



youth
ACCESS

To Information, Advice and Counselling

Important new evidence on advice needs

Major new study shows young people have highest needs for advice on issues like housing, homelessness, employment and domestic violence but are more likely to take no action

Earlier this year the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) published the results of the most in-depth study of people's advice needs and advice-seeking behaviour ever undertaken. 'Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice' reports the findings of 5,611 face-to-face interviews with members of the public about their experiences of legal problems. The research will heavily influence all future government policy on advice and legal services, so the findings are extremely significant for all providers of rights-based advice and information services to young people. Although the study only looked at adults aged 18 and over, the LSRC has kindly agreed to run some additional data analysis for Youth Access on the responses from the 539 18-24 year olds who took part in the survey. We hope to publish a detailed analysis of the data in due course, but we can reveal here some of the findings from the main report and the early findings from the first tranche of data we have received from the LSRC. (NB: *The following represents our own initial analysis of the data only*)

Levels of need

- Overall, over one third of survey respondents experienced one or more 'justiciable' problems during the preceding three and a half years. The overall level of needs of the 18-24 age group is in line with that of the general public, however, the pattern of their needs differs markedly.
- 18-24 year olds experience greater levels of problems than any other age group in several key areas of social welfare law, including: homelessness (where young people appear to be around 7 times as likely as people from other age groups to experience a problem), rented housing (four times greater than average), employment, domestic violence and unfair police treatment.
- 18-24 year olds also experience higher levels of problems than average relating to: welfare benefits, mental health, personal injury and clinical negligence.
- 18-24 year olds experience average levels of problems in the areas of: money/debt, discrimination, consumer, immigration and relationship breakdown.
- 18-24 year olds experience significantly lower levels of problems than average relating to: children, divorce, neighbours and owner-occupied housing.

Problem clusters

- Young people appear to be more susceptible than other age groups to clusters of problems. The majority of 18-24 year olds who reported experiencing one problem reported two or more problems. 15% reported five or more problems, more than double the average. Indeed, 18-24 year olds emerge as over 20 times as likely to experience more than five problems as people aged over 65.
- Amongst all age groups, those most likely to experience multiple problems tend to be the most vulnerable, e.g. people experiencing ill-health or disability, people in receipt of benefits and lone parents.

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- Young people in receipt of welfare benefits appear to be particularly prone to problem clusters including housing & homelessness, unfair treatment by the police and action being taken against them.
- Certain problems, including domestic violence, homelessness, relationship breakdown and work-related ill-health, act as 'triggers' to multiple problems.

Seeking & obtaining advice

- Young people who had experienced a problem were slightly more likely than average to have taken no action to resolve it (22% of 18-24s compared to 19% overall). The most common reason for inaction amongst all age groups was that they did not think anything could be done, accounting for 33% of 18-24 year olds who had a problem but took no action. Young people were more likely than other age groups to have taken no action because they did not think it was important (16%) or because they were too scared to do anything (13%) and were the least likely to cite concerns over the time and costs involved. People of all ages who were least likely to take action to resolve their problems included people with mental health problems, those facing problems relating to unfair treatment by the police and victims of domestic violence. Men and people from BME groups, notably Asian groups, were also less likely to take action, whilst people with homelessness problems were the most likely to take action.
- 41% of 18-24 year olds obtained advice, only slightly below the average for all age groups. (NB: similar research by Genn ('Paths to Justice', 1999) found that 18-24 year olds were significantly less likely than other age groups to have obtained advice. It is possible that the apparent discrepancy can be explained by the introduction of Connexions providing an additional gateway to advice.)
- 28% of 18-24 year olds handled their problems alone.
- Young people were more likely than all other age groups to have tried and failed to obtain advice and so ended up handling their problems alone (7.2%).
- Within the 18-24 age range, younger young people were significantly more likely to have taken no action (34.4% of 18 year olds against 16.6% of 23-24 year olds) and to have handled their problems alone; and far less likely to have obtained advice (18.8% of 18 year olds against 47.4% of 23-24 year olds).
- Although people of all ages experiencing homelessness were amongst the most likely to seek advice, almost half failed to obtain it. Others less likely to obtain advice included people with problems relating to rented housing and benefits and those who sought advice from local councils. (NB: Shelter recently reported that 90% of housing aid centres surveyed had seen people who were passed from one council department to another without receiving proper advice or support).
- A quarter of people with public sector rented housing problems sought advice in the first instance from the 'other side', i.e. the local council. The authors of Causes of Action note that "although it is possible that sometimes an opposing part in a dispute might provide a person with dispassionate and valuable advice, it seems unlikely that such advice would always be as dispassionate and valuable as that potentially available from an independent adviser."

Satisfaction with advisers

- Around 90% of all survey respondents who had been advised by solicitors or CABx rated their advisers as helpful or very helpful. By contrast, only 62% of those obtaining advice from their local council, and 50% from their employers, rated their advisers as helpful or very helpful.

- Amongst those dissatisfied with the advice they received, 54% felt the adviser didn't provide the 'type of help' they needed (including 74% of people who were dissatisfied with advice received from their local council); 34% cited the quality of advice (including 68% of those dissatisfied with 'other advice agencies', i.e. excluding CABx); and 17% were 'just sent off somewhere else'.

'Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice: The final report of the First LSRC survey of justiciable problems' is available, price £24 (incl. P&P), by sending a cheque, made payable to 'The Legal Services Commission', to: LSRC Publications, The Legal Services Research Centre, 85 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8TX.

Youth Access' publication 'Rights To Access: meeting young people's needs for advice' (2002) contains detailed evidence of young people's needs for advice, advice-seeking behaviour and barriers to access. For further information about Youth Access' work in this area, contact james@youthaccess.org.uk