

Abstract

THEME 11: INEQUALITY, DISADVANTAGE AND DISCRIMINATION

‘When you don’t have a place to call home’: Measuring severe housing deprivation/homelessness in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2023 Census

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This paper will present the latest homelessness estimates for Aotearoa/New Zealand, building on previous research by University of Otago researchers Drs Kate Amore, Helen Viggers, and Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman.

In 2009, Stats NZ defined homelessness as: a living situation where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are: without shelter; in temporary accommodation; sharing accommodation with a household; or living in uninhabitable housing (Stats NZ 2009, updated 2015). When estimates were first produced based on the 2006 Census, only the first three aspects of homelessness could be measured.

Stats NZ has worked closely with researchers to enable the extension of these estimates. In 2018 Census, a question was added on access to basic amenities to measure the fourth dimension of homelessness – uninhabitable housing. On Census night 2018, 102,123 people (2.2 percent) were identified as severely housing deprived.

For the 2023 Census, Stats NZ introduced an emergency and transitional housing indicator to better measure people in temporary housing situations. Additionally, new questions on gender, sexual identity and intersex were included in the census for the first time.

This paper will present the 2023 homelessness estimates, including homelessness rates by ethnicity and for New Zealand’s rainbow population.

Summary

In 2009, Stats NZ, in conjunction with several other agencies, developed a definition of homelessness that was updated and formalised as the official definition of homelessness in New Zealand in 2015. The definition is a New Zealand adaptation of the European Observatory on Homelessness (ETHOS) framework (Stats NZ, 2015c). It recognises living situations that may not be immediately identifiable as homelessness (compared with rough sleeping), such as people who have no other option but to share someone else's accommodation temporarily, or who are living in uninhabitable housing. Once the definition was in place, measurement was possible with the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings used as the main data source, supplemented by some administrative data from homeless service providers.

University of Otago researchers developed a methodology to adapt this definition using data from Census. The researchers adapted and refined the New Zealand definition of homelessness in order to operationalise it – to enable homelessness to be measured.

In this instance it regards people as homeless if they are:

- living in severely inadequate housing due to a lack of access to minimally adequate housing (Amore et al, 2013). This means not being able to access a private dwelling to rent or own that has all basic amenities. Housing that lacks at least two of the three core dimensions of housing adequacy – habitability, security of tenure, and privacy and control – is deemed severely inadequate.
- Using the New Zealand definition of homelessness (Stats NZ, 2015c), this population is organised into four groups, ‘Without shelter’; ‘Temporary accommodation’; ‘Sharing accommodation’; and uninhabitable housing (housing that lacks one or more basic amenities’.

The data used in the updated 2023 estimates is from the 2023 Census of Population and Dwellings. The inclusion of the identification of emergency and transitional accommodation along with measurement of people living in housing lacking basic amenities has improved the comprehensiveness of census data.

Methodology

A complex algorithm has been developed to ensure that homelessness is as accurate as possible. This algorithm ensures that people are correctly apportioned as either severely housing deprived, not severely housing deprived, or severe housing deprivation undetermined (where there is not enough information available to determine their status).¹ The research uses a range of information from the Census, including the range of dwelling types in which people who are homeless can reside (such as boarding houses, improvised dwellings or shelters, as well as the roofless and rough sleepers). A very low threshold income cutoff is used as a proxy to determine whether people ‘have no other options to acquire safe and secure housing’.

There are a number of data complexities to work through when determining these estimates and assessing quality and consistency of change over time. This paper will discuss the challenges and adaptations required when using the 2023 Census datasets. We worked closely with the New Zealand researchers developing the NZ Socioeconomic Index of Deprivation in order to ensure that some of the key components of the index such as the poverty threshold, and crowding data aligned.

Expected findings

¹ The research methods for previous estimates can be seen here [Housing-that-Lacks-Basic-Amenities-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-2018.pdf \(healthyhousing.org.nz\)](#) and [Severe housing deprivation : the prob... | Items | National Library of New Zealand | National Library of New Zealand \(natlib.govt.nz\)](#)

Data on the severely housing deprived/homeless population has been consistent when measured through the census previously, with rates higher among Māori and Pacific peoples, and among younger people. Research from University of Otago also suggests that rainbow populations are more likely to experience homelessness.

This paper will describe the state of homelessness in New Zealand as at Census Day 2023, using the methodology developed using census data.

Note that the Waitangi tribunal has highlighted the importance of measuring the homeless population as well as recommending work required in the future to address indigenous perspectives of homelessness.

References

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