

# Housing issues during lockdown: health, space and overcrowding

## A briefing on research supporting the Homes at the Heart campaign

### Summary

- Nearly a third (31%) of adults in Britain – 15.9 million people – have had mental or physical health problems because of the condition of, or lack of space in, their home during lockdown.
- 30,000 people are spending lockdown in a home that consists of one room, and more than 3,600 children are spending lockdown in a home made up of two rooms.
- A record 3.7m people are living in overcrowded homes, including a record 1.6m children.
- More than half of people (52%) who said their home was not big enough said they'd suffered from health problems during lockdown.
- More than 1 in 10 (11%) of all British adults said they felt depressed during lockdown because of a lack of space in their home.
- 1 in 20 (5%) of everyone who said their home was not big enough said this had led them to seek medical help during lockdown or take medication for their mental health.
- Almost a fifth (19%) of those who said their home was not big enough said they hadn't been able to get enough sleep during lockdown because of the lack of space.

## Introduction

For many people, our homes have been important places of refuge and safety during this pandemic – but for countless others across the country, home has felt less like a sanctuary and more like a prison. Inadequate housing and cramped conditions are making lockdown even more unbearable for millions of people right now.

To support the Homes at the Heart campaign, we have explored the reality of lockdown life for people in Britain today. This involved in the first instance analysis of the extent and nature of overcrowding in England, as evidenced through the English Housing Survey. Secondly, we commissioned YouGov to ask more than 4,000 British adults about the types of issues they have been facing during lockdown.

The findings contained in this report represent just a small part of what we found. We plan to spotlight more of these issues as the campaign progresses.

[Find out more about our Homes at the Heart campaign](#)

## Overcrowding

This analysis was based on the English Housing Survey 2017/18 dataset published through the UK Data Archive. At the time of writing, this was the most recent full dataset available. We looked at households classed as not meeting the bedroom standard<sup>1</sup>. These households were then also analysed according to:

- a) The number of persons in the household.
- b) The number of dependent children in the household.
- c) The number of bedrooms available to the household.

All households including at least one dependent child were categorised as Families for the purposes of this analysis<sup>2</sup>.

- There are more than 825,000 households living in overcrowded homes.
- More than 687,000 of these households are families with dependent children.
- There are 3.7 million people living in overcrowded households.
- 1.6 million of these people are children.
- There are nearly 150,000 families living in one-bedroom properties.

<b>Overcrowded households only</b>						
Number of bedrooms:	1	2	3	4	5+	Total
Households	204,049	313,740	261,568	34,476	11,308	825,141
Families	149,561	272,451	227,860	29,159	8,128	687,159
People	566,121	1,303,189	1,509,328	242,095	90,852	3,711,585
Children	184,797	620,704	709,306	100,303	21,659	1,636,768

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<sup>1</sup> See the appendix for a description of the bedroom standard.

<sup>2</sup> Households with 5 or more children are recorded as “5+” in the dataset. As larger families are more likely to be overcrowded we felt it important to try to reflect a more accurate count for these larger families. We thus used an average based on previous years’ data to calculate the number of children in larger households.

Given the peculiarities of lockdown, we wanted also to look at the situations of people who are not necessarily living in overcrowded conditions against the bedroom standard, but who are living in small homes.

<b>All households (not just overcrowded)</b>		
Number of rooms:	One	Two
Households	27,212	130,070
Of which Families	0	3,660
People	30,442	156,155
Of which Children	0	3,660

Again this is from the English Housing Survey. Note the measure here is all rooms, as opposed to bedrooms in the previous table. It is also worth noting that while we are aware of examples of families in temporary accommodation having to live in one room, such households do not get picked up by surveys such as this, which is why the families in one room figure here is zero.

## Housing experiences during lockdown

To further explore the housing experiences of people during lockdown, we commissioned YouGov to run a series of questions across two waves of their Omnibus survey<sup>3</sup>. The key findings used in our press release are explored here.

We asked respondents to indicate which, if any, of a range of physical and mental health issues they had experienced during lockdown. We asked this through two questions: one asking about impacts which were felt to be due to a lack of space in the home, and one asking about impacts which were felt to be due to the condition of the home.

The health issues we asked about were:

- Not being able to get enough sleep
- Getting ill often or for a long time
- Having general ill health
- Feeling stressed
- Feeling depressed
- Seeking medical help, or taking medication, for mental health issues
- Catching coronavirus (note this was only asked with regard to lack of space).

We also asked separately whether they felt that their home was not big enough for their needs. This was asked in the form of a statement (“My home is not big enough for me and my household”) to which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement. All those who selected “Strongly agree” or “Tend to agree” were classed as indicating that their home was not big enough.

It is worth noting at this point that whereas the overcrowding figures in the first part of this document are based on consistent measurement against a formal standard, the questions here are reliant on the respondents’ own assessment of their issues and the causes of those issues.

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<sup>3</sup> Total sample size from YouGov Plc. survey was 4116 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th - 15th June 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

**Nearly a third (31%) of adults in Britain – 15.9 million people – have had mental or physical health problems because of the condition of, or lack of space in, their home during lockdown**

This was arrived at by combining those who had identified that they were suffering from any health impact due to a lack of space with those who had identified that they were suffering from any health impact due to the condition of their home. This was regardless of whether or not they assessed their home as not being big enough. The figures were combined rather than added to avoid double counting. The result (31% of British adults) was compared with the ONS 2019 mid-year estimate figure for the adult population of Great Britain (51,220,471) which can be found [here](#).

This gave us a total estimate of 15.9 million adults.

	% of British adults	Number of adults (based on ONS total)
Any health problem	31.03%	15,893,712
Health problem arising from lack of space	19.50%	9,987,992
Health problem arising from condition of home	25.20%	12,907,559
All British adults		51,220,471

**More than half of those (52%) who said their home was not big enough said they'd suffered from health problems.**

**1 in 20 (5%) of everyone who said their home was not big enough said this had led them to seek medical help or take medication for their mental health.**

**Almost a fifth (19%) of those who said their home was not big enough said they hadn't been able to get enough sleep because of the lack of space.**

These findings were arrived at by looking at how those respondents who had identified a lack of space in their home had answered the question about health problems arising from a lack of space. Grouping the different impacts together to avoid double counting allowed us to see that 51.65% of those who said their home was not big enough had also linked a lack of space to health issues they were experiencing. We were also able to see the responses for each individual impact listed.

<b>For the following question, please think about life in your home since the start of the lockdown imposed on 23 March 2020. Which, if any, of the following has any lack of space in your home led to?</b>	<b>% of those who agreed with the statement "My home is not big enough for me and my household"</b>	<b>Number of adults (based on proportion who said home was not big enough)</b>
<b>Any health impact (deduplicated)</b>	<b>51.65%</b>	5,955,105
...not being able to get enough sleep	18.5%	2,133,000
...getting ill often or for a long time	3.7%	426,600
...having general ill health	5.8%	668,724
...feeling stressed	40.1%	4,623,421
...feeling depressed	27.7%	3,193,735
...seeking medical help or taking medication for mental health issues	5.4%	622,605
...catching coronavirus	1.9%	219,065
None of these	34.2%	3,943,167
Don't know	3.0%	345,892
Not applicable – my home does not have a lack of space	9.3%	1,072,265
Prefer not to say	1.9%	219,065
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11,529,728</b>

To arrive at the numbers of adults affected, we first adjusted the total number of British adults to reflect the proportion of those who had said their home did not have enough space (22.5%), then applied the percentages to that adjusted total.



**More than 1 in 10 (11%) of all British adults said they felt depressed during lockdown because of a lack of space in their home.**

Looking again at all adults – not just those who said their home was not big enough – and just at the impact of feeling depressed due to a lack of space identified that this was felt by 10.9% of all British adults. Extrapolated to the whole adult population, this would amount to more than five and a half million people feeling this way.

<b>For the following question, please think about life in your home since the start of the lockdown imposed on 23 March 2020. Which, if any, of the following has any lack of space in your home led to?</b>	<b>% of British adults</b>	<b>Number of adults (based on ONS total)</b>
<b>Any health impact (deduplicated)</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>9,987,992</b>
...not being able to get enough sleep	6.4%	3,278,110
...getting ill often or for a long time	1.1%	563,425
...having general ill health	2.1%	1,075,630
...feeling stressed	14.2%	7,273,307
...feeling depressed	10.9%	5,583,031
...seeking medical help or taking medication for mental health issues	2.0%	1,024,409
...catching coronavirus	0.8%	409,764
None of these	29.0%	14,853,937
Don't know	1.6%	819,528
Not applicable – my home does not have a lack of space	46.9%	24,022,401
Prefer not to say	3.0%	1,536,614

## Relationship issues

We looked at relationship issues being faced by people who are:

- Married, or
- In a civil partnership, or
- Living with a partner but neither married nor in a civil partnership.

Again we explored the impact of the size of people's homes on these issues. The responses came out as follows:

Which of the following have you experienced during lockdown?	Agree that home not big enough	Say that home is big enough
Me and my partner have been arguing more during lockdown	18.78%	9.75%
My relationship with my partner has broken down	3.31%	0.49%

Nearly 19% of people in relationships who say that their home is not big enough report having argued more than usual with their partners during lockdown, compared with less than 10% of those who say their home is big enough.

To arrive at numbers of adults we looked at the proportion of adults who are living with a partner. The ONS publishes figures on this for England, which show that 61.46% of adults (here aged 16 or over) fit into the categories listed above. This can be calculated from [table 2 of this document](#).

These figures are just for England, but we made the assumption that the overall proportion will be similar across Great Britain, especially as England accounts for the greatest part of the total.

We applied this proportion to the total number of GB adults (51,220,471) to get a co-habiting base of 31,480,101.

Next, we looked at the split in our polling between those cohabittees who say their home is big enough and those who do not. This fell out as 22.12% saying their home is not big enough, and 76.52 saying it is big enough. (The remainder said they didn't know.)

Applying these proportions to the co-habiting base gave us the following totals:

Not big enough	6,963,398
Big enough	24,088,574
Don't know	428,129

To these we applied the percentages from the first table in this section, to arrive at the numbers as shown below:

Which of the following have you experienced during lockdown?	Agree that home not big enough	Say that home is big enough
Me and my partner have been arguing more during lockdown	1,307,726	2,348,636
My relationship with my partner has broken down	230,488	118,034

## Appendix – The bedroom standard

The most commonly used measure of overcrowding is the bedroom standard. This was developed by the Government Social Survey for use in the 1960 housing survey. While it is not legally enforceable, it is commonly held to be a realistic and useful measure. Under the standard, the number of bedrooms needed by a household is calculated according to the composition of the household in terms of age, gender and relationships. The household is deemed to be overcrowded (“below standard”) if they have fewer bedrooms available to them than this calculated figure.

This description of the bedroom standard – and how it is calculated for the purposes of the English Housing Survey – is taken from House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 1013, [Overcrowded housing \(England\)](#), published October 2018:

“A standard number of bedrooms is allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to one another. A separate bedroom is allocated to each married or cohabiting couple, any other person aged 21 or over, each pair of adolescents aged 10-20 of the same sex, and each pair of children under 10. Any unpaired person aged 10-20 is paired, if possible, with a child under 10 of the same sex, or, if that is not possible, he or she is given a separate bedroom, as is any unpaired child under 10. This standard is then compared with the actual number of bedrooms available for the sole use of the household and differences are tabulated. Bedrooms converted to other uses are not counted as available unless they have been denoted as bedrooms by the informants; bedrooms not actually in use are counted unless uninhabitable.”