

Exploring patterns of homelessness risk among young people in Wales

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In this Data Insight, the ADR Wales Housing and Homelessness team explore patterns of homelessness risk among secondary school pupils in Wales. Analysis was conducted using screening assessment surveys completed by young people (aged 11–16 years) in secondary schools participating in the Upstream Cymru intervention. This data source offers an unprecedented opportunity to quantify the scale of homelessness risk among young people in Wales and explore different patterns of risk reporting. This analysis encompassed both youth and family homelessness—youth homelessness being when young people are not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Background

Homelessness policy and practice in the UK is increasingly moving towards prevention, with 'upstream' approaches focusing on identifying and supporting vulnerable people before a housing crisis occurs¹. One such vulnerable group is young people, an estimated 1 in 62 of whom faced homelessness in the UK in 2023/24². In Wales, Upstream Cymru is an example of a homelessness prevention intervention aimed at school-aged young people³. The intervention uses a screening assessment, in the form of a survey, to identify young people at risk of homelessness, with support primarily delivered through mediation to address family conflict. Beginning in Wales in 2020, this model of screening young people followed by targeted support—generally referred to as 'Upstream'—has since been adopted in England and Scotland by the youth homelessness charities Centrepoint and Rock Trust, respectively.

What we did

This Data Insight is based on analysis of anonymised Upstream Cymru screening assessment surveys completed between September 2020 and January 2025. Pupils can complete multiple assessment surveys; the first completed survey was used in this Data Insight. Twelve secondary schools across the south Wales region participated in Upstream Cymru.

As part of the screening, young people are asked about a range of aspects related to the risk of homelessness, including:

- Past experiences of youth and family homelessness
- Factors related to homelessness, such as conflict with parents, stays away from home, and feelings about where they currently live
- Concerns or worries about future episodes of homelessness

In total, 11 questions/Likert statements related to homelessness risk were analysed (see Appendix for the full list). Statistical techniques were applied (Multiple Correspondence Analysis followed by Cluster Analysis) to process the data and identify groups, or clusters, of young people with similar responses. Cross-tabulations of cluster by screening question were used to describe each cluster. Adjusted Standardised Residuals, not

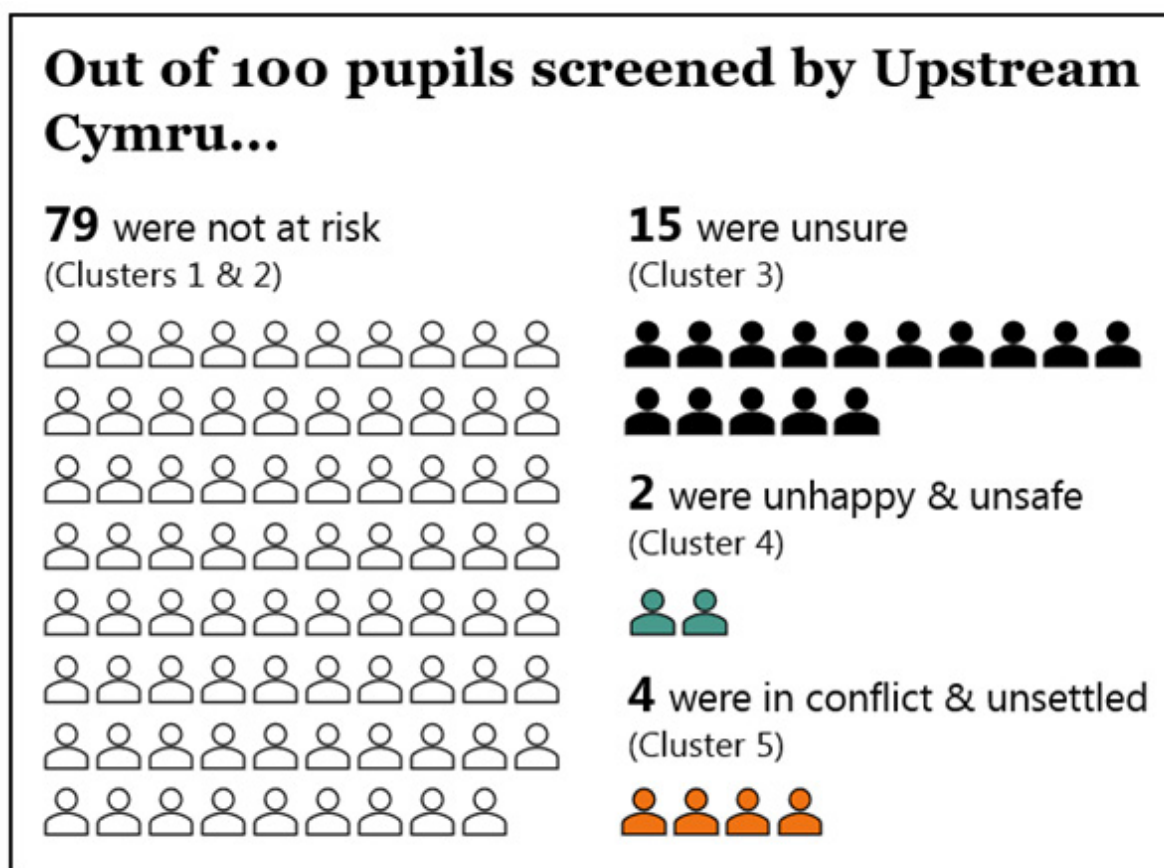
shown here, were used to assess how much the observed distribution of data in the cross-tabulations differed from what would be expected if variables were unrelated. These are expressed in standardised units to help identify which cells in the tables stood out.

A total of 6,187 screening assessments (out of an original 6,408) were analysed after the removal of cases with missing data.

What we found

In terms of direct measures of homelessness, **2.4% of pupils had experienced youth homelessness**, finding themselves homeless on one or more nights in the past year. Meanwhile, **6.0% of pupils reported that they and/or their family had experienced family homelessness**, staying with friends or relatives because they did not have accommodation.

Five clusters were identified, ranging in size from 52% of the sample to 2%. Two of the clusters (Clusters 1 and 2) had limited previous experiences of homelessness and few signs of risk or concerns about safety. The remaining three clusters (Clusters 3, 4 and 5) showed different patterns of youth and family homelessness experiences and related risks.



Responses to the 11 questions/Likert statements by cluster can be found in the Appendix. The following descriptions summarise the size and main features of each cluster, followed by some key statistics.

Cluster 1 (52% of sample) reported high levels of happiness, safety, and stability in their living situation, with minimal conflict or housing insecurity.

- 95.9% strongly agree they feel happy where they live.
- 96.9% strongly agree they feel safe.
- 99.7% report never experiencing youth homelessness in the past year.

Cluster 2 (27% of sample) generally felt safe and happy, though their responses were less strongly positive than Cluster 1. They showed moderate levels of housing and family stability.

- 88.5% agree they feel happy where they live.
- 84.0% agree they feel safe.
- 48.6% disagree with wanting to move out, and 49.1% disagree with experiencing conflict with parents/guardians.

Cluster 3 (15% of sample) had mixed feelings about their living situation, with moderate levels of dissatisfaction, conflict, and housing stability.

- 38.4% don't agree or disagree they feel happy where they live.
- 39.6% don't agree or disagree they want to move out of the place where they are living, whilst 27.5% agree to this statement.
- 38.2% don't agree or disagree they get into lots of conflict with parents/guardians, with 30.6% agreeing to this statement.

Cluster 4 (2% of sample) reported high levels of unhappiness and elevated concerns about safety where they currently lived, though potentially unrelated to conflict.

- 88.3% strongly disagree they feel happy where they live.
- 46.2% strongly disagree they feel safe where they live, with this cluster accounting for all pupils who had ever reported strongly disagree to this statement.
- 60.7% reported either strongly disagree or disagree that they get into lots of conflict with their parents.

Cluster 5 (4% of sample) experienced past homelessness and family struggles, combined with future worries, indicating a high level of vulnerability.

- 31.5% reported youth homelessness and 36.6% family homelessness in the past year.
- 54.9% slept away from home in the past year.
- 48.5% worry they might run away or be asked to leave at some point in the following year.
- 34.5% report that they/their family were unable to pay rent or mortgage due to lack of money.
- 69.3% either strongly agree or agree that they get into conflicts with their parents/guardians.

Why it matters

Our results indicate that most pupils assessed by Upstream Cymru did not show patterns of risk in relation to youth or family homelessness. Roughly six pupils out of every 100 assessed responded in ways that would be of particular concern to youth homelessness service providers (those in Clusters 4 and 5). However, differences in response patterns among these pupils suggest that different forms of intervention may be appropriate.

One of the clusters of concern, Cluster 5, encompassed pupils experiencing homelessness and very high levels of vulnerability, including family conflict. Upstream Cymru currently offers family mediation support, which would be suitable for some young people in this cluster. However, the remit of Upstream Cymru (and Upstream in other UK nations) focuses largely on youth homelessness prevention. The elevated risk of family

homelessness observed in Cluster 5 suggests that the Upstream screening tool could also be used to identify and support young people and their families through a wider range of interventions.

The second cluster of concern, Cluster 4, was marked by extreme unhappiness. As the source of unhappiness was unclear, and not exclusively related to conflict, interventions focused on family mediation may not be helpful for young people in this cluster. This highlights the importance of using the screening assessment as a starting point for a conversation with the young person, to better understand their needs and identify appropriate support options.

It should be noted that this analysis presents a snapshot of pupil experiences at the point of first screening. Homelessness, however, is a dynamic phenomenon. Pupils in Cluster 3, who showed some tentative signs of family conflict, may therefore move into Cluster 5 if circumstances at home deteriorate. Exploring these changes over time could provide further important insights to inform early intervention and homelessness prevention.

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This Data Insight has been produced by the ADR Wales Housing and Homelessness research team. It provides a snapshot of informative research currently underway at ADR Wales but is not intended to provide a complete picture of work undertaken within this field or the ADR Wales programme of work. The information presented in this Data Insight has been reviewed by ADR Wales colleagues with expertise within this thematic area and is accepted to be accurate at the point of publication. Views expressed in this Data Insight are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of ADR Wales partner organisations.

References

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- ² Centrepont (2025) Hidden in plain sight: Understanding youth homelessness in the UK. [Report]. London: Centrepont
- ³ Cardiff University (2025) Upstream Cymru [Website]. Online. Available at: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/2500988-upstream-cymru> [Accessed 20 August 2025]

Appendix

The following 11 questions/Likert statements were included in this analysis:

- I feel happy where I live now.
- I feel safe in the place where I live now.
- I would like to move out of the place where I am living.
- I get into lots of conflict with my parent(s)/guardian(s).
- During the past year, how many different times have you found yourself homeless for one or more nights?
- During the past year, did you ever sleep away from your parents or guardians because you were kicked out, ran away, or didn't feel safe to stay?
- Are you worried that you might run away or be asked to leave home sometime this year?
- How many times have you moved from one address to another during the past year?
- Was there a time in the past year when you or your family could not pay the rent or mortgage because you did not have enough money?
- During the past year, how many times have you and your family stayed with friends or relatives because you did not have a place to stay?
- Are you worried that you or your family might not have a place to live sometime this year?



Supplementary Table 1: Percentage breakdown within each cluster for youth homelessness screening questions

		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
I feel happy where I live now	Strongly agree	95.9	9.6	23.0	3.4	10.6	56.1
	Agree	3.8	88.5	32.7	2.8	11.1	31.4
	Don't agree or disagree	0.2	1.8	38.4	3.4	50.6	8.3
	Disagree	0.1	0.2	5.7	2.1	23.4	1.9
	Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.2	88.3	4.3	2.3
I feel safe in the place where I live now	Strongly agree	96.9	15.2	23.2	38.6	12.3	59.1
	Agree	2.6	84.0	49.9	6.9	22.6	32.7
	Don't agree or disagree	0.3	0.7	24.4	4.1	47.2	5.9
	Disagree	0.2	0.1	2.5	4.1	17.9	1.3
	Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.2	0.0	1.1
I would like to move out of the place where I am living	Strongly disagree	56.3	5.7	7.2	38.6	5.1	32.8
	Disagree	26.2	48.6	16.6	16.6	7.7	29.9
	Don't agree or disagree	10.5	31.4	39.6	10.3	28.1	21.2
	Agree	4.1	12.1	27.5	6.2	30.6	10.8
	Strongly agree	2.8	2.3	9.1	28.3	28.5	5.2
I get into lots of con-flict with my par-ent(s)/ guardian(s)	Strongly disagree	43.3	7.3	5.5	35.9	4.3	26.2
	Disagree	36.9	49.1	19.6	24.8	10.6	36.4
	Don't agree or disagree	15.1	34.3	38.2	15.2	15.7	23.8
	Agree	3.2	8.1	30.6	8.3	37.0	10.0
	Strongly agree	1.6	1.2	6.0	15.9	32.3	3.6
Past year, how many times youth home-less?^a	Never	99.7	99.5	96.0	86.9	68.5	97.6
	1 or more	0.3	0.5	4.0	13.1	31.5	2.4
During the past year, did you ever sleep away?^b	No	98.7	97.8	86.5	90.3	45.1	94.4
	Yes	1.3	2.2	13.5	9.7	54.9	5.6
Worried might run away/asked to leave sometime this year?^c	No	97.7	93.6	56.3	82.8	24.3	87.3
	Don't know	1.9	6.1	33.4	10.3	27.2	8.9
	Yes	0.4	0.3	10.2	6.9	48.5	3.8

- During the past year, how many different times have you found yourself homeless for one or more nights?
- During the past year, did you ever sleep away from your parents or guardians because you were kicked out, ran away, or didn't feel safe to stay?
- Are you worried that you might run away or be asked to leave home sometime this year?

Supplementary Table 2: Percentage breakdown within each cluster for family homelessness screening questions

		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
How many times moved address in past year?^a	0	84.8	77.2	64.8	66.2	50.2	78.0
	1 to 2	12.8	17.7	25.0	23.4	26.4	16.7
	3 or more	2.4	5.1	10.1	10.3	23.4	5.3
Past year, time when could not pay rent or mortgage?^b	No	81.7	67.3	39.1	64.1	28.5	69.0
	Don't know	16.7	30.0	48.0	28.3	37.0	26.1
	Yes	1.6	2.7	12.9	7.6	34.5	5.0
Past year, times family has been homeless?^c	0	97.8	95.8	87.2	82.8	63.4	94.0
	1 or more	2.2	4.2	12.8	17.2	36.6	6.0
Worried you/family might not have place to live this year?^d	No	95.5	89.4	57.7	84.1	41.3	85.9
	Don't know	3.6	10.0	35.8	10.3	34.5	11.5
	Yes	0.8	0.7	6.5	5.5	24.3	2.6

- How many times have you moved from one address to another during the past year?
- Was there a time in the past year when you or your family could not pay the rent or mortgage because you did not have enough money?
- During the past year, how many times have you and your family stayed with friends or relatives because you did not have a place to stay?
- Are you worried that you or your family might not have a place to live sometime this year?



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