Final Report

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Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia

authored by

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ACRONYMS

ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
DoCs	Department of Community Services
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores the prevalence and structure of intergenerational homelessness in Australia; examines lifetime experiences of homelessness; considers the role of key personal and parental background drivers of homelessness; and examines the implications of the research findings for policy and practice.

Intergenerational homelessness occurs when homelessness is repeated across generations of the same family. In other words, it occurs when an individual, who experiences homelessness in their own right, has one or more parents who were also homeless at some point in their lives.

In this study, homelessness is defined as a state of 'non-permanent accommodation' and includes the following states:

- Living on the streets or sleeping in parks, caves, cars and makeshift dwellings.
- Staying in crisis or transitional accommodation.
- Temporarily living with other households because individuals have no accommodation of their own ('couch surfers').
- Living in boarding houses either on a short-term or medium to long-term basis.

The study is restricted to a cohort of adult Australians (defined as those over 18) who, at the time of analysis, were currently homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and receiving support in one form or another through specialist homelessness services. For this cohort, the study addressed the following four key research questions:

1. What is the prevalence and structure of intergenerational homelessness?
2. What is the pattern of childhood and teenage experiences of homelessness among adult clients of specialist homelessness services?
3. What is the pattern and extent of intergenerational homelessness and of lifetime experiences of homelessness among Indigenous clients of specialist homelessness services as compared with non-Indigenous clients of those services?
4. To what extent do those who are current clients of specialist homelessness support services experience individual-level 'risk' factors in the parental home? Is there an apparent association between specified individual risk factors and intergenerational homelessness? What role do parental forces play in generating future homelessness among offspring? Are those who meet the criteria of intergenerational homelessness more likely also to come from family backgrounds displaying a higher prevalence of individual risk factors of homelessness?

The principal source of data on intergenerational and lifetime experiences of homelessness used in this report is a large representative national cross-sectional survey, the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, the research team administered in 2009–10. The survey was administered to a cohort of adult Australians who, at the time of analysis, were currently homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and receiving support in one form or another through specialist homelessness services.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* elicited information on the homeless histories of current clients in homelessness services, their early-life backgrounds, current and lifetime issues faced, and their knowledge of the homelessness experiences and issues faced by their parents. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* used a cross-sectional retrospective design and was restricted in scope to

those who were currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services at the time of the study. The survey provides the most comprehensive record of the lifetime experiences of homelessness and of life in early childhood and teenage years for homeless Australians currently available.

The retrospective nature of the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* means that the information collected on intergenerational homelessness and lifetime experiences of homelessness in this study is limited by the accuracy of the memories of respondents, and by their knowledge and awareness of their parents' lives. Furthermore, the scope of the survey means that rates of intergenerational homelessness can only be determined for one segment of the population; namely, those who are currently receiving support from homelessness services.

Seventy agencies and 647 respondents from those agencies from across Australia participated in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*. At the time we conducted the survey, it was one of the largest and most representative studies of homelessness carried out in Australia.

The key findings of the study are as follows:

1. The rate of intergenerational homelessness among clients of homelessness services was relatively high among the cohort of those currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services. Around half of all respondents (48.5%) to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* report that their parents were also homeless at some point in their lives. Given the self-report and retrospective nature of the study and associated imperfect knowledge or recall, it is probable that estimated rates of intergenerational homelessness for the target cohort may be lower than actual rates.
2. The intergenerational homelessness rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous respondents. For Indigenous participants, the intergenerational homelessness rate is 69.0 per cent. This compares with an intergenerational homeless rate of 43.0 per cent among non-Indigenous participants.
3. In spite of a similar overall rate of lifetime-to-date primary homelessness, Indigenous respondents are much more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to experience primary homelessness in childhood. It is not the form of homelessness experienced but the age of the first spell of homelessness that is the important difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people. Around half of all respondents experienced their first spell of homelessness prior to the age of 18. Early onset of homelessness is most prevalent in the case of couch surfing and use of crisis accommodation services. Primary homelessness as a lifetime experience is more evident for men than women. However, around half of all respondents had not experienced a spell of primary homelessness in their lifetime. This fact illustrates one of the key broader findings of the study—and that is that there are many different experiences of homelessness in Australia.
4. Indigenous respondents were more likely to have experienced primary homelessness prior to the age of 18, many before the age of 12, than non-Indigenous respondents were. Around a quarter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported a spell of primary homelessness prior to the age of 12 as compared with half that percentage of non-Indigenous respondents.
5. In most cases where homelessness is experienced before the age of 18 it is a not a single episode but one of several episodes of homelessness. In some cases,

very many spells of homelessness are experienced. For a majority, however, the cumulative time spent in homelessness is less than a year prior to the age of 18.

6. Many, but by no means all, respondents experienced significant issues in the home environment prior to the age of 18. The most striking single indicator of this was that around half of all respondents reported that they had run away from home at some point prior to the age of 18.
7. Significant inter-parental conflict in the home was also evident for many respondents as they grew up. Over half of respondents (58.8%) reported police intervention due to inter-parental conflict. Around 20 per cent of respondents reported that police came to their home six or more times because of inter-parental conflict. Childhood exposure to inter-parental conflict can be considered a proximal risk factor for homelessness and a key driver of homelessness among young people.
8. Close to half of all respondents who indicated that they had a father in their life reported that their father had a serious drinking problem. Incarceration rates for fathers were also high. Among Indigenous respondents, these problems were significantly more prominent. Likewise, there was a strong association between the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness and high family risk factors in the parental home.
9. Adult clients of homelessness services are significantly more likely to have been placed in foster care or residential care than those in the general population. The prevalence of such arrangements among Indigenous respondents is much higher than for non-Indigenous respondents—30 per cent of Indigenous participants reported that they had been placed in foster care at some point before the age of 18. Seventy per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants lived with relatives prior to the age of 18 as compared with 42 per cent of non-Indigenous participants.

These findings have important implications for our understanding of homelessness in Australia and of policy and practice settings.

First, the findings point to relatively high rates of intergenerational homelessness and very early onset of homelessness for adult homeless people. From a service perspective, our study confirms that intergenerational homelessness is relevant for many adults experiencing and presenting at homeless specialist services.

Second, the study's findings show that earlier occurrences of homelessness may be a predicator of subsequent adult homelessness and that the role of individual family risk factors appears critical to the experience of many adult homeless people irrespective of the significant influence of system-level responses and the availability of affordable accommodation.

Third, the findings point to the fact that among homeless people, Indigenous homeless people have often experienced longer and more traumatic early life experiences than non-Indigenous respondents.

Fourth, the findings point to the fundamental importance of preventative and early intervention homelessness programs for children and young teenagers in relation to parental domestic violence, alcohol and drug use problems and entry into out-of-home care arrangements. It is critical that as much focus is placed on children and young teenagers as the adults who are the 'clients' in programs that are addressing issues in the family home around parental domestic violence, and alcohol and drug use problems. While *The Road Home* and subsequent programs funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness have focused renewed attention

on preventative and early intervention programs many of these programs were directed to adults at risk of homelessness and young people exiting out-of-home care arrangements. There is a need to boost programs directed at children and teenagers in difficult home environments. The report confirms the importance of homelessness for children (a large and growing group presenting at homeless specialist services) and the subsequent effect childhood experiences of homelessness may have on childhood development and educational opportunities.

Fifth, the report underscores the importance of generalist services for families (health, mental health, drug and alcohol, child protection, and justice services) in identifying and responding to, in collaboration with local specialist homelessness services, to any risk of homelessness.

A study of this kind, which draws on evidence from a survey focused on individual life experiences, naturally focuses on the individual risk factors associated with homelessness. The structural determinants of homelessness are also obviously critical in driving entry into homelessness and creating exit barriers from homelessness. Some of these structural forces are implicit in the problems identified by respondents through their lives around low income and a lack of opportunity for fulfilling activities that leave respondents bored and feeling depressed and anxious. There is also a focus on issues surrounding the management of health problems. And, clearly, respondents faced extreme difficulties around accommodation issues as evident in the high rate of primary homelessness and temporary accommodation among those entering their support period.

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

The intergenerational transmission of a broad range of social phenomena such as poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, and incarceration has been the subject of extensive analysis. The existing research points to relatively high rates of intergenerational transmission of a number of social problems.[2] The implication for policy and practice is that effective intervention and support for families, children and young teenagers provides benefits to the present generation but also to the next generation and beyond.

In contrast to our knowledge of the intergenerational transmission of social problems such as poverty and domestic violence and abuse, we know very little about the intergenerational transmission of homelessness and, in particular, its prevalence, structure and possible causal drivers.[3] Likewise, we know relatively little about the lifetime experiences of homelessness and the individual risk factors that may influence entry into homelessness and its reoccurrence over the life cycle. It is the aim of this study to help remedy these gaps in our evidence base.

We define intergenerational homelessness as homelessness that is repeated across generations of the same family. In other words, it occurs when an individual, who experiences homelessness in their own right, has one or more parents or carers who are also homeless at some point in their lives.

It is important to emphasise that the concept of intergenerational homelessness is not the same concept as family homelessness—that is, homelessness experienced by members of the same family (parents/carers and children) at a particular point in time. This is because children who are homeless with their families may or may not become homeless later in their own right. And, at the same time, intergenerational homelessness can occur without an episode of family homelessness, for example, when parents experience homelessness prior to the birth of their offspring and their offspring experience homelessness later in life.

Nevertheless, there is, a significant overlap between the concepts of intergenerational homelessness and family homelessness, which we will focus on this study. Children who are homeless with their parents are far more likely than other children to be affected in their lives as children, teenagers and adults by the same factors that resulted in their parents being homeless. Moreover, they may 'learn' and adapt to the experience of homelessness from being homelessness with their parents. This may influence their own subsequent entry into homelessness later in their own right.

[1] We would like to thank two anonymous referees for their very useful and informative comments and Shelley Mallett for her comments on our report at an AHURI Homelessness Research Network event held in Sydney in August 2012. All three are, of course, in no way responsible for any failings in the present report.

[2] Childhood poverty is a significant determinant of poverty experienced later in life (Hobcraft 1998; Blanden & Gibbons 2006). Intergenerational reliance on social income support is evident (e.g. Beaulieu et al. 2005; Pech & McCoull 2000; Brown 2005). Child maltreatment usually occurs in patterns or cycles across family generations with substance use factors critical in this pattern of abuse and strong causal relationships between sexual abuse in childhood and early adult mental health problems (Hamilton & Collins 1981; Cicchetti & Carlson 1989; Sheridan 1995; Markward et al. 2000; Raine 2002; Fergusson et el. 2006, 2008). Many children are the victims of family violence at the same time as their mothers (Widom 1989; Wilden et al. 1991; Bennett 1995). Foster and Hagan (2007) find high levels of intergenerational incarceration with parental incarceration increasing the risk of children becoming homeless in their early adult years.

[3] An overview of this literature, including the gaps in current research, is provided in our paper *Intergenerational Homelessness and the Intergenerational use of Homelessness Services*, AHURI Positioning Paper No. 119 (Flatau et al. 2009).

We utilise an accommodation/tenure-based definition of homelessness in this study. Homelessness is defined in this report as a state of 'non-permanent accommodation'. Non-permanent accommodation is assumed, for the purposes of this study, to be fully exhausted by the following set of circumstances:

- Living on the streets or sleeping in parks, caves, cars and makeshift dwellings (referred to as 'street-based homelessness' or 'primary homelessness' in the literature and this report).
- Staying in crisis or transitional accommodation provided by specialist homelessness agencies.
- Temporarily living with others because those involved have nowhere else to go ('couch surfers').
- Staying in hotels and motels because those involved have nowhere else to go.
- Living in boarding and rooming houses either on a short-term or medium to long-term basis.

An accommodation-based definition of homelessness is the most commonly used approach to defining homelessness in Australia. This enables cross-referencing of our findings with those from much of the existing literature although we would point out that Australian Census-based analyses of homelessness, though accommodation/tenure based have been problematic in not clearly delineating couch-surfing directly and not accounting for the use of hotels and motels as potential sources of non-permanent accommodation.

Nevertheless, an accommodation-based definition has been criticised for not accounting for a concept of the 'home' as being wider than that of a physical dwelling and tenure position, and hence that 'homelessness' is a broader notion than the absence of non-permanent accommodation. AHURI research examining Indigenous homelessness, for example, suggests that homelessness could be better redefined as losing one's sense of control over, or legitimacy in, the place where one lives (spiritual homelessness) (Memmott et al. 2003; Birdsall-Jones et al. 2010).

The notion of a sense of a lack control, or of belonging, or of legitimacy around place is a powerful one. In the Indigenous context, it has added force in a history of dispossession. In both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous context, a sense of a lack control, or of belonging, or of legitimacy around place is a critical dimension of the homelessness experience. Nevertheless, focusing on this dimension in a definition of homelessness considerably widens the scope of homelessness. It brings into scope many living in secure accommodation. Because it detaches the notion of homelessness from that of an accommodation/tenure-based state, it takes us away from the extreme marginalised objective position occupied by those without permanent accommodation.

The purpose of the study is twofold; first, to explore the prevalence and structure of intergenerational homelessness in Australia and second, to examine the potential role of individual risk factors derived from the parental home in driving intergenerational homelessness and lifecycle experiences of homelessness.

We focus on a specific cohort of Australians, namely, the cohort of Australians currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services. Our hope is that the study will help fill an important gap in the homelessness literature in Australia and in our understanding of appropriate policy and practice responses to intergenerational homelessness. In particular, the study seeks to provide an evidence base to assist in the development of policies and support services aimed at breaking the cycle of

homelessness and ending the flow of children and young people into adult homelessness.

The Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness *The Road Home* (Australian Government 2008) and the subsequent National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) between the Australian Government and the states and territories focused national attention on homelessness and policies to reduce homelessness. *The Road Home* indicated that government policy should focus more attention than before on implementing evidence-based prevention programs more widely across the country. The present study is critical in this regard in developing the evidence on critical drivers and points in childhood and teenage life that may be fundamental in influencing future adult homelessness.

The study is restricted to a cohort of adult Australians who, at the time of the analysis, were receiving support in one form or another through what are referred to as 'specialist homelessness services' funded through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the NPAH. Those receiving support from specialist homelessness services include those in supported accommodation arrangements, those at risk of homelessness, and those accessing outreach and day centre support including those who are in primary homelessness.

The purposive sampling of this particular cohort was undertaken for two reasons. First, there had been significant interest from the policy and practice community prior to the study in the topic of intergenerational homelessness among clients of specialist homelessness services and this led to a call for a study of this cohort. Our study responded to this interest. Second, resources for the study were limited and it was considered important to focus those resources on the chosen cohort rather than all those who are currently homeless including those not receiving support through specialist homelessness services (the key missing group are those couch surfing) or on the general Australian population. The costs of undertaking a wider study were well beyond the available budget.

For the target cohort, the study addresses four key research questions:

1. What is the prevalence and structure of intergenerational homelessness?
2. What is the pattern of childhood and teenage experiences of homelessness among adult clients of specialist homelessness services?
3. What is the pattern and extent of intergenerational homelessness and of lifetime experiences of homelessness among Indigenous clients of specialist homelessness services as compared with non-Indigenous clients of those services?
4. To what extent do those who are current clients of specialist homelessness support services experience individual-level 'risk' factors in the parental home? Is there an apparent association between specified individual risk factors and intergenerational homelessness? What role do parental forces play in generating future homelessness among offspring? Are those who meet the criteria of intergenerational homelessness more likely also to come from family backgrounds displaying a higher prevalence of individual risk factors of homelessness?

Our study is based on a large representative national cross-sectional survey the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* that was developed and administered by the research team in 2009–10. The survey was administered to a cohort of adult Australians who, at the time of analysis, were currently homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and receiving support in one form or another through specialist

homelessness services.[4] The survey provides the most comprehensive record of the lifetime experiences of homelessness and of life in early childhood and teenage years for homeless Australians currently available.

It is important to emphasise that the sample that is the subject of the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* is not representative of the Australian population. As such, the evidence presented in this paper on the prevalence and structure of homelessness is unique to the population being examined; namely, those who are currently receiving support from homelessness agencies. While, the study is not representative of the Australian population, the chosen cohort is arguably the most critical when thinking of those most in need from a policy and practice perspective, the development of preventative strategies, and the factors in childhood and teenage life that may influence a future move into homelessness for this group. The evidence derived from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* was supplemented by a qualitative study, using in-depth interviews and focus groups of service managers and workers undertaken in NSW (see the appendix).

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* elicited information on the homelessness histories of current clients of homelessness services, their early-life backgrounds, current and lifetime issues faced, their knowledge of the homelessness experiences of their parents and carers, and issues faced by their parents and life in the home environment when they were growing up (as known to the respondents). The survey used a cross-sectional retrospective design and was restricted in scope to those who were currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services at the time of the study.

The retrospective nature of the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* means that the information collected on intergenerational homelessness and lifetime experiences of homelessness is restricted by the accuracy of the memories of respondents, and by their knowledge and awareness of their parents' lives. Furthermore, the scope of the survey means that rates of intergenerational homelessness can only be determined for one segment of the population; namely, those who are currently receiving support from homelessness services.

Our study not only examines the prevalence and structure of intergenerational homelessness among currently homeless people, but also investigates issues surrounding parental background, childhood experiences of the parental home and childhood experiences of homelessness. Moore et al.'s (2007) examination of childhood homelessness pointed to a range of factors associated with the occurrence of childhood homelessness, such as parental problematic drug and alcohol use, family violence and parental mental health issues. We investigate the role of these particular individual risk factors in our study.

It is important to recognise that, in focusing on a specific set of individual risk factors, we are not suggesting that these are the only risk factors that are of potential significance in influencing future homelessness. In particular, the chosen set does not focus attention directly on the role of poverty and social isolation in influencing future homelessness trajectories. Furthermore, by focusing on this specific set of risk factors we do not wish to deny the role of a range of individual protective factors that act to reduce entry into homelessness or increase the resilience of those who become or are homeless. There is the potential for studies of this kind to be read as purely 'deficit'-based approaches to homelessness. Finally, we do not wish, in focusing on individual risk factors in the parental home, to deny the critical role of structural

[4] The results included in the present report are based on unweighted data from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* and may differ from results that may be derived from weighted estimates.

determinants of homelessness including the failure of the housing market to provide sufficient affordable housing or the labour market to provide accessible jobs.

The importance of focusing on early lifetime experiences and parental home experiences in this study is that childhood experiences have significant impacts on adult lives (Spooner & Hetherington 2005; Duncan et al. 2010; Shonkoff et al. 2009). Stress associated with childhood homelessness, for example, may affect child development in a manner that reduces adult coping skills, thereby increasing the risk of homelessness in adulthood (see Thornberry et al. 2009). Additionally, studies examining early life adversity have shown that chronic and severe stress in children impacts on the developing neurobiological stress response system resulting in increased risk for later onset of mental disorder (McCrory et al. 2010), an important precipitant of homelessness in some individuals. Related to this, there is some evidence of impaired immune functioning among homeless individuals with stress-related disorders (Arranz et al. 2009). These critical early lifetime experiences focus attention on related preventative policies that can be implemented to reduce the threat of later adult homelessness.

The report is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 of the report outlines the approach taken in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* and its sampling frame. It also presents a descriptive profile of the respondents.

Chapter 3 presents evidence in relation to lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness, and the individual-level 'risk' factors that we have chosen to focus on in influencing entry into childhood and teenage homelessness and intergenerational homelessness.

Chapter 4 presents key findings from analyses of the survey for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. In a number of areas, there are significant differences between the experiences of Indigenous homeless people and those of non-Indigenous people, particularly when it comes to the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness and early lifetime experiences of homelessness.

The appendix presents the findings of the qualitative research component of the study.

2 METHOD AND PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

This chapter has three main purposes. The first is to provide a typology and framework for examining intergenerational homelessness. The second is to detail the approach taken in this study to gathering evidence on intergenerational homelessness and lifetime experiences of homelessness. The third is to provide a descriptive profile of respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*. This profile provides context to our later results.

2.1 Intergenerational homelessness

2.1.1 Defining intergenerational homelessness

The definition of intergenerational homelessness that we adopt in this study is disarmingly simple: intergenerational homelessness occurs when one or more parents are homeless *and* offspring experience homelessness in their own right. By 'experiencing homelessness in their own right', we mean homelessness experienced independent of parental homelessness. The vast majority of those in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* were, at the time of interview, homeless in their own right.

The concept of intergenerational homelessness used in this study is intimately related to that of an individual's understanding of their family and of who their mother and father are. In the present context, we are measuring intergenerational homelessness based on responses of those currently receiving support from homelessness services as to their knowledge of their mother's and father's experience of homelessness.

To be able to estimate the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness for respondents we must first determine whether the respondent identifies a person who they regard as their 'mother' and/or a person who they regard as their 'father' in their lives. If a respondent does not identify either a father or a mother in their lives then it is not possible to assess, from self-report data, whether their mother or father was homeless at any point in their lives. Estimates of intergenerational homelessness presented in this study are, therefore, conditional estimates—conditional on the sample of those respondents who can answer questions concerning their mother and/or father's experience of homelessness.

We leave it to the respondents to determine who their 'mother' and/or 'father' are. We do not restrict the concept of a 'mother' and 'father' to that of birth mothers and birth fathers. We allow the respondents to determine who for them are their mother and/or father. For a particular respondent (the majority as it turns out), that may mean their birth father and birth mother.[5] For others, their 'mother' and 'father' is their birth mother and their step-father, for others their 'mother' is their birth mother with no person recognised as a father, and for yet others their 'father' and 'mother' is their adoptive father and adoptive mother.

As noted in the introduction, in this study, homelessness means a state of 'non-permanent accommodation'. This is an accommodation/tenure-based notion of homelessness. Those in non-permanent accommodation include those in street-based primary homelessness, those in temporary accommodation provided by specialist homelessness agencies, those couch surfing or staying in hotels and motels due to insufficient accommodation or because they have nowhere else to go; and, those living in boarding houses.

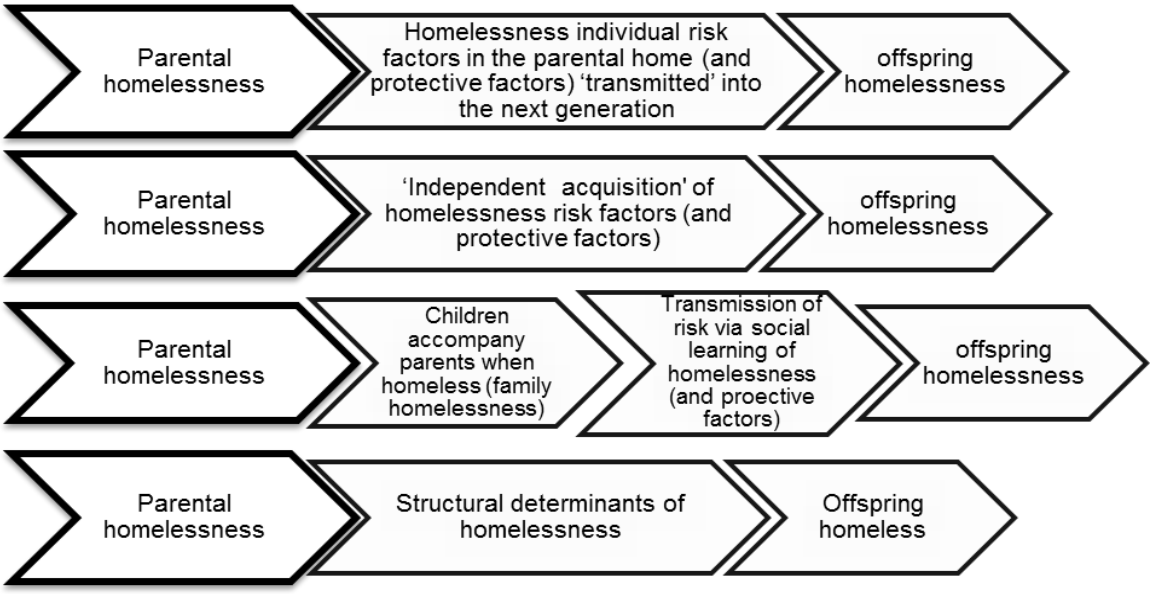
[5] Two-thirds of the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* sample reported that their 'mother' and 'father' was their birth mother and birth father—see Table 9 below.

2.1.2 Taxonomy of intergenerational homelessness

We develop a taxonomy of intergenerational homelessness by considering pathways into intergenerational homelessness. There are a number of possible proximate causal intergenerational homelessness channels. In all cases, the starting point is parental homelessness.

These channels into intergenerational homelessness are presented in Figure 1 below. This presentation is informed by Beaulieu et al.'s (2005) framework of the intergenerational transmission of social assistance and while the presentation of these channels in diagrammatic form suggests a mutually exclusive linear form, in practice the channels are likely to be interactive and dynamic in form.

Figure 1: Channels of intergenerational homelessness



The first intergenerational channel involves the transmission of individual homelessness risk factors from parents to children. In this channel, parents experience homelessness either before or after the birth of their offspring and subsequently 'transmit' risk factors of homelessness to their children by whatever means. (They may also transmit protective factors but we do not emphasise that here.) Offspring become homeless in their own right. Once homeless, it is difficult for individuals to exit homelessness, particularly when structural determinants, such as the absence of housing and employment opportunities inhibit this exit. From a policy perspective, the key preventative policies in this context are policies directed at parental behaviours and supportive programs for the children of parents with problematic alcohol and drug issues and violence in the home.

In the second channel, parents experience homelessness but do not transmit risk factors to their offspring, or, if they do, they are successfully navigated by their offspring. However, the children of homeless parents independently experience risk factors, which lead ultimately to independent experiences of homelessness—It is not the parental home that matters in this instance, but the external environment. Preventative strategies need to focus on the individual and their early experiences of homelessness risk factors.

In the third channel, the transmission of homelessness from parents to children is of a direct form. In this pathway, homelessness is a learnt experience passed on from one generation to the next and derived most likely from joint experiences of homelessness

across the generations. This could occur, for example, when the family unit becomes homeless, or when mothers escape domestic violence with their children and receive support in women's refuges. Experiences of homelessness during adolescent years, when young people are developing their identities, can shape that process so that being homeless becomes an element of one's self-identity. The alternative possibility is that the experience of childhood homelessness may build a resolve in children not to experience homelessness again, thereby reducing the risk of adult homelessness (see Rutter 1998). The key focus of policy interventions in this channel is with programs directed at young children and teenagers in family homelessness programs and in women's refuges.

The final channel of entry into intergenerational homelessness focuses on the role of structural determinants in the intergenerational homelessness experience. These include such factors as the absence of affordable housing and employment opportunities.

Those who experience intergenerational homelessness may be influenced by more than one channel. For example, social learning of homelessness is likely to coexist with both transmission of risk factors by parents and quite possibly the role of independent causal influences. Without a prospective longitudinal study, it is impossible to unravel these various influences and to gain a full appreciation of the causal forces at work. Nevertheless, it may be possible to understand something of possible influences and associations in a study of the type undertaken here.

2.2 The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*

To gather evidence on both the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness and its structure and potential causal influences, we developed a survey instrument administered to current clients of homelessness services. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* was based on the recall of the lifetime experiences of homelessness, of problems faced over time, and parental background. The survey was designed not only to elicit information on the timing and form of homeless experiences of users of homelessness services, but also the incidence of parental homelessness and a set of parental-based homelessness risk factors and so inform a discussion of causal pathways into both intergenerational homelessness and into childhood and teenage homelessness.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* is a retrospective, cross-sectional investigation of the lifetime experiences of homelessness and intergenerational homelessness among those who are currently homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and receiving support through specialist homelessness services. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* asks respondents about their own past homelessness experiences, their knowledge of parental/carer homelessness, experiences of growing up and problems experienced over respondents' lifetimes.

As the *survey* is a retrospective, as opposed to prospective longitudinal survey, it inevitably suffers from a number of limitations.

First, imperfect recall and/or imperfect knowledge of past events will affect the quality of the data and may bias the results. We would expect under-reporting of parental homelessness and possibly too of issues experienced in the home when the child was growing up, but we do not know the size of under-reporting.

Second, as a one-off cross-sectional survey, it has a limited ability to address issues of causality and the influence of mediating influences on outcomes.

Third, the sampling frame of the study is those who are currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services. It is not a population-based sample of respondents but rather a purposive sampling approach and so is not designed to provide a complete picture of the extent and recurrence of homelessness in the general population.

The vast majority of the cohort was experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey (as adults in their own right) and a very small number fell into the category of no lifetime experience of homelessness. This group was subsequently excluded from the analysis. As such, estimates of intergenerational homelessness were simply operationalised as those in the cohort with parents who had experienced homelessness.

Nevertheless, for all its shortcomings, the survey does provide an immediate very rich snapshot of the lifetime and intergenerational homelessness experiences of those who are currently receiving support from homelessness services. It therefore provides critical evidence for practitioners and policy-makers with respect to the position of clients of homelessness services and preventative programs that may be successful in reducing the entry into homelessness.

Recruitment of respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* was via specialist homelessness services in Australia. A random sample of specialist homelessness services from all over Australia was drawn from the list of 1459 specialist homelessness services in Australia through a two-stage sampling approach. First, specialist homelessness services were included in the sampling frame if they provided crisis/short-term accommodation and support; medium/long-term accommodation and support; day support; outreach support or multiple forms of support. These criteria identified 1339 agencies for inclusion in the initial sampling frame. Second, 200 agencies were randomly sampled from those 1339 agencies for the purposes of seeking engagement in the study. Further refinement occurred due to our desire to ensure appropriate sampling of services in regional and remote areas of Australia. Seventy agencies provided useable survey data for the purposes of the study.

Figure 2 below shows the location of the agencies that participated in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*.[6]

Participating agencies nominated a staff member whose role it was to liaise with the research team and oversee data collection within their agency. Agency contacts were provided with a *Guide to Completing the Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, which outlined the process for selecting clients and obtaining informed consent, as well as details regarding the specific purpose and coding frame for each survey question. Agencies were paid $100 if they administered between one and 10 surveys and $200 if they administered between 11 and 20 surveys.

Data collection was concentrated in a period between November 2009 and March 2010. Clients were eligible to participate if:

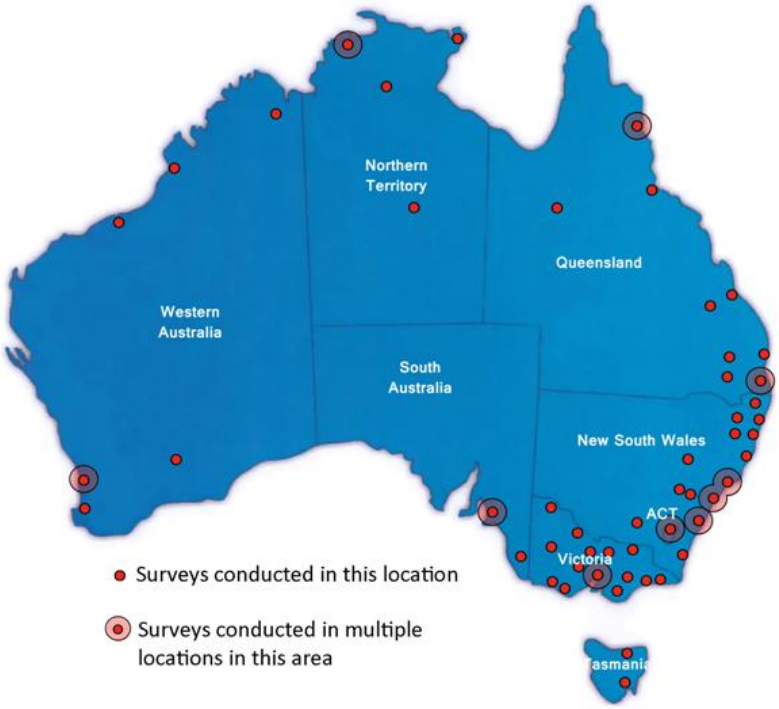
- → They were at least 18 years of age at the time of completing the survey.
- → They were able to provide informed consent.
- → They had not previously completed the survey.

[6] A number of agencies agreed to participate in the survey but were unable to return useable surveys for analysis.

Agencies were requested to randomly select the required number of clients from all clients accessing their service within the designated data collection period. Participation was not restricted to clients who had just begun their support periods.

The survey was designed to be completed by participants in the presence of a staff member. Where a client had difficulty reading the survey, the staff member was instructed to read out the survey to the participant. Once completed, the survey was sealed in an envelope before being returned to the research team. All participants were compensated for their time and contribution with a $15 gift card at the time of undertaking the survey.

Figure 2: Locations of specialist homelessness services around Australia participating in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*



The number of surveys to be completed at each agency was determined by the size of the agency and the take-up rate among potential respondents. Agencies were asked to self-select into one of the following categories:

- Small-sized agency—5 interviews.
- Medium-sized agency—10 interviews.
- Large-sized agency—20 interviews.

The intended sample size for each agency was largely achieved; a small number of agencies were unable to meet their target sample size. The total number of surveys returned was 647 making the study one of the largest studies of homelessness in Australia and certainly one of the most representative.

Table 1 below shows the number of agencies and the number of clients per agency who participated in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, stratified by Australian state or territory, service model, and primary target group.

The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* was largely representative of the range of service types and primary target groups in the homelessness sector. Based on 2006 Census and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data,

Western Australia and NSW agencies and clients were somewhat over-represented in the survey client sample, while South Australia, Victoria and Queensland were somewhat under-represented.

The results presented in this and subsequent chapters are simple descriptive statistics that will inform subsequent multivariate analyses. For all analyses, we excluded 37 participants because they were less than 18 years of age with a further 24 participants excluded because no age was recorded. This left a group of 586 respondents for further analysis. Not all of the respondents included in the final analysis responded in full to each question, resulting in missing observations in a range of topic areas. Thus, only the valid per cent is reported for all measures.

Table 1: Distribution of specialist homelessness agencies and clients participating in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, by state/territory, service model and primary target group

	Agencies		Clients	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent
State/territory				
New South Wales/ACT	25	35.7	208	32.2
Victoria	14	20.0	105	16.2
Queensland	10	14.3	94	14.5
Western Australia	12	17.2	151	23.4
South Australia	4	5.7	31	4.8
Tasmania	1	1.4	10	1.5
Northern Territory	4	5.7	48	7.4
Total	**70**	**100.0**	**647**	**100.0**
Service model				
Crisis short-term accommodation and support	25	35.7	199	30.7
Medium long-term accommodation and support	26	37.1	224	34.6
Day support	2	2.8	16	2.5
Outreach support	8	11.4	106	16.4
Multiple	6	8.6	69	10.6
Undefined	3	4.3	33	5.2
Total	**70**	**100.0**	**647**	**100.0**
Primary target group				
Young people	19	27.1	154	23.8
Single men only	12	17.1	134	20.7
Families	9	13.0	77	11.9
Women and women with children escaping domestic violence	12	17.1	106	16.4
Cross-target multiple general	15	21.4	143	22.1
Undefined	3	4.3	33	5.1
Total	**70**	**100.0**	**647**	**100.0**

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

2.3 A profile of respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*

Table 2 displays key features of the socio-demographic profile of the sample.

A similar number of men and women completed the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* (52% male). The majority of participants were born in Australia (84%) and around a fifth of respondents (22%) were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. More than one-quarter (27%) of all the women in the sample identified as Indigenous Australians, compared with 17 per cent of the male sample. Hence, findings for women will reflect the Indigenous experience more than will be the case for men—a factor that needs to be accounted for when reading the results. Approximately 17 per cent of the sample indicated that they spoke a language other than English with their family. This largely reflected the inclusion of Indigenous respondents who were from more remote settings.

Those who are homeless have a lower level of educational attainment than the general population. This fact is reflected in the present study too. Around 25 per cent of respondents held a post-school qualification, as compared with 56 per cent of the Australian population aged 15–64.[7] Around 40 per cent of respondents had not completed high school beyond Year 9. The majority of survey respondents had achieved an education level at least to Year 10 level.

[7] See Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) *Education and Work, Australia, May 2010*, Cat. No. 6227.0.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics, by sex

	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Sex	302	51.5	284	48.5	586	100.0
Age						
18–24	78	25.8	103	36.3	181	30.9
25–34	60	19.9	86	30.3	146	24.9
35–44	78	25.8	62	21.8	140	23.9
45–54	53	17.5	24	8.5	77	13.1
55 and over	33	10.9	9	3.2	42	7.2
Total	*302*	*100.0*	*284*	*100.0*	*586*	*100.0*
Country of birth						
Australia	245	81.7	247	87.0	492	84.2
Other country	55	18.3	37	13.0	92	15.8
Total	*300*	*100.0*	*284*	*100.0*	*584*	*100.0*
Indigenous status						
Indigenous	51	16.9	77	27.3	128	22.0
Non-Indigenous	250	83.1	205	72.7	455	78.0
Total	*301*	*100.0*	*282*	*100.0*	*583*	*100.0*
Highest level of education						
Primary school	15	5.0	8	2.8	23	4.0
Some high school	113	37.9	98	34.6	211	36.3
High school Year 10 or higher	95	31.9	108	38.2	203	34.9
Trade certificate/apprenticeship	26	8.7	17	6.0	43	7.4
TAFE qualification	34	11.4	40	14.1	74	12.7
University bachelor degree or higher	15	5.0	12	4.2	27	4.6
Total	*298*	*100.0*	*283*	*100.0*	*581*	*100.0*
Ever married (both legal and de facto)						
Yes	193	64.1	215	76.0	408	69.9
No	108	35.9	68	24.0	176	30.1
Total	*301*	*100.0*	*283*	*100.0*	*584*	*100.0*
Current relationship status						
Single	237	78.7	167	59.2	404	69.3
Have a partner but do not live together	31	10.3	52	18.4	83	14.2
Have a partner and live together	33	11.0	63	22.3	96	16.5
Total	*301*	*100.0*	*282*	*100.0*	*583*	*100.0*

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 3: Labour force status, by sex

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Employed						
Employed for 35 hours or more	15	5.2	19	6.9	34	6.1
Employed less than 35 hours	12	4.2	14	5.1	26	4.6
Employed, but temporarily not working	14	4.9	11	4.0	25	4.5
Total	*41*	*14.3*	*44*	*16.1*	*85*	*15.2*
Unemployed	*146*	*50.9*	*88*	*32.1*	*234*	*41.7*
Not in the labour force						
Studying	14	4.9	31	11.3	45	8.0
Caring for children	4	1.4	63	23.0	67	11.9
Unable to work due to disability	69	24.0	32	11.7	101	18.0
Retired	9	3.1	2	0.7	11	2.0
Other—Unspecified	4	1.4	14	5.1	18	3.2
Total	*100*	*34.8*	*142*	*51.8*	*242*	*43.1*
Total	**287**	**100.0**	**274**	**100.0**	**561**	**100.0**
Unemployment rate	78.1		66.7		73.4	
Labour force participation rate	65.2		48.2		56.9	

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 4: Current main source of income, by sex

	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
No income	5	1.7	2	0.7	7	1.2
Government income support payments						
Registered awaiting benefit	4	1.4	1	0.4	5	0.9
Youth Allowance	37	12.7	23	8.5	60	10.7
ABSTUDY/AUSTUDY payment	7	2.4	6	2.2	13	2.3
Disability Support Pension	82	28.2	48	17.8	130	23.2
Age Pension	7	2.4	2	0.7	9	1.6
Parenting Payment	5	1.7	107	39.6	112	20.0
Newstart Allowance	111	38.1	45	16.7	156	27.8
Other government payment	6	2.1	7	2.6	13	2.3
Total	*259*	*89.0*	*239*	*88.5*	*498*	*88.8*
Paid work	21	7.2	21	7.8	42	7.5
Other source of income	6	2.1	8	3.0	14	2.5
Total	**291**	**100.0**	**270**	**100.0**	**561**	**100.0**

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 5: Accommodation status immediately prior to current support period and at the point of interview, by sex

	Accommodation immediately prior to the support period						Current accommodation					
	Males		Females		Total		Males		Females		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Primary homelessness												
Street, park, cave or in the open	41	15.5	14	5.4	55	10.5	13	6.1	4	1.9	17	4.0
A squat, car, tent or makeshift dwelling	28	10.6	13	5.0	41	7.8	11	5.1	3	1.4	14	3.3
Total	*69*	*26.0*	*27*	*10.4*	*96*	*18.3*	*24*	*11.2*	*7*	*3.4*	*31*	*7.3*
Crisis accommodation service or refuge	38	14.3	32	12.4	70	13.4	81	37.9	88	42.3	169	40.0
Couch surfing	12	4.5	22	8.5	34	6.5	1	0.5	2	1.0	3	0.7
Other marginalised housing												
Hotel, motel or backpackers room	17	6.4	18	6.9	35	6.7	2	0.9	2	1.0	4	0.9
Boarding/rooming house or hostel	30	11.3	37	14.3	67	12.8	54	25.2	15	7.2	69	16.4
Caravan	6	2.3	10	3.9	16	3.1	3	1.4	4	1.9	7	1.7
Living with family	7	2.6	16	6.2	23	4.4	1	0.5	4	1.9	5	1.2
Health or treatment facility	15	5.7	10	3.9	25	4.8	0	0.0	1	0.5	1	0.2
Prison or other detention centre	16	6.0	2	0.8	18	3.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	3	1.1	2	0.8	5	1.0	1	0.5	1	0.5	2	0.5
Total	*94*	*35.5*	*95*	*36.7*	*189*	*36.1*	*61*	*28.5*	*27*	*13.0*	*88*	*20.9*
Own housing												
Public housing	9	3.4	19	7.3	28	5.3	8	3.7	20	9.6	28	6.6
Community housing	5	1.9	11	4.2	16	3.1	24	11.2	28	13.5	52	12.3
Private rental housing	33	12.5	46	17.8	79	15.1	13	6.1	33	15.9	46	10.9
Own home (owned outright or mortgaged)	5	1.9	7	2.7	12	2.3	2	0.9	3	1.4	5	1.2
Total	*52*	*19.6*	*83*	*32.0*	*135*	*25.8*	*47*	*22.0*	*84*	*40.4*	*131*	*31.0*
Total All accommodation types	265	100.0	259	100.0	524	100.0	214	100.0	208	100.0	422	100.0

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

A large proportion of the sample had been married at some point in their lives (70%) and 30 per cent indicated they were currently in a long-term relationship. Among the latter group, just over half (54%) indicated that they were living with their partner at the time of completing the survey. This result almost certainly reflects the role of domestic violence in the lives of clients of homelessness services.

The mean age of participants was 34. The majority of participants were aged less than 45 years. Female respondents were younger than their male counterparts with a mean age of 31 (reflecting in part the greater number of Indigenous women in the sample) compared with a mean age of 37 for men.

Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to elicit information on labour force status and to nominate a main source of income. Their responses are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Of the 561 respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* who provided information in relation to labour force status, 6 per cent were employed full-time, 5 per cent were employed part-time and 5 per cent were employed but temporarily not working. This compares to 10 per cent among all SAAP clients in the 2009/2010 reporting period (AIHW 2011a). Those who stated that they were 'unemployed but looking for work and available to start work last week' represented 42 per cent of survey respondents, while those neither employed nor unemployed (the 'not in the labour force' category) represented 43 per cent of all survey respondents. Of the respondents indicating participation in the labour force, the unemployment rate among men was 78 per cent and for women 67 per cent. Eighteen per cent of all survey respondents indicated that they were 'unable to work due to disability' comprising 42 per cent of the not in the labour force group.

Consistent with the high rate of unemployment among men in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, the Newstart Allowance represented the most important main source of income for males in the study while the Parenting Payment represented the most significant payment for women.

The current accommodation profile of respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* is presented in Table 5. The survey was administered to those receiving support through specialist homelessness services. Many of these services were supported accommodation services for those who would otherwise be homeless. Not surprisingly, crisis accommodation services and women's refuges represented the main form of accommodation at the time of the survey. Approximately 40 per cent of respondents were in this form of accommodation at the time of the survey. A further 7 per cent were without shelter (primary homelessness) and 21 per cent were residing in other forms of non-permanent accommodation such as boarding houses.

Close to one-third of respondents were in permanent accommodation at the time of the survey. While this seems a surprisingly high figure, those in permanent accommodation may be receiving support from specialist homelessness services because they may be at risk of homelessness (and so receiving tenancy support services) or have entered permanent housing with ongoing support from homelessness services.

Immediately prior to the present support period, a greater proportion of respondents were without shelter (26% of men and 10% of women) with a further 13 per cent in supported accommodation, 7 per cent couch surfing and 36 per cent in other forms of non-permanent accommodation.

As evident in Table 6, precipitating factors for accessing homelessness support services include accommodation-based reasons, such as eviction (formal or otherwise

40%) and the ending of emergency accommodation (13%) and financial problems (27% of respondents). This points to the important role of structural factors in entry into homelessness.

Reasons for entry include relationship breakdown (19% of respondents), escaping violence (32% of female respondents), and escaping emotional abuse (27% of female respondents). Mental health problems (16%) and drug and alcohol problems (18%) were prominent reasons for entry, as were recent transitions to the area. Finally, 6 per cent of respondents indicated that they had just left prison or a remand facility, while 9 per cent of respondents indicated that they had just left a health facility.

Figure 3 provides details of whether respondents had ever experienced a serious problem in a particular area over their lifetime. Feeling depressed, anxious or stressed represented the problem most likely to be cited as seriously experienced at some point in the respondent's lifetime. More women (43%) cite this factor as a serious problem than men (33%). High numbers of women and men also reported that 'being lonely', 'being bored', 'losing my temper', 'repeating the same mistakes', 'doing things on the spur of the moment', 'getting on with my family' and 'mixing in bad company' were seen as serious problems at some point.

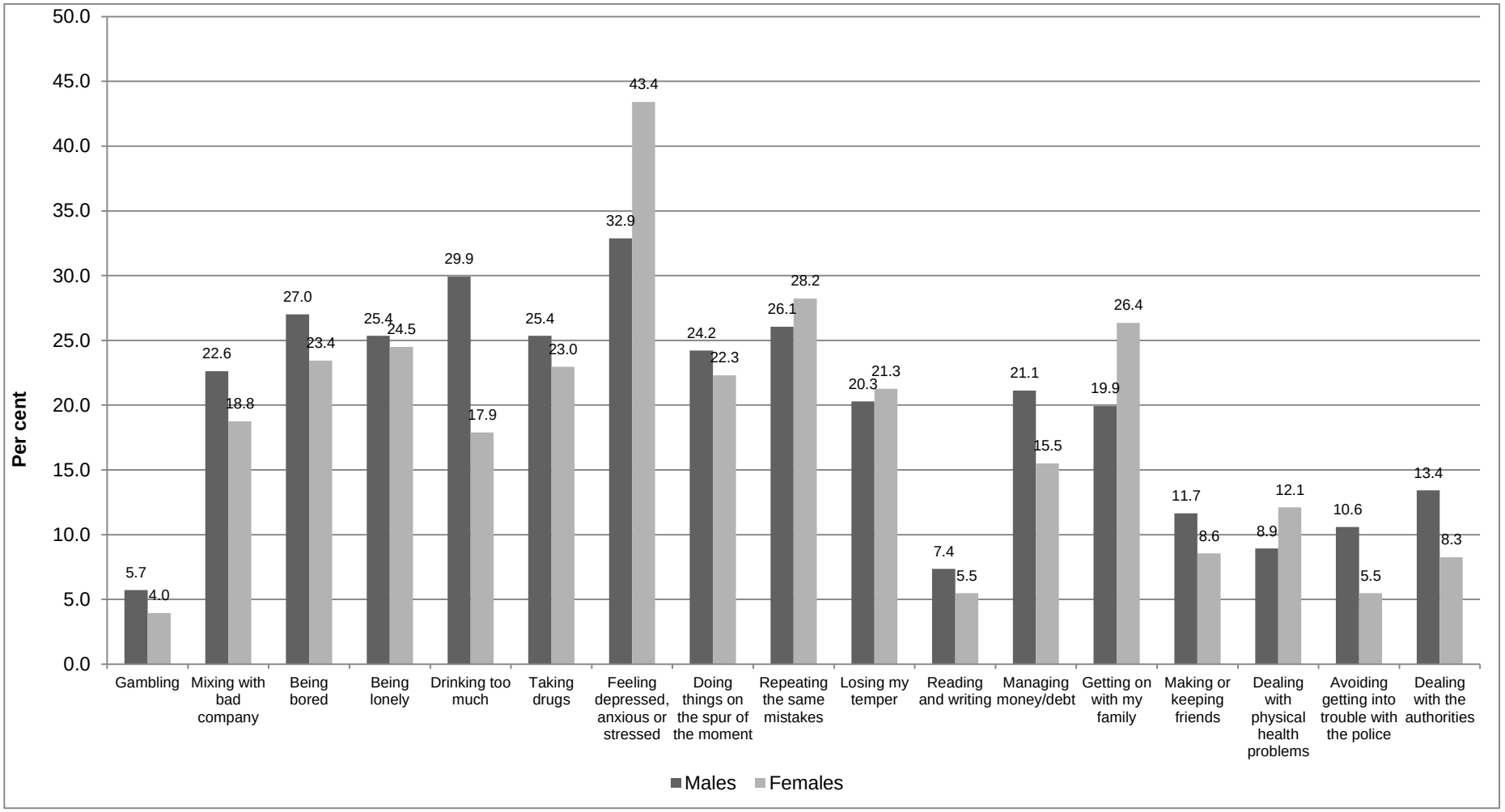
Among men, drinking too much was cited as a serious problem by 30 per cent of respondents compared with 18 per cent of women. In terms of serious drug use, a similar number of women and men reported that they had experienced serious problems in this area. A significant number of men cited money and debt management issues as serious problems, but not so by women. It is noticeable that money issues are less significant (even for men) than the social and personal issues noted above.

Table 6: Main reasons for presentation to specialist homelessness services, by sex

	Males	Females	Total
	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent
I was evicted	12.7	18.3	15.3
I was told to leave my last accommodation	25.4	23.3	24.5
My emergency accommodation period ended	14.8	10.1	12.6
I needed time out from family or a situation with others (but not because of violence or abuse)	12.7	18.3	15.3
My relationship broke down	17.5	20.6	19.0
I needed to escape violence (physical or sexual)	6.6	32.3	18.6
I needed to escape emotional abuse	8.6	27.2	17.3
My child was being abused (physical/sexual/emotional abuse/neglect)	1.0	7.0	3.8
I had recently left state care (including foster care)	1.7	0.4	1.1
I had just left prison or other detention centre	8.2	3.1	5.8
I had just left hospital or other health facility (e.g. general/psychiatric hospital, detox/rehab)	10.3	6.6	8.6
I recently arrived in the area	17.9	12.5	15.3
I was moving around (for work or other reasons)	13.4	9.3	11.5
I was having money problems	25.4	28.4	26.8
I was losing money by gambling	2.7	2.7	2.7
I had mental health problems	14.8	17.5	16.1
I was drinking or using drugs too much	21.0	14.4	17.9
I had trouble with the law/police	9.3	5.1	7.3

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 3: Serious problems experienced over the lifetime, by sex



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 7: Problems experienced over the lifetime and in the last three months

	Ever had a problem (per cent)				Problem in the last three months (per cent)			
	Not a problem	Slight problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem	Not a problem	Slight problem	Moderate problem	Serious problem
Gambling	68.0	18.6	8.5	4.9	86.4	8.9	3.0	1.7
Mixing with bad company	24.1	26.7	28.4	20.8	65.9	19.7	8.9	5.6
Being bored	18.3	25.9	30.5	25.3	35.8	28.5	20.7	15.1
Being lonely	21.4	24.8	28.9	25.0	36.1	27.4	17.5	19.0
Drinking too much	40.7	15.9	19.2	24.2	68.7	13.6	8.6	9.1
Taking drugs	40.9	17.9	17.0	24.2	71.1	15.9	6.5	6.5
Feeling depressed, anxious or stressed	11.9	23.9	26.3	37.9	23.9	28.8	23.0	24.3
Doing things on the spur of the moment	24.4	27.8	24.4	23.3	49.3	27.6	13.2	9.9
Repeating the same mistakes	18.6	31.9	22.4	27.1	50.3	28.0	12.8	8.9
Losing my temper	24.4	29.4	25.4	20.7	49.0	29.2	12.5	9.3
Reading and writing	70.6	11.9	11.1	6.5	75.1	11.4	9.6	3.9
Managing money/debt	23.2	32.7	25.6	18.5	38.3	35.7	15.4	10.6
Getting on with my family	24.3	29.5	23.2	23.0	46.4	24.8	12.3	16.6
Making or keeping friends	41.7	30.0	18.1	10.2	58.1	25.3	10.9	5.8
Dealing with physical health problems	45.3	26.3	17.9	10.4	57.8	20.6	12.6	9.0
Avoiding getting into trouble with the police	53.3	27.0	11.5	8.2	81.7	11.8	3.7	2.8
Dealing with the authorities	53.8	22.7	12.5	11.0	80.2	10.8	3.9	5.0

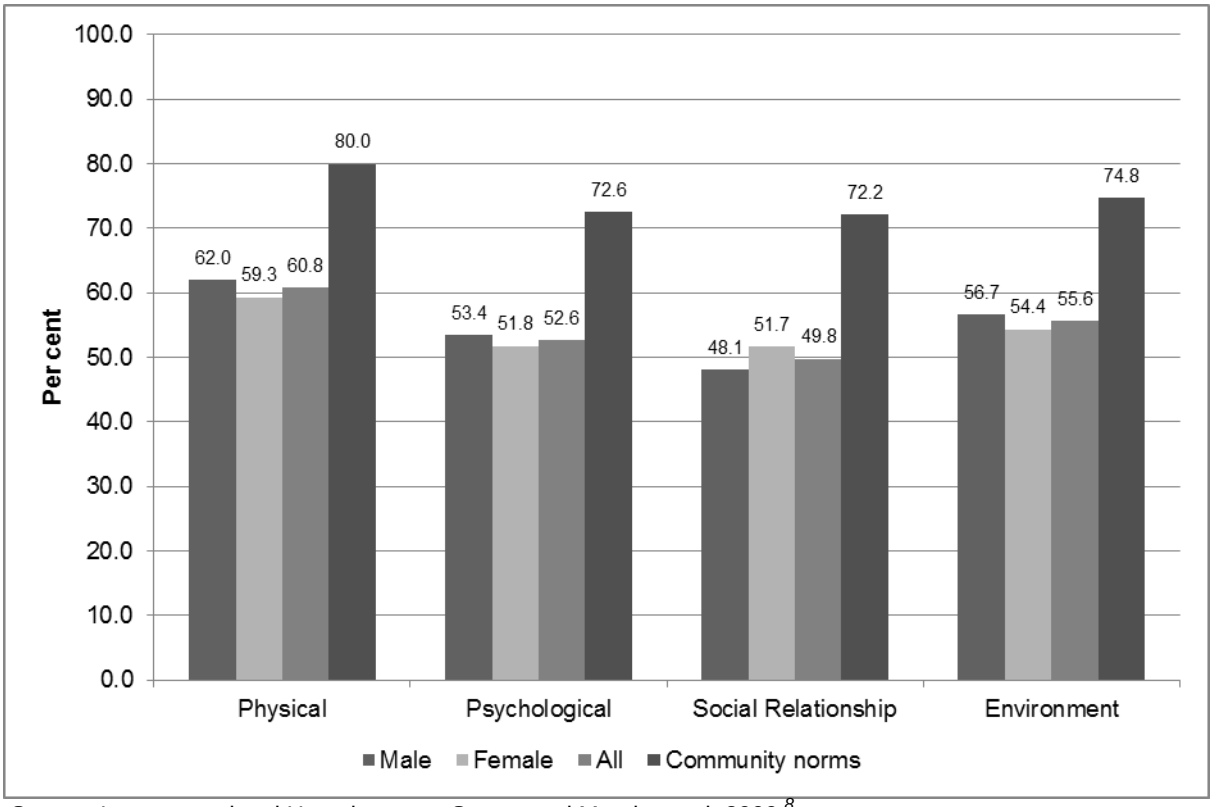
Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Our profile of respondents concludes with an overview of quality of life outcomes among respondents. To measure quality of life outcomes we use the World Health Organisation Quality of Life BREF (WHOQOL-BREF) instrument. The WHOQOL-BREF measures quality of life across four domains. These are:

- Physical—pain and discomfort, dependence on medical treatment, energy and fatigue, mobility, sleep and rest, activities of daily living, and work capacity.
- Psychological—positive thinking, spirituality, thinking learning memory and concentration, body image and appearance, self-esteem, and negative effect.
- Social relationships—personal relationships, sexual activity, and social support.
- Environment—physical safety and security, physical environment, financial resources, opportunities for acquiring new information and skills, participation in and opportunities for recreation/leisure activities, home environment, health and social care: accessibility and quality, and transportation.

As evident in Figure 4, respondents had quality of life outcomes that were substantially lower than the community as a whole. There is little difference in outcomes between men and women and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents across the four dimensions. Notice that the dimensions of quality of life that exhibit the poorest outcomes are those connected to social relationships and psychological factors and not the environment or physical dimensions.

Figure 4: Quality of life outcomes, World Health Organisation Quality of Life BREF Survey, by sex



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey and Murphy et al. 2000.[8]

[8] The Australian norm results are drawn from a Victorian-based study of 'randomly selected community members weighted by socioeconomic status to achieve representativeness of the Australian population (n=396)' (Murphy et al. (2000, p. 24).

3 LIFETIME AND INTERGENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

This chapter presents the key findings from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* with respect to the lifetime experiences of homelessness and the prevalence and form of intergenerational homelessness. It also presents evidence on the role of parental forces in potentially influencing future homelessness among offspring and the individual-level 'risk' factors associated with intergenerational homelessness.

3.1 Lifetime experiences of homelessness

To gather information on the lifetime experiences of homelessness, respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* were asked a series of questions about whether they experienced homelessness and if so what specific form of homelessness they experienced. They were further asked to detail the number of times they experienced homelessness across different age categories (the frequency of episodes of homelessness) and the cumulative time spent in these various forms of homelessness in different age categories. As noted previously, as a recall-based study, lifetime experiences of homelessness may be measured with error, particularly with respect to early childhood experiences of homelessness.

As discussed previously, homelessness was defined broadly in the survey comprising the following five states: (1) living on the streets with no alternative accommodation; (2) 'couch surfing' with no alternative accommodation; (3) hotel or motel accommodation with no alternative accommodation; (4) crisis and emergency accommodation; and (5) boarding or rooming house accommodation. The joint reading of homelessness as a specific accommodation position *and* a constrained ability to find an alternative form of accommodation (i.e., one is in the state because of an inability to find alternative accommodation) means that the definition of homelessness used is narrower than that which may be adopted where it is simply the accommodation position.

The specific *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* questions used to classify experiences of particular forms of homelessness are set out below:

- Have you ever slept on the street, in the open, in a car, a cave, or in some makeshift dwelling or derelict house because you didn't have anywhere else to live?
- Have you ever had to stay with friends or family because you didn't have anywhere else to live? (couch surfing)?
- Have you ever stayed in a hotel or motel because you had nowhere else to live?
- Have you ever stayed in a crisis or temporary accommodation service (e.g. if you were homeless or couldn't stay in your usual accommodation or you had to leave home because of violence)?
- Have you ever stayed in a boarding or rooming house/hostel (i.e. own bedroom but shared kitchen and bathroom)?

Figure 5 presents a profile of lifetime experiences of various forms of homelessness drawn from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*.

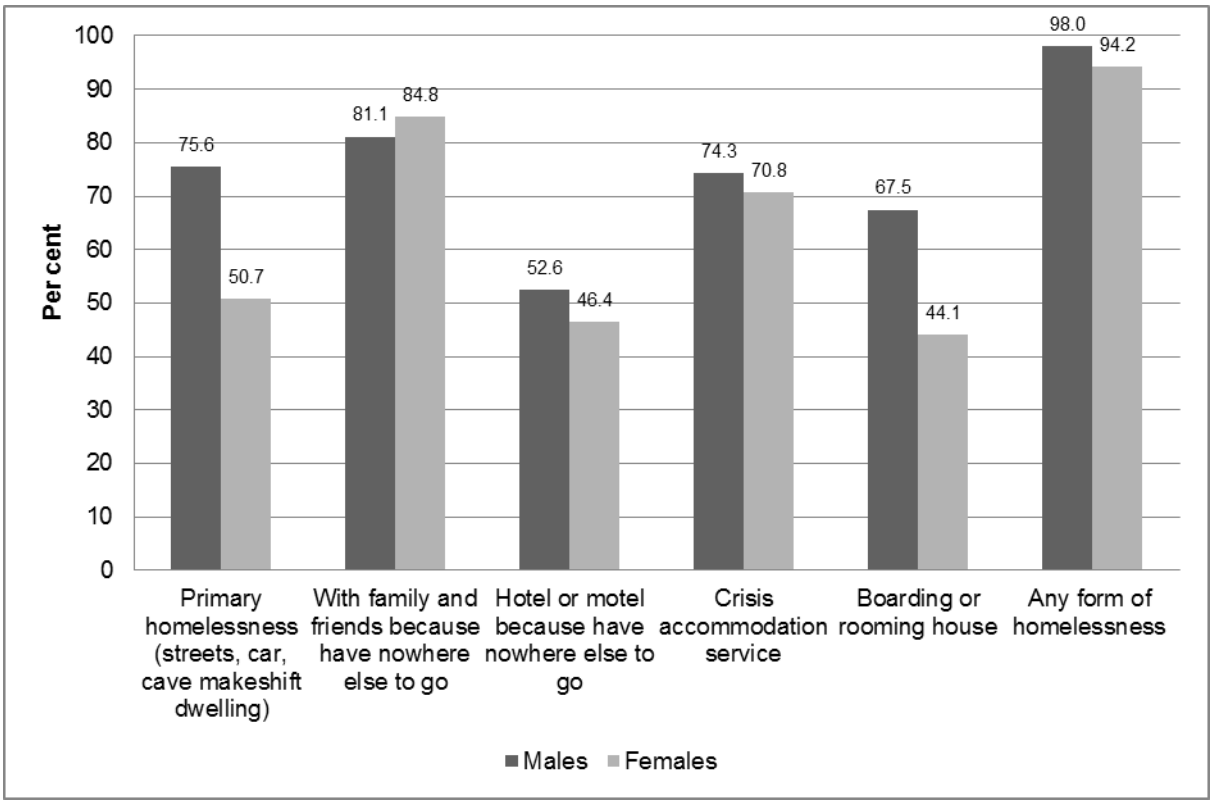
As one would expect, almost all respondents had experienced one or more of the above forms of homelessness at some point in their lives (98% and 94% for males and females, respectively). For the purposes of our analysis of intergenerational homelessness, we took all those respondents who indicated that they had

experienced some form of homelessness in their lifetime as having experienced homelessness in their own right.

Couch surfing (staying with friends or family because of nowhere else to live) was the most prevalent form of homelessness identified. Over 80 per cent of respondents reported at least one episode of couch surfing. Little difference was evident between men and women in the survey in respect of the lifetime experience of couch surfing.

The same is not the case with respect to other forms of homelessness where significant gender differences in experiences of homelessness are evident. Three quarters of men but only half of the women in the survey had experienced primary homelessness at some point in their lives. Similar disparities are evident with respect to boarding and rooming house accommodation: 68 per cent of men report having lived in boarding and rooming houses as compared with 44 per cent of women.

Figure 5: Lifetime experience of homelessness, by sex



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

A second key research question of the present study is the timing of first experiences of homelessness and the extent to which current clients of homelessness services experienced homelessness as children and as adolescents. For this and all remaining analyses in the study, we excluded cases where there was missing data on all relevant homelessness history questions and those respondents who stated that they never experienced homelessness. This left a sample size of n=555.

Table 8 provides evidence on the age of first onset for each of the different forms of homelessness. The evidence presented points to the critical importance of preventative policies directed at children and young people to reduce the risk of subsequent homelessness in later teenage years and in adulthood. Over three quarters of male respondents had experienced an episode of primary homelessness by the time of the survey interview and, of these; a majority report an episode prior to the age of 18. While the overall proportion of women ever experiencing primary

homelessness over their lifetime was lower than for men, early onset of primary homelessness was also the norm for women.

In the case of male respondents, 16 per cent of men experienced primary homelessness prior to the age of 12, while for women 15 per cent did so prior to the age of 12. A further 26 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women experienced primary homelessness as teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17. While women are less likely to experience primary homelessness than men are overall, their first experience of it is likely to occur at a younger age. This largely reflects the higher relative representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the sample.

Table 8: Age first experienced a specific type of homelessness, by sex

	Male		Female		All	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Primary homelessness (streets, car, cave makeshift dwelling)						
Never experienced	72	32.7	138	57.5	210	45.7
Experienced first under the age of 12	35	15.9	35	14.6	70	15.2
Experienced first between 12 and 17	57	25.9	43	17.9	100	21.7
Experienced first aged 18 or over	56	25.5	24	10.0	80	17.4
Total	*220*	*100.0*	*240*	*100.0*	*460*	*100.0*
With family and friends because have nowhere else to go						
Never experienced	56	26.4	42	19.8	98	23.1
Experienced first under the age of 12	49	23.1	69	32.5	118	27.8
Experienced first between 12 and 17	46	21.7	60	28.3	106	25.0
Experienced first aged 18 or over	61	28.8	41	19.3	102	24.1
Total	*212*	*100.0*	*212*	*100.0*	*424*	*100.0*
Hotel or motel because have nowhere else to go						
Never experienced	138	59.7	150	61.5	288	60.6
Experienced first under the age of 12	9	3.9	10	4.1	19	4.0
Experienced first between 12 and 17	11	4.8	27	11.1	38	8.0
Experienced first aged 18 or over	73	31.6	57	23.4	130	27.4
Total	*231*	*100.0*	*244*	*100.0*	*475*	*100.0*
Crisis accommodation service						
Never experienced	76	34.4	81	36.8	157	35.6
Experienced first under the age of 12	23	10.4	31	14.1	54	12.2
Experienced first between 12 and 17	37	16.7	32	14.5	69	15.6
Experienced first aged 18 or over	85	38.5	76	34.5	161	36.5
Total	*221*	*100.0*	*220*	*100.0*	*441*	*100.0*
Boarding or rooming house						
Never experienced	96	43.6	152	63.9	248	54.1
Experienced first under the age of 12	15	6.8	15	6.3	30	6.6
Experienced first between 12 and 17	26	11.8	31	13.0	57	12.4
Experienced first aged 18 or over	83	37.7	40	16.8	123	26.9
Total	*220*	*100.0*	*238*	*100.0*	*458*	*100.0*

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Overall, 37 per cent of all respondents experienced their first episode of primary homelessness prior to the age of 18. This focuses attention on policies directed at programs specifically for children. It is likely that the estimates of homelessness under the age of 12 may represent an under-report of the true figure, given limited recall capabilities from very early childhood. Additionally, younger children might not also have perceived themselves as homeless, especially if parents did not describe it to them as such (e.g., by saying they were staying at a friend's place for a visit).

Figures 6 to 10 present estimates of the cumulative duration of homelessness and of the frequency of those episodes for different forms of homelessness for both early childhood and adolescence (under 12 and 12–17 respectively). The percentages reported for cumulative duration and frequency relate only to respondents having experienced the particular form of homelessness in question.

Of those who experienced an episode of primary homelessness prior to the age of 12, 42 per cent experienced less than one month of primary homelessness in total up to the age of 12, and a further 25 per cent experienced homelessness for less than one year. Hence, the majority of those who do recall an experience of early childhood homelessness only remember a relatively short cumulative period of homelessness. However, one-third of respondents reported that they experienced primary homelessness for one year or more as children under the age of 12.

The vast majority of those who became homeless prior to the age of 12 (84%) experienced more than one episode of homelessness. Only 16 per cent of respondents experienced a single episode of primary homelessness. Multiple episodes of homelessness were the norm across all categories of homelessness.

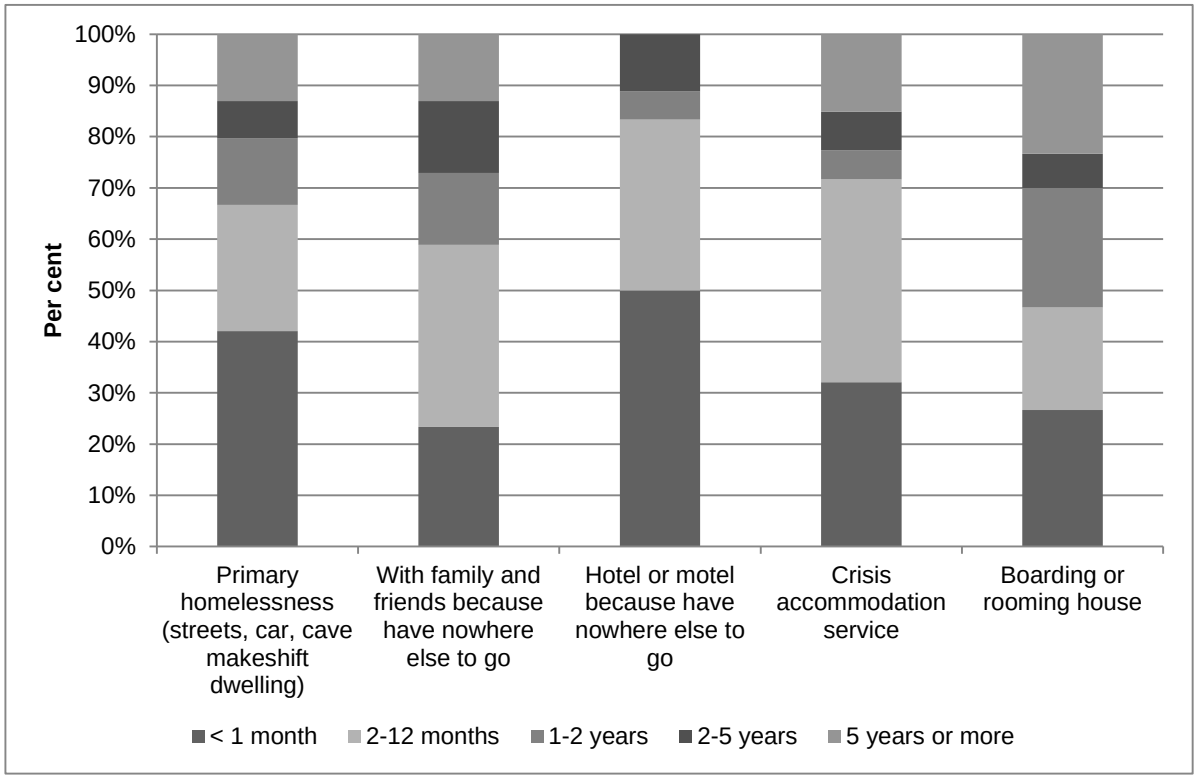
The patterns of cumulative time spent in primary homelessness and recurrence of homelessness in adolescence (12–17), are similar to that of the under 12 profile; the majority of those who are primary homeless as adolescents are homeless in this form for relatively short periods. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents who had experienced primary homelessness during adolescence spent one month or less in primary homelessness in total during adolescence; a further 36 per cent spent less than a year in primary homelessness during adolescence. The vast majority of respondents who experienced primary homelessness during adolescence experienced more than one episode of this form of homelessness (90%).

During childhood and adolescence, the most common state of homelessness experienced was couch surfing, that is , staying with family or friends because you had nowhere else to go. Overall, 53 per cent of respondents had stayed with family and friends at some point prior to the age of 18 because they had nowhere else to go. The prevalence of couch surfing during childhood is higher for women than for men. Sixty-two per cent of women reported that they had stayed with family and friends because they had nowhere else to live prior to the age of 18 compared with 45 per cent of men. As in the case of primary homelessness, the majority of respondents who couch surfed during adolescence experienced relatively short episodes of couch surfing. However, a somewhat greater proportion spent a longer cumulative time couch surfing as compared with the case of primary homelessness. For example, 39 per cent of respondents who stayed with family and friends during adolescence did so for more than a year in total.

The next most common form of homelessness during childhood and adolescence is staying in crisis and emergency accommodation with 28.7 per cent of respondents experiencing a period of homelessness in this form prior to the age of 18. There are no real differences in the proportion of women experiencing this form of homelessness as compared with men. Again, the most common experience is several

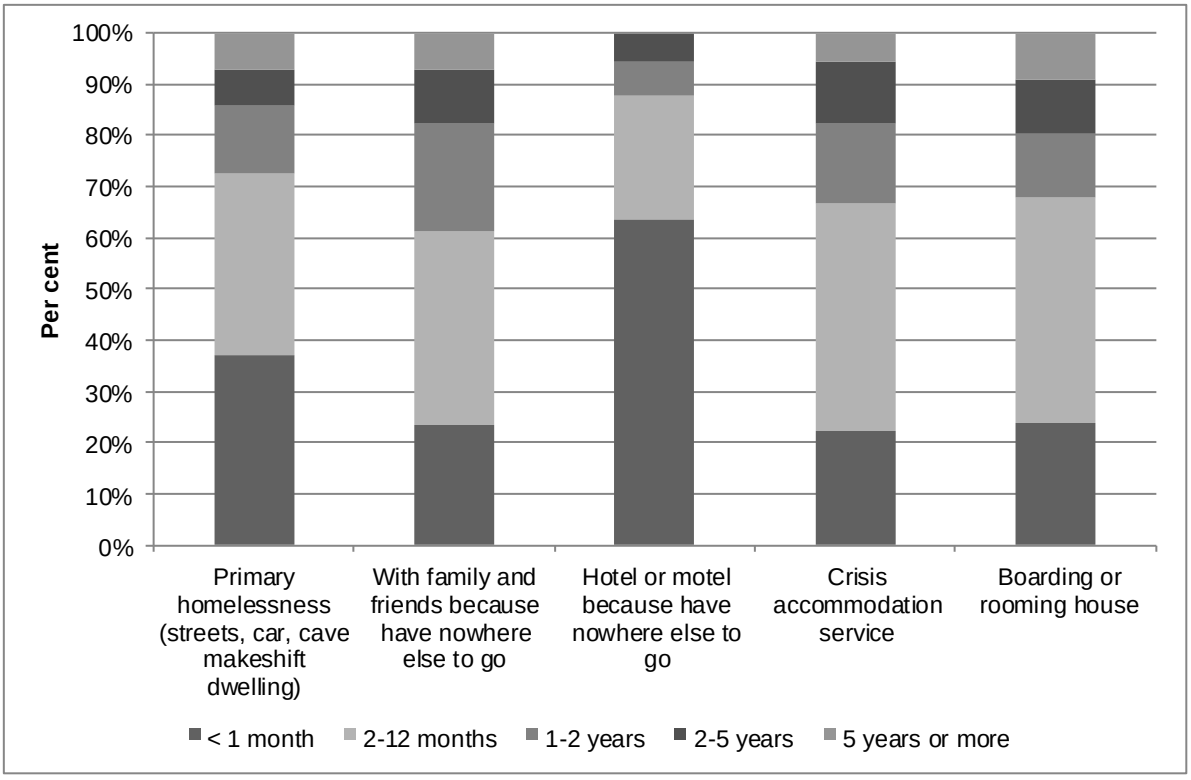
stays in crisis accommodation and a relatively low cumulative time spent in crisis accommodation.

Figure 6: Cumulative duration of homelessness during childhood (before age 12) for those who experienced homelessness as children



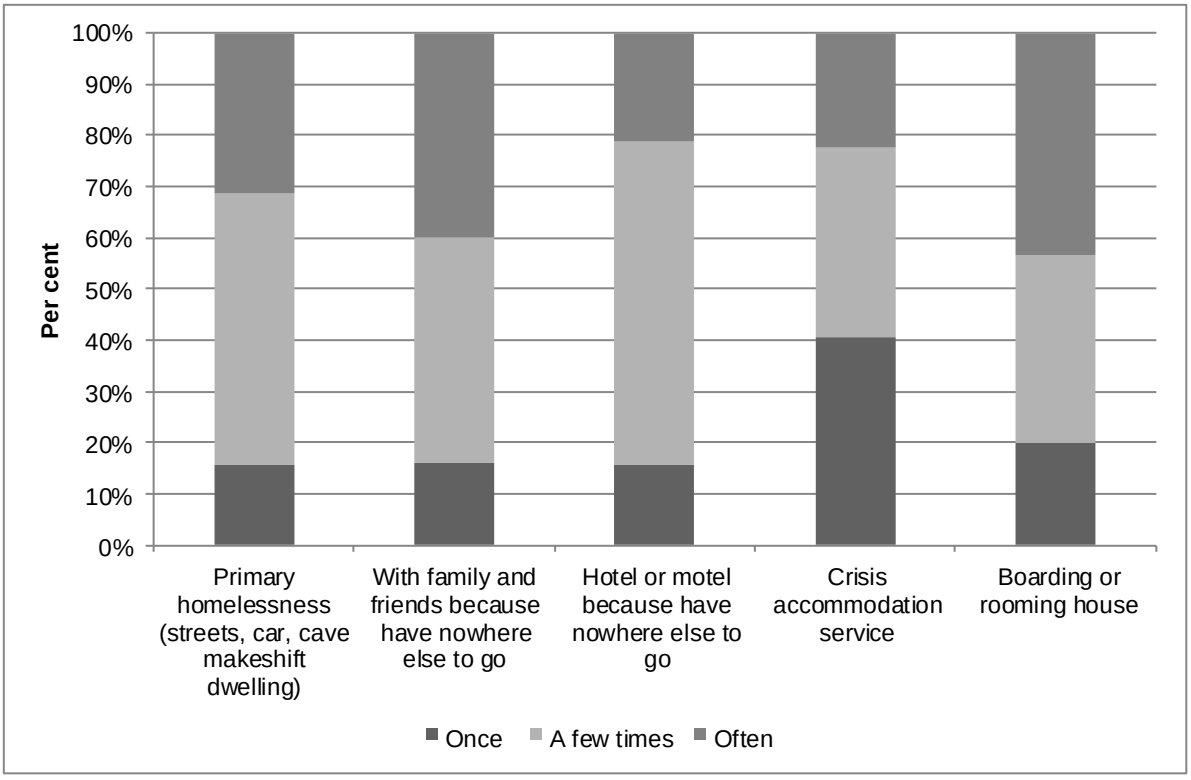
Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 7: Cumulative duration of homelessness during teenage years (12–17) for those who experienced homelessness as teenagers



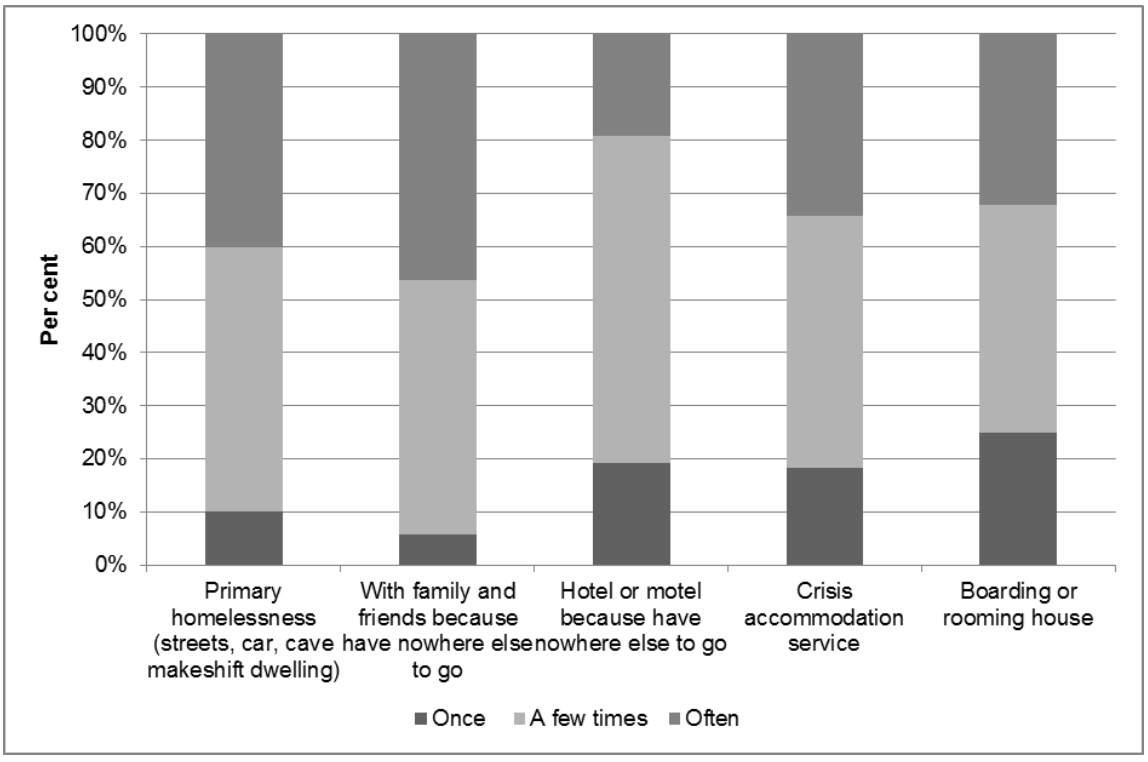
Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 8: Frequency of spells of homelessness during childhood (before age 12) for those who experienced homeless as children



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 9: Frequency of spells of homelessness during teenage Years (12–17) for those who experienced homelessness as teenagers



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Boarding and rooming house related homelessness and emergency use of hotel and motels is relatively low in childhood and adolescence. Patterns of time spent and episodes of homelessness in this form of homelessness are similar to other forms of homelessness. The only exception is that aggregate time spent in hotels and motels, which, not unexpectedly, is much lower than for other forms of homelessness.

In summary, the most common experienced form of homelessness was that with family and friends (couch surfing). Males were more likely than females to have first experienced homelessness in a boarding/rooming house or hotel/motel as an adult.

3.2 Intergenerational homelessness

As discussed in previous chapters, intergenerational homelessness occurs when homelessness is repeated across generations of the same family. The *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* was designed to elicit information from the respondents to determine the homelessness history of both the respondent and their parent(s). For intergenerational homelessness to be estimated accurately, the lifetime homelessness status of both the preceding and present generation needs to be known.

Incomplete information on intergenerational homelessness from the survey may occur for several reasons. These are:

- Respondents do not have full information on their own lifetime experiences of homelessness.
- Respondents do not have full information concerning their parent(s) homelessness.
- Respondents do not have birth mothers or fathers or other figures that they identify as their mother or father and so cannot refer to a parental experience of homelessness.

In terms of the first issue, we assume that if a respondent indicated that they had not experienced homelessness through their lifetime, then there was no such homelessness experienced in their history. Similarly, we assume that all remaining respondents have had a spell of homelessness in their own right at some point in their lives. It is important to recall that while all respondents are current clients of specialist homelessness services this does not mean that they are currently homeless.

In terms of the second issue, information on the homelessness background of respondents is based on self-report information from participants about their parents. As such, it is likely that parental homelessness was measured with some level of error based on the absence of relevant information. It would be natural to assume that the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness is likely to be underestimated as a consequence.

Finally, it is important to understand the parental/carer identification of each respondent to determine what an analysis of intergenerational homelessness means for the cohort in question. If respondents do not identify anyone as a ‘mother’ or a ‘father’ then it is not possible, in a study based on respondents own knowledge and perceptions of parental background, to determine whether intergenerational homelessness exists for the individual. Data pertinent to this assumption is presented in Table 9 below.

The mapping of respondent parental status is drawn from the following survey questions contained in Box 1 below.

Box 1: Questions on mother and father identity in the Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

The next few questions ask about your female caregivers. By caregiver, we mean someone whose primary role it was to look after you, such as a biological or adoptive mother, step-mum, foster mum, or grandmother.

27. How many different female caregivers did you have when you were growing up?

Please write the number of female caregivers: ___

28. Is the person you think of as your mother, your birth mother, an adoptive mother, a step-mother or someone else?

Please tick one box only

- ❑ Birth mother
- ❑ Adoptive mother
- ❑ Step-mother
- ❑ Foster mother
- ❑ Someone else (please specify: _____)
- ❑ I didn't have anyone growing up whom I would consider as my 'mother' ⇨ *go to Question 34*

The next few questions ask about your male caregivers. By caregiver, we mean someone whose primary role it was to look after you, such as a biological or adoptive father, step-dad, foster dad, or grandfather.

34. How many different male caregivers did you have when you were growing up?

Please write the number of male caregivers: _____

35. Is the person you think of as your father, your birth father, an adoptive father, a step-father or someone else?

Please tick one box only

- ❑ Birth father
- ❑ Adoptive father
- ❑ Step-father
- ❑ Foster father
- ❑ Someone else (please specify: _____)
- ❑ I didn't have anyone growing up whom I would consider as my 'father' ⇨ *go to Question 41*

As set out in Table 9, two-thirds of respondents identified both a birth mother and a birth father as their 'mother' and 'father', respectively. A further 13 per cent of respondents identified a birth mother and a non-birth father (either an adoptive father, a step-father, a foster father or another father-figure) and 4 per cent identified a birth mother only. Around 4 per cent of respondents had a birth father and a non-birth mother while 2 per cent identified a birth father only.

Table 9: Family background of respondents

	No.	Per cent
Birth mother *and* birth father	343	66.2
Birth mother *and* step-father	52	10.0
Birth mother *and* adoptive father/foster father/someone else as father	14	2.7
Birth mother *and* no one identified as a father	23	4.4
Birth father *and* step-mother/adoptive mother/foster mother/someone else as mother	18	3.5
Birth father *and* no one identified as a mother	9	1.7
Adoptive mother/step mother/foster mother/other identified as a mother *and* adoptive father/step-father/foster father/other identified as a father	37	7.1
Adoptive mother/step-mother/foster mother/other identified as a mother *and* no one identified as a father	7	1.4
No one identified as a mother *and* adoptive father/step-father/foster father/other identified as a father	4	0.8
No one identified as a mother *and* no one identified as a father	11	2.1
Total	**518**	**100.0**

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

The proportion of respondents who identified both a non-birth mother and a non-birth father was approximately 7 per cent of respondents. A small proportion of respondents (2%) had no identified mother or father figure. This means that for the vast majority of respondents it is possible to obtain measures of intergenerational homelessness and known parental histories. All remaining questions in the survey in relation to parents were based on whom the respondent identified as their mother and whom they identified as their father. The small number of respondents who reported not having identified mothers or fathers have been excluded from the analysis.

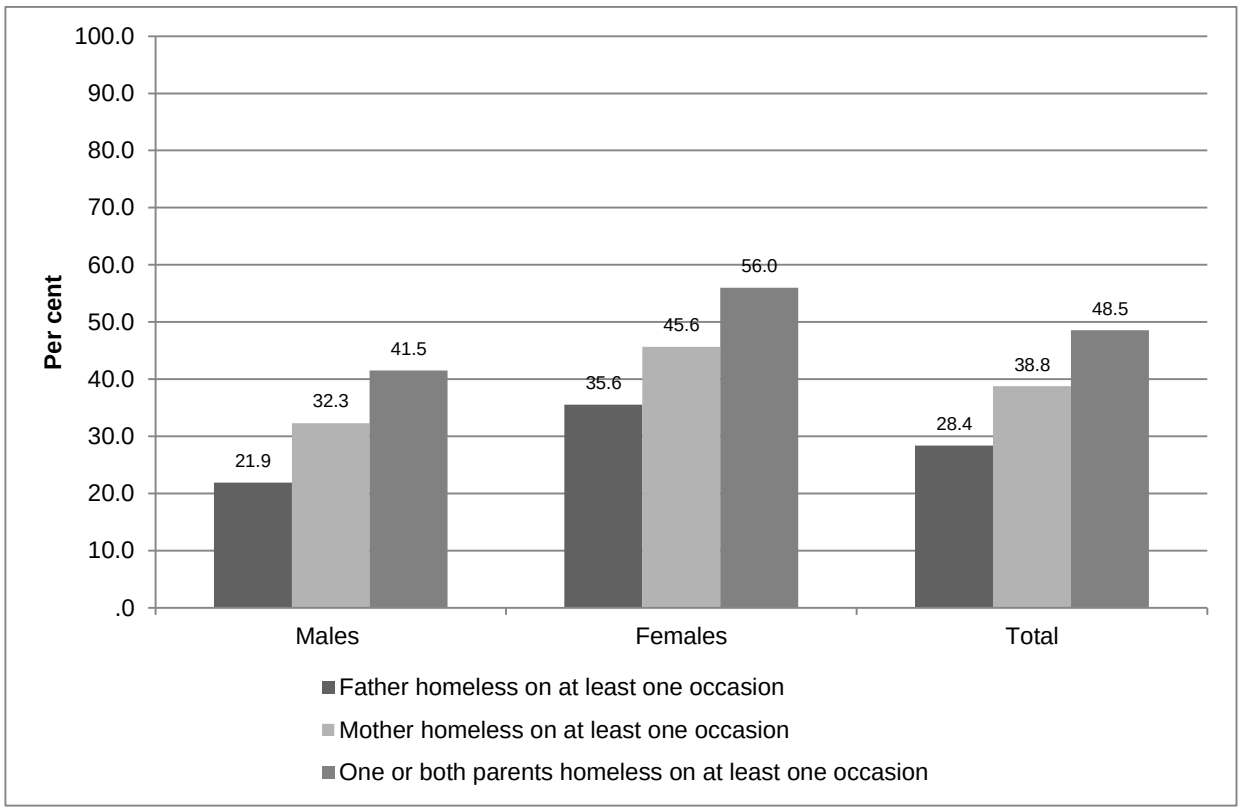
Figure 10 presents findings on the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness among survey respondents. As noted previously, the definition of homelessness adopted in this analysis is a wide one, taking into account all forms of homelessness examined above; namely, primary homelessness, couch surfing, emergency hotel and motel accommodation, crisis and emergency supported accommodation and boarding and rooming house accommodation.

Across both male and female respondents who have experienced an episode of homelessness, 48.5 per cent of respondents report that they were aware that one or both parents were also homeless at some point over their lifetime. This we take as the intergenerational homelessness rate for the cohort of adults receiving support from specialist homelessness services at a given point in time who had experienced themselves homeless at one point or another.

A higher proportion of respondents reported that their mother was homeless at some time in her life as compared with the proportion of respondents who said that their father had been homeless. This may reflect a higher proportion of cases where a mother was known to the respondent as compared with a father, a higher rate of homelessness among mothers as compared with fathers, or it could reflect the fact that respondents knew more about their mother's life than their father's life, perhaps in turn resulting from a father's absence. If in fact at least some respondents did not

have contact with one of their parents throughout even a portion of their childhood, it would underline the conjecture that the measured rate of intergenerational homelessness, using a recall approach, will be below the true rate.

Figure 10: Prevalence of intergenerational homelessness, by sex



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

The rate of intergenerational homelessness among male respondents is lower than for female respondents. One possible driver of this differential is the higher rate of intergenerational homelessness among Indigenous Australians as compared with non-Indigenous Australian respondents and the over-representation of Indigenous women in the sample. These results are discussed in Chapter 4 below. It is also possible that male respondents have less awareness of the histories of their parents than their female counterparts do.

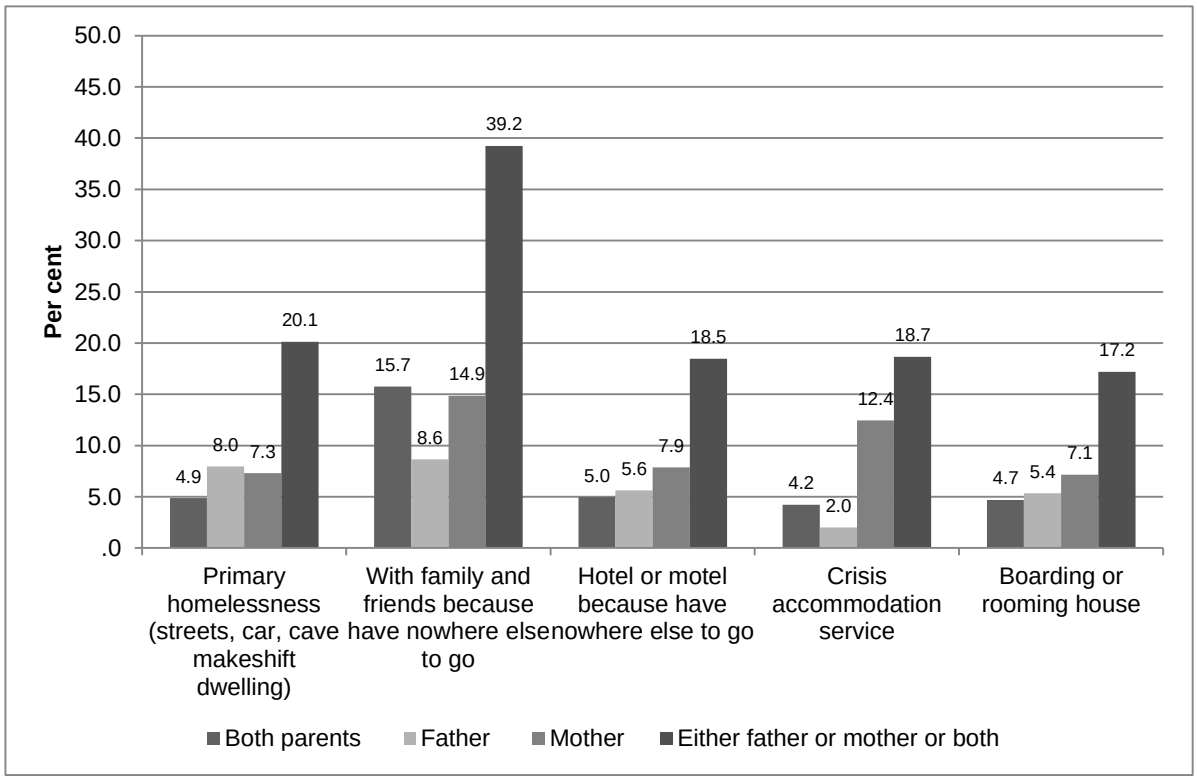
Figure 11 presents a profile of the homelessness states occupied by parents as known by respondents. As known to respondents, the main form of homelessness occupied by parents is couch surfing with family or friends. The incidence of other forms of homelessness among parents was well below this.

To gain insights into the experience of homelessness with parents (family homelessness), participants were asked whether a parent or caregiver accompanied them on any occasion they experienced homelessness. As noted previously, family homelessness may be associated with social learning of homelessness and may act as an independent homelessness channel.

Figure 12 presents the relevant findings on family homelessness. Participants were more likely to experience homelessness during childhood or adolescence without their parents than with them, but a relatively high proportion of respondents report being homeless with one or more of their parents during childhood and adolescence. When they were with their parents experiencing homelessness as children or adolescents

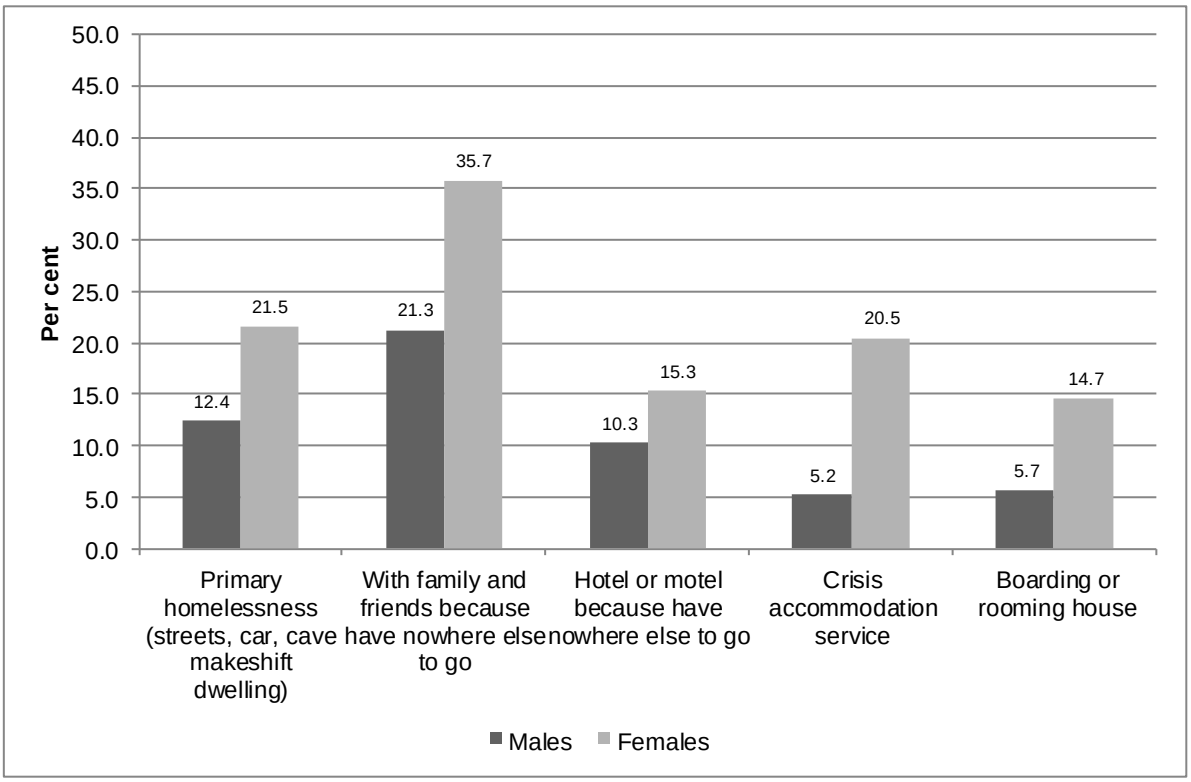
they were most likely to be staying with family or friends because they had nowhere else to go than any other form of homelessness.

Figure 11: Types of homelessness experienced by parents, by parental status



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 12: Experiences of homelessness with parents, by sex



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

As in the case of intergenerational homelessness, female respondents report a higher rate of experiencing homelessness with parents than male respondents. This is particularly the case for staying in crisis or emergency accommodation with their parents. As noted previously, a possible reason for this is the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in the sample. Higher rates of family-based homelessness reported by female respondents may also reflect greater awareness of family homelessness among women compared to men. It is also possible that men who are homeless as adults may leave home earlier and so are less likely to experience homelessness with their family. In the case of crisis accommodation, male adolescents are less likely (or not allowed) to stay with mothers in women's refuges in their teenage years.

3.3 The role of individual risk factors: early life experiences and parental backgrounds

We now turn to an examination of the role of individual homelessness risk factors in the early lives of our respondents.

Our study focuses on a narrow set of individual homelessness risk factors around inter-parental conflict and violence in the home, parental problematic drug and alcohol use, and parental mental health issues. In focusing on a specific set of individual risk factors, we are not suggesting that these are the only risk factors that are of potential significance in influencing future homelessness or denying the role of a range of individual protective factors that act to reduce entry into homelessness or increase the resilience of those who become or are homeless. Finally, we do not wish, to deny the critical role of structural determinants of homelessness, including the failure of the housing market to provide sufficient affordable housing or the labour market to provide accessible jobs.

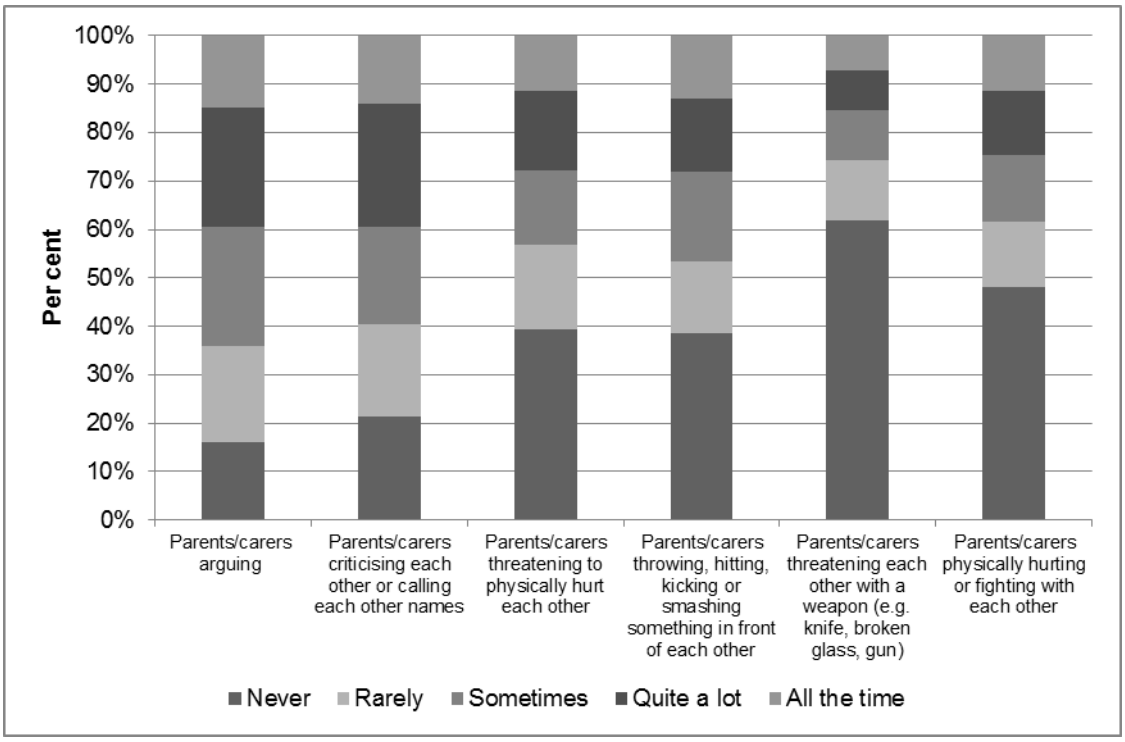
Figure 8 presents a profile of parental and caregiver conflict in the family home. Conflict can vary in terms of severity and frequency. Arguing is the least severe form of conflict while parents physically attacking one another represents the most severe form of conflict. Respondents report conflict between parents or caregivers across a continuum ranging from 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Sometimes', 'Quite a lot' and 'All the time'. For simplicity, the term inter-parental conflict is used here to refer to all forms of verbal and physical aggression between caregivers, including both biological parents and non-biological parental figures such as step-parents.

Overall, 87 per cent of participants reported inter-parental conflict when they were growing up. Focusing on physical aggression, between 40 and 60 per cent of all respondents did not experience such conflict between their parents. In other words, in around half of all cases, respondents were not brought up in homes where physical aggression was evident between their caregivers. Physical aggression was endemic in around 10 per cent of households and was often evident in a further 15 per cent of households.

Although there are no published data on childhood exposure to inter-parental conflict specifically among homeless populations, one Australian study examining the issue in other marginalised populations reported rates of 72 per cent and 76 per cent among an opioid dependent sample and a similarly disadvantaged comparison group matched on sex, age and employment status (Conroy et al. 2009).

Table 10 shows the proportion of participants who recalled that police attended their home because of inter-parental conflict. Over half of respondents (58.8%) reported police intervention due to inter-parental conflict. Around 20 per cent of respondents reported that police came to their home six or more times because of inter-parental conflict. This is consistent with the level of physical aggression between caregivers reported in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Inter-parental conflict



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 10 also shows the proportion of respondents who ever had to leave home because of violence between their parents. Consistent with the fact that around half of all respondents reported that they did not experience physical violence in the home when growing up, about half reported not ever having to leave home (even for a few hours) because of violence in the home. Of the remainder, a substantial proportion fled their home on numerous occasions, including 22 per cent of respondents who left home more than five times.

Table 10: Inter-parental conflict and its consequences

	Never	Once	2–5 times	6–10 times	More than 10 times
As far as you are aware….	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*
Did the police ever come to your home because of violence (either verbal or physical) between your parents/carers?	58.8	9.8	12.4	5.5	13.5
Did you ever have to leave home (even if just for a few hours) because of violence between your parents/carers?	50.8	9.3	17.5	6.7	15.6

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

In some situations, childhood exposure to inter-parental conflict can be considered a proximal risk factor for homelessness. For example, family conflict has been identified as a key driver of homelessness among young people (Mallett et al. 2005). Inter-parental conflict might also be distally related to homelessness. Witnessing domestic violence is associated with an increased risk for psychosocial problems, such as mental illness and relationship difficulties, and these in turn have been found to be associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing homelessness (Craig & Hodson 1998; Martijn & Sharpe 2006). In a longitudinal study of a New Zealand birth cohort, Fergusson and Horwood (1998) found inter-parental conflict was directly associated with certain adjustment problems in young adulthood, such as alcohol abuse/dependence and property offending.

Alternatively, inter-parental conflict might be a marker of social and economic disadvantage, of which homelessness is a part. In the Fergusson and Horwood (1998) study, some adjustment problems—such as drug abuse and violent crime—were no longer significantly associated with inter-parental conflict when other familial adversities (including parental substance use, parental criminal behaviour, and economic disadvantage) were included as covariates.

In the present study, inter-parental conflict was more prevalent among those with a history of intergenerational homelessness (95%) compared to those without a history of intergenerational homelessness (79%). Moreover, childhood exposure to the physical aggression indices (e.g. parents/carers physical hurting or fighting with each other) was much lower for those without a history of intergenerational homelessness (68–82%) when compared with those with a history of intergenerational homelessness (28–42%). This difference was also reflected in the proportion of participants who reported police intervention because of inter-parental conflict: 62.3 per cent and 21.7 per cent among those with and without intergenerational homelessness, respectively. These data suggest that although childhood exposure to inter-parental conflict is a common experience of homeless adults, more severe inter-parental conflict is associated with the experience of intergenerational homelessness.

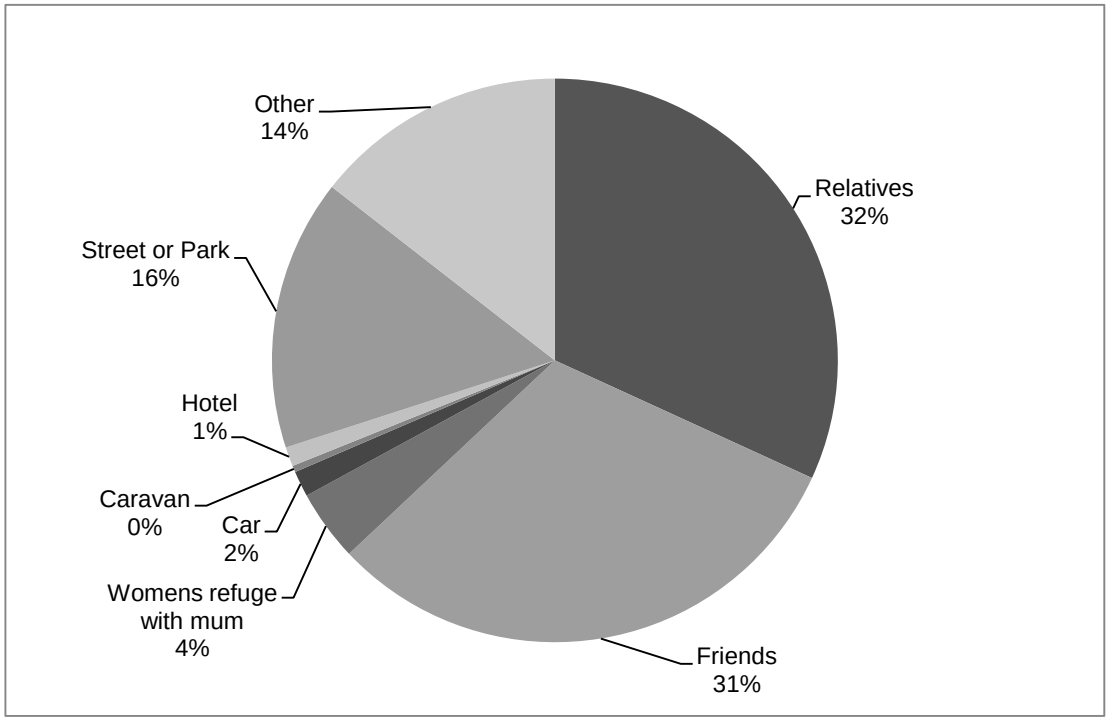
The most direct pathway between inter-parental conflict and homelessness is the situation of a child accompanying a parent fleeing domestic violence.

In Figure 14, we present information on the place where respondents reported going on the first occasion they left home due to parental conflict—what we call the 'first occasion destination'. Only a small minority of respondents reported that their first destination was a women's refuge with mum. As is evident from the figure, the first occasion destination is typically an informal one through friends and relatives (62% of respondents). Sixteen per cent of respondents reported that they lived on the streets (as children or as adolescents) the first time that they left home due to parental conflict at home. This suggests that programs focused on formal points of entry to support, including women's refuges, will only scratch the surface in terms of homelessness prevention policies aimed at ending the cycle of homelessness through domestic violence channels.

An area of current research and policy interest has been in relation to the strong connection been foster care and other forms of out-of-home care and homelessness and the need for policy measures to ensure that those leaving foster care do not transition immediately into homelessness. Table 11 presents findings on the prevalence of out-of-home care and the form of out-of-home care for respondents during childhood and adolescence. Around half of all respondents lived with relatives at some point when growing up. In terms of residential care and foster care, a similar proportion of respondents (19%) reported that they had been placed in residential care and foster care during childhood or adolescence.

The frequency of exposure to these forms of out-of-home care placements was also similar; around 7 per cent of respondents reported that they had been placed in foster care and/or residential care two to five times and approximately 5 and 4 per cent were placed in residential care and foster care, respectively, on six or more occasions. These data highlight the disruptive experiences of home and housing that emerge early in the lives of some clients. Interventions aimed at preventing subsequent homelessness among this group are critical and out-of-home care is a critical site for homelessness prevention programs. Recent AHURI research by Johnson et al. (2010) found that many young people exited into homelessness after leaving out-of-home care, particularly those that lacked continuing social connections.

Figure 14: Leaving home due parental/carer conflict, first occasion destination



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 11: Out-of-home care and experiences of running away from home

	Never	Once	2–5 times	6–10 times	More than 10 times
Thinking about your home situation when you were growing up, how many times …	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*
Were you placed in residential care or a group home before you turned 18?	81.2	7.4	6.5	1.3	3.6
Were you placed in foster care before you turned 18?	81.5	7.5	7.1	1.7	2.1
Did you live with relatives before you turned 18?	51.5	16.2	19.1	5.3	7.8
Were you placed in independent accommodation before you turned 18?	83.3	7.5	7.2	1.3	0.7
Did you run away from home before you turned 18?	42.9	17.2	19.4	5.9	14.5

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

A key finding of the study is that just over half of all respondents ran away from home during childhood or adolescence (57%). The majority of those who did run away did so on more than one occasion. This is a striking result and represents an important point for possible intervention in terms of early intervention and prevention strategies in the homelessness space.

As discussed in Jamieson and Flatau (2009 p.15), 'child protection policies aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect and more effectively responding to children who have been harmed or who have no effective parental support represent a critical child protection policy as well as a critical homelessness prevention strategy. There is a

direct and fundamental relationship between our success in reducing child abuse and neglect on the one hand and reducing child and adult homelessness in Australia on the other'. They refer to a number of policy actions that can be undertaken to arrest and subsequently significantly reduce the number of children entering care including formation and community awareness campaigns similar to the quit smoking campaigns.

Parents need to be encouraged to access early parenting support. Programs that work with families in difficulties need increased support. There are surprisingly few programs designed to prevent the entry of children into out-of-home care. There is too little focus on prevention in terms of out-of-home care and not enough attention on prevention. Finally, the pool of foster carers needs to be significantly expanded with greater training and support for those agreeing to become foster carers.

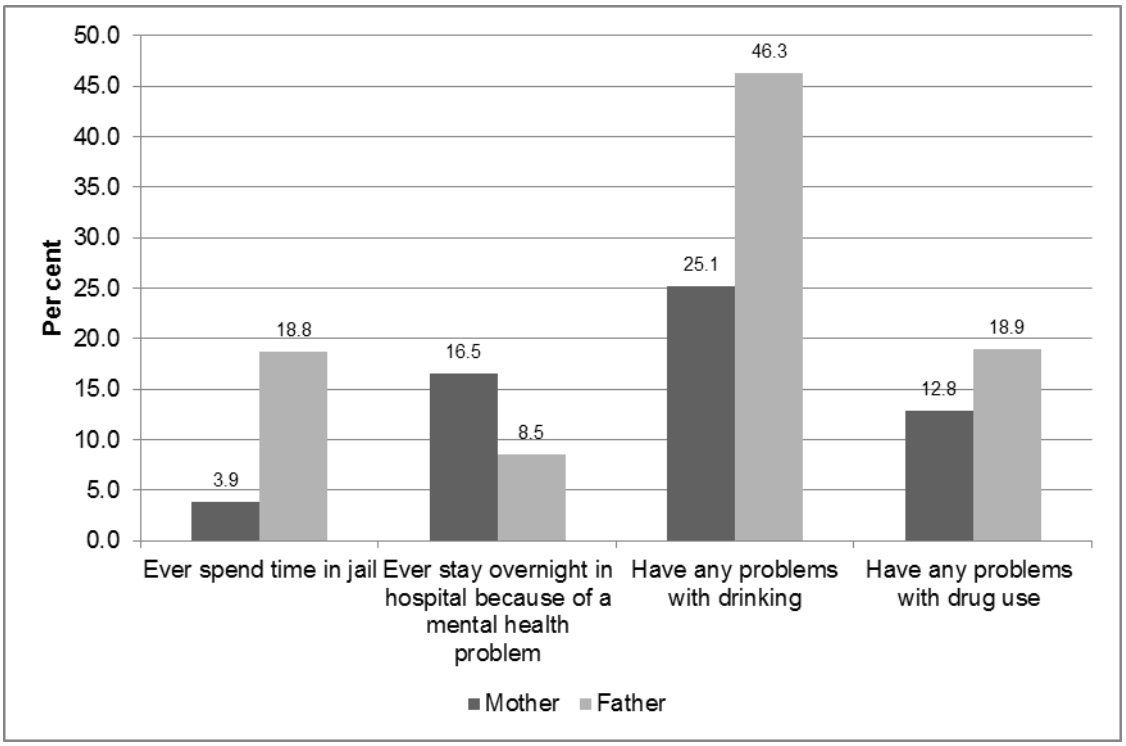
Figure 15 provides a profile of known parental issues across a range of domains. Almost half of all respondents reported having a father who had problems with drinking alcohol (46%), while a quarter reported having a mother with alcohol problems (25%). Problematic drug use among parents was reported less often relative to problematic alcohol use among parents. Additionally, there was a smaller difference between mother- and father-related drug problems compared to mother and father reported alcohol problems. Nineteen per cent of respondents reported that their fathers had problematic drug use and 13 per cent reported problematic drug use among mothers.

These findings are consistent with qualitative investigations documenting the early family environments of homeless youth (Mallett et al. 2005). The research literature has shown parental substance use to be associated with increased liability for child maltreatment, early initiation of substance use (a marker for the later development of substance use disorder), and higher levels of family conflict alongside lower levels of family cohesion (Fergusson & Lynskey 1997; Keller et al. 2008; Hussong et al. 2008).

Mothers were twice as likely as fathers to have spent time in hospital because of mental health issues. Some 17 per cent of mothers spent time in hospital (according to respondents) compared with 9 per cent of fathers. In contrast, the rate of incarceration was much higher for fathers compared to mothers. Reported incarceration among fathers was 19 per cent while only 4 per cent of mothers had been incarcerated at some point during their lives. Parental separation through hospital stays and incarceration can impact negatively on family cohesion and the psychosocial wellbeing of children if compensatory supports are unavailable. Hospitalisation and incarceration are also strongly associated with socioeconomic disadvantage.

As indicated in Table 12, 17 per cent of male respondents and 11 per cent of female respondents had spent time in juvenile detention. Among adult males, close to half had been in jail at some point in their lives underlining the close relationship between jail and homelessness for many men (Baldry et al. 2006; Willis 2004).

Figure 15: Parental experiences of jail, stays in hospital and problematic drug and alcohol use while growing up



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 12: Juvenile detention and jail experiences

	Males	Females
	Per cent	*Per cent*
Ever been in juvenile detention	17.4	10.8
Ever been in jail	48.3	14.0

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

3.4 Summary

A key finding from the present study is that a high rate of intergenerational homelessness is evident for those adults currently homeless. Around half of all adults currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services at a given point in time who have been homeless themselves report that one or more of their parents or carers were also homeless at one point or another. Moreover, among those who were in families where homelessness was experienced over two generations, early lifetime experiences of the parental home were more severe than among those who did not report that their parents were homeless. For example, childhood exposure to the physical aggression indices (e.g. parents/carers physical hurting or fighting with each other) was much lower for those without a history of intergenerational homelessness (68–82%) when compared with those with a history of intergenerational homelessness (28–42%). Interestingly, respondents were more likely to experience homelessness during childhood or adolescence without their parents than with them.

Childhood homelessness is a common experience among adults receiving support. Around half of all respondents had couch surfed as they had nowhere else to live prior to the age of 18. A significant minority of respondents had lived on the streets prior to

the age of 18. However, it is important to remember that a significant number of adults currently receiving support from homelessness services were not homeless as children nor were their parents. Not all in this category report inter-parental conflict involving physical threats and actual violence. Their experience of adult homelessness is one that appears not to relate directly to experiences in the parental home, or to the histories of their parents, or significant issues experienced during childhood and teenage years.

An important simple flag of major issues in the home or through childhood and teenage life driving outcomes is the experience of running away from home during childhood or adolescence. In our study, 57 per cent of respondents had run away from home at some stage with the majority doing so on more than one occasion. This highlights the fact that effective preventative policies in childhood and adulthood using a flag such as this may be critical in achieving long-term benefits for young people.

The importance of individual homelessness risk factors associated with the parental home is highlighted in the study in terms of parental drinking problems and, to a lesser extent, substance abuse problems. Close to half respondents reported problematic drinking among fathers while a quarter reported problematic alcohol use among mothers. Around 20 per cent of respondents report problematic substance use. The rate of incarceration among fathers is particularly high.

4 INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

In this chapter, we extend our analysis of lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness by considering outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the study. Previous studies have confirmed the high rate of homelessness among the Indigenous population relative to the non-Indigenous population, the forms of homelessness experienced by Indigenous people and their needs and services received *at a point in time* (AIHW 2011b). However, there is little by way of research on the lifetime experiences of homelessness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and no evidence on rates of intergenerational homelessness.

This study is important for our understanding of Indigenous homelessness in Australia given both the issues examined and the size and scope of the Indigenous sample in the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*—22 per cent of a large sample was Indigenous with representation across capital cities, regional towns and remote areas.

4.1 Profile of Indigenous respondents

Tables 13 to 15 present a socio-demographic profile of the Indigenous respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*.

Female Indigenous participants are more highly represented in the sample than male Indigenous respondents are. Indigenous female respondents comprise 60 per cent of all Indigenous Australian respondents in the study and Indigenous female respondents comprise 27 per cent of all female respondents whereas Indigenous male respondents comprise 20 per cent of all male respondents. As noted, findings in respect of women in the previous chapter were more influenced by outcomes for Indigenous women than were corresponding estimates for men.

One of the important features of the study was the coverage of regional and remote areas across the country. Reflecting this, approximately 27 per cent of the Indigenous Australian sample indicated that they spoke a language other than English with their family. This confirms the fact that the study was able to access outer regional and remote specialist homelessness services, predominantly women's refuges, in which Indigenous women from remote communities were being provided with services.

Indigenous participants in the study were generally younger than their non-Indigenous peers and had a lower level of educational attainment. Around 70 per cent of Indigenous respondents were under the age of 35 as compared with around half of non-Indigenous respondents. Around half of Indigenous respondents had not completed high school to Year 10 compared with around 35 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents. There were no differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents with respect to whether they had ever been married or in a de facto relationship.

There were relatively minor differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents in terms of labour market outcomes. Slightly more non-Indigenous respondents were employed (16.0%) compared with Indigenous respondents (12.5%). On the other hand, a somewhat greater though not significantly so proportion of Indigenous respondents were unemployed (54.0%) and the unemployment rate for Indigenous respondents was 78.3 per cent as compared with 71.9 per cent for non-Indigenous respondents. Around 40 per cent of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents were neither employed nor unemployed (i.e., they were in the 'not in the labour force' category) and roughly the same proportion of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents were unable to work due to a disability.

Consistent with low employment rates, the relatively high number of Indigenous respondents who are women with children and the relatively high rate of disability in the sample, the majority of Indigenous respondents were reliant on government income support payments. The same is true for non-Indigenous respondents. The key payments received by Indigenous respondents were Parenting Payment (30.1% of respondents), Newstart Allowance (22.0%) and Disability Support Pension (20.3%). The pattern of receipt is a little different for non-Indigenous respondents but this difference is largely accounted for by the higher number of Indigenous women in the sample compared with men.

Table 13: Socio-demographic characteristics, by Indigenous status

	Indigenous		**Non-Indigenous**		**Total**	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent
Sex						
Male	51	39.8	250	54.9	301	51.6
Female	77	60.2	205	45.1	282	48.4
Total	*128*	*100.0*	*455*	*100.0*	*583*	*100.0*
Age						
18–24	57	44.5	123	27.0	180	30.9
25–34	30	23.4	116	25.5	146	25.0
35–44	20	15.6	118	25.9	138	23.7
45–54	17	13.3	60	13.2	77	13.2
55 and over	4	3.1	38	8.4	42	7.2
Total	*128*	*100.0*	*455*	*100.0*	*583*	*100.0*
Speak another language other than English with family members						
Yes	34	27.4	63	13.8	97	16.8
No	90	72.6	392	86.2	482	83.2
Total	*124*	*100.0*	*455*	*100.0*	*579*	*100.0*
Highest level of education						
Primary School	11	8.6	12	2.7	23	4.0
Some High School	61	47.7	149	33.1	210	36.3
High School to Year 10 or higher	41	32.0	161	35.8	202	34.9
Trade certificate/apprenticeship	7	5.5	36	8.0	43	7.4
TAFE qualification	6	4.7	67	14.9	73	12.6
University bachelor degree or higher	2	1.6	25	5.6	27	4.7
Total	*128*	*100.0*	*450*	*100.0*	*578*	*100.0*
Ever married (both legal and defacto)						
Yes	89	70.1	317	69.8	406	69.9
No	38	29.9	137	30.2	175	30.1
Total	*127*	*100.0*	*454*	*100.0*	*581*	*100.0*

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 14: Labour force status, by Indigenous status

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Employed						
Employed for 35 hours or more	8	6.7	26	5.9	34	6.1
Employed less than 35 hours	2	1.7	24	5.5	26	4.7
Employed, but temporarily not working	5	4.2	20	4.6	25	4.5
All employed	*15*	*12.5*	*70*	*16.0*	*85*	*15.2*
Unemployed	*54*	*45.0*	*179*	*40.9*	*233*	*41.8*
Not in the labour force						
Studying	10	8.3	35	8.0	45	8.1
Caring for children	18	15.0	49	11.2	67	12.0
Unable to work due to disability	17	14.2	82	18.7	99	17.7
Retired	2	1.7	9	2.1	11	2.0
Other—Unspecified	4	3.3	14	3.2	18	3.2
All not in the labour force	*51*	*42.5*	*189*	*43.2*	*240*	*43.0*
Total	*120*	*100.0*	*438*	*100.0*	*558*	*100.0*
Unemployment rate	78.3		71.9		73.3	
Labour force participation rate	57.5		56.8		57.0	

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 15: Current main source of income, by Indigenous status

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
No income	0	0.0	7	1.6	7	1.3
Government income support payments						
Registered awaiting benefit	2	1.6	3	0.7	5	0.9
Youth Allowance	10	8.1	50	11.5	60	10.8
ABSTUDY or AUSTUDY payment	6	4.9	7	1.6	13	2.3
Disability Support Pension	25	20.3	104	23.9	129	23.1
Age Pension	3	2.4	6	1.4	9	1.6
Parenting Payment	37	30.1	75	17.2	112	20.1
Newstart Allowance	27	22.0	125	28.7	152	27.2
Other government payment	3	2.4	12	2.8	15	2.7
Total	113	91.9	382	87.8	495	88.7
Paid work	8	6.5	34	7.8	42	7.5
Other source of income	2	1.6	12	2.8	14	2.5
Total	123	100.0	435	100.0	558	100.0

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Table 16 provides a profile of the current and immediate past accommodation status of Indigenous participants in the study as compared with non-Indigenous participants.

At the time of the survey, Indigenous respondents were marginally more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to have experienced primary homelessness immediately prior to the support period in which they were interviewed, but substantially more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to be in primary homelessness at the time of interview. This suggests that Indigenous respondents who were in primary homelessness prior to the current support period were less likely to receive crisis accommodation as part of a support period than non-Indigenous respondents were. Non-Indigenous respondents were more likely to be in private rental accommodation prior to support while Indigenous respondents were more likely to be in public and community housing prior to support.

Table 16: Accommodation status immediately prior to current support period and at the point of interview, by Indigenous status

	Accommodation immediately prior to the support period				Current accommodation			
	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Primary homelessness								
Street, park, cave or in the open	16	13.8	39	9.6	7	7.6	10	3.0
A squat, car, tent or makeshift dwelling	7	6.0	33	8.1	4	4.3	9	2.7
Total	23	19.8	72	17.7	11	12.0	19	5.8
Crisis accommodation or refuge	10	8.6	60	14.7	31	33.7	138	42.1
Couch surfing	6	5.2	28	6.9	2	2.2	1	0.3
Other non-permanent housing								
Hotel, motel or backpackers room	2	1.7	32	7.9	1	1.1	3	0.9
Boarding/rooming house or hostel	19	16.4	48	11.8	12	13.0	57	17.4
Caravan	6	5.2	9	2.2	3	3.3	4	1.2
Living with family	6	5.2	17	4.2	3	3.3	2	0.6
Health or treatment facility	1	0.9	24	5.9	1	1.1	0	0.0
Prison or other detention centre	8	6.9	10	2.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	4	3.4	3	0.7	1	1.1	1	0.3
Total	46	39.7	143	35.1	21	22.8	67	20.4
Permanent housing								
Public housing	11	9.5	17	4.2	6	6.5	22	6.7
Community housing	10	8.6	6	1.5	9	9.8	43	13.1
Private rental housing	10	8.6	69	17.0	12	13.0	33	10.1
Own home (owned outright/mortgaged)	0	0.0	12	2.9	0	0.0	5	1.5
Total	31	26.7	104	25.6	27	29.3	103	31.4
All accommodation types	116	100.0	407	100.0	92	100.0	328	100.0

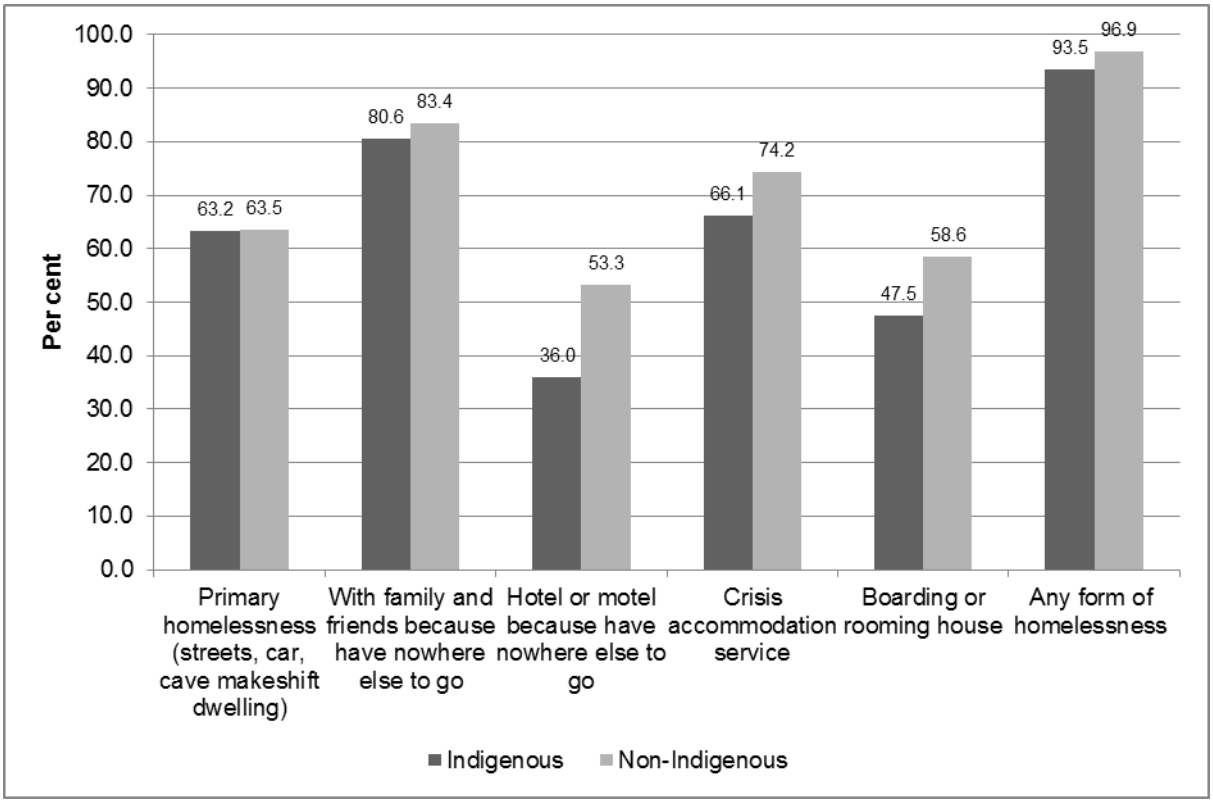
Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

4.2 Lifetime and intergenerational homelessness

Figure 16 presents a profile of lifetime experiences of specific forms of homelessness experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. The prevalence of lifetime experiences of primary homelessness and couch surfing is similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents, as is the overall rate of lifetime homelessness. As is the case for non-Indigenous respondents, couch surfing is the most likely form of homelessness to be experienced at least once over lifetime to date. Over 80 per cent of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents reported at least one episode of couch surfing. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents report the same rate of lifetime-to-date experience of primary homelessness. Lifetime-to-date experiences of all remaining forms of homelessness are lower in the Indigenous respondent group than the non-Indigenous respondent group. Indigenous respondents were less likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts were to have experienced staying in hotels and motels on an emergency basis, staying in crisis accommodation and staying in boarding and rooming houses as forms of homelessness.

Table 17 provides findings in relation to the age of first spell of particular forms of homelessness. As not all respondents completed questions on age of first episode of homelessness, prevalence rates presented in this table do not precisely match prevalence rates for lifetime homelessness presented in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Lifetime experience of homelessness, by Indigenous status



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

In spite of a similar overall rate of primary homelessness, Indigenous respondents are much more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to experience primary homelessness in childhood. It is not the form of homelessness experienced but the age of the first spell of homelessness that is the important difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people. In the case of Indigenous

respondents, 24 per cent of Indigenous respondents experienced primary homelessness prior to the age of 12, while for non-Indigenous respondents 13 per cent did so prior to the age of 12. The proportion of respondents having their first experience of primary homelessness during adolescence was roughly equal for the two groups. In contrast to the findings in respect of childhood homelessness, more non-Indigenous than Indigenous respondents reported their first experience of primary homelessness as an adult.

Table 17: Age first experienced a specific type of homelessness, by Indigenous status

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		All	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Primary homelessness (streets, car, cave makeshift dwelling)						
Never experienced	46	43.0	163	46.4	209	45.6
Experienced first under the age of 12	26	24.3	44	12.5	70	15.3
Experienced first between 12 and 17	25	23.4	74	21.1	99	21.6
Experienced first aged 18 or over	10	9.3	70	19.9	80	17.5
Total	*107*	*100.0*	*351*	*100.0*	*458*	*100.0*
With family and friends because have nowhere else to go						
Never experienced	24	24.0	74	23.1	98	23.3
Experienced first under the age of 12	42	42.0	74	23.1	116	27.6
Experienced first between 12 and 17	24	24.0	82	25.5	106	25.2
Experienced first aged 18 or over	10	10.0	91	28.3	101	24.0
Total	*100*	*100.0*	*321*	*100.0*	*421*	*100.0*
Hotel or motel because have nowhere else to go						
Never experienced	80	72.7	207	57.2	287	60.8
Experienced first under the age of 12	7	6.4	12	3.3	19	4.0
Experienced first between 12 and 17	7	6.4	31	8.6	38	8.1
Experienced first aged 18 or over	16	14.5	112	30.9	128	27.1
Total	*110*	*100.0*	*362*	*100.0*	*472*	*100.0*
Crisis accommodation service						
Never experienced	42	41.2	115	34.2	157	35.8
Experienced first under the age of 12	22	21.6	32	9.5	54	12.3
Experienced first between 12 and 17	15	14.7	54	16.1	69	15.8
Experienced first aged 18 or over	23	22.5	135	40.2	158	36.1
Total	*102*	*100.0*	*336*	*100.0*	*438*	*100.0*
Boarding or rooming house						
Never experienced	63	58.9	184	52.9	247	54.3
Experienced first under the age of 12	13	12.1	17	4.9	30	6.6
Experienced first between 12 and 17	13	12.1	43	12.4	56	12.3
Experienced first aged 18 or over	18	16.8	104	29.9	122	26.8
Total	*107*	*100.0*	*348*	*100.0*	*455*	*100.0*

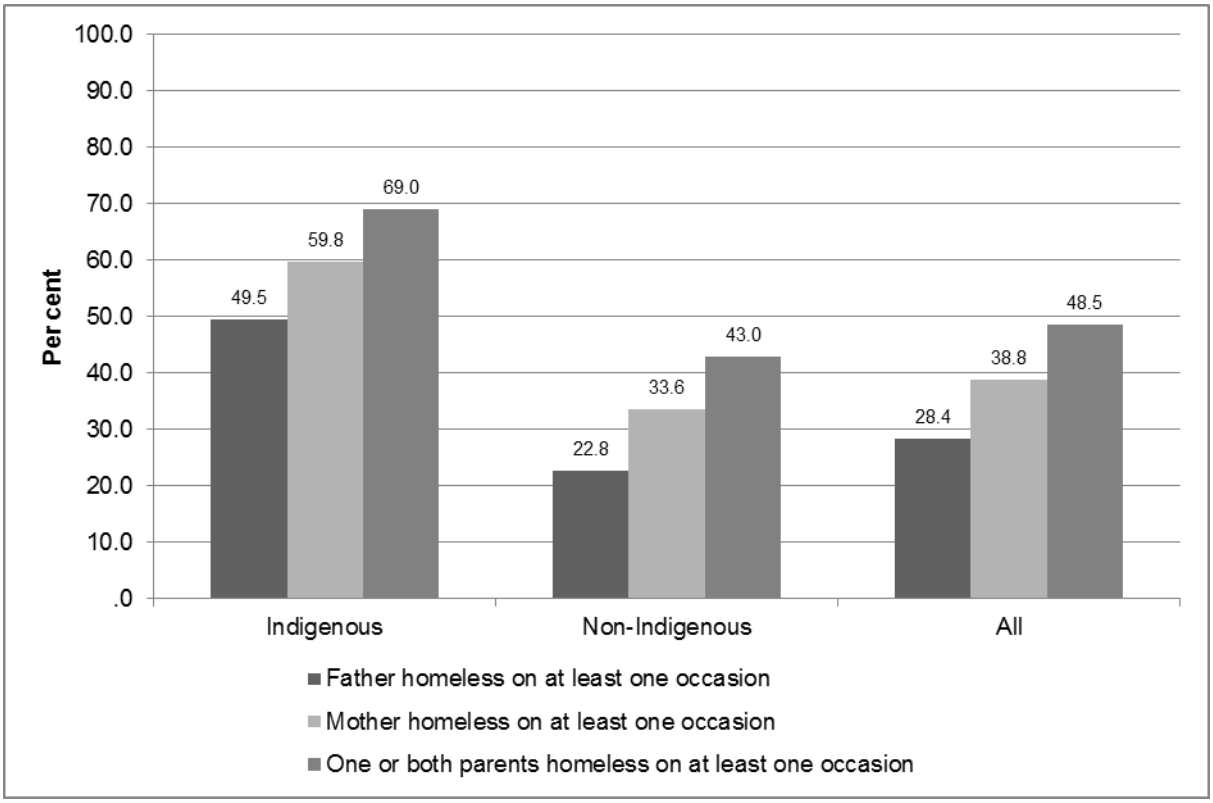
Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

During childhood and adolescence, the most common state of homelessness experienced for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents was couch surfing (staying with family or friends because of no other housing option). As was the case for primary homelessness, the prevalence of couch surfing during childhood was higher for Indigenous respondents than for non-Indigenous respondents. Forty-two per cent of Indigenous participants reported that they had stayed with family and friends because they had nowhere else to live prior to the age of 12 compared with 23 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents. Onset rates for adolescence are similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents.

The pattern of earlier onset of homelessness among Indigenous respondents was repeated in the case of crisis and emergency accommodation and for boarding and rooming houses. In spite of lower overall prevalence rates for these two forms of homelessness, the rate of childhood homelessness was higher for Indigenous respondents than non-Indigenous respondents for both these forms of homelessness. In terms of crisis accommodation, 22 per cent of Indigenous respondents experienced an episode of crisis accommodation prior to the age of 12 as compared with 10 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents. Likewise, in the case of boarding and rooming houses, 12 per cent of Indigenous respondents had spent time in a boarding or rooming house prior to the age of 12 as compared with 5 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents.

Figure 17 presents findings on the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness among respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*. Recall that intergenerational homelessness is defined as homelessness experienced independently over two generations. For the cohort of relevance to the present study—those receiving support by a specialist homelessness support service—the intergenerational homelessness rate for Indigenous respondents was substantially higher than for non-Indigenous respondents. For Indigenous participants the intergenerational homelessness rate was 69 per cent. This compares with an intergenerational homeless rate of 43 per cent among non-Indigenous participants.

Figure 17: Prevalence of Intergenerational Homelessness, by Indigenous Status

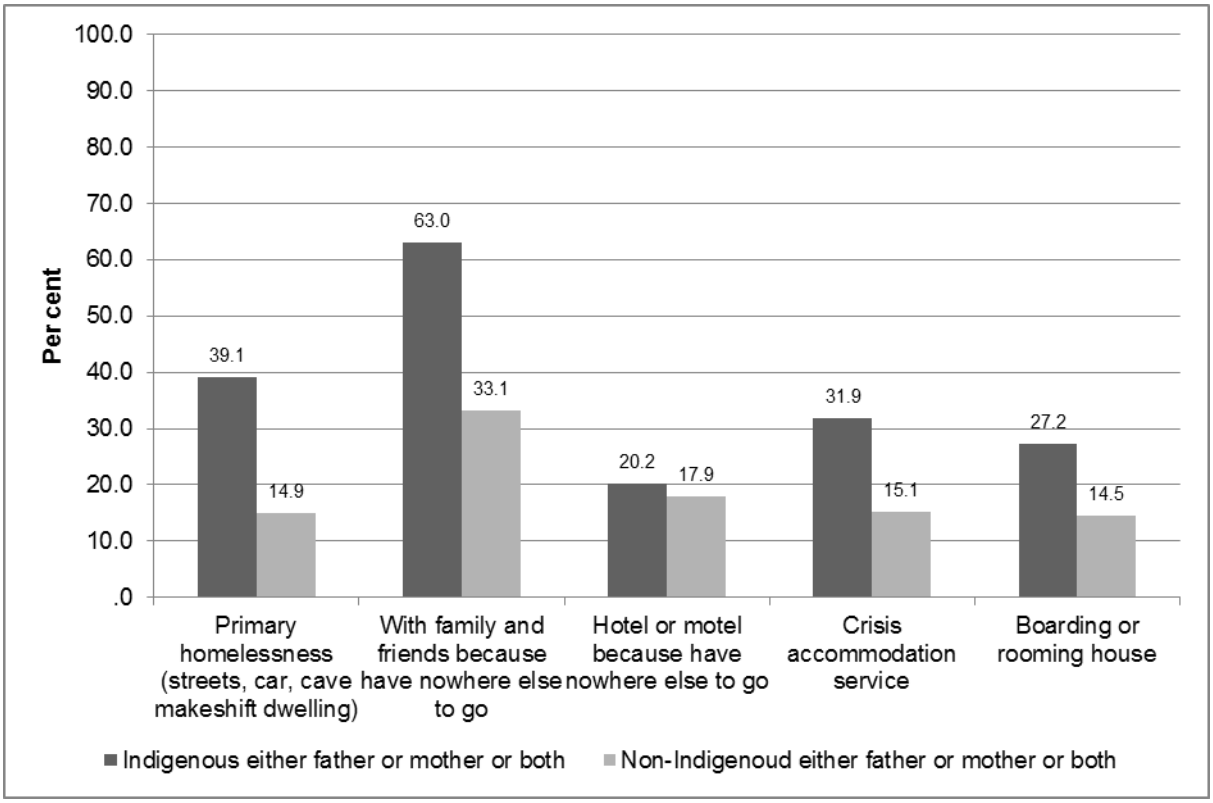


Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

As noted previously, it is likely that this represents an under-reporting of the true intergenerational homelessness rate for the cohort of adults using specialist homelessness services as respondents may not have been fully aware of the homelessness experiences of their parents. Reported parental homelessness was higher for mothers than fathers for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. As suggested previously, this may reflect a number of factors including the higher prevalence of female-headed households, greater awareness of the past lives of mothers and a high prevalence of domestic violence in the home.

Figure 18 provides a profile of the type of homelessness experienced by parents of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. Reflecting the higher rate of intergenerational homelessness experienced by Indigenous respondents, parents of Indigenous respondents also experienced higher rates of specific forms of homelessness. For example, 39 per cent of Indigenous respondents indicated that one or both of their parents were primary homeless at some point in their lives compared with 15 per cent for non-Indigenous respondents. In the case of couch surfing with friends and relatives, 63 per cent of Indigenous respondents indicated that one or both of their parents couch surfed at some point in their lives compared with 33 per cent for non-Indigenous respondents. The same pattern of higher rates of homelessness experienced by parents of Indigenous respondents is evident in other homelessness categories other than the case of emergency use of hotels and motels.

Figure 18: Types of Homelessness Experienced by Parents, by Parental Status and Indigenous Status



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

4.3 Early life experiences and parental background of Indigenous people

We turn now to the childhood memories of Indigenous respondents and their perceptions of their parents and home environment growing up. There is now a well-established literature with respect to issues such as domestic and family violence in the home, the role of parental alcohol and substance abuse, rates of incarceration and out-of-home care rates among Indigenous children.

Indigenous people are far more likely to be hospitalised as a result of domestic violence compared to non-Indigenous people (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Indigenous Compendium 2012; Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010; Anderson & Wild 2007; Robertson 2000). Use of alcohol in the Indigenous population is lower than the non-Indigenous population and in remote areas and abstinence rates are relatively high. However, Indigenous Australians are twice as likely as non-Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over to drink at short-term risky/high risky levels at least once a week (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010).

The 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) data reveal strong links among Indigenous people between chronic risky/high risk drinkers and rates of arrest, lifetime likelihood of incarceration and violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010). Findings from the AIHW's 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey suggests that Indigenous people were almost twice as likely as other Australians to be recent users of illicit substances (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of

Health and Welfare 2010). Alcohol and illicit substance misuse is a major determinant of the disease burden and a contributing factor to child abuse and neglect (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce 2006; Anderson & Wild 2007; Gordon et al. 2002; Robertson 2000). Indigenous children are 7.5 times more likely than non-Indigenous children are to be the subject of substantiated reports of harm/risk of harm than non-Indigenous children and are over-represented in the Australian out-of-home care system (AIHW 2012). Indigenous people are far more likely to be represented in prisons than non-Indigenous people, with the national imprisonment rate for Indigenous people 18 times higher than non-Indigenous people.

Findings from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* suggest that the above differences in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia are also evident among those currently receiving services by specialist homelessness services. Indigenous respondents to the survey were more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to recall the police coming to the house due to physical or verbal violence between parents and more often reporting having to leave home because of violence between their parents.

As seen in Table 18, nearly two-thirds of Indigenous respondents indicated that they recalled police coming to the parental home because of violence in the family home compared with a little over one-third of non-Indigenous respondents. In terms of leaving home due to violence in the family home, 62 per cent of Indigenous respondents left home at some point due to violence in the family home compared with 46 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents. Indigenous respondents were more likely to report leaving the family home on multiple occasions or recall police coming to the family home on multiple occasions than were non-Indigenous respondents.

Table 18: Parental/carer violence and its consequences, by Indigenous status

As far as you are aware….	**Did the police ever come to your home because of violence (either verbal or physical) between your parents/carers?**			**Did you ever have to leave home (even if just for a few hours) because of violence between your parents/carers?**		
	Indigenous	**Non-Indigenous**	**Total**	**Indigenous**	**Non-Indigenous**	**Total**
	Per cent	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*
Never	37.3	64.4	58.8	38.2	54.2	50.9
Once	10.0	9.5	9.6	10.9	9.0	9.4
2–5 times	25.5	9.1	12.5	19.1	17.0	17.4
6–10 times	7.3	5.0	5.5	6.4	6.6	6.6
More than 10 times	20.0	11.9	13.6	25.5	13.2	15.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Indigenous respondents were also more likely to have been placed in foster care or residential care than non-Indigenous respondents were. Thirty per cent of Indigenous participants were placed in foster care at some point before the age of 18 as compared with 16 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents (see Table 19). Similarly, 25 per cent of Indigenous respondents reported that they were placed in residential care prior to the age of 18 compared with 17 per cent of non-Indigenous participants.

Finally, 70 per cent of Indigenous participants lived with relatives prior to the age of 18 as compared with 42 per cent of non-Indigenous participants. Moreover, a greater proportion of Indigenous participants stayed with relatives multiple times during childhood; a relatively uncommon outcome for non-Indigenous participants. Thirty-five per cent of Indigenous residents stayed with relatives more than five times before the age of 18 compared with 8 per cent of non-Indigenous residents.

While there were large differences between rates of foster care, residential care and care by relatives there was little difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in terms of running away from home.

Figure 19 provides a profile of parental issues as known by respondents across a range of domains. The prevalence of parental incarceration for Indigenous participants was larger than that for non-Indigenous participants. One-third of Indigenous respondents reported that their fathers had been in jail at some point during their lives as compared with 15 per cent of non-Indigenous participants. The gap in incarceration rates was even higher for mothers; the proportion of Indigenous respondents that reported maternal incarceration was approximately 10 times that for non-Indigenous respondents.

There was also a difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents in terms of drinking problems in the parental home with two-thirds of Indigenous respondents reporting their father had problems with drinking compared with 40 per cent of non-Indigenous respondents. Problematic drug use by parents was reported less often than problematic alcohol use and this was true for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. As the overall rate of parental drug use problems was lower than the overall rate of parental alcohol problems, the differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents regarding problematic drug use is smaller.

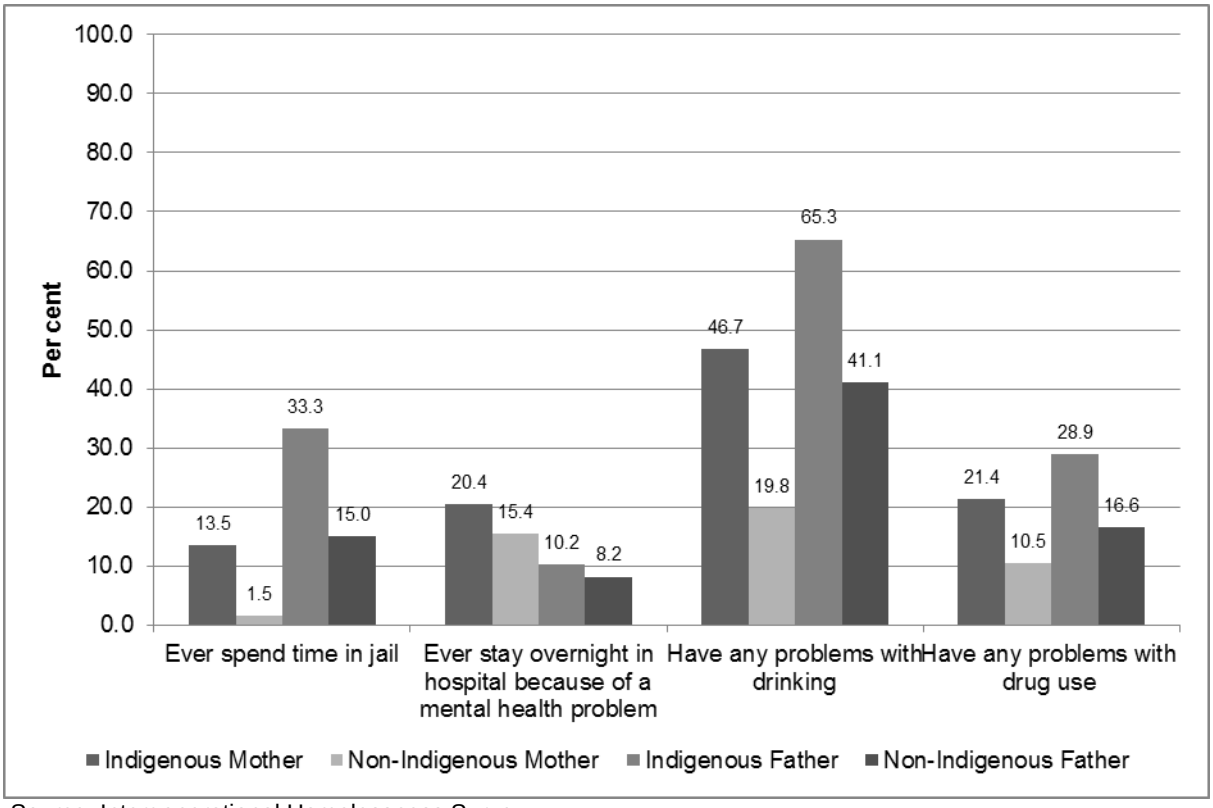
There was no apparent difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents in terms of parental mental health problems.

Table 19: Out-of-home care and experiences of running away from home, by Indigenous status

	Indigenous					Non-Indigenous				
	Never	Once	2–5 times	6–10 times	More than 10 times	Never	Once	2–5 times	6–10 times	More than 10 times
Thinking about your home situation when you were growing up, how many times …..	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*	*Per cent*
Were you placed in residential care or a group home before you turned 18?	75.0	8.3	11.5	1.0	4.2	82.9	6.9	5.3	1.3	3.5
Were you placed in foster care before you turned 18?	70.2	12.8	10.6	2.1	4.3	84.3	6.2	6.2	1.6	1.6
Did you live with relatives before you turned 18?	30.0	13.0	22.0	16.0	19.0	57.6	17.2	17.7	2.6	4.9
Were you placed in independent accommodation before you turned 18?	87.8	5.6	5.6	0.0	1.1	82.4	7.7	7.7	1.7	0.6
How many times did you run away from home before you turned 18?	38.8	15.3	18.4	7.1	20.4	44.1	17.8	19.3	5.7	13.1

Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

Figure 19: Parental experiences of jail, stays in hospital and problematic drug and alcohol use while growing up, by Indigenous status



Source: Intergenerational Homelessness Survey

4.4 Summary

There are many similarities in the experiences of Indigenous homeless clients of support services as compared with non-Indigenous clients, but also very significant differences. Within the same highly marginalised group, Indigenous homeless people experience a much higher rate of intergenerational homelessness and of parental home issues. The intergenerational homelessness rate was 69 per cent for Indigenous respondents as compared with 43 per cent among non-Indigenous participants. While lifetime rates of primary homelessness are the same between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents, Indigenous respondents were much more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to experience primary homelessness in childhood.

Indigenous respondents to the survey were more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to report significant parental conflict in the home (e.g. police coming to the parental home because of violence in the home). They also left home more often than non-Indigenous respondents did. The prevalence of parental incarceration for Indigenous participants was far higher than that for non-Indigenous participants reflecting the overall significant incarceration rate among Indigenous people in Australia. Also, problematic alcohol use among fathers was much higher among Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people.

5 SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a first examination of the issue of intergenerational homelessness in Australia and the largest Australian study on the lifetime experiences of homelessness and pathways into homelessness of those currently experiencing support in specialist homelessness services.

The principal source of data on intergenerational and lifetime experiences of homelessness used in this paper was a large representative national cross-sectional survey the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*, administered in 2009–10. The survey was administered to a cohort of adult Australians who, at the time of analysis, were currently homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and receiving support in one form or another through specialist homelessness services. Seventy agencies throughout Australia were involved in the survey; clients completed over 647 surveys and around 586 surveys met all eligibility criteria. The study was unique in its coverage of all parts of Australia (many homelessness studies being restricted to inner city Melbourne and Sydney) including regional and remote regions with a large sample of Indigenous respondents many of whom spoke a language other than English in the family home.

The key findings of the study are as follows:

- The rate of intergenerational homelessness among clients of homelessness services was high among the cohort of those currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services. Around half of all respondents to the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* who themselves have been homeless report that their parents were also homeless at some point in their lives. Given the self-report and retrospective nature of the study, it is likely that estimated rates of intergenerational homelessness may be lower than actual rates.
- The intergenerational homelessness rate for Indigenous respondents is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous respondents. For Indigenous participants the intergenerational homelessness rate is 69.0 per cent. This compares with an intergenerational homeless rate of 43.0 per cent among non-Indigenous participants.
- Around half of all respondents experienced their first spell of homelessness prior to the age of 18. Early onset is most prevalent in the case of couch surfing and use of crisis accommodation services. Primary homelessness as a lifetime experience is most evident in the case of men than women. However, around half of all respondents had not experienced a spell of primary homelessness in their lifetimes.
- In spite of a similar overall rate of lifetime-to-date primary homelessness, Indigenous respondents are much more likely than were non-Indigenous respondents to experience primary homelessness in childhood. It is not the form of homelessness experienced but the age of the first spell of homelessness that is the important difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people. Indigenous respondents were more likely to have experienced primary homelessness prior to the age of 18 and many before the age of 12 than non-Indigenous respondents were. Around a quarter of Indigenous respondents reported a spell of primary homelessness prior to the age of 12 as compared with half that percentage of non-Indigenous respondents.
- In most cases where homelessness is experienced before the age of 18, it is not a single episode but one of several episodes of homelessness. In some cases,

multiple episodes of homelessness are experienced. For a majority, however, the cumulative time spent in homelessness is less than a year prior to the age of 18.

- Many, but by no means all, respondents experienced significant issues in the home environment prior to the age of 18. The most striking single indicator of this was that around half of all respondents reported that they had run away from home at some point prior to the age 18. Significant inter-parental conflict in the home was also evident for many respondents as they grew up. Respondents reported that close to half of all those identified as fathers in their life had a serious drinking problem. Incarceration rates for fathers were also high. Among Indigenous respondents, these problems were significantly more prominent. Likewise, there was a strong association between the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness and high family risk factors in the parental home.
- Adult clients of homelessness services are significantly more likely to have been placed in foster care or residential care than those in the general population. The prevalence of such arrangements among Indigenous respondents is much higher than for non-Indigenous respondents (30% of Indigenous participants had been placed in foster care at some point before the age of 18). Seventy per cent of Indigenous participants lived with relatives prior to the age of 18 as compared with 42 per cent of non-Indigenous participants.

These findings have important implications for our understanding of homelessness in Australia and of policy and practice settings.

First, they point to relatively high rates of intergenerational homelessness and very early onset of homelessness among adult homeless people with multiple episodes of homelessness a relatively common occurrence. From a service perspective, our study confirms that intergenerational homelessness is pertinent for many adults experiencing and presenting at homeless specialist services and that service workers need to be aware of this issue. This raises the question of the cumulative effect and (possible) trauma from earlier, non-adult, experiences of homelessness and service responses to this cumulative trauma.

Second, the findings show that earlier occurrences of homelessness may be a predicator of subsequent adult homelessness, and that the role of individual family risk factors appears critical to the experience of many adult homeless people irrespective of the significant influence of system-level responses and the availability of affordable accommodation. At the same time, the report suggests that many of those who present as adults to specialist homelessness services did not experience intergenerational homelessness or family risk factors. Intergenerational homelessness and histories of family risk factors should not be assumed for all homeless people.

Third, the findings point to the fact that within such a strongly marginalised group of people, Indigenous homeless people have often experienced longer and more traumatic early life experiences than non-Indigenous respondents. Those placed in foster care or residential care as children are significantly over-represented in the adult homeless population.

Fourth, the findings point to the fundamental importance of preventative and early intervention homelessness programs for children and young teenagers in relation to issues revolving around parental domestic violence, alcohol and drug use problems and entry into out-of-home care arrangements. It is critical that as much focus is placed on children and young teenagers as the adults who are the 'clients' in programs that are addressing issues in the family home around parental domestic violence, and alcohol and drug use problems. While *The Road Home* and subsequent programs funded under the National Partnership Agreement on homelessness have

focused renewed attention on preventative and early intervention programs, many of these programs were directed to adults at risk of homelessness and young people exiting out-of-home care arrangements. There is a need to boost programs directed at children and teenagers in difficult home environments.

The report confirms the importance of homelessness for children (a large and growing group presenting at homeless specialist services) and the subsequent effect childhood experiences of homelessness may have on childhood development and educational opportunities.

Fifth, the report underscores the importance of generalist services for families (health, mental health, drug and alcohol, child protection, and justice services) in identifying and responding to, in collaboration with local specialist homelessness services, to any risk of homelessness.

The focus of attention in the study has been on the evidence gathered on high rates of intergenerational homelessness and early lifetime experiences of homelessness in the cohort being studied and issues in the home environment while this cohort was growing. However, it is important to remember that there exists a significant number of adult homeless people whose onset of homelessness occurs after the age of 18 and who do not report significant issues in the home. Issues that arise in adulthood appear to be the drivers of adult experiences of homelessness. However, care must be taken here, as the absence of *identified* risk factors in childhood and teenage years (as reflected in evidence from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*) is not proof that serious issues were not developing in these years. It may simply be that our survey failed to address these issues.

A study of this kind, which draws on evidence from a survey focused on individual life experiences, naturally focuses on the individual risk factors associated with homelessness. The structural determinants of homelessness and system-level drivers are also obviously critical in driving entry into homelessness and creating exit barriers from homelessness. Some of these structural forces are implicit in the problems identified by respondents through their lives around low income and a lack of opportunity for fulfilling activities that leave respondents bored and feeling depressed and anxious. There is also a focus on issues surrounding the management of health problems. Also, clearly, respondents faced extreme difficulties around accommodation as evident in the high rate of primary homelessness and temporary accommodation entering their present support period.

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APPENDIX QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This appendix discusses findings from a series of in-depth interviews with clients and from two focus groups with service providers, both of which were sampled from specialist homelessness services in NSW. These interviews and focus groups were designed to pursue, in more depth, issues arising from the preliminary analysis of findings from the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey* data. Thus, they complement and illustrate these key results.

Two broad themes relevant to the specific issue of lifetime experiences of homelessness and intergenerational homelessness emerged from the qualitative research. The first is concerned with the sense of belonging that a family provides. The early family environment of many participants was fractured and although there was a strong desire to establish a cohesive family of their own, they often struggled to realise it. The second theme is strongly related to the first but focuses on the role of violence in particular and the intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour within interpersonal relationships.

Additionally, there were a number of secondary themes that hold relevance for homelessness in general, involving experiences of mental ill health and problematic drug and alcohol use. These themes are not discussed in the present chapter as they are dealt with effectively by other published literature on the homeless population.

Focus group: Sample characteristics and understanding of intergenerational homelessness

Two focus groups with service providers were conducted during May—June 2010, and involved 20 participants. Eight workers participated in the first group of Sydney-based homelessness services, which came from the same broad cross-section that provided the client interviews. Twelve workers took part in the second group, from a range of NSW women's domestic violence refuges in Sydney and regional and country NSW, including staff from the NSW Women's Refuge and Resource Centre. Having a focus group specifically comprising domestic violence workers was considered important because of what is known about the intergenerational transmission of violence. As reviewed in the Positioning Paper for this study and discussed in Chapter 2 of the present report, the intergenerational transmission of homelessness may be a correlate of the transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage across generations rather than having it's own trajectory.

Some concerns about the concept of intergenerational homelessness were raised during the focus group of homelessness service providers. Several participants considered that current issues of poverty, marginalisation, disadvantage and housing un-affordability were the main drivers of homelessness; past and intergenerational experiences of homelessness were not necessarily given the same level of importance. Moreover, they thought that the concept of intergenerational homelessness could itself imply some failings and dysfunction on the part of families, rather than the structural failings of the housing system to provide affordable accommodation to those who needed it. These comments suggest that agency staff feel individual risk factors (e.g. family dysfunction or homeless parents) are less of an issue than structural or systemic problems. This view may reflect their direct involvement with clients and the prominence of structural issues in attempting to provide assistance for this population. Research reported in this study has consistently demonstrated that both family and systemic factors are important in the transmission of risk for homelessness.

The homelessness service providers did acknowledge that intergenerational homelessness might be a hidden problem, as crisis service workers do not always know or ask about clients' histories. Participants in the domestic violence refuge focus group were more comfortable and familiar with the concept of intergenerational homelessness, given their understanding of intergenerational violence and the cycle of violence. This is discussed further in Section 4 below.

Interview sample and recruitment

Fifteen client interviews were conducted during JuneJuly 2010. Of these, 12 were conducted face-to-face at the location of the homelessness service. The remaining three were telephone interviews of clients living in NSW country towns. All interviews were conducted by the same researcher to provide for consistency. Where consent was given, interviews were recorded.

It was not possible to recruit participants for the qualitative interviews directly from among the survey respondents for reasons of confidentiality. Instead, we asked a range of homelessness services in NSW to recruit recent service users for interview, based on their knowledge of client circumstances and experience and using the operational definition of intergenerational homelessness outlined in Chapter 1.

One of the challenges in recruiting clients in this manner was the lack of a shared understanding of intergenerational homelessness among agencies (see above). This made it difficult to recruit interview clients who fell into specific categories of intergenerational homelessness experience. Nevertheless, the 15 clients that services were able to recruit for the study in the time available turned out to have a wide range of experiences of homelessness that reflected those found in the survey. Overall, the interview group included:

- Adults who were currently homeless and remembered experiences of being homeless as a child with their family.
- Adults who became homeless after running away from home as a child.
- Women with children staying at a domestic violence refuge.
- Women staying at a domestic violence refuge whose adult daughter/s had also stayed at a refuge.
- Adults who were homeless and who had been made state wards as a child.
- Parents who had no contact with their children, who may be cared for by grandparents or the state.

The 15 clients came from eight services in NSW. Six services were located in Sydney and two in NSW regional areas. The services included a cross-section of women's, men's and youth crisis services, as well as domestic violence refuges.

The client interview group included eight women and seven men aged between 21 and 64. Three were currently rough sleepers; six were staying in crisis or short-term shelters; two in women's refuges; and the remaining four were living in Department of Housing accommodation. At the time of their interview, 12 were living in Sydney and three in country NSW. Four identified as Indigenous Australian (two male and two female); one was born in a non-English Speaking country; one was born in the UK; and the remaining nine had Anglo-Australian backgrounds.

Eleven of the 15 participants had children. Some had large families, including two women who had eight children each. Of the 11 clients with children, at least six had children in state care or who were being cared for by grandparents. One woman had six children to two partners, all of whom were being cared for by paternal

grandparents. Most of the women had borne their first child while they were in their teenage years—some in their early teens.

Of the eight women, seven reported having experienced domestic violence, while four of the seven men had experienced and/or witnessed family violence as children.

Based on self-reports, at least 13 clients had a mental illness (including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia) and/or a history of suicide attempts. At least eight also had drug and alcohol problems and a number of women spoke of their ex-partner's drug and alcohol problems. Additionally, two clients reported having had gambling problems.

Three clients had been made state wards as children. Five (one-third of the client group) had left home before the age of 16, when they were still children. The youngest of these (a woman) was only 13 when she left home. This was their entry into homelessness.

None of the clients were currently engaged in any form of employment. Only one was currently engaged in education, completing her Year 10 by correspondence. Others had plans to finish Year 10 at TAFE. One young man with Asperger's Syndrome had made several attempts to finish Year 10, but had been unsuccessful at the time of being interviewed. He attributed his difficulties in education to being bullied and harassed by other students.

This brief summary of the background and circumstances of the clients interviewed for this study provides a good illustration of the range of difficulties and the complex problems experienced by those accessing homelessness services.

Fractured families—recurrence across generations

Many of the 15 client narratives give voice to a need for family in the context of substantial fragmentation and loss.

More than half the participants (eight clients) were not living with their birth family by the time they turned 16. Three had been made wards of the state, one was living with her grandparents, and four had left home as children. Sometimes they exited their home straight into homelessness. Others, notably young women, exited their home straight into a violent relationship.

Even though respondents had difficult (or no) relationships with their mothers, they generally expressed a loyalty and strong desire to have a connection, together with a need to understand why their mother had neglected them as a child. Throughout Jenny's[9] life, she has had a strong need to re-connect with the mother who first neglected and then abandoned her as a baby. This need became stronger when she spent some time in a women's prison, where her mother was well-known and the inmates told stories of her mother. Coming out of jail she decided to track her mother down:

> Just to meet her and understand why. I just wanted to understand why, because I was the only one not given to family, all the other brothers and sisters all went to family, except for me.

The first sight was of her mother crossing [name of street] weaving in and out of the traffic with a bottle in her hand. 'Jenny' told her she was her daughter and said 'I've looked for you for a long time.' 'Jenny' had to produce her birth certificate as proof. After embraces, the mother asked her daughter to buy her a drink.

[9] Not her real name. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

> I bought her a cask and after a few drinks the guilt started kicking in and she started looking at me and getting real nasty … I walked away in tears, I was shattered [her mother was throwing bottles at her].

Even the respondents whose parents had died indicated a need for having a connection with their family. A young man's plans to move interstate to find housing and employment also factored in a visit to his father's grave in Melbourne, so he could 'talk to him'. In the case study below, when Catherine was homeless, she slept in the cemetery, where her parents were buried because this was where she felt safe.

> Catherine is 24 years of age. She is caring for her 11-month old daughter with her second partner. They are living in his Department of Housing unit in Sydney. Catherine was in a violent relationship with her first partner; her two older children were removed from her care and placed with the paternal grandparents. Catherine's own parents died when she was still a child. 'I've been through a lot, I lost my parents when I was young, I lost my father when I was in kindergarten and then my mum when I was 12 years old. I got raised by my two older brothers. That was hard, they were drug addicted, they used to go in and out of jail, they are dead now too, they OD'd.' At the time of interview Catherine felt she was just getting her life back on track, after leaving school early, getting into trouble with the police, being in a violent relationship and experiencing bouts of homelessness. Catherine talks about being homeless following her parents and brothers' deaths. 'I had nowhere to stay and I slept in a cemetery … I felt safe there because that's where my parents were buried.' Catherine wants her daughter to have a better life and 'live the life that I never got to live'. She said that she hoped her own mother would feel proud of the way she is looking after her daughter. Catherine is doing Year 10 by correspondence and then hopes to find work as a beautician. She has done volunteer work for a food van in the inner city.

Respondents appeared to have an idealised view of family, despite all the difficulties they had encountered in their childhood family. They desperately wanted to be part of a family and expressed the need to create their own family as their way forward in the future. This is illustrated most clearly in the following case example:

> Richard, 31 years old, is staying at a crisis shelter in Sydney. He has had problems with drugs, and attributes problems to his mother abandoning the family of six children when he was eight years old. His father was left to care for the family, who fell homeless and camped outside a government office for several nights before being given temporary accommodation in a motel. Speaking of his mother, 'She did a lot of damage to me, and a couple of the other kids too, it just seems like yesterday, even to this day I've asked my mum why she did it and she can't tell me.' As a child, and then school student, Richard had a lot of emotional problems and was taken out of his school and placed in a school for children with high needs. He said he started taking drugs (initially marijuana) when he was 12 years old and that this helped him feel better. 'Everything seemed to be all right again, like when my parents were together, I was self-medicating myself, but it got me into a lot of trouble.' In his early twenties he was able to get his life back on track and find work as a packer and then storeman, and to rent his own flat from the private rental market. He had friends and had a girlfriend. However, he became involved with drugs again, and with dealing. 'I started to live the high life, because we were brought up very poor, it was great to be rich. I was earning heaps of money.' When his girlfriend and he had a baby they were unable to look after it and the maternal grandparents took over the care. 'I had no support, my family

didn't support me, my brothers didn't support me. I felt alone in the world, I just went on destruct mode, I didn't care if I died or if I lived.' Richard had a breakdown and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital; on discharge he found himself homeless. At the time of interview he was seeing a psychologist from the service and said this was helping him. He said it was the first time he had ever spoken to anybody about his problems. His desire for family is strong, '*All I wanted in my life, like after my mum left, was to have a nice girl to marry and a kid, to be a father*.'

Even the man who had been homeless on and off for two decades, living the life of a 'bushie' tramping around Australia doing odd jobs which came his way, responded to the question about hopes for his future, '*one day I might settle down and get married.' Another man in his mid-thirties said 'I need to locate the mother of my child. I don't know where she is. I left her when I was 25*.'

Aboriginal respondents spoke about how their connection to a wider family and kinship network can help break down the social isolation, which may come with homelessness. As one respondent put it, 'cousins all around Australia … every blackfella is related to another somehow.'

The interviews suggested a connection between a mother (and/or family) becoming homeless and children being taken into care or placed in relative care. For example, when one woman and her partner fell behind with the rent and were evicted from their privately rented house, their three children were placed with her partner's mother, ostensibly because the children's mother was homeless. She reflected on her fall into homelessness:

> I'm normally with my children and my partner and we've got a nice little cosy home and everything's good … and I've gone from that to being here [crisis shelter for women] and having nothing.

The same woman had three older children to her first partner. Those children were also being cared for by paternal grandparents, following the mother fleeing a domestic violence relationship she described as life-threatening. At 32 years of age, all six of her children were being cared for by paternal grandparents. She had no contact with her own parents, had left both home and school very early, had no qualifications and had never worked. She saw housing as being the first step needed for her recovery:

> If you don't have a house you can lose everything … your kids have got to be warm and they have to be safe.

Of the 11 respondents who had children, more than half (six clients) had their children in state care or cared for by grandparents. One male respondent in his early thirties did not know the whereabouts of either his child or the child's mother. There were also examples of children being cared for by the state welfare department (Community Services) and relatives (generally grandparents) across two or three generations of the same family.

Some women had very large families, including one Anglo-Australian woman from country NSW who at 40 years of age had eight children (to two different partners). The two older children to her first partner were now adults. She was currently looking after six children aged between two months and 14 years. Understandably, her life was prescribed by caring for her children. 'I was going to go to TAFE to do my Year 10, but fell pregnant again.' She separated from her second partner because of domestic violence. The older boys' father had been caring for the 13 and 14-year-olds but was currently in prison for an unregistered motor bike offence. She was living in Department of Housing accommodation in a country town in NSW, 'it's a hole, full of

termites and ants, they aren't doing anything to repair it, the walls will fall down soon.' She was not coping looking after all six children, and said she was thinking about contacting Community Services and having the two boys taken into care while her ex-partner was in prison. She said the behaviour of the boys was 'shocking', they 'solve problems by using violence'. One had just been suspended from school and they witnessed a lot of violence between their parents. There was a history of children in care across three generations: her own mother had fostered out her two young sons, and her daughter's oldest child was being cared for by her paternal grandmother.

These examples illustrate the difficulty that clients face in establishing and maintaining their families and the potential for the transmission of risk into the next generation. In particular, they highlight the lack of support and supervision in a client's early development that has contributed to their experiences of disadvantage in adulthood. They add further support for the premise that homelessness in parenthood might be a marker of general dysfunction including, among other things, poor parenting practices in the context of life stress and limited coping capacity.

Domestic violence, intergenerational violence and children witnessing violence

The fracturing of the family system (described in the preceding section) was often associated with conflict and violence within interpersonal relationships. Invariably, the women's narratives were characterised by leaving home early, leaving school early, falling pregnant early, violent relationship/s, children in care and partners abuse of drugs and alcohol. For Jenny, domestic violence not only caused her fall into homelessness, but also was one reason that her child was removed from her care and placed with the Department of Community Services (DoCS). Jenny was also fostered out as a baby, and had spent a lot of her teenage and adult life trying unsuccessfully to reconnect with her birth mother. Jenny was doing what she could to care for her daughter and break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

> Jenny is a 30-year-old Aboriginal woman with one daughter aged four years. She was brought up by a white foster mother after her birth mother neglected and abandoned her as a baby on the outskirts of a mission in country Victoria. Jenny and her daughter live in Department of Housing accommodation which is head-leased from the private market. She has kept the tenancy now for three years. Jenny was approved for DoH accommodation on the basis of serious domestic violence. She was assisted by interventions on her behalf by government ministers and the Department of Public Prosecutions, when her housing application was initially rejected (twice). Jenny and her baby were taken to the hospital after Jenny sustained serious injuries during a violent incident at her boyfriend's home. Her daughter, then a baby, witnessed the assault. 'I'm not really sorry for myself, I'm sorry for my daughter because of what she saw … I remember every time he hit me or he had a knife to my throat, she was trying to crawl across the room trying to get to me.' At the hospital, her baby was removed from Jenny's care and given to DoCS. She felt she was being blamed for the domestic violence, and for endangering her daughter. When Jenny moved into an Aboriginal hostel, she was able to be re-united with her daughter, demonstrating the importance of housing to keep the family together and make reunion with children possible. Her main motivation now is to look after her daughter and provide a safe home for her. She hopes her daughter will have an easier life.

Two women from country refuges described situations of domestic violence across two generations, where their adult daughters had also sought safety in a women's

refuge; one woman had also been subject to abuse from adult children. Speaking about how she saw things in her daughter's relationship that had happened to her:

> … he won't call her by her name, he calls her 'bitch', sleeps around but accuses her of sleeping around, on drugs, drinks … she's going the same way as I did.

The same woman said the cycles of violence in her family were caused by drugs and alcohol, and that the violence could only be stopped by '*getting rid of the drugs and alcohol … [name of town] is full of drugs, you can get anything*.' She has no relationship with her own mother, who she has not seen for 15 years. Calling her 'poxy' she said that her mother,

> … never spoke to me as a daughter, never looked at me as a daughter, never told me about my period or sex, she lies all the time.

The shared environment of both mother and daughter in this example may be an important factor in intergenerational homelessness, in addition to, or separate from, the trajectory of intergenerational violence. If parents and children are subject to the same environmental risk factors they are more likely to have the same outcomes (e.g. homelessness). Refuge workers provided examples of children who had come to a refuge with their mother and then returned later as young adults fleeing their own experiences of domestic violence, sometimes accompanied by their own child or children. Another example was given of a child, mother and grandmother presenting at the refuge together, victims across three generations of women experiencing domestic violence. The workers spoke of cycles of violence recurring across generations and of the impact on children of witnessing domestic violence.

> It's the cycles of violence, the kids have been brought up in the violence, they have seen it, kids have been in a violent home with a perpetrator, they might become violent themselves.

Participants in the domestic violence focus group spoke of the need for young women to be educated, and to show 14–15 years old girls that there were other options to having children at such a young age.

> Women must be educated, they are the mothers of the world, we don't want mothers at 14 years old.

This is perhaps a simplistic view of how to solve a complex problem such as intergenerational homelessness and associated socio-economic disadvantage. Such a view echoes the previously reported opinions of the focus group participants regarding the dominance of systemic issues in driving homelessness. It underscores the need for more effective translation of research into policy and practice regarding the individual and environmental risk factors for homelessness into policy and practice.

Although the preceding discussion focuses on the transmission of violence and homelessness across generations, domestic and family violence was however present in the majority of the respondents' lives, regardless of whether there was also a history of intergenerational homelessness. This is consistent with the findings reported in Chapter 3 regarding inter-parental conflict. A number of the men among the interviewees had also experienced or witnessed family violence as a child. This had had long-lasting effects on them. One had been fostered out following physical and sexual abuse as a child and another had left home aged 14 due to family violence, leading to decades of chronic homelessness. Three respondents had been made wards of the state. One spoke of having a series of foster families he described

as abusive and commented that this was the same as being homeless as a child, because he was not living in a safe home.

Sometimes domestic violence was a direct precipitating factor in a person's homelessness, as in the case of a 64-year-old woman suffering from mental illness and sleeping rough on the train from Sydney to Newcastle. She was an educated woman and had previously been a teacher. In her own words, '*I used to own a home, I'll tell you how my housing disappeared*.' She narrated a situation where she was the victim of domestic violence, but saw the police, court and her ex-partner as 'twisting and turning' the case against her. Now she struggles to find a home:

> … the Newcastle Hotel takes me in occasionally, but you can't get in there very often as they may not like the look of you. It depends whether you are dressed up or dirty. If I had looked into a crystal ball and seen me now I would have laughed, no way that couldn't happen to me, you just don't know what's around the corner.

The following example of 'Veronica', an Aboriginal woman in her mid-30s, demonstrates the isolation women can feel when they flee domestic violence. It suggests the refuge practice of expecting women to leave their home town is sometimes a barrier to a mother and her children remaining together. It shows the importance of having family and community to provide support. 'Veronica' was not raised by her own mother, but by her grandparents.

> Veronica left a country town where she had support from family and friends in order to flee domestic violence. She would have preferred to stay in her home town but was unable to secure privately rented accommodation for herself and her three children because she was on the 'black-list' as her ex-partner had defaulted on rent. The refuge in the town where she lived would not take her or her children, and told her to go to a refuge in another town. She found herself staying in a refuge in an isolated country town where she had no connection with family or friends. Furthermore, her two daughters (aged 16 and 17) remained in their home town in order to complete their schooling. Her 10-year-old son had to leave his school and travel with his mother to a distant part of NSW, when a vacancy became available at the refuge. The mother fell into a depression and tried to commit suicide due to feelings of isolation and the effects of physical and emotional abuse she had suffered in the violent relationship. The refuge workers helped to move her to another refuge where she had connections with the local Aboriginal community. However, she was finding it difficult to secure private rented accommodation, in her view because the real estate agent in the small country town was racist and she was on the 'black-list'. NSW Housing had made inappropriate housing offers to her in other remote towns. She wants to return to her home town, which offered better employment and education opportunities for herself and her three children, and where she had family support and connections with the Aboriginal community. The only work she had ever had was as a cleaner, but she wants to re-enrol in the Aged Care Certificate at TAFE and find employment in aged care. Despite Veronica's experience of domestic violence she had this advice to give: '*you don't necessarily have to come from a broken or violent home to experience violence yourself. It can happen to anyone*.'

The preceding case studies highlight the complex interplay between violence and homelessness. While both of these issues may contribute to, and be a part of, the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage, they also appear to have separate trajectories that can be initiated at any stage of a person's life.

Interventions and pathways out of intergenerational homelessness

Each of the 15 respondents spoke positively about the service offering them housing and/or support. Services provided a range of functions including practical support for rough sleepers (shower, lunch and facilities to wash clothes); crisis accommodation for periods up to three months; emotional support and counselling; advocacy and assistance with securing longer-term housing; and outreach support. Some people spoke about the importance of services in helping them to get back on their feet; others spoke about the role of services in helping them break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, violence and homelessness. For example, Jenny (see case study) attributed breaking this cycle to the ongoing support she had received from a community-based women and children's centre.

The young man who had been a state ward was assisted by after-care services which helped him with education, health and housing since his leaving care three years earlier. For some it was more a matter of survival, living in poverty and receiving what support they could from services. For one man living in a crisis shelter, the breakfast and dinner provided helped him survive each day: he said he didn't eat lunch because he could not afford to buy it. For others, emotional and social support was critical. For example, Catherine, who attended the young mum's group at a youth service, said:

> They make me feel welcome, I can speak about anything, they are good with [name of daughter], my best friend comes here with her son, I met her here [at young mum's group], we went away on holidays together.

Focus group participants reported that despite the significant problems their clients face, some were doing reasonably well and some would be successful in breaking cycles of disadvantage for the next generation. They spoke of the need for approaches that built hope and dignity for homeless people and advocated for:

- Clients needing varying levels of support, long-term support, and a system where housing and support are integrated.
- A range of accommodation types and supports, not just crisis or Housing First.
- Innovative public housing approaches that are part of a cohesive strategy to reduce homelessness.
- A focus on housing sustainability and on maintaining tenancies.
- Providing people with hope, dignity, respect and responsibility.

Furthermore, service providers highlighted the role of education, employment and training, social enterprises and leadership and empowerment programs for young people as interventions, which aim to break cycles of intergenerational homelessness, violence and disadvantage. They also pointed to community development approaches based on engagement and dialogue with people in their own local neighbourhoods, which have proved successful on public housing estates. Education programs in schools about healthy relationships, and mentoring programs for children, have had some success in challenging violence in the home and providing an alternative vision of safety.

Domestic violence workers reported that their service was not a crisis 'homelessness service', but rather a refuge where women and children escaping domestic violence could come to a safe place and be nurtured. Refuges provide an important child support program aimed at building the resilience of children, empowering children and building protective behaviours. The program can be considered as an early intervention program to break intergenerational cycles of violence.

> It's about letting the child know that they're accepted, they're safe, they're cared for and they're listened to … the aim is to build safety for the child so that they get their own skills.'

Women's refuges advocated for children to be considered as clients in their own right, as is now underway in the new data collection system for specialise homelessness services, and argued that there has been an inadequate systems response to children who accompany their mother to a refuge.

This priority to re-establish safety as a strategy in preventing intergenerational homelessness is consistent with the needs expressed repeatedly by the interviewees. Where the intergenerational disadvantage, homelessness and violence seemed to come most to the fore in respondents' narratives was in their feelings of being completely alone and lonely in life, with no family support. The absence of family support and respondents' sense of being 'on my own' makes the support from homelessness services and women and children's centres critical to survival and recovery. Indeed all respondents, at the time of interview, indicated that the support they were receiving from services was crucial for their well-being and getting back on their feet. Sometimes the support had been offered for many years, as in the case of a woman (and her family) living in country NSW who had received support from the local women's refuge over 20 years. The refuge welcomed her back on a number of occasions when she was fleeing domestic violence and the service also has an outreach worker able to visit ex-residents in their own home. She had recently been offered a flat on the private rental market and will continue to receive outreach support from the refuge. Likewise, participants in the domestic violence staff focus group affirmed the value of long-term and ongoing support to women and children. Refuge workers spoke of how women could always return to the refuge and that they 'come in the front door and they go out the back door a little bit different to when they arrived.' Participants in the homelessness service group also spoke of the need for continuing support, but reported that this component of their service was sometimes under-funded and inadequate.

One important role for services—which was not evident during focus group discussions but which was identified as an important need in the analysis of the client interviews—is to address social inclusion and link people into their wider community. Connecting with the community, or in the words of the client who was a *Big Issue* vendor, 'having a go', may help people with histories of homelessness to sustain housing in their local neighbourhood. Selling the *Big Issue* helped connect the man with his city, as well as the neighbourhood in which he grew up. This connection to place was the exception, however, with most respondents suggesting that home was where they put their head down that night. Taking account of ideas of place and home will be important in any policy response aimed at breaking cycles of homelessness.

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