place to stay but they **cannot gain entry** to it.
- have somewhere to stay but are **threatened with violence**.
- have somewhere to stay but it is not reasonable to stay there because of **overcrowding** and this overcrowding is bad for their health.
- have somewhere to stay but its **poor standard** means that it is not reasonable for them to stay there.
- have somewhere to stay but they **do not have permission** to stay there.
- are living in either a **B&B accommodation, a hotel, a hostel or a refuge**.
- usually live in a **mobile home** but there is **nowhere for them to put it**.

This definition is surprisingly broad and often surprises people. The majority of these elements are invisible to the public eye and so people do not think about them. In fact it is possible to be legally classed as homeless without knowing that it is the case; for example, if an accommodation has an extreme case of damp and mould, to the point that it is causing illness in the person living there, that person can then be legally classed as homeless. However, unless the individual seeks aid, either from the council or from advice agencies, this form of homelessness is invisible.

(Group) activity:

Consider the following statements. Decide whether you think they are true or false and give a reason or an example to support your answer:

1. Anyone can become homeless

2. When someone becomes homeless, it is usually their own fault or choice

3. Sometimes homeless people have a house

What causes homelessness?

As homelessness is so complicated it can be very difficult to determine one cause that leads an individual to become homeless. The simple answer, using the legal definitions, is that homelessness occurs when someone doesn't have a suitable place to stay. Whilst this is true there are often several other reasons that have contributed to a person becoming homeless.

(Group) activity:

Here is a selection of potential causes for homelessness. Think about how each could lead to homelessness (you may want to research some of them in more detail) and give them a number from 1-10 based on which cause you think is most common (1) through to the least common (10) reason within Scotland.

Rank: Unemployment:

Leaving an institution (Army, Care, Prison etc.):

Addiction (Drug, Alcohol, Gambling etc.):

Parents unwilling/unable to provide accommodation:

Domestic Violence:

End of Tenancy:

Debt:

Breakdown of relationship:

Disability:

Choice:

The Numbers

When a person finds themselves facing homelessness they must **present** themselves to their local council. The council then conducts an **assessment** of the person's situation and tries, first and foremost, to help them avoid homelessness but, if this is not possible, the council will work with them to provide the best possible scenario.

As part of the **assessment** the person facing homelessness is asked to give one or several reasons that led to their situation. According to the Scottish Government's report on Homelessness in Scotland 2016-17 the most cited reasons are as follows:

1. Asked to leave - 25%
2. Non-Violent Dispute – 18%
3. Other Reason – 14 %
4. Violent Dispute – 12%
5. Action by landlord ending tenancy – 10%
6. Discharge from institution – 6%
7. Termination of tenancy/mortgage due to lack of payment – 4%
8. Fleeing non-domestic violence – 3%
9. Deliberate termination of secure accommodation – 2%
10. Harassment – 2%
11. Overcrowding - 2%
12. Emergency (fire, flood etc.) – 1%
13. Divorce and division of home – 1%

However, these **primary** causes try to pin the cause of homelessness down to one event and so do not reflect the complicated web of issues that can lead to homelessness. For this reason, applicants are given the opportunity to give a more general reason for failing to maintain accommodation which is considered alongside the **primary** cause. These are:

1. Circumstances from outside the household (landlord selling property, emergency etc.) - 45%
2. Mental Health reasons – 20%
3. Financial difficulties (debt or unemployment) – 16%
4. Drug or alcohol dependency – 14%
5. Criminal or anti-social behaviour – 12%
6. Physical health reasons – 6%
7. Difficulties managing alone – 5%
8. Unmet need from housing/social work/health services – 2%

Some people gave more than one of these reasons when asked. This shows even more clearly how difficult it is to pin down a specific reason that leads to homelessness.

(Group) activity:

How close were your answers to the official statistics? Did any of the figures surprise you? Why/why not?

Who is affected by Homelessness?

Between September 2016 and September 2017 nearly 35,000 people in Scotland presented as homeless to their local council. This equates to approximately 1 person out of every 200 within Scotland. This number may sound quite small but in reality a group of 200 people is quite small.

Think about a cinema. A medium sized cinema screen will hold about 200 people. It is likely then that, the next time you go to see a film, one of the people sitting with you will have experience of homelessness. A scary thought.

The Scottish Government 2016-17 statistics demonstrate that people facing homelessness in Scotland are more likely to have certain characteristics. For example, out of 10 people facing homelessness the following is likely to be true:

