

# Research uncovers impact of UK housing crisis on single mothers

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Researchers at the University of Hertfordshire are calling for urgent action to provide safe and stable accommodation for single mothers and their children, after research uncovered the devastating effects of the UK's chronic housing crisis on their mental and physical health.

Interviews with 12 [single mothers](#) living in temporary accommodation in

London revealed experiences of abuse and neglect from the housing system, including degrading treatment from staff and development of suicidal thoughts and PTSD.

This comes at the height of twin crises in housing and mental health. After being made homeless, many find themselves stuck in temporary housing indefinitely, often in very poor conditions.

Some of the women participating in the study, which was published in the *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counseling*, were fleeing [domestic abuse](#). But shockingly, one stated the [domestic violence](#) she experienced would be more bearable than the systemic abuse she faced in temporary housing, after fearing non-compliance might leave her with nowhere to turn.

Poor housing conditions were also connected with changes in their children's behavior and even physical illness. For example, one distressed child was scared to sleep in his bed, which was full of bed bugs. One participant told researchers, "it feels like I'm being looked at like scum," and another said "being a single mum in temporary housing is hell on Earth."

Researchers found that many women benefited from community-based action, such as joining local campaign groups, as well as individual acts of resistance—for example, refusing to accept offers of accommodation outside London. Yet researchers concluded that individual interventions are not the solution. Instead, a collective, system-wide approach is necessary to address stigma and inequalities, where services as well as individuals advocate for guaranteed access to safe housing.

Nina Carey, Clinical Psychologist who led the research during her time at Hertfordshire, said, "Conducting this research uncovered the devastating effects of homelessness and temporary accommodation on

the mental and physical health of mothers and children. Urgent action needs to be taken to provide safe, stable and suitable accommodation for families.

"Individuals, groups and organizations can be led by single mothers, grassroots activist groups such as Focus E15 and charities such as the Magpie Project to provide support and solidarity, and to urge [local authorities](#) and governments to take action."

Emma Karwatzki, Program Director for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, said, "This research further highlights the inequalities and injustice our communities experience in accessing appropriate [housing](#), care and support. It reinforces the crucial need for systemic change at multiple levels. This research also speaks to the strength and solidarity demonstrated by single mothers living in such highly unstable contexts."

**More information:** Nina Carey et al, "Hell on Earth": Single mothers' experiences of temporary accommodation in London and its impact on their mental health, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/13642537.2023.2175884](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2023.2175884)

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