



# Destitution in the UK 2020

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# Research aims

- To estimate the scale of destitution in the UK in 2019 (pre-COVID-19)
- To identify any emerging trends in destitution (pre-COVID-19)
- To identify the early impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on people who were destitute when surveyed in autumn 2019

# Definition of destitution

a) People are destitute if they have lacked **two or more** of following in past month because they **cannot afford them**:

- ***Shelter***
- ***Food***
- ***Heating***
- ***Lighting***
- ***Clothing and footwear***
- ***Basic toiletries***

b) *People are also destitute if their income is so low, and they have no savings, such that they are **unable to purchase these essentials for themselves***

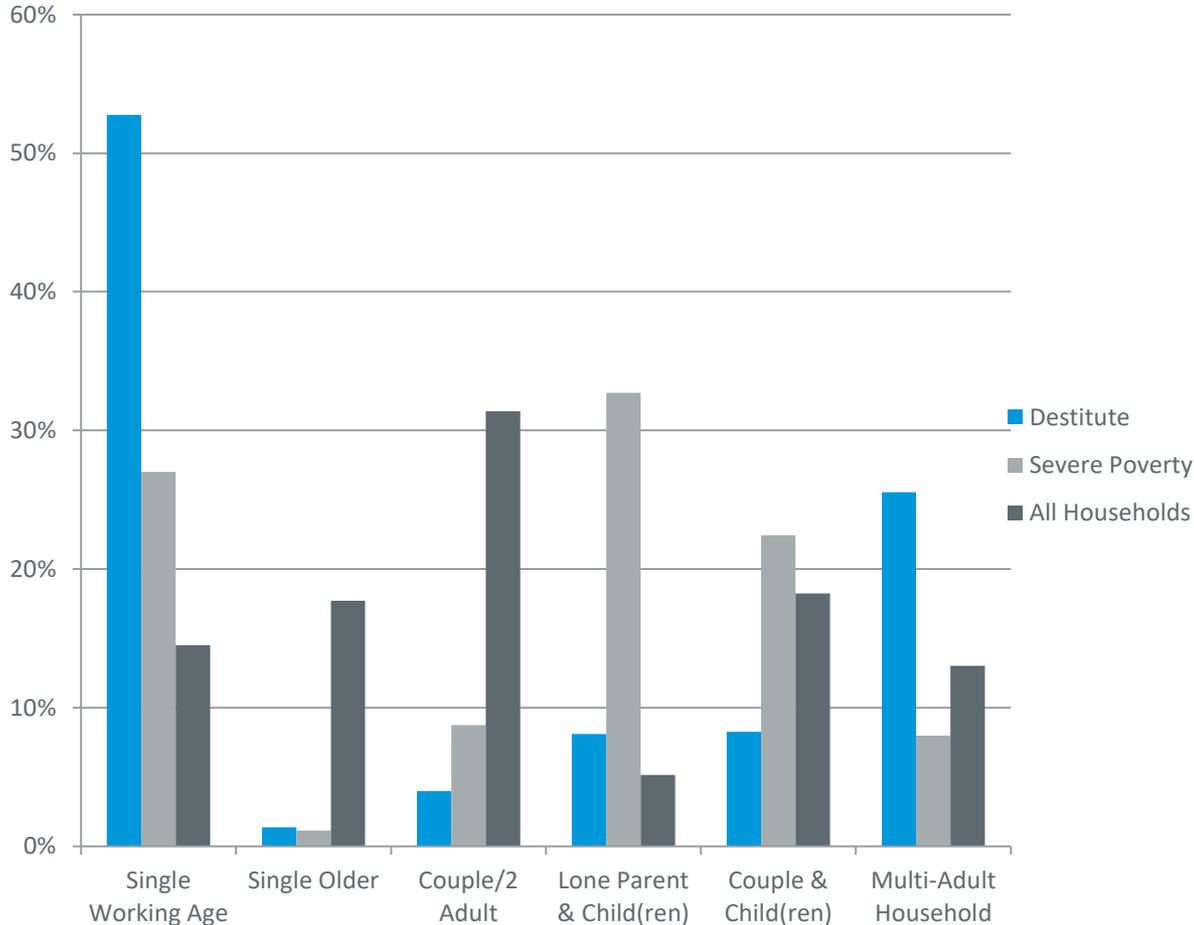
# Methods in 2019/20

- User survey of 113 crisis services in 18 case study areas – 3,914 questionnaire returns
- Secondary analysis of over 40 quantitative datasets enabled scaling up of statistical findings from case studies to national level
- In-depth interviews with 70 people who were destitute when surveyed in autumn 2019

# The Scale of Destitution

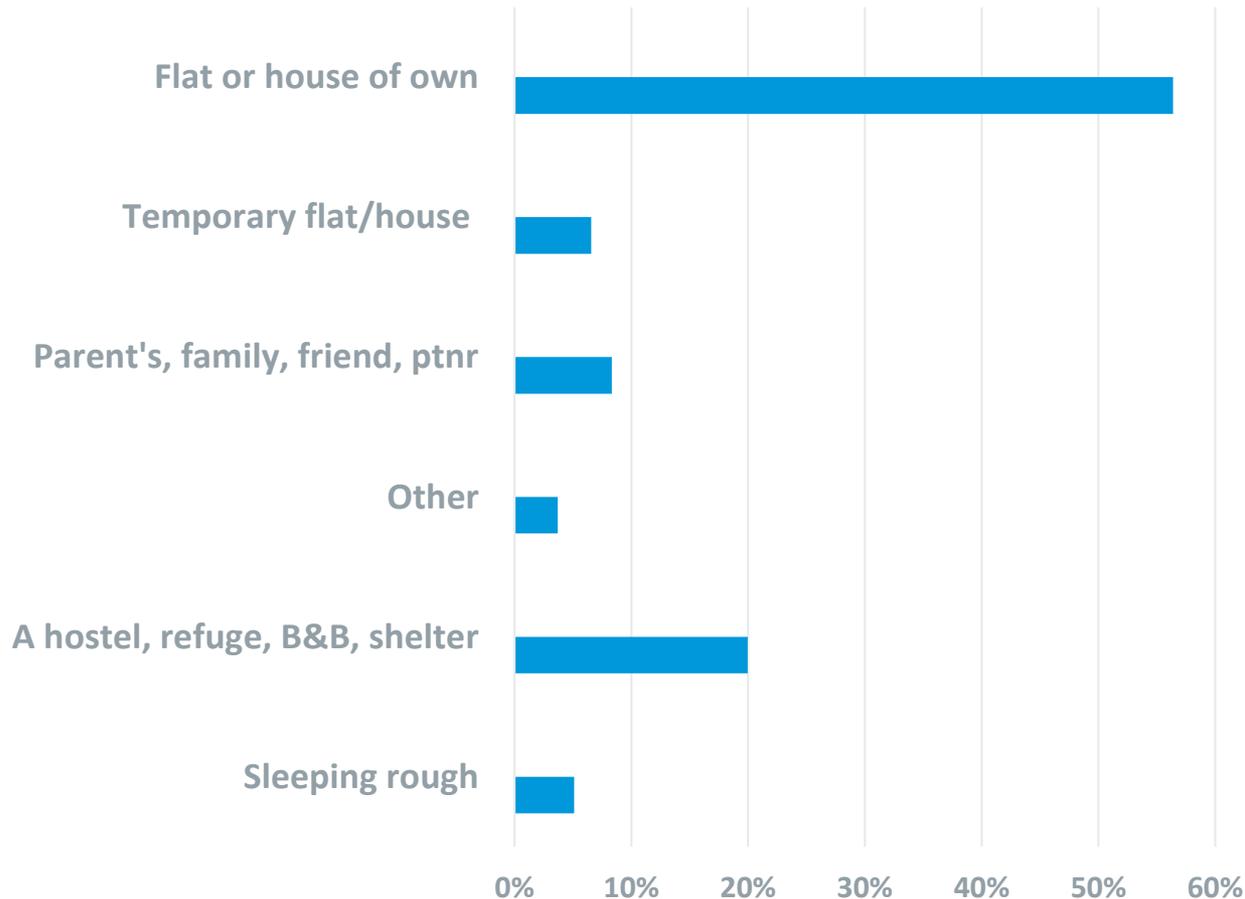
- Over a million UK households were destitute **at some point in 2019**, including **2,388,000 people**, of whom **552,000 were children**
- The number of destitute households has increased by **35%** since spring 2017: the number of people affected by **54%** and the number of children by **52%**

# The people affected



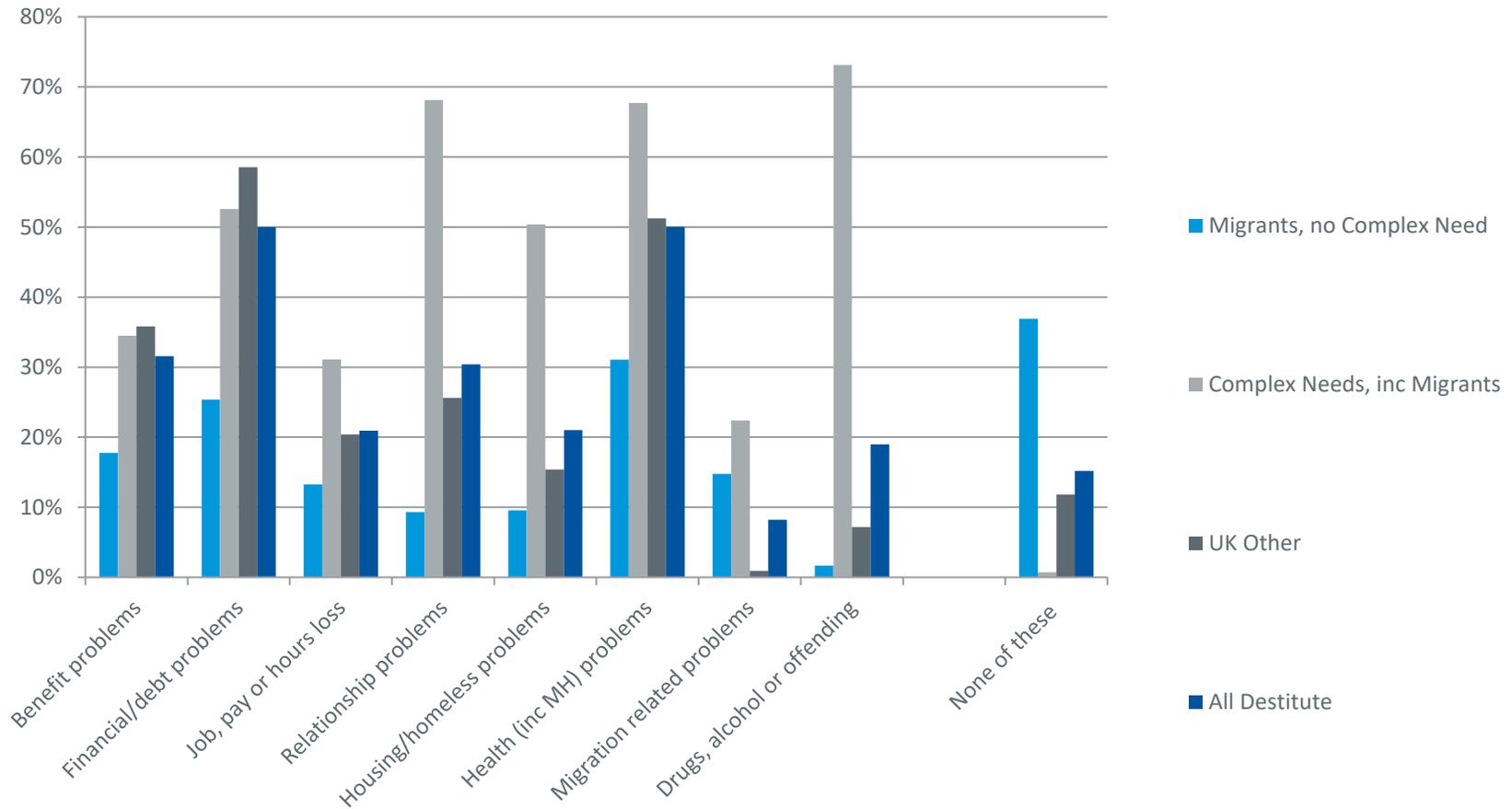
- Mainly single and multi-adult households
- But more families with children in 2019
- People affected by destitution are predominantly younger, very few over 65

# Current housing situation

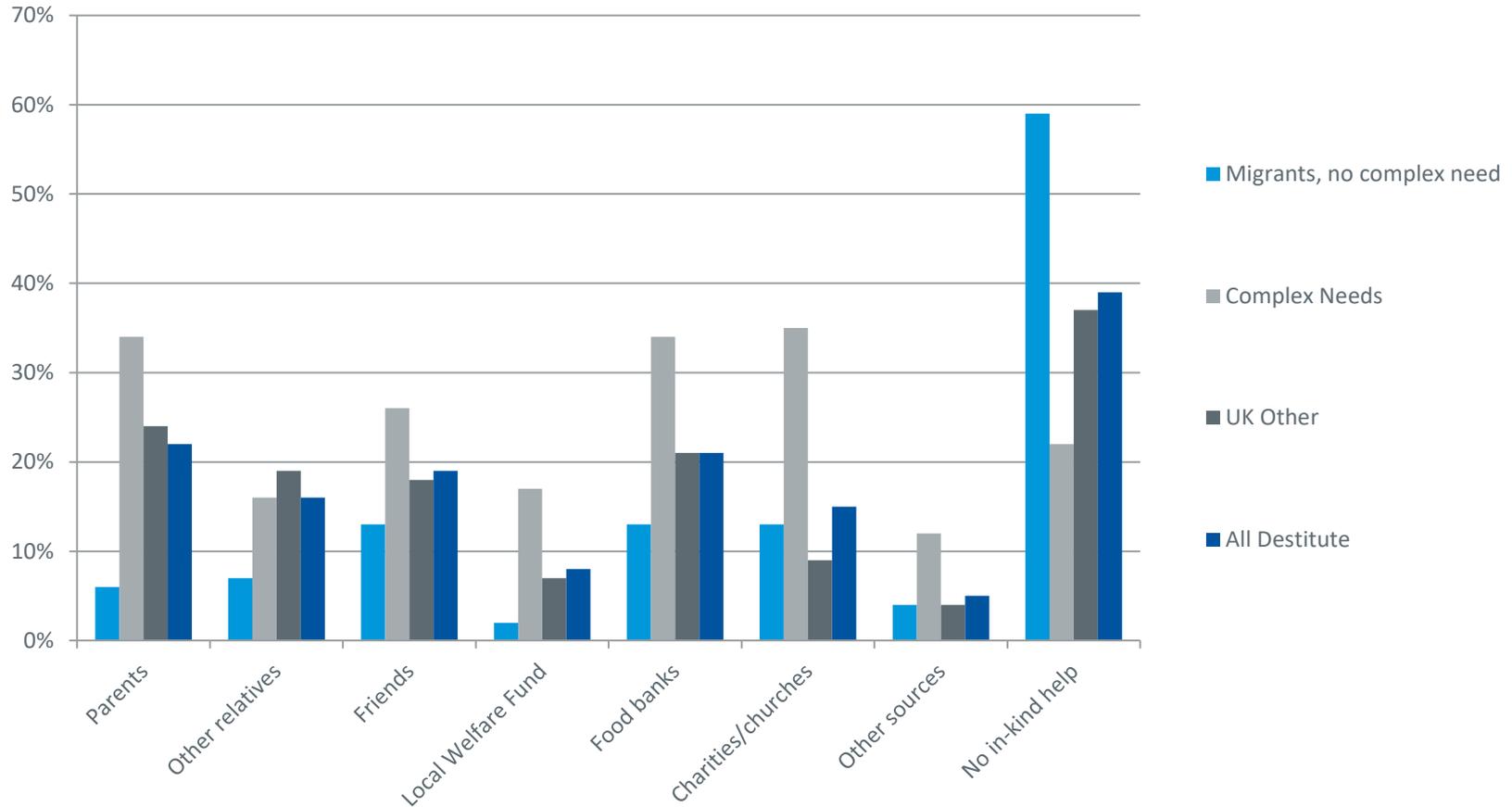


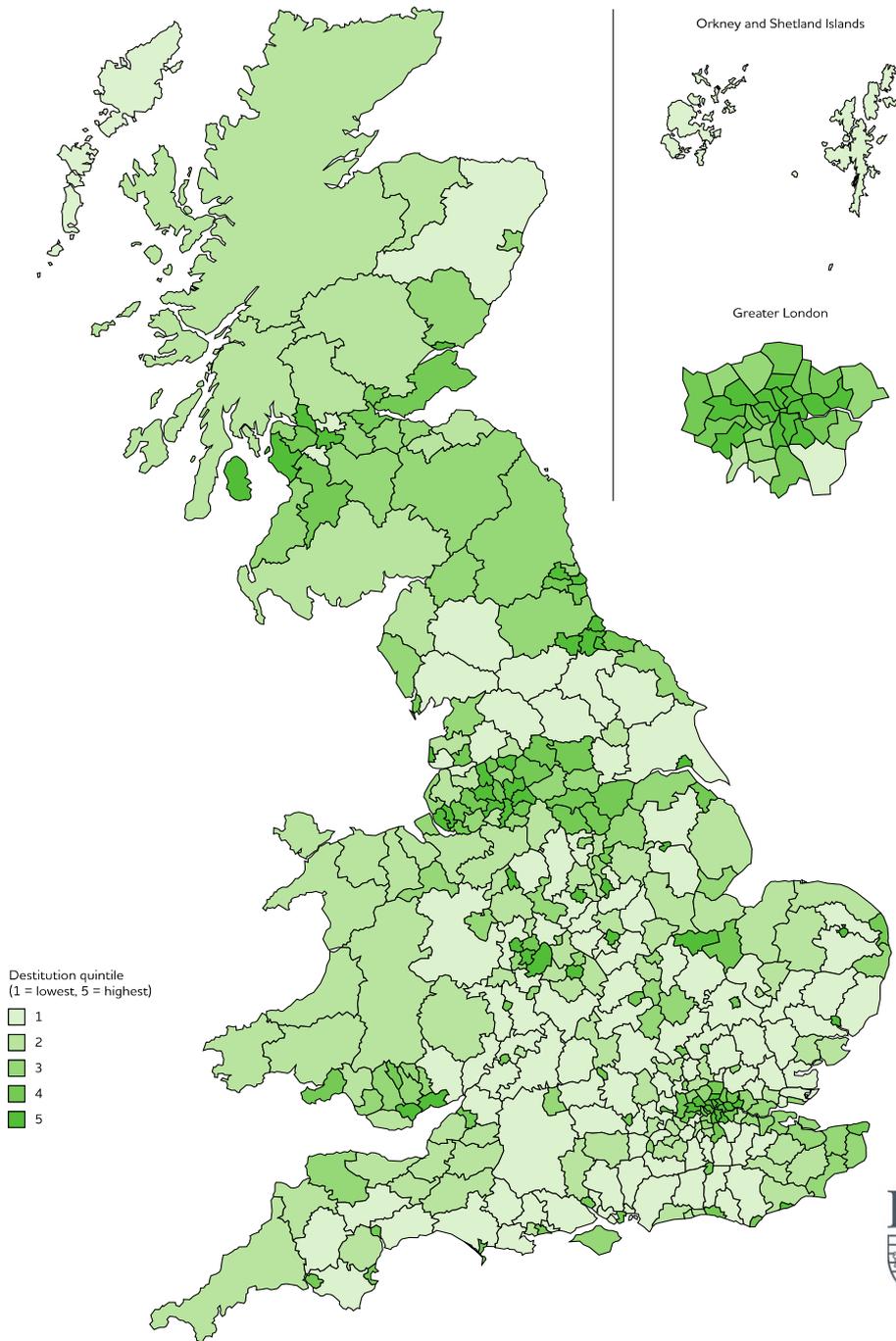
- Of those with own home, 60% were social tenants, 30% private tenants, and 8% home owners
- 5% were sleeping rough when surveyed, but 22% had slept rough in last month

# Problems experienced last 12 months



# Sources of in-kind support





Highest rates in  
North East, North  
West and (parts  
of) London

Geographical  
concentration in  
northern parts of  
the UK has  
intensified since  
2017

# Social Security

- The £20pw uplift, relaxation of conditionality, and suspension of debt deductions eased pressure
- Biggest problem was repayment of UC advances:

*“... as soon as my [UC] claim went through ... I owed them £514 ... Because for six weeks I had no income, so when I got the advance, that went on everything that I [already] owed ... you’re just never catching up, because of the way it starts. Hence, the reason that we had to use a food bank to even survive.”* Woman, aged 25-45

# Housing

- Inadequate or overcrowded accommodation, with little access to outside space, severely exacerbated the effects of lockdown:

*“... this house is very congested, overcrowded for us ... The elder [child] is living in the small bedroom, and we have four members – me, my husband, and five-year [old] boy, three-years [old] boy, we are living in one room. My children have no separate bed, because the house is very small. We have no space for another bed.”* Woman, aged 25–45

- Housing affordability was also a major theme, especially in London:

*“We’re being evicted because we can’t afford the rent ... before the whole COVID thing started up, we were being evicted, that’s why we’re not out yet [the government ban on evictions], we were due to be out about a month ago...”* Man, aged 25-45

# Community services

- Some struggled to access foodbanks because referral agencies closed/difficult to reach; while the pandemic-induced closure of charity shops and libraries hit many hard:

*“I don’t have a computer in the house, in the flat. I don’t have, of course, internet... At the very start of the COVID thing, the library was open for a limited time ... That’s been a couple of weeks, bam ... closed totally.”* Man, aged over 45

- Difficulties reaching local authorities because of unaffordable call charges were widely reported:

*“They tell you not to walk into the [council offices] ... You ring the number up and talk to a machine to be put through ... They take more of the premium and the minutes seem to go down quicker ... Then I have to try and stretch the minutes out in case I have to ring my family or anything.”* Man, aged 25–45

# Conclusion

- Increasing, intensifying destitution even before COVID-19 pandemic
- More families with children affected
- Experiences of the (initial) COVID-19 lockdown
  - eased by some social security measures
  - exacerbated by poor housing conditions, digital exclusion, and difficulties accessing services/goods from local authorities and some charities