

# Homelessness

12



## Definition

Callers seeking information about leaving home or contemplating leaving home. Callers who have left home, run away or have been asked to leave (either temporarily or permanently) and who may or may not have somewhere to stay.

*Caller and his 8 year old brother were kicked out of home yesterday by their parents. Slept on the streets last night.*

*Male aged 9*

It is very difficult to say just how many young homeless people there are in Australia. Various estimates have been made over the years, but the figures vary depending on the definition of homelessness and the method used for counting.

The National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) reported that there were anywhere between 20,000 and 25,000 homeless young people aged between 12 and 25 in Australia, and emphasised that this was a conservative estimate. These people were either living on the streets, accommodated in refuges and shelters, moving between relatives, or living in buildings (some abandoned, others occupied) or building sites.

*Caller had a fight with her mum and was kicked out of home yesterday without any money and nowhere to go. She slept on the street last night and wanted to know where she could sleep tonight.*

*Female aged 13*

The Morris Report (1995) suggested that the number of homeless aged 12 to 18 years doubled between 1991 and 1994, making a total of 21,000.

There are many reasons why a child or young person might find themselves homeless, and there is no one thing that can be identified as a cause of homelessness.

Some of the more common factors that may contribute to homelessness are poverty, family breakdown, mental illness, drugs, alcohol, learning difficulties and abuse (emotional, physical and sexual).

*Having severe trouble at home... constantly fighting with mother...when at father's place is in fear of verbal and physical abuse...wants to leave home but is scared her parents will come after her...has depressed and suicidal feelings that are becoming more and more frequent.*

*Female aged 15*

## Caller Information

An average of 3,470 calls are made to Kids Help Line each year about homelessness and/or leaving home, accounting for just over 3.5% of all problem calls. Between 1997 and 1999 the proportion of calls for this category has been stable, ranging between 3.5 and 3.6% of all calls. Almost three-quarters of these callers are from metropolitan areas, with the remainder from regional Australia.

Ethnic background of the caller was recorded for 26% of calls – 89% were Anglo-Australian, 6% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and the remaining 5% from other backgrounds. Indigenous youth make 4% of all calls to KHL, which means there is a higher representation of calls from Indigenous children and young people about homelessness.

## Age and Gender

The table below shows the age and gender breakdowns for calls about this issue:

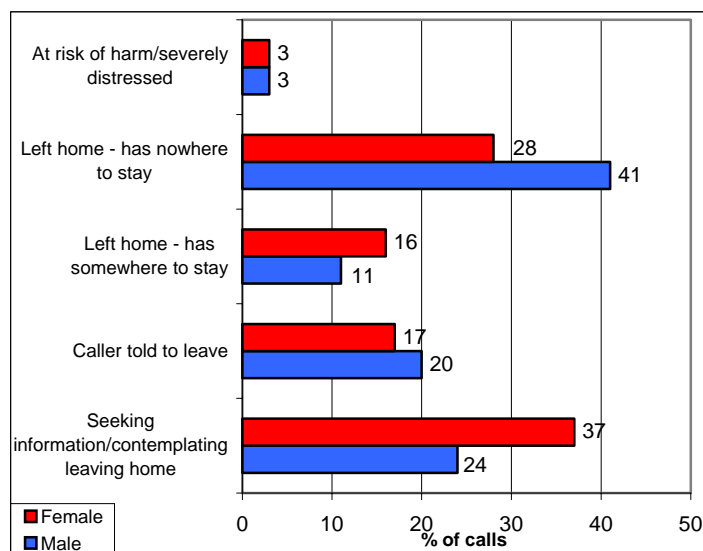
AGE	FEMALE	MALE
5-9	<1%	<1%
10-14	19%	11%
15-18	44%	25%

Homelessness is the 4<sup>th</sup> most common problem males aged 15 to 18 call KHL about, and the 5<sup>th</sup> most common for females in this age group. Combined, they made over two-thirds (69%) of homelessness calls. Females (64%) made considerably more calls than males (36%).

*Just wanting to know her legal rights...she is determined to leave home because her mum regularly beats her.*

*Female aged 16*

The graph below describes the types of calls about leaving home/homelessness:



An analysis of the severity of calls indicates that 33% of young people were enquiring about leaving home or contemplating leaving home, with a further 18% having been told to leave their home. In many enquiries the caller wants information on the legal age they can leave home, how to access financial benefits, or employment information. Counsellors can either provide this information or direct the caller to appropriate agencies. For those callers contemplating leaving home, counsellors will explore the reasons and help clarify the issues in order to assist the caller to make informed decisions. Kids Help Line promotes constructive relationships between young people and their parents or caregivers.

14% of callers stated they had left home and had somewhere to stay. Some of the issues for this group included negotiating with the Department of Social Security, improving their standard of living and feelings concerning parents and family.

*Based on 1997 to 1999 data.*

A further 33% of callers reported they had left home and had nowhere to stay, or were at risk of harm or severely distressed. Often the safety of the caller is the major concern. In this situation, counsellors can quickly access those services that provide emergency accommodation using a computerised national data base. Worth noting is that 41% of male callers fall into this category, which is considerably above the rate for females (28%). For callers from regional or remote areas there exists the added difficulty of limited availability of services.

*Currently outside of the caravan park from where he has just been evicted. Has been on street for past few days and has not eaten. Contacted a number of refuges but has not found a place and distance and access to transport is a problem.*

*Male aged 17*

Finally, 3% of callers were at risk of harm or severely distressed at the time of the call. This rate was consistent for both males and females.

Research by Crane, Brannock, Ray, Campbell, Smeal & Atwih (1996) has found young people see their relations with parents or other parental figures as central to their capacity to remain at home, thus supporting current Commonwealth, State and Territory policies which acknowledge the importance of prevention and/or early intervention. Kids Help Line is acknowledged as one of the few services which is specifically focused on prevention and/or early intervention.

## References

- Mackenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. (1994) *The National Census of Homeless School Students*, International Year of the Family, National Conference, Adelaide.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (1995) *A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*. Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
- Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) *Our Homeless Children: The Report of The National Inquiry Into Homeless Children*. Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
- Crane, P., Brannock, J., Ray, L., Campbell, J., Smeal, G. & Atwih, B. (1996) *Homelessness Among Young People in Australia: Early Intervention and Prevention: A Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme*. Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies: Hobart.

*Updated: May 2000*

## For more information

© This information may be re-used, copied or distributed as long as it is sourced to Kids Help Line and is not used out of context. For up to date information, current events and what's on the drawing board, visit our website.

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

### NATIONAL OFFICE:

PO Box 376, Red Hill, Qld, 4059  
 Ph (07) 3369 1588 Fax (07) 3367 1266  
 Email [admin@kidshelp.com.au](mailto:admin@kidshelp.com.au)  
 24 hour telephone counselling line: 1800 55 1800