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to information, advice and counselling

The advice needs of young people – the evidence

Key research evidence on young people's needs for advice on social welfare issues

James Kenrick

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Abbreviations used

An attempt has been made to minimise the use of jargon throughout the report, but some has been unavoidable. These are the abbreviations that are used most frequently in the report:

BAME Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

CAB Citizens Advice Bureau

CLS Community Legal Service

CSJS Civil and Social Justice Survey

LSRC Legal Services Research Centre

NEETs Young people not currently in employment, education or training

SEU Social Exclusion Unit

Foreword

It is well understood that young people, especially young men, are particularly likely to become involved in, or be affected by, crime. It is less well understood how young people are prone to experiencing a range of civil legal problems lying at the heart of our system of social welfare law.

The life events that characterise the transition from childhood to adulthood – from leaving education, leaving home and leaving care, to moving into and out of (relatively poorly paid and insecure) employment – define a particular vulnerability to civil legal problems concerning, for example, rented housing, homelessness, employment and debt.

Young people who experience civil legal problems also more often experience multiple problems, and problems that adversely affect their lives more generally – demonstrating the value of integrated services in addressing such problems and their underlying circumstances. Problems rarely exist in a vacuum. Public services aimed at their resolution should recognise this, and so facilitate people to regain control over lives that might otherwise become increasingly chaotic. The development of more integrated services within the Community Legal Service (such as Community Legal Advice centres and networks), and further afield, is therefore one that is to be welcomed and encouraged.

This is all the more important in the case of the most vulnerable people in our society, and for those who have the least experience and personal capability to change their life circumstances. Those young people who experience accelerated or disordered transitions to adulthood, or are not in education, employment or training (NEET) would appear to be particularly vulnerable to multiple and complex problem experience. As Kenrick details in this review of research into the legal needs of young people, findings from the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey indicate that whereas young survey respondents who report legal problems report an average of 1.8 problems each, the figure is 2.6 problems for NEETs (2004 survey). Moreover, the problems reported by NEETs more often concern the most serious issues, such as homelessness, and less often concern typically minor difficulties, such as with consumer transactions.

Compounding their vulnerability, young people (for a variety of reasons) also often lack knowledge, familiarity or trust in mainstream services that can help them. There is a clear challenge for public legal education here; starting, but not ending with the national curriculum. There is also a challenge to better tailor services aimed at young people to their distinctive behaviour and predilections. This need not entail developing entirely new services for young people. It could involve relatively simple changes to the nature of service interfaces with young clients. The Legal Services Research Centre's recent evaluation of money advice outreach services has highlighted the importance of trust, and mirroring of service user behaviour, in the delivery of services to those who would not normally access mainstream services. Many of the lessons of that evaluation apply equally to services aimed at vulnerable young people.

Finally, it is worth noting that researching young people is not straightforward. Because of this, there is still much to learn about young people's need for and use of advice.

Professor Pascoe Pleasence
Professor of Empirical Legal Studies, University College London; Academic and Scientific Advisor, Legal Services Research Centre

Acknowledgements

This report could not have been completed without the contribution of a large number of people.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to every researcher upon whose work I have been able to draw for this report. A few years ago, when I wrote *Rights to Access: meeting young people's needs for advice* – in some ways the precursor to this report – there was very little research evidence that could provide any detailed insight into the subject of young people's needs for social welfare rights-based advice. I am pleased to say that it was rather easier locating relevant evidence this time around, reflecting a growing interest in research into both legal and advice needs generally and young people's needs specifically.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Pascoe Pleasence, Dr Nigel Balmer and their colleagues at the Legal Services Research Centre for stimulating much of that interest and satisfying my frequent requests over the past few years for data on young adults from the Civil and Social Justice Survey. I hope that the inclusion of such robust national data lends greater credibility to the report as a whole, particularly given its consistency with the other evidence presented.

I am also deeply grateful to the many advice workers – too many to mention here – with whom I consulted throughout the lengthy process that has resulted in this report. Their insights from their experiences at the 'front-line' have enabled me to test the reliability and applicability of findings from published research and have added a greater degree of depth to this report.

I would like to record my gratitude to a number of people for providing detailed comments on earlier drafts of this report, in particular: Mandy Wilkins (Law Centres Federation), Mark Sefton (independent researcher), Lisa Wintersteiger (AdviceNow project, Advice Services Alliance) and Alicia Hardy (YouthNet). I would also like to thank Margaret Doyle for her help editing the report.

This piece of work has not been specifically funded. However, it has been made possible by funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the Department for Children Schools and Families which has helped support Youth Access' advice team over the last few years.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who is committed to working to improve young people's access to high quality advice including:

- Pioneers of the 'Youth Access Law Centre' service model: Streetwise Community Law Centre in South London, StreetLegal in North London and The Cabin in Stockton on Tees;
- Youth advice agencies everywhere;
- National organisations campaigning for improved access to justice for young people, including The Law Centres Federation, Howard League for Penal Reform and Children's Rights Alliance for England;
- My colleagues at Youth Access who have given unwavering support to this work and are using our developing knowledge of young people's needs to provide practical support to front-line agencies, develop a workforce that is fit for purpose and exert an influence on public policy.

James Kenrick
Advice Services Development Manager
Youth Access

Executive summary

Why is this an important issue?

Youth Access estimates,[1] based on data from the Civil and Social Justice Survey, that each year:

- 16–24-year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million rights-related problems requiring advice.
- More than a quarter of these problems will be experienced by young people who are not in employment, education or training.
- Young people will not even seek advice in relation to around half of their problems – about 1.15 million problems each year.
- A further 200,000 problems will result in young people trying, but failing to obtain advice, often because there is no service able to help them.
- In all, considerably fewer than half of all young people with serious social welfare problems will actually manage to obtain advice – leaving at least a million of our most vulnerable citizens to cope with their problems unassisted each year.

This is despite evidence indicating that young people are more likely to need advice when they have a problem than other age groups, as their problems have a greater adverse impact on them and getting advice makes a bigger positive difference to the outcomes of their problems.

The cost of the country's collective failure to provide this vulnerable group with the rights-based advice services it needs is likely, based on existing research,[2] to amount to several hundred million pounds a year.

Recent indications are that the effects of the current UK recession are leading to a sharp rise in demand for advice from disadvantaged young people on debt, welfare benefits, homelessness and employment.

In this context, it is vital that service planners and providers gain a better understanding of young people's needs for advice.

This report attempts to provide a comprehensive source of evidence on the subject for practitioners, policy makers and funders to turn to as they attempt to understand and tackle unmet need. It is complemented by *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, a separate forthcoming report by Youth Access which provides evidence on methods of and barriers to addressing those needs.

Root causes of advice need

At the root of young people's social welfare problems, and their advice-seeking behaviour, are four key phenomena:

The changing nature of adolescent transition Paths to adulthood have become more complex in recent years. The achievement of full social and financial independence is more protracted. Most young people, supported by parents, friends and school, manage the adolescent transition successfully. But for some young people the process is fraught with difficulties and they develop problems. At particular risk are those young people who experience 'accelerated' or 'fast track' transitions, where independence and responsibility are thrust upon them at an early age, for example through becoming a young parent, an early school leaver or a young carer.

The unique thinking and behaviour of young people Recent research in the field of cognitive behaviour and adolescent brain development reinforces the importance of considering young adults' thinking and behaviour as distinct, and has demonstrated that the brain's centre of reasoning and problem-solving is among the last to mature – even into the twenties, young people may think, react and process emotions very differently from older

1 The figures quoted on this page have been calculated by Youth Access using data from the 2004 Civil and Social Justice Survey supplied by the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC). The calculations have been checked by the LSRC and are deemed to under-estimate the extent of young people's unmet needs for advice. For further details of the calculations, see Appendix 1.

2 Ministry of Justice economists have used CSJS data to estimate that over a three-and-a-half-year research period, unresolved law-related problems cost individuals and the public purse at least £13 billion (DCA 2006).

adults. In addition, negative attitudes displayed by adults towards young people in wider society can result in some young people lacking trust in mainstream advice services that do not cater specifically for their needs.

The social exclusion of young people The statistical evidence supports the view that young people are disproportionately and increasingly prone to a range of social welfare problems – e.g. homelessness, unemployment, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, mental health issues – that both increase the risk of an unsuccessful adolescent transition and frequently give rise to a need for advice. Without effective intervention, social exclusion in youth can continue long into adulthood and be passed down to the next generation.

Problem 'triggers' – Young people's social welfare problems are often the result of changes in life circumstances or key life events. The most common triggers are leaving home or care, leaving education, getting or losing a job, being the victim or perpetrator of crime and arriving in the UK as a refugee or asylum seeker. Many of young people's social welfare problems result directly from the actions, or inaction, of a local or central government department, often in relation to benefits or housing. Without early intervention, young people can develop serious, multiple problems.

Problems experienced by young people

Problem incidence Analysis of data from the CSJS indicates that approximately one-third of 18–24-year-olds had experienced at least one civil justice problem in the previous three and a half years – a broadly similar level of problem incidence to that of the population as a whole. However, it is likely that CSJS data significantly under-estimates the relative prevalence of young people's problems.

Subject areas The pattern of young people's problems differs markedly from that of other age groups. Young people are much more likely to experience problems relating to rented housing, homelessness, employment, discrimination and problems with the police.

Relevance to the not-for-profit advice sector Analysis of data from the CSJS suggests that young people increasingly account for a disproportionate number of all people with problems in the key subject areas of social welfare law that fall within the remit of the Community Legal Service and that are traditionally the core areas of work for the not-for-profit advice sector.

Age differences Advice needs change significantly as young people get older. Hence, whilst under-16-year-olds often present to advice services with social services and education issues, housing and welfare benefit problems are more prevalent amongst 16–24-year-olds.

Multiple problems Young people, particularly the 22–24 age group and disadvantaged young people, are prone to multiple problems. As people experience multiple problems, they are increasingly likely to experience problems, such as homelessness, that play a direct role in social exclusion.

Interrelated needs Reflecting the complexity of the adolescent transition, young people's social welfare problems rarely develop in isolation from inter-connected practical, emotional and personal issues – concerning, for example, relationship breakdown, stress, depression, abuse, drugs and alcohol or education – pointing to a need for legal advice to be closely integrated with other services that young people use.

The experience of disadvantaged young adults

Disadvantaged young adults experience a disproportionate number of all the problems experienced by young people:

In the 2004 CSJS, **NEETs** accounted for more than a quarter of all young adults who reported problems, for almost two-fifths of all the problems reported by young adults and for approaching half of those seeking advice.

Remarkably, **homelessness and rented housing** were the most common problems experienced by NEETs, ahead of consumer problems (which are many times more prevalent than homelessness problems amongst the general population).

The report examines in greater detail the advice needs of a number of **specific groups** of young people, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young refugees, young parents, disabled young people and young offenders.

Severity and impact of problems

- Young people appear to experience relatively severe problems, evidenced by the type of problems they experience, their greater reliance on face to face services and the disproportionate impact that problems have on them.
- Disadvantaged young adults are significantly more likely than the population as a whole to worry about their problems and to report (as a result of their problems) stress-related illness; violence (aimed at them); loss of home; loss of confidence; physical ill-health.
- Young people fare worse than average when they have a problem due to their inherent vulnerability and their relatively little experience of 'the system' compared to older groups.

- In addition, young people are less likely to obtain advice than older age groups, rendering it less likely that their problems will be resolved and the impact of their problems ameliorated.

Services required

- 16–19-year-olds with housing, homelessness and welfare benefits problems generate the greatest **demand** for support from youth advice services, with debt, employment, education and social services being other important areas.
- Service approaches that fail to appreciate the distinct behaviour and needs of the adolescent are clearly less likely to succeed. The evidence points strongly to the importance of the availability of advice services **targeted** solely at young people.
- No single intervention can hope to deal comprehensively with the full range of issues on which young people need help. Rights-based advice is best delivered to young people as part of a package of **integrated interventions** that may include:
  - **public legal education** – to raise young people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities; to build their life skills and resilience; and to help young people avoid problems and cope with them when they do arise;
  - generalist **information, advice and guidance**;
  - **targeted support** from a range of services, e.g. counselling, sexual health, drug and alcohol and housing support services.

The difference made by advice

- Previous research for Youth Access has highlighted the positive contribution that advice can make to achieving all five of the **Every Child Matters outcomes**.
- New CSJS data indicates that 18–24-year-olds are twice as likely to **meet their objectives** where they do manage to obtain advice in comparison to when they handle their problems alone. By contrast, older adults meet their objectives only slightly more often where they obtain advice.
- This evidence reflects the fact that, because of young people's **inherent vulnerability** as a result of their age, they are more likely to need advice than people with greater experience when they have a comparable problem.

It is hoped that the data presented in the report can be used as the basis for further research into the cost of failing to provide social welfare legal advice to every young person in need and the potential economic benefits of targeting advice at young people.

Introduction

Background to this report

Youth Access' latest estimates,[3] based on data from the Civil and Social Justice Survey, indicate that each year 16–24-year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million rights-related problems requiring advice, but fewer than half will manage to obtain advice. As many as 200,000 problems will result in young people trying, but failing to obtain advice, often because there is no service able to help them. This is despite evidence indicating that young people are more likely to need advice when they have a problem than other age groups, as their problems have a greater adverse impact on them and getting advice makes a bigger positive difference to the outcomes of their problems.

The cost of the country's collective failure to provide this vulnerable group with the rights-based advice services it needs is likely, based on existing research,[4] to amount to several hundred million pounds a year.

Improving young people's access to high quality rights-based advice has been a strategic priority for Youth Access for the past decade. In that time, we have published a number of reports on the subject of young people's needs for advice, their advice-seeking behaviour, barriers to access to advice, models of delivery and the impact of advice (e.g. Kenrick 2002; Balmer et al 2007; Kenrick 2007; MBA 2007).

This report focuses solely on the first aspect of this broader subject: young people's needs for advice. It sets out the available evidence and attempts to explain the implications of the evidence in greater detail than has been done before.

The **purpose** of the report is to provide a one-stop evidence resource for anyone wishing to understand this complex subject and respond appropriately. It is hoped that it will be used by:

- providers developing advice services for young people to inform their models of delivery and to refer to the most relevant evidence in their applications for funding;
- policy-makers in the legal and youth sectors to inform their policies, priorities and strategies;
- funders to ensure they focus their limited funding on projects that have been designed on the basis of the evidence available;
- researchers with an interest in the subject to inform further research.

Scope

This report focuses on young people's advice needs in relation to **social welfare rights-based i**ssues, such as housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, debt, employment rights, education rights, social services and discrimination.[5] The report does not generally focus on young people's wider needs for information, advice, guidance and support in relation to issues such as careers, health or relationships, although it is acknowledged that such issues can, for some young people, have a rights-based aspect to them.

The report is intended to be of principal relevance to the young people's (non-careers) information, advice and guidance sector and the legal advice sector, although evidence cited is occasionally drawn from, and may have relevance, beyond these sectors.

The definition of 'young person' for the purposes of this report includes those between the ages of 13 and 25. However, due to the scarcity of robust data on under-18-year-olds, there is a greater focus in some parts of the report on the 18–24 'young adult' age group.

The report does not examine in detail, although it touches upon, issues relating to young people's access to advice, the impact of advice for young people or

3 See Appendix 1 for details.

4 See footnote 2.

5 It should be noted that this definition of social welfare rights-based issues is slightly broader than that sometimes used within the legal advice sector, in which there are often deemed to be five core areas of social welfare law: housing/homelessness; welfare benefits; debt; employment; community care.

successful models of delivery, as these are the subjects of separate papers due to be published by Youth Access over the coming months.

Methodology

This report is based primarily on desk research. The author has tracked research evidence on the subject of young people's needs for advice for more than eight years, although the bulk of the desk research for this report was conducted between July 2007 and February 2008.

In addition to desk research, the author has consulted extensively with colleagues and practitioners in the field, drawing on the expertise in Youth Access' network of over 200 member agencies, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues explored in this report and to ensure the evidence presented rings true to those 'on the front-line'.

Youth Access also conducted three focus groups with young people during 2008 focusing on access to legal advice. Although these focus groups were conducted to inform a separate piece of work and are not reported on explicitly in this report, they provided an additional opportunity to test young people's views on some of the emerging issues covered in this report.

Data from the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey

The report draws extensively on both published and unpublished data from the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey (CSJS). The CSJS is a major, and increasingly influential, national private household survey of adults aged 18 and over focusing on people's experiences of everyday problems. It provides detailed information on the nature, pattern and impact of people's experiences of rights problems which were 'difficult to solve' and the use and success of problem resolution strategies.

Categories of civil law problems covered in the CSJS include: employment, housing (divided into problems to do with rented housing, and to do with owned housing), homelessness or the threat of being homeless, money/debt, welfare benefits, consumer, neighbours, personal injury, clinical negligence, discrimination, divorce, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, children, unfair police treatment, immigration and mental health.

Three main CSJS surveys have been conducted: in 2001,[6] 2004[7] and, on a continuous basis, from 2006-2008.[8]

Youth Access has worked with the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC), which leads the CSJS, over a number of years to analyse data on 18–24-year-olds from the surveys, providing a unique insight into the nature and impact of young people's problems and how they try to resolve them.

It should be noted that the significant legal needs of children and young people under the age of 18 have not hitherto been captured in the CSJS, although consideration is being given to extending the survey to cover 16- and 17-year-olds in the future.

6 Reported in Pleasence et al. 2004. Findings on young people are the result of analysis by Youth Access of data supplied by the LSRC.

7 Reported in Pleasence 2006. The main findings on young people are reported in *Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*, Nigel J. Balmer, Tania Tam & Pascoe Pleasence, LSRC/Youth Access, 2007.

8 Broad findings from interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007 are set out in annual reports available on the LSRC's website (www.lsrc.org.uk/publications.htm).

CHAPTER 1

Understanding the root causes of young people's needs for advice

This chapter considers the challenges of adolescent transition into adulthood, including 'accelerated' and 'disordered' transitions that are additionally challenging and put young people at particular risk. It describes the development of thinking and skills such as communication and resilience and the often negative attitudes towards young people in the UK. In addition, it explores what factors can lead to social exclusion of young people, and what life events trigger the need for advice for young people.

The changing nature of adolescent transition

Emerging from childhood, but not yet adults, young people are at a crucial and challenging time of life. As they enter adolescence, young people begin to leave the confines of the family and gain greater independence.

The Government recognises that paths to adulthood have become more complex in recent years (HM Treasury/DfES 2007). Contemporary youth live accelerated lives, as physical, emotional and social milestones are passed at younger ages.

The period of adolescent transition is by no means easy to define. Adolescence is extending increasingly further into both childhood and adulthood. Most young people are in the process of transition right up to the age of 25 and often beyond. Although puberty is reached, on average, at an earlier age, the achievement of full social and financial independence is more protracted. For example, young people today generally stay in education for longer, whilst changes in the housing market are forcing young people to wait longer before flying the nest (ONS 2007 *Social Trends*).

Most young people, supported by parents, friends and school, manage the adolescent transition successfully. But for some young people the process is fraught with difficulties and they develop problems. Many young people are ill equipped with the financial, social and psychological resources they need to overcome these problems. The traditional support structures for young people – such as the family and the community – have changed and weakened for significant numbers of young people (Margo and Dixon 2006). Meanwhile, levels of income poverty amongst young people are high, with those in work receiving relatively low wages[9] and those who are not currently in employment, education or training experiencing unequal access to welfare benefits (Kenrick 2002). In addition, some young people endure a painful psychological transition. The feelings of confusion, uncertainty and insecurity which many young people experience in their transitional years and the practical consequences of their growing independence are undoubtedly key factors contributing to the range of issues and problems on which advice and support may be needed.

'Accelerated', 'disordered' (and disorderly) transitions

At particular risk are those young people who experience 'accelerated' or 'fast track' transitions, where independence and responsibility are thrust upon them at an early age, e.g. through becoming a young parent, an early school leaver or a young carer. These kinds of transitions tend to be more difficult for the young person to negotiate and, if unsuccessful, are more likely to lead to complex problems and social exclusion in the long term (SEU 2005).

Research has also identified the phenomena of 'disordered transitions' (SEU 2004), which are less age-related and more complex, and of the 'yo-yo-isation' of transitions between youth and adulthood (Jones 2002), in which young people seeking independence may experience many ups and downs in what can be a reversible process with stages of backtracking and intermediate stages between youth and adulthood. Traditional age cut-offs between children's and adult services tend, therefore, to be unhelpful, and it is vital

9 In 2006 92% of workers aged 16–17 and 67% aged 18–21 were 'low paid' (defined as earning less than £6.67 an hour), compared to just 14% of workers aged 30–39 (Cooke and Lawton 2008).

that targeted age-sensitive services are available to meet the needs of young people in a broad age range, e.g. 13–25 (SEU 2005).

The thinking and behaviour of young people

In order to understand why young people sometimes end up in otherwise incomprehensibly chaotic personal situations requiring advice and support, it is important to gain an understanding of their thinking and behaviour. With young people exposed to more information and choices than ever before, their attitudes, assumptions and responses to situations are very powerful in shaping their life chances. A young person's 'soft' or non-cognitive skills – such as communication and understanding of others and the ability to deal with tasks, make decisions and solve problems – have a protective effect. The possession of such skills is becoming increasingly important to young people's ability to develop 'resilience' – a concept encompassing a set of personal qualities that makes people more able to withstand the negative effects of particular events or circumstances.[10] The building of resilience and life skills through advice and community education is crucial in helping young people to negotiate the complex adolescent transition process.

Yet physiological changes in adolescence can make the development of such skills more difficult. Recent research in the field of cognitive behaviour and adolescent brain development reinforces the importance of considering young adults' thinking and behaviour as distinct (Jones 2005) and has demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, these are influenced not just by hormones. The brain's centre of reasoning and problem-solving is among the last to mature, meaning that even into their twenties young people may think, react and process emotions very differently from older adults.[11] Service approaches that fail to appreciate the distinct behaviour and needs of the adolescent are clearly less likely to succeed.

The differences in young people's thinking, behaviour, attitudes and lifestyles can, of course, lead them into conflict with parents, carers, authorities and wider society. Research shows that, compared to adults in other countries, adults in Britain are more likely to blame young people for their behaviour (ONS 2007 *Social Trends*) and that a substantial proportion of the population even believe young people behave like animals.[12] Indeed, in its October 2008 report on the UK, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child commented on the cumulative effect of society's attitude to young people, expressing concern at *'the general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents'* (UNCRC 2008).

Such negative attitudes can be replicated in the treatment accorded to young people when they approach services. Often young people sense a lack of respect from adults and from society in general and reciprocate with a lack of trust. This lack of trust from young people can be extended towards mainstream advice services that are not designed specifically to meet their needs.

The social exclusion of young people

The Social Exclusion Unit has identified homelessness, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, mental health issues, poor health, poor education and long-term unemployment as key factors that increase the risk of an unsuccessful adolescent transition (SEU 2005). Many of these adverse outcomes characterise 'social exclusion' and have become more common amongst young people in Britain in recent years as a result of changes in wider society.

Youth labour markets offering relatively stable employment collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s under the pressures of rapid de-industrialisation, making it increasingly difficult to move directly into work from education. Simultaneously, as the Institute of Public Policy Research has noted, growing economic prosperity over the past thirty years has been unequal and created a set of richer parents who are increasingly able to purchase activities and access to institutions that can enhance children's personal and social development, whilst those in poorer groups are unable to provide similar benefits for their offspring, meaning these children and young people lose out in relative developmental terms (Margo and Dixon 2006). In addition, as public services have become more 'customer' focused, those with good personal and social skills have benefited at the expense of their less educated contemporaries (Margo and Dixon 2006).

Young people's opportunities can be determined, to some extent, by their background. Three locations in particular have been identified for the key factors that can put young people at high risk of social exclusion (SEU 2000):

- The family – poor parenting; family conflict; low income; poor housing; being placed in care.
- School – low achievement; truancy; exclusion.

10 For further reading on the concept of resilience see, for example, Rutter, M., 'Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy', *Journal of Family Therapy*, vol. 21, 1999, pp.119–44.

11 Research into brain development during adolescence by the National Institute of Mental Health is ongoing: www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/teenbrain.cfm.

12 See Barnardo's press release, *The shame of Britain's intolerance of children*, 17th November 2008, highlighting findings from a YouGov poll of 2021 adults.

- The community – friends condoning or involved in risky behaviour; disadvantaged neighbourhoods.[13]

Statistical evidence supports the view that young people are disproportionately prone, compared to the population as a whole, to experiencing the kinds of social welfare problems that give rise to a need for advice. For example:

- Young people aged under 25 now account for almost 40% of all homelessness acceptances by local authorities[14] (DCLG 2007).
- Over 40% of 18-year-olds in England were NEETs in 2005[15] (DfES 2006).
- 94% of unaccompanied asylum seekers reaching the age of 18 have their applications for asylum refused (Home Office 2004 *Asylum Statistics*).
- Four out of five young people have been in debt by the age of 21 (Rainer 2007).

The Social Exclusion Unit has found that without effective intervention, social exclusion in youth can continue long into adulthood and be passed down to the next generation, and it concluded that better services, support and advice for young people will help promote self-respect and, thereby, responsible behaviour (SEU 2005).

Legal advocacy and advice for poor and excluded people, it is argued, is an effective engine of social inclusion and fighting poverty through providing access to critical rights, entitlements and services, and empowering people and communities. Helping people to resolve problems involving debt, housing, benefits or domestic violence can reduce the social exclusion experienced by those suffering the greatest disadvantage. Conversely, lack of access to reliable legal advice can be a contributing factor in creating and maintaining social exclusion.

Triggers: life events and the failures of authorities

Whether or not a young person is pre-disposed to experiencing problems for the reasons outlined in the previous sections, the importance of specific 'triggers' should not be under-estimated as drivers of advice need. Triggers in this context may be changes in life circumstances or key life events and have been identified by legal researchers as significant due to the notion that serious and multiple problems tend to 'cascade' from them (Pleasence et al. 2004 and Genn 1999). Triggers of this type that are most commonly identified for the population as a whole include relationship breakdown, long-term illness or disability, losing a job, leaving or moving home, homelessness, bereavement and domestic violence. A recent study (Moorhead and Robinson 2006) linked specific life event triggers to specific problems, for example:

- Illness, disability or bereavement frequently lead to benefits, debt and social services problems.
- Problems with partners frequently lead to debt problems.
- Losing a job frequently leads to benefits and debt problems.

The significance of housing and homelessness problems as triggers for young people to seek advice should not be underestimated. The Social Exclusion Unit found in a survey carried out in 2004 that housing and homelessness were cited far more often than any other issue by professionals as the reasons disadvantaged young adults first have contact with services, as well as frequently leading on to other problems (SEU 2005).[16]

Consultation by the author with youth advice agencies suggests that other common key life event triggers for disadvantaged young people include:

- leaving education – leading to benefits and education rights problems;
- leaving home or care – leading to social services, rented housing, homelessness, benefits and money problems;
- getting or losing a job – leading to employment, benefits and debt problems;
- being the victim or perpetrator of crime – leading to criminal justice, benefits, housing and debt problems;
- arriving in the UK as a young refugee or unaccompanied asylum-seeker – leading to immigration, social services, housing and education problems.

As this list shows, social welfare problems tend to be closely interrelated, sometimes blurring the distinction between the trigger problem and resulting problems, which may occur simultaneously. (For more on problem 'clusters', see Chapter 2.)

The role of authorities in triggering a need for advice – and for advice that is independent – is also highly significant. Moorhead and Robinson (2006) found that

13 Social Exclusion Unit (2005) reports that there is evidence that a disproportionate number of young people live in the most deprived neighbourhoods, so whilst 11% of the total population are aged 16–24, this rises to up to 42% in some deprived areas.

14 This includes 9% of homelessness acceptances classified as 16–17-year-olds in priority need and 31% accepted as homeless for other reasons but where the applicant is aged under 25.

15 See Chapter 3 for data indicating increased advice need amongst NEET young adults.

16 The Social Exclusion Unit conducted an online questionnaire with 200 organisations in autumn 2004, receiving 129 responses. 'Disadvantaged young adults' were defined as 16–25-year-olds facing particularly severe disadvantage, such as those with either multiple or deep problems. Housing or homelessness were cited by 43% of respondents. The second highest figure was 'care leaver' (11%).

the most common cause of advice-seeking by the general population was the action or inaction of the local authority, primarily in relation to housing benefits and rented housing, leading to other problems like debt and homelessness. Similarly, a study for AdviceUK's RADICAL Advice Project involving 14 advice agencies in Powys and Oxford found that a large proportion of advice demand could be characterised as 'failure demand':

> *'The study found that an alarmingly high proportion of enquiries were....caused by service failings on the part of the authorities / an institution. Of these, the vast majority were caused by the failings of public services, particularly the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In one advice agency that serves mainly social housing clients fully 95% of all failure demand observed in the study was caused by the DWP.'* (AdviceUK 2008)

Such failings on the part of authorities are also known to disproportionately affect young people presenting themselves to Homeless Persons Units when in housing need (Kenrick 2007). Other statutory services that are often criticised for letting vulnerable young people down through their inadequate responses include Social Services (Ofsted 2007) and JobCentre Plus (Bateman 2007).

Authorities in the private sector also play their part in creating a need for advice: unfair treatment by employers and being 'fobbed off' by retailers, for example, are common complaints made by young people (CRAE 2005).

CHAPTER 2

The interrelationship of young people's advice and other needs

This chapter describes the diversity of issues affecting young people, which are often interrelated and come in 'clusters' of problems. It also explains how these interrelated needs can be met by holistic advice services such as 'under-one-roof' services for young people.

Interrelated needs

The range of young people's needs for advice and support reflects the complexity of the adolescent transition and the diversity of issues this brings, including:

- social, welfare and legal issues, e.g. relating to housing and homelessness, welfare benefits, debt, social services, employment rights, education rights, domestic violence;
- practical issues, e.g. careers, managing money, independent living skills;
- personal and physical health issues, e.g. relationships, sexual health, drugs and alcohol, healthy eating;
- emotional and mental health issues, e.g. stress, depression and self-harm.

For the population as a whole, it can be hard to disentangle emotional, practical, personal and social welfare issues. Genn (1999) recognised, for example, that legal problems can have an emotional impact:

> *'The financial vulnerability, emotional impact, and other consequences that can flow from many kinds of justiciable problem have implications for the type of advice and assistance that is needed....'*

Recent research by the LSRC has confirmed the close relationship between mental health and social welfare problems, both for the general population (e.g. Pleasence and Balmer 2007; Pleasence and Balmer 2009) and for young people specifically (LSRC 2009).[17]

Issues that are more likely to be addressed by youth agencies through a counselling intervention, such as bereavement or stress, can often have a practical or legal dimension necessitating advice. Equally, young people's social welfare legal problems rarely develop in isolation from other issues in their lives that need resolving simultaneously, as exemplified by this quote from an advice agency working with young people that was included in recent research on access to legal advice conducted by Advice Services Alliance:

> *[Y]oungsters who are prematurely independent, living on their own before they're 20, 22, 23 – they tend to have had traumatic, difficult expulsions from their family set up. Whether that's because they're asylum seekers, or because they've been looked after, or because the family relationship's broken down, or they've been bereaved.... So they tend to have clusters of problems, some of which are legal, some of which are emotional, some of which might be medical.... It's rare to have someone with a very straightforward simple, one little problem and off they trot.'* (Interviewee quoted in Sefton 2008).

The Social Exclusion Unit (2005) has previously identified that:

> *'one of the most important features of the disadvantage faced by young adults is that it often does not confine itself to a single domain.... There is a great deal of evidence that disadvantages for young adults...tend to 'cluster' and that one disadvantage makes people more likely to suffer from others.'*

Hence, there is often an urgent need to tackle a range of issues in a co-ordinated way.

Problem clusters

The issue of 'problem clusters'[18] is one that affects the wider population and has implications for advice services. Moorhead and Robinson (2006) recently found that legal problems experienced by vulnerable clients tend to

17 Youth Access will be publishing a report by Sefton, M., exploring the relationship between mental health, social welfare problems and youth later in 2009.

18 The LSRC (e.g. Pleasence 2006) has used the term 'problem cluster' to describe the tendency of certain civil justice problems to co-occur, whether or not they cause or are caused by one another.

cluster with interrelated social problems and concluded that these clients would benefit from a holistic coordinated management approach, pointing to a need for legal advice to be closely integrated with other services used by vulnerable groups. The Legal Services Commission's (2006) Community Legal Service Strategy acknowledges that *'People do not face 'legal problems' but clusters of problems to which the law may offer one solution'*, reinforcing the need for holistic multi-disciplinary approaches to legal advice service delivery.

Moorhead and Robinson (2006) also found that about 40–50% of all legal problems presented at advice agencies formed part of a 'legal problem cluster', i.e. they co-occurred with other legal problems. The most common legal problem clusters found amongst the general population included:

- rented housing + benefits + debt + mental health problems
- relationship breakdown + children + home ownership + domestic violence
- discrimination + employment

The legal problem clusters that most affect young people are likely to be different from those that affect older adults. The 2001 CSJS indicated a relatively strong problem cluster involving young people in receipt of welfare benefits with problems relating to housing and homelessness, unfair treatment by the police and action being taken against them, hinting at a possible direct link between unresolved social welfare legal problems and crime. This precise cluster was not confirmed in the 2004 CSJS. However, in its report focusing on young people's experiences from that survey, the LSRC reported that respondents aged 18–24 experienced problem clusters that were *'subtly different'* from those experienced by the general population:

> *'[T]here was evidence that, for 18 to 24 year olds, problems concerning relationship breakdown and domestic violence had a tendency to cluster, as did problems concerning employment, homelessness, rented housing and money/debt. This last set of problems is a combination of components of two clusters seen more generally. There was a tendency for problems concerning children and mental health to occur in combination.'* (Balmer et al. 2007)

The experience of youth advice workers consulted for this report would suggest that the clusters most commonly actually presented by young people at youth advice agencies involve:

- rented housing + benefits + homelessness
- relationship breakdown + social services + benefits + homelessness[19]

In addition, youth advice workers report that domestic violence, money/debt, crime, mental health, immigration, discrimination and employment are often related to either cluster, whilst related non-legal issues commonly include stress, depression, abuse, drugs and alcohol, education, careers and relationships.

In addition to experiencing problems in clusters, young people are prone to experiencing multiple problems,[20] which are explored in the following chapter.

Holistic services

This complex interrelationship of issues and needs has clear implications for those planning help services for young people. No single intervention can hope to deal with the full range of issues comprehensively. Young people need a range of early intervention and prevention services to address their complex needs, including:

- community education (including 'Public Legal Education'[21]) – to raise young people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities; to build their life skills and resilience; and to help young people avoid problems and cope with them when they do arise;
- generalist information and advice;
- counselling;
- specialist legal advice and advocacy, e.g. on housing, benefits and other rights-based matters;
- targeted support from a range of services and professionals, e.g. sexual health services, child and adolescent mental health services, drug and alcohol services, youth workers, social workers and housing support services.

There is evidence of the desirability and success of holistic approaches to meeting young people's complex needs, as in the 'under-one-roof' model promoted by Youth Access (SEU 2005).[22] For example:

19 The LSRC have commented that slight differences between the homelessness type clusters reported by youth advice workers and those found in the CSJS may reflect the difficulty of sampling particularly severe cases of this type. The CSJS, for example, does not sample rough sleepers or those in hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation. However, a separate temporary accommodation survey was undertaken by the LSRC in 2001 and is reported in Pleasence et al. (2004).

20 The LSRC's use of the terms 'multiple problems' and 'problem clusters' makes clear that they describe two different, but linked, phenomena. 'Multiple problems' refers to the reporting by individuals of more than one problem, whereas a 'problem cluster' is when particular problems have a tendency to co-occur.

21 See box on page 9.

22 The SEU's *Transitions* report concluded that holistic services – which it defined as services that look at the person and the range of problems they face, not just a particular problem or issue in isolation – can be effective at managing complex problems and encouraging some young adults with sensitive problems to engage with services. The report includes several case studies of youth information, advice and counselling services as good practice examples of holistic services.

- The Make Space Youth Review found that a majority of young people surveyed *'…agreed that they would be more likely to visit a 'one stop shop' for support services, from which they could be directed or referred to the right agency whatever their issue or concern. Even larger numbers of young people told us that they would be more likely to access support if it were offered at the same place as wider activities and clubs.'* (4Children 2007)
- A significant number of the young people interviewed in 2006 as part of a qualitative study[23] for Youth Access' Rights to Access Project (MBA 2007) reported the holistic approach offered by under-one-roof services for young people as a key desirable service characteristic when accessing legal advice as it meant they didn't have to go to different places to get help and support. A strong message emerged from young people that legal advice is best delivered as part of a package of integrated interventions tailored to their specific needs. Such an approach can ensure that relevant expertise is available when required, but reserves specialist resources for when legal advice is judged to be the most appropriate intervention to serve the interests of the individual young person.

The unique nature of young people's needs, as outlined above – particularly the wide range of interrelated social welfare, practical, personal, emotional and health issues on which they need co-ordinated support – together with young people's unique advice-seeking behaviour (see *Young People's Access To Advice – The Evidence*, the companion paper to this report), points strongly to the importance of the availability of advice services targeted solely at young people.

23 A total of 27 young people aged between 16 and 25 who had received legal advice in a youth setting were interviewed for this study.

Public Legal Education

> *'It is no good a person having rights in theory, if they do not know what those rights are; do not know how to exercise them; or have no idea where to turn for advice if they need expert help enforcing their rights. Without these things legal rights and justice are illusory.'* (LCD/LCF 2001)

One of the key reasons some young people are marginalised from access to justice is their relatively low level of 'life skills'[24] – which limits their ability to avoid and deal with problems themselves – and their lack of awareness of rights and services (Kenrick 2002). Recent research (Buck et al. 2007) has demonstrated that people who said they did not know their legal rights relating to their problem[25] were more likely to take no action to resolve their problem and were less likely to obtain advice. Those who said they knew their rights at the time of their problem met all of their objectives 59% of the time, compared to only 29% for those who did not know their rights. Significantly, young people are less likely to know their rights than other age groups (Buck et al. 2008).

As well as needing access to advice when they have a problem, therefore, young people need what has been termed Community Legal Education or 'Public Legal Education' in order to increase their 'legal capability' (PLEAS Task Force 2007)[26] or 'legal consciousness' (Cowen 2004):

> *'Enabled citizens are better equipped to take the sort of preventive action that avoids escalation and crises….[and] can also plan their daily lives better, recognising and making better and timelier decisions about the issues that need their attention.'* (PLEAS Task Force 2007)

Public Legal Education helps develop legal capability in individuals by:

- providing people with awareness, knowledge and understanding of rights and legal issues;
- developing the skills and confidence needed to deal with everyday problems and gain access to justice;
- helping people recognise when they may need support, what sort of advice is available and how to go about getting it; and
- helping citizens better understand everyday life issues, make better decisions and anticipate and avoid problems.[27]

By focusing on promoting key 'protective factors' that help boost young people's own capacity to avoid developing problems and build their 'resilience' to potential poor outcomes, Public Legal Education is an important early intervention and prevention tool.

For further reading on the role of Public Legal Education in improving young people's access to justice, see Wintersteiger (2008).

24 See Chapter 1 for discussion of physiological changes in adolescence which can impact upon young people's thinking, behaviour and problem-solving skills.

25 In this study by Buck et al., based on data from the CSJS, 62% of people (of all ages) experiencing problems reported that they did not know what their legal rights were at the time of their problem.

26 The Public Legal Education and Support Task Force published its final report, *Developing capable citizens: the role of public legal education,* in July 2007; see www.pleas.org.uk.

27 Definition adapted from PLEAS Task Force, 2007.

CHAPTER 3

Problem incidence among young adults

This chapter draws upon data from the CSJS to explore the incidence of legal problems among young people as opposed to adults. It also covers the experience of multiple problems and examines the pattern of young people's problems by subject type. Finally, it examines the particular experience of disadvantaged young adults, including NEETs.

Note that the focus in this chapter is on young adults aged 18–24. The significant legal needs of children and young people under the age of 18 have not been captured in the CSJS, although it is hoped that the survey will be extended to cover 16- and 17-year-olds in the future. This is a very serious gap in the available research data, for evidence from legal advice services targeting young people suggests a remarkable concentration of need amongst 16–17-year-olds.[28]

Problem incidence

Young adults have traditionally been a group neglected by policy and services, yet are now acknowledged by policy-makers to have very high unmet needs:

> *'Many policies assume that youth ends at 18 or 19 but the reality is that for some disadvantaged young people...this may be when support is most needed. Many of the issues that are thought of as the problems of teenagers are in fact as bad (or worse) for those in their early twenties, on whom much less policy has been focused – the phenomenon of "the invisible early twenties".'* (SEU 2005)

Increasingly, this phenomenon is being identified as applicable to the social welfare advice sector. For example, in her 1999 report on the first major national survey in the UK of the experiences of ordinary citizens in finding solutions to their everyday social welfare legal problems, Genn found that younger people were more likely to have experienced such problems than older adults (Genn 1999). The study found that 52% of 18–24-year-olds surveyed had experienced at least one 'justiciable problem'[29] during the previous five years.

Since then, the increasingly influential CSJS has been developed by the LSRC using methodology that has built upon that of Genn.[30] Four main CSJS reports have been published, based on survey data from 2001 (reported in Pleasence et al. 2004), 2004 (Pleasence 2006), 2006 (Pleasence et al. 2007) and 2007 (Pleasence et al. 2008). They have consistently found that approximately one-third of 18–24-year-olds had experienced at least one

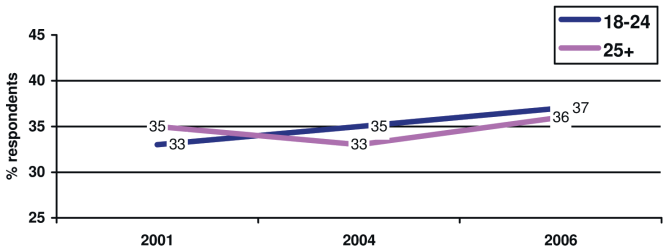

Fig. 3.1 **Overall problem incidence 2001-2006 by age** *(Source: Youth Access' analysis of CSJS data supplied by LSRC)*

28 Those under the age of 18 are not the only group not covered in the CSJS. The LSRC acknowledges the limitations of the CSJS and other national household surveys in its annual reports of the CSJS in terms of reaching some of the most excluded groups in society (see, e.g. Pleasence et al. 2007; Pleasence et al. 2008). As it draws on a sample of residential addresses, the following are amongst those sections of the population falling outside the CSJS's sample frame: elderly people in residential care; students living in halls of residence; hospital in-patients; prisoners; some military personnel; those in immigration detention centres; and Gypsies / travellers. The LSRC recommends surveying such groups separately using alternative methodologies and notes that several of the groups tend to be relatively young.

29 Genn defined 'justiciable problems' as problems that had a potential legal remedy and were non-trivial.

30 The CSJS, which covers England and Wales, adopts the same 'triviality threshold' to identifying problems as Genn did. Respondents to the CSJS surveys were asked if they had experienced 'a problem that had been difficult to solve' in each of eighteen distinct justiciable problem categories, including discrimination, employment, rented housing, money/debt, welfare benefits and personal injury. The samples are nationally representative and drawn from a random selection of residential addresses across England and Wales. The 2001 CSJS survey included 5,611 respondents aged 18 and over, the 2004 survey 5,015 and the 2006 survey 3,087. Typically, around 10–11% of survey respondents are aged between 18 and 24. The CSJS is currently a continuous survey.

The relationship between 'problem incidence', 'need' and 'demand'

'Problem incidence' is a term employed by the LSRC to describe the prevalence of problems reported by respondents to the CSJS, regardless of whether they need or want advice to resolve those problems. Caution must be taken when trying to plan services based on problem incidence data alone, for not every problem experienced results in a 'need' or 'demand' for advice.

'Advice need' is a largely subjective term to describe situations where people are perceived to require expert advice to resolve their problem or enquiry. The level of 'need' for advice depends to some extent upon the experience, skills, capacity and attitudes of the individual to resolve their problems without help. It could be argued that young people's problems generally are more likely to lead to a need for advice due to their relative inexperience and vulnerability. Need is also dependent upon the relative seriousness and complexity of the problem, the attitude and status of the other side, the complexity of the forum for resolving any dispute and the potential impact of not resolving the problem. Thus, a 17-year-old with poor literacy requiring a judicial review of a homelessness decision made by a hostile local authority is rather more likely to need advice than a well-educated 40-year-old with a minor consumer problem.

'Demand for advice' describes the desire for advice and actual advice-seeking of individuals, which may or may not match their need for advice. Some individuals and groups are more likely to seek, and obtain, advice than others. As with need, demand tends to be partly driven by the capacity of the individual and the seriousness of their problem. Demand is also driven to a large extent by the nature of the advice service on offer. This can be seen in the markedly differing patterns of demand experienced by voluntary-sector youth advice agencies and the Connexions Service, both of which claim to offer advice on any issue with which a young person may need help: 86% of young people contacting Connexions discussed jobs and careers (Deakin et al. 2004), with only 9% making housing enquiries, whereas housing enquiries vastly outnumber careers enquiries at voluntary-sector youth advice agencies.[48]

Notwithstanding these definitions, the term 'needs' is often used – including within this report – as a pragmatic catch-all when discussing the wider subject encompassing problem incidence, advice needs and demand for advice.

48 Youth Access membership survey data.

civil justice problem in the previous three and a half years.

As can be seen in Figure 3.1, young adults' overall experience of problems, in terms of their likelihood of having experienced one or more problems, appears broadly in line with that of the rest of the population.

There appear to be grounds for supposing that problem incidence data recorded in the CSJS may slightly under-estimate the prevalence of young people's problems in comparison with those of adults. The LSRC have commented that young respondents between 2006 and 2008 who reported problems over the three and a half year survey reference period were considerably more likely than the general population to say that their problems started in the most recent year and less likely to say that their problems had started before the survey reference period. Thus, a greater proportion of young people's reported problems are either recent or current.[31]

The overall trend of problem incidence amongst young people was steadily upwards between 2001 and 2006 (from 33% to 37%). This contrasts with a fluctuating trend amongst the rest of the population, although these differences are not significant.

More recent data, although not directly comparable,[32] suggests a higher problem incidence among young people: a BMRB Omnibus poll conducted for Citizens Advice found that 65% of 18–24-year-olds had experienced at least one problem over the previous 12 months, compared to 53% of all respondents.[33]

Data from the CSJS indicates that problem incidence generally increases within the 18–24-age-range, rising in the 2004 CSJS from 19% of 18-year-olds to a peak of 53% of 23-year-olds (see Figure 3.2).[34]

31 Further, neither those under the age of 18 nor some homeless young people are included in the CSJS – see notes 19 and 28 above.

32 It is not suggested that direct comparisons between CSJS problem incidence data and data from the BMRB Omnibus survey should be made, as the two surveys cover slightly different issues and employ different methodologies.

33 From a poll conducted in August 2008 by BMRB Omnibus, which asked 1005 people aged 18 and over whether they had experienced any problems in twelve categories of problem type over the last twelve months. The twelve categories were: health; goods or services; employment; benefits; legal matters; housing; relationship/family matters; debts (including credit); tax issues; education; discrimination; and citizenship/immigration. The data is unpublished, but see Figure 3.4.

34 It should be noted that the numbers of young people of specific ages in the survey are relatively small, so not too much significance should be attached to differences between say 22-year-olds and 23-year-olds. However, the pattern of problem incidence generally increasing within the 18–24 age range is reasonably clear and is also indicated by 2001 CSJS data.

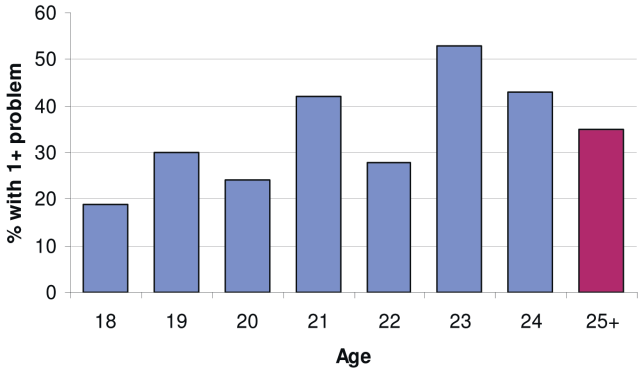

Fig. 3.2 **Problem incidence generally increases with age within the 18-24 age group**
(Source: 2004 CSJS)

One must bear in mind that problem incidence does not equate to a need for advice: a 24-year-old may be better able to deal with a given problem independently than an 18-year-old, for example. (See box on *The relationship between 'problem incidence', 'need' and 'demand'* on p. 11.) It is also worth noting that respondents to the CSJS were asked to report any problems they had experienced in the previous three and a half years, which may partly account for the trend of rising incidence with rising age, as 18-year-olds could have been looking back to when they were 14 or 15, at which age fewer legal problems would be expected to occur.

Multiple problems

Young people, particularly the 22–24 age group and disadvantaged young people, appear relatively prone to multiple problems: young people who have experienced at least one problem are more likely than the general population to have experienced two or more problems.[35] In the 2004 CSJS the mean number of problems amongst 18–24-year-olds was 1.82, compared to 1.72 for the rest of the population.

In the 2001 CSJS young people became increasingly disproportionately represented amongst those with multiple problems as the number of problems increased. Thus, relatively few young people who reported at least one problem reported only one problem (42% compared to 54% amongst the 25+ group), but they were twice as likely as people aged 25 and over to report five or more problems (6% vs 3% of 25+). One young person reported 22 problems.[36]

In the 2004 CSJS this trend was far stronger amongst older young people: 17% of 22–24-year-olds reported two or more problems, compared to 10% of 18–21s and 12% of those aged over 25. As the number of problems increases, so this trend was magnified. Hence, 7% of 22–24s experienced four or more problems compared to 0% of 18–21s and 2% of those over 25.[37]

Research in the legal advice sector has confirmed that the experience of multiple legal problems is a key indicator of social exclusion and that experiencing one problem greatly increases the likelihood of experiencing further problems. The LSRC has reported that:

> *'Experiencing justiciable problems has an additive effect. Each time a person experiences a problem they become increasingly likely to experience additional problems.'* (Pleasence 2006)

Further, as people experience multiple problems, they are increasingly likely to experience problems that play a direct role in social exclusion. For example, whereas 2% of respondents to the 2004 CSJS who reported one problem reported a problem relating to homelessness, 17% of respondents reporting six or more problems did so (Pleasence 2006). Other problems strongly related to the experience of multiple problems include unsafe or unsatisfactory rented housing and divorce.

As might be expected, vulnerable groups are much more likely to report multiple problems. The LSRC has identified the following groups as prone to multiple problems: people experiencing ill-health or disability; people in receipt of benefits; lone parents; those living in high-density housing in the rented sector; and men (Pleasence 2006).

Pattern of problems

Whilst the overall incidence of social welfare problems experienced by young adults differs only slightly from that experienced by the general population, the pattern of their problems differs markedly.

Youth Access' analysis of data from the 2001 CSJS showed that young people experienced more problems, proportionately, than the population as a whole relating to ten of the eighteen problem types covered in the CSJS, including homelessness, rented housing, domestic violence, employment, unfair police treatment and welfare benefits. Significantly, this list contains many of the key areas of social welfare law covered by the Community Legal Service.[38] The findings on homelessness were particularly striking, with young people emerging as seven times more likely to have reported a problem. These

35 Note that in the CSJS, 'problem incidence' data relates to the proportion of people experiencing at least one problem. 'Multiple problem' data, on the other hand, relates to the reporting by individuals of more than one problem. See footnote 20 for an explanation of the distinction between multiple problems and problem clusters.

36 Unpublished analysis by Youth Access of 2001 CSJS data supplied by LSRC.

37 Additional analysis by Youth Access of 2004 CSJS data. Equivalent analysis of 2001 CSJS data has not been undertaken.

38 See Chapter 6 for further analysis of the coincidence of young people's problems with the key areas of social welfare law relevant to the Community Legal Service.

findings were largely confirmed in the LSRC's analysis of the 2004 CSJS:

> *'[T]here was substantial variation in the types of problems reported by 18 to 24 year olds and those aged over 24. Problems such as those concerning owned housing, consumer problems and divorce were more common amongst those aged over 24. In contrast, 18 to 24 year olds more often reported problems such as those concerning rented housing, homelessness, unfair police treatment, employment and discrimination.'* (Balmer et al. 2007).

Young adults were also more likely to report immigration and mental health problems in both the 2001 and 2004 CSJS surveys, though numbers were very small. Figure 3.3 sets out the full findings on problem incidence by problem type and age found in the 2004 CSJS.

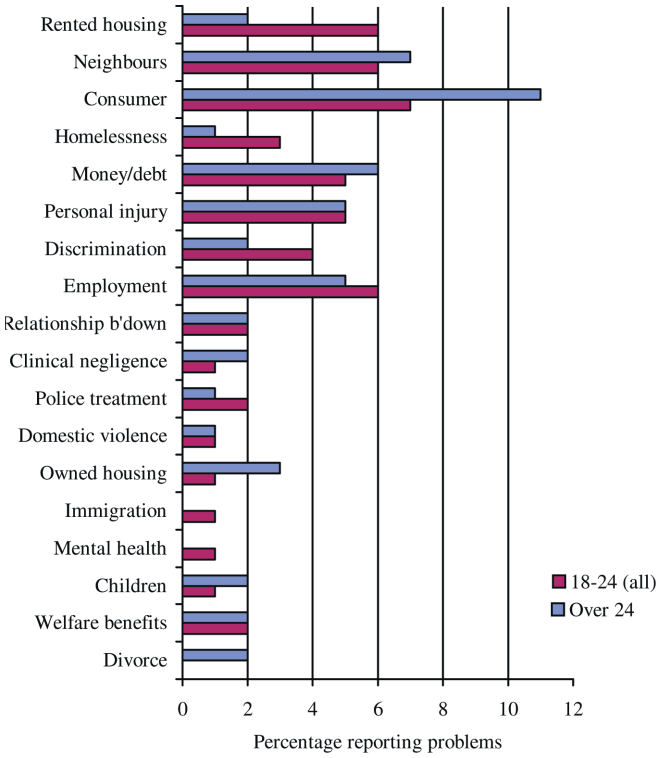

Fig. 3.3 **Problem incidence by problem type and age**
(Source: 2004 CSJS)[39]

It is worth noting that, whilst 18-24-year-olds in general are more likely than older adults to experience many of the most common social welfare problems, there are differences within the 18–24 group; the incidence of employment, rented housing, neighbours, consumer and debt problems appears to increase with age within this group, whilst discrimination problems decrease (Balmer et al. 2007).

The above findings from the 2004 CSJS can be compared with those from the BMRB Omnibus survey conducted for Citizens Advice in August 2008, referred to earlier[40] and set out in Figure 3.4; the two sets of data are largely consistent. Young adults experienced more problems than the population as a whole in most of the categories, notably housing, employment, immigration and education, but fewer consumer problems. Unlike in the CSJS, young people also reported experiencing more debt problems than the general population.

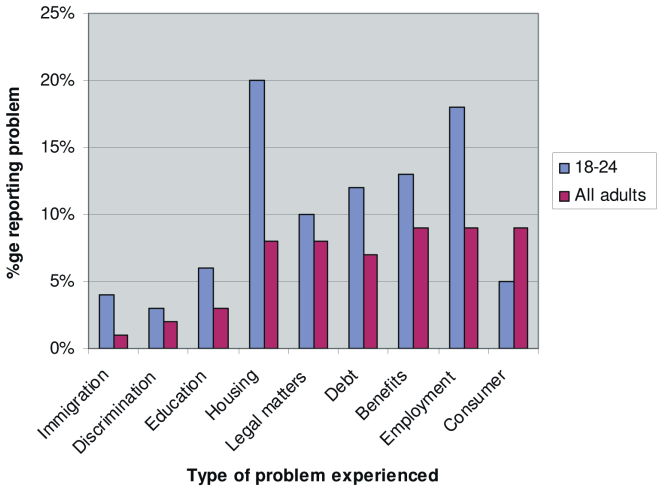

Fig. 3.4 **Problems experienced over last twelve months by age and type**
(Source: BMRB Omnibus poll for Citizens Advice, 2008)

The experience of disadvantaged young adults

The public's experience of social welfare problems is by no means common across all social groups. Analysis by the LSRC of its 2004 CSJS survey data indicates that key predictors of problem incidence amongst 18–24-year-olds include (Balmer et al. 2007):

- housing type
- illness/disability
- family type
- being a victim of crime
- social isolation
- education, employment or training status.[41]

39 Chart extracted with minor corrections from Balmer et al. 2007.

40 See footnote 33 for details of the BMRB Omnibus survey. Aside from the nine categories of problem included in Figure 3.4, respondents were asked about health, tax issues and relationships/family matters. The 18–24 age group experienced similar levels of problems to the sample as a whole in these three categories.

41 Identification of education, employment and training status as a factor comes from unpublished analysis for Youth Access by the LSRC of data from the 2004 CSJS on NEET 18–24-year-olds. See also LSRC 2009.

Thus, the 2004 CSJS shows a similar level of problem incidence for adults aged 25 and older and for young adults aged 18–24 (33% and 35% respectively), but a marked difference between these two groups and disadvantaged young people, for whom problem incidence rises considerably to: 47% amongst socially isolated young people;[42] 51% amongst young people with long-term illnesses or disabilities; 60% amongst young parents; and 61% amongst young people living in flats (see Figure 3.5).

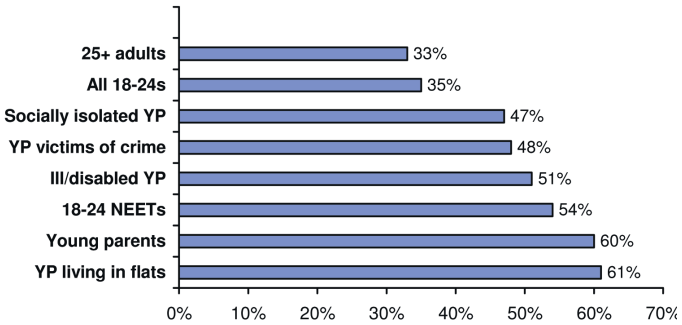

Fig. 3.5 **Problem incidence amongst disadvantaged young people**
(Source: 2004 CSJS)

These findings are highly significant, especially given suggestions that policy should be focused to a far greater extent on those 750,000 16–25-year-olds facing disadvantage and the 200,000 facing 'very severe disadvantage' (SEU 2005).[43]

Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs[44]) are seen as a particularly important group for youth policy makers. Not only is being NEET often viewed as a proxy for youth disadvantage, but the recession that began in 2008/09 is likely to lead to a substantial increase in the numbers of NEETs.

The LSRC's analysis of 18–24-year-old NEETs from the 2004 CSJS reveals some significant findings:

- 54% of 18–24-year-old NEETs in the 2004 CSJS reported experiencing at least one problem, compared to 31% of non-NEETs.[45]
- In addition, those NEETs experiencing a problem were also more likely to experience additional or multiple problems (see Figure 3.6 below).
- Although fewer than a fifth of the 18–24-year-olds in the 2004 CSJS were NEETs, this group accounted for more than a quarter of all young adults who reported problems, for almost two-fifths of all the problems reported by young adults and for approaching half of those seeking advice.[46]

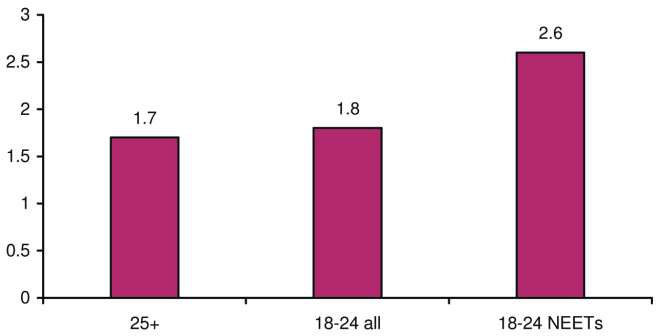

Fig. 3.6 **Mean number of problems experienced**
(Source: 2004 CSJS)

In relation to specific problems:

- NEETs were more likely to experience most types of problem, particularly homelessness (12.4% vs 3% of non-NEETs), relationship breakdown (7.6% vs 1.5%), rented housing and discrimination.
- NEETs were less likely to experience consumer and employment problems.[47]

Remarkably, homelessness and rented housing were the most common problems experienced by NEETs (each 12.4%), ahead of consumer problems (9.5%). To put this in context, adults over the age of 24 are roughly fourteen times more likely to experience a consumer problem than a homelessness problem.

42 The LSRC defines socially isolated young people as 18–24-year-old respondents living apart from their parents or any other adult over the age of 24.

43 The SEU report states that these are *'broad ball-park'* figures based on information that is available: *'Of the 5.5 million young adults in England, approximately 750,000 were not in employment, education or training in 2004. We consider this a very rough proxy for the largest possible estimate of the number of young adults facing disadvantage. We consider that a smaller number – perhaps 200,000, or between 5 and 10 per cent – face very severe disadvantage or have complex needs.'*

44 The use of the term 'NEETs' appears to have been used first in the UK in the DfES' *Transforming Youth Work* policy document published in 2000, but usage has spread to other countries, including Japan. The UK government uses the term NEETs narrowly as a classification for young people aged 16 to 18 who are 'Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training', covering young people who are unemployed (i.e. out of work and looking for a job) or inactive in the labour market (e.g. young parents, carers, those on unpaid holiday or travelling, sick / disabled, doing voluntary work, or engaged in other unspecified activities). Whilst the LSRC's analysis of data from the 2004 CSJS focuses on 18–24-year-olds, the distinction in activities between NEETs and non-NEETs follows the government's definition.

45 Unpublished analysis for Youth Access by LSRC of data from 2004 CSJS on 18–24-year-old NEETs.

46 The relevant figures are: 17.5% of 18–24 respondents were NEETs; 27% of young respondents with problems were NEETs; 39% of all the problems experienced by 18–24s were experienced by NEETs; 45% of all advice-seeking by this age group was by NEETs; 48% of young respondents who obtained advice were NEETs.

47 This may be due to the fact that NEETs are likely to have less money to buy goods in the first place and, by definition, are less likely to be in employment.

CHAPTER 4

Advice needs of specific groups of young people

This chapter outlines evidence on the specific advice needs of particular groups of young people, including groups that experience additional disadvantage. Where possible, the specific types of issues presented to advice agencies by these groups are identified.

Under-18s

As mentioned earlier, there is a gap in research data on the advice needs of young people under age 18. For this report, the service statistics of several youth advice services were examined, revealing a startling pattern of usage of those services that provide specialist legal advice targeted at young people:

- Typically, around half of all clients of these services were aged either 16 or 17, with most presenting with a combination of homelessness, social services and welfare benefit problems.
- The advice needs of under-16s differ markedly from those of 16–24-year-olds. Advice services catering for this group tend to deal with significant numbers of 13–15-year-olds whose relationships with parents and carers have broken down. They are often homeless, with little care, out of school and/or involved in drugs and crime.
- Many of those under 16 have asked social services for help but rarely receive support without legal challenge from a solicitor to ensure their rights are upheld.
- The other key area of advice need for this group relates to education rights; there is a clear need for more services that advise the young person directly rather than their parents.

The increased vulnerability of younger young people and the prevalence of severe problems may lead to relatively high levels of actual need for advice amongst those young people in this age group who experience problems, compared to amongst older young people (and older adults).

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people

17% of children and young people aged 0–19 in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups (ONS 2007 *Population Estimates*), yet there is little data on the specific advice needs of BAME young people. However, there are some useful pointers from evidence on the needs of people from BAME communities in general (e.g. Springer 2000):

- Overall problem incidence amongst BAME respondents was higher than that for white respondents in the 2004 CSJS (Pleasence 2006), but lower in the 2006 CSJS (Pleasence et al. 2007).
- The mix of problems experienced by BAME groups overall is similar to that of the general population, however they are more likely to experience certain problems, particularly discrimination, rented housing, homelessness, immigration and unfair police treatment.[49] These are all areas in which young people also experience more problems than the general population.
- There are likely to be significant differences in the advice needs of different BAME communities, e.g. housing and homelessness problems appear to be more prevalent amongst Black and Black British people.[50]
- Agencies in Youth Access' membership targeting, or working in areas with large South Asian communities[51] have reported seeing significant numbers of young women with problems relating to forced marriage and domestic violence.
- BAME communities are more likely to
  - live in deprived areas and in poor and overcrowded housing;

49 Youth Access' analysis of data contained in Pleasence (2006) and Pleasence et al. (2007).

50 Ibid. See also, MORI (2004).

51 See, for example, Ashiana Project: www.ashiana.org.uk

- be involved with the criminal justice system and be victims of crime;
- be poor and unemployed;
- suffer from poor health (SEU 2001).

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young refugees

Young people who are asylum seekers experience problems similar to those of other disadvantaged young people, such as housing and social services, but in addition they may need access to specialist legal advice to address a complex combination of problems:

- Problems faced by this group can be exacerbated by their emotional needs. A report on legal advice for asylum-seekers in London found that *'Unaccompanied young people have a need for particularly skilled legal advice...[requiring] sensitive interviewing skills, as many children will have been through traumatic experiences.'* (Mayor of London 2005).
- Youth advice agencies report that many asylum-seeking children are treated automatically as adults by social services and the Home Office whether or not they arrive with paperwork asserting their age. The need for specialist legal advice on immigration and social services is therefore very high (ILPA 2006).
- Focus groups carried out by Enfield Law Centre with young refugees discovered that all those interviewed had experienced more general legal problems both before and after they were given refugee status: *'Housing was an issue.... [T]he picture for young refugees was very disturbing. As soon as their immigration cases had been decided, they were made homeless.'* (Braverman 2004).

Care leavers

Care leavers are another group high on the agenda of policy makers due to concerns about the poor outcomes they experience in terms of education, health and crime.[52] Little research has focused on the specific social welfare advice needs of care leavers, but service planners should bear in mind the following evidence:

- Care leavers often leave care at 16 or 17, at which age they tend to be ill-prepared for independent living – many admit to finding the prospect of leaving care and being on their own very daunting (Centrepoint 2006).
- There is a paucity of suitable accommodation available for young people leaving care. Care leavers report that they are often housed in flats that are unclean, unsafe and situated in 'bad' areas (Commission for Social Care Inspection 2006).
- Many care leavers are inadequately prepared to manage their own finances and lack support with things like budgeting (Morgan & Lindsay 2006). This can impact on their ability to avoid problems arising with their tenancies, often leading to debt, rented housing and homelessness problems. If young people are unable to sustain their tenancy and are evicted, they risk being classified as 'intentionally homeless'.
- Many care leavers mention a lack of support generally: *'You are given a flat, given your money and left to get on with it'* (Morgan & Lindsay 2006). Once they turn 18, social services support is usually withdrawn altogether.
- Within two years of leaving care, half of care leavers will be unemployed; a third will be parents or pregnant; a fifth will be homeless (Sergeant 2006).
- Care leavers are an obvious group on which to focus preventative services, including Public Legal Education initiatives, as well as advice.

Young parents

For the general adult population, lone parenthood is far more strongly associated with increased likelihood of experiencing rights-related problems than parenthood in general. However, amongst 18–24-year-old respondents to the 2004 CSJS, *all* young parents were markedly more likely to report problems. Thus, whilst 58% of young lone parents reported problems, this actually rose to 62% amongst both young cohabiting and married couples with children (Balmer et al. 2007). This may be linked to the relative lack of economic security enjoyed by many young parents in comparison to older parents and suggests that age of parenthood may be a more significant predictor than marital status of problem incidence. In relation to the types of problems experienced:

- Youth advice agencies consulted for this report mentioned debt, benefits and housing problems as being the main issues brought in by young parents.
- Significant numbers of lone parents (of all ages) have benefits problems (69%), problems with contact (53%) and debt problems (48%) (Moorhead et al. 2004).
- Problems relating to rented housing, debt, welfare benefits, divorce, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, children, mental health and homelessness are all associated with parenthood, and particularly lone parenthood (Pleasence 2006).

52 The Government published a Green Paper, *Care Matters* (2006), focusing on improving the life chances of young people in and leaving the care system.

Disabled young people

Disabled young people are more likely to experience legal problems than other young people or than older people with disabilities. They are also more likely to face multiple problems. The evidence suggests there is a need for community education to develop disabled people's self-advocacy skills.

- In the 2004 CSJS, problem incidence amongst 18–24-year-olds with long-term illnesses or disabilities was 51%, compared to 35% amongst all young people and 37% amongst older respondents with long-term illness/disability (Balmer et al. 2007).
- Among the wider population, of all ages, the 2006 CSJS found that people with long-term illnesses and disabilities were more likely than non-ill/disabled people to experience problems relating to:
  - discrimination (3.0% vs 1.7%)
  - neighbours (13.6% vs 7.4%)
  - rented housing (4.2% vs 2.9%)
  - debt (7.1% vs 5.0%)
  - welfare benefits (4.5% vs 2.5%)
  - personal injury (5.4% vs 3.1%)
  - clinical negligence (3.6% vs 1.4%)
  - mental health (0.9% vs 0.1%)
- These individuals were also more likely to experience multiple problems (Pleasence et al. 2007).
- Around half of disabled children and young people experience a combination of difficulties, and many of these will involve a degree of learning difficulty (HM Treasury/DfES 2007). These young people are more likely to need a complex range of services provided through education, health and social services – problems accessing these services can, in turn, give rise to a need for advice and advocacy.

Youth advice agencies consulted for this report consistently mentioned that young disabled people frequently approach their services with benefit problems. One issue for them is that the transition from child to adult disability benefits can be problematic:

- There is a sharp fall-off in the numbers of Disability Living Allowance claimants at the age when responsibility for the claim transfers from the parent to the claimant, suggestive of a failure by young people to obtain appropriate advice regarding their entitlement.
- Many young people who are entitled do not claim incapacity benefits under the special 'incapacity in youth' provisions on reaching 16 (Robinson 2007).
- Many disabled people also need advice to challenge decisions on direct payment assessments and support to access direct payments and community care services.

Young carers

There is little data available on the specific advice needs of young carers, but service planners should bear in mind the following evidence:

- Nearly half (49%) of young carers look after people affected by mental health and/or alcohol and drug addictions (Barnardo's 2006).
- Young carers experience high levels of stress and have significant emotional needs (Morgan 2006).
- Getting adequate social services support and welfare benefits for the person cared for is vital – advice is often needed, therefore, to enforce the rights of the person cared for as well as of the young carer (Morgan 2006).

Young offenders, prisoners and ex-offenders

Advice on issues such as debt, income maximisation and housing can often break a vicious circle for offenders. However, young offenders' needs vary at different stages of the criminal justice process, starting with a need for Public Legal Education and advice to prevent offending among teenagers.

Once in prison, there is a need for advice to focus on the practical issues that new prisoners have to sort out, such as outstanding housing, employment, debt and benefit liabilities (Citizens Advice 2007). It is important to bear in mind:

- Many prisoners, and in particular young prisoners, lack self-esteem, have literacy problems and possess low problem-solving ability. Good-quality advice can help reduce the risk of re-offending (SEU 2002).
- Simple actions such as making a phone call or writing a letter are no longer easy and are subject to restrictions. Without support and advice within prison, it is often not possible to deal with outstanding debts or housing issues and many prisoners lose their outside accommodation and build up debts (Citizens Advice 2007).
- Nearly half (48%) of prisoners (of all ages) had a history of debt before entering prison, which had escalated to crisis point by the time of their release (SEU 2002).

- Many young adults in prison are particularly vulnerable to bullying, abuse and self-harm. Their rights to education are rarely met; they can be subject to illegal segregation or restraint; and they have access to inadequate complaints procedures (Howard League 2002).
- The need for advice may be higher among remand and short-term prisoners than medium to long-term prisoners.

On release, many prisoners face immediate housing, benefit and debt problems, having received no help during their sentence. In addition:

- Many are released without their basic needs met, and thus re-offend as a result of immediate poverty (Citizens Advice 2007).
- Homelessness is a strong contributory factor to re-offending (SEU 2002). Up to a third of prisoners lose their housing during custody and some local authorities refuse to rehouse ex-offenders because they consider they are not vulnerable and are intentionally homeless (Citizens Advice 2007).
- 'Child prisoners' can be released from penal custody with virtually no support from their local authorities' social services departments; there is a need for specialist lawyers to fight to ensure these young people are provided with care and support on release (Howard League 2002).
- The majority (81%) of ex-prisoners claim benefits after release (SEU 2002), making the availability of good benefits advice crucial. Indeed, the Social Exclusion Unit has identified the importance of financial stability in the period immediately following release in terms of resettlement and avoidance of re-offending.

Victims of crime

Young victims of crime may present with a range of practical and emotional issues to advisers. Although there is little research evidence on the specific advice needs of young victims of crime, research by the LSRC has recently highlighted the relationship between civil justice problems and being a victim of crime (Kemp et al. 2007). Key findings from the research include the following:

- In the 2004 CSJS, 20% of respondents reported being a victim of one or more offences; the figure in the 2006 British Crime Survey was 23%.
- Social exclusion was a key factor: 60% of socially excluded victims of crime reported legal problems, compared to 28% of non-socially excluded non-victims.
- Victims of assault were the most likely victims of crime to experience legal problems.
- The more crimes people had experienced, the more legal problems they experienced.
- Amongst socially excluded victims of crime with legal problems, neighbour disputes emerged as by far the most common single problem, followed by rented housing and money/debt problems.
- These victims of crime were far more likely to have experienced problems relating to homelessness, unfair police treatment, domestic violence, children, relationships and discrimination than socially excluded people who had not been victims of crime.

CHAPTER 5

Young people's advice needs in key subject areas

This chapter considers young people's needs for advice in relation to specific subject areas, namely: housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, debt, employment, discrimination, social services, education and consumer rights. Evidence from the 2006 CSJS relating to problem incidence by age is examined in the context of anecdotal evidence from youth advice services and published research evidence.

The key areas of demand

A number of agencies providing rights-based advice services to young people were consulted for this report in order to help identify the most common types of problems and issues presented to them. This has produced helpful evidence about the context within which the more formal research evidence should be read.

Overall, it is clear that the greatest demand for legal advice comes from 16–19-year-olds with housing, homelessness and welfare benefits problems, with debt, employment, education and social services being other major areas. However, there were some important differences in the types of problems reported by different types of agencies.

For youth information, advice and counselling agencies – which typically provide rights-based advice alongside personal, practical and health advice and support – housing, homelessness and welfare benefits issues comprised the vast majority of the legal issues with which they dealt. Money (including debt and more general financial capability issues), education and employment tended to be the next most frequent areas of enquiry dealt with.

Amongst Law Centres that target young people, housing, homelessness and welfare benefits again emerged as by far the biggest area of work, although education, employment and social services were seen as important, and often growing, areas for which specialist advisers or lawyers were required. Although debt was rarely mentioned, several Law Centres dealt with a number of debt issues within their housing and welfare benefits cases. The age profile of clients seen by Law Centres targeting young people was highly significant: typically, at least 60% were aged 16–19.

Demand amongst services based within more generalist advice agencies differed somewhat. For example, the caseload at The Cabin, the most developed CAB service targeting young people (whose clients are also primarily 16–19), consisted predominantly of benefits and debt cases, followed by housing and homelessness and employment.

To some extent, the lower level of housing problems seen by CABx may reflect the greater traditional emphasis of the CAB service, particularly in comparison with Law Centres, on benefits and debt. However, the variable practices of local authorities, particularly in relation to homelessness, were seen by agencies to be highly significant in terms of local patterns of demand.

Housing and homelessness

As can be seen in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below, which set out the incidence by age of housing problems reported in the 2006 CSJS, homelessness and rented housing are both very much associated with young people. This pattern was also clear in the 2001 and 2004 CSJS surveys.

Around a quarter of all rented housing problems and a third of all homelessness problems are reported by young people aged 18–24. In the 2001 CSJS, young people were seven times more likely to report a homelessness problem than the rest of the population – and eleven times less likely to get advice (Kenrick 2007).

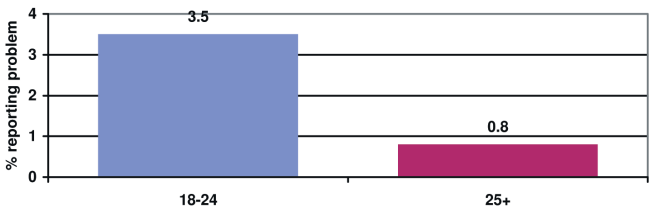

Fig. 5.1 **Homelessness problem incidence by age**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

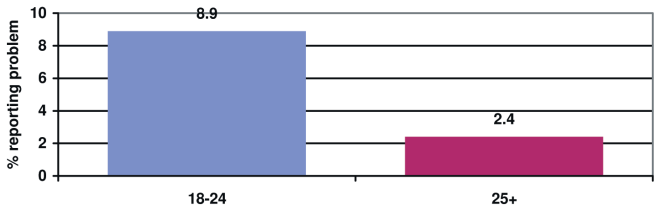

Fig. 5.2 **Rented Housing problem incidence**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

The Social Exclusion Unit has reported that housing and homelessness *'are by far the most common reasons that the most disadvantaged young adults reach out to services'*, accounting for 43% of first contact with services.[53] They are also the most common rights-based issues presented by young people to the services in Youth Access' membership.[54] For the few specialist legal advice services for young people, housing and homelessness tend to represent the single largest area of work.[55]

Youth advice agencies report that many of the problems they deal with are related to the routine failure of local authorities to fulfill their responsibilities under the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, which extended automatic priority to homeless 16–17-year-olds and care leavers up to age 21. These young people are frequently deemed to be intentionally homeless following the breakdown of family relationships.[56]

Common rented housing problems include:

- getting money for rent deposits
- benefits and finances, including Housing Benefit
- rent arrears
- problems with budgeting
- tenancy issues
- problems with landlords, including threats of and actual evictions (legal and illegal)
- vulnerable young people being placed in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation

A specialist legal advice service for young people in Stockton recently reported that:

> *'Experience from the first three years of the Youth Advice Service confirms that advice regarding homelessness is central to meeting the needs of a large number of young people. Our experience would also suggest that some young people setting up home for the first time do not always have a good grasp on the routine of coping with a tenancy and can require more support.'* (Robinson 2007)

Further information on young people's housing and homelessness advice needs can be found in Kenrick 2007.

Welfare benefits and debt

As can be seen in Figure 5.3, again based on 2006 CSJS data, the incidence of welfare benefit problems amongst young people appeared slightly higher than that amongst the general population, although the difference is not significant given the relatively small numbers involved.[57]

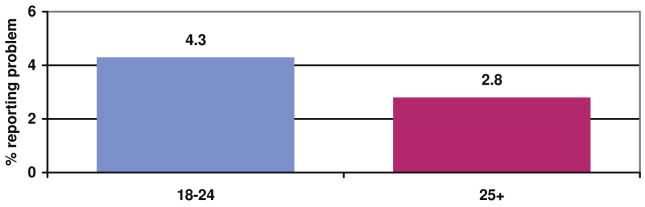

Fig. 5.3 **Welfare Benefit problem incidence by age**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

Effective benefits advice is essential to maximise young people's incomes and help stabilise their lives. Assistance with Social Fund reviews and the resolution of Housing Benefit problems, e.g. applications for Discretionary Housing Payments, can be critical for people setting up home for the first time. Securing in-work benefits is crucial in helping young people move into and stay in employment.

Benefit rules for young people in general, and for 16–18-year-olds in particular, are extremely complex, and intervention from an experienced adviser is often needed to secure entitlement. The following are examples of complex areas:

- rules on part-time working and studying
- benefit entitlement for care leavers and for young people from abroad
- young people with disabilities claiming in their own right for the first time
- appeals for Disability Living Allowance

In terms of debt, young people appear slightly less likely to experience problems than the rest of the population, according to 2006 CSJS data (see Figure 5.4), although the difference is not significant.[58]

53 Findings from analysis of the 'Young Adults Questionnaire', as reported in SEU 2005.

54 Youth Access membership surveys.

55 Statistical returns from 'pilots' and 'good practice' agencies participating in Youth Access' Rights to Access Project.

56 For further analysis of this issue, see Shelter 2005.

57 CSJS data from 2001 and 2004 showed welfare benefit problem incidence amongst young people to be very similar to that of the general population.

58 Debt problem incidence amongst young people in the 2001 and 2004 CSJS surveys almost identically matched that of the general population.

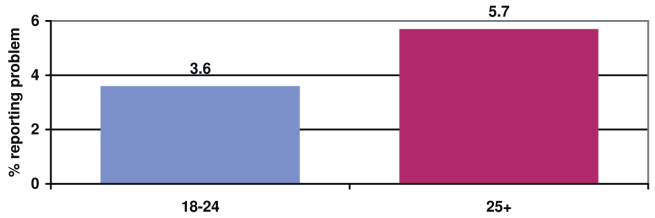

Fig. 5.4 **Debt problem incidence by age**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

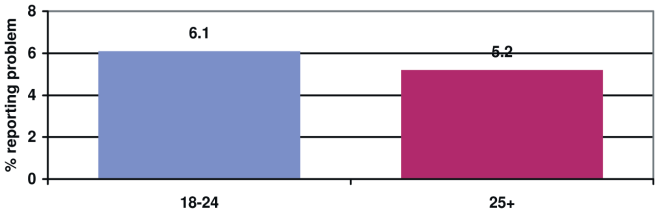

Fig. 5.5 **Employment problem incidence by age**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

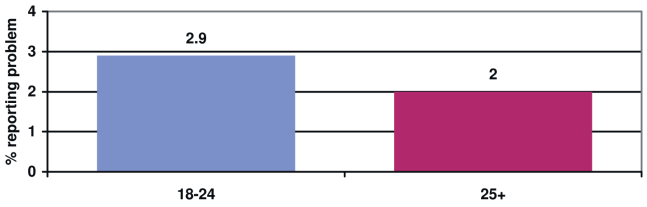

Fig. 5.6 **Discrimination problem incidence by age**
(Source: 2006 CSJS)

A number of recent reports document the rise of debt as a key issue for many young people. For example:

- Rainer and YouGov reported in 2007 that almost four out of five young people have been in debt by the age of 21. The survey found a third of young people had owed more than £5,000 and one in five more than £10,000.[59] For young people reliant on benefits, long delays and the complexities of the system were a major cause of debt.
- A 2007 survey by the marketing agency Face claimed that about half of young people have debts of more than 50% of their annual income; the average amount owed by young people aged 16–25 had risen from £3,700 to £5,500 in the past year.[60]
- Credit Action (2006) reported that 19% of 22–24-year-olds have short-term debts over £5,000.
- A GfK NOP poll for Citizens Advice, adviceUK and Youth Access in 2007 found that more than half of all 16–24-year-olds reported money as the issue worrying them the most, with nearly one in three saying that they worried 'all' or 'most' of the time about their money problems.[61]
- The Financial Services Authority (2006) reported that the 18–30 age group is less financially capable than older adults, performing significantly less well on making ends meet, planning ahead, choosing financial products and staying informed about financial matters.

Employment and discrimination

Data from the 2006 CSJS show that young people experienced similar levels of employment problems and discrimination problems to the rest of the population (see Figures 5.5 and 5.6).[62]

Research by Age Concern (2006) found that younger people reported more discrimination of all forms, with the youngest age group (16–24) experiencing the highest levels of discrimination.[63] The most prevalent form of discrimination suffered by young people was as a result of age, followed by gender, race, religion, sexuality and disability.

A recent online survey of under 18s found that 43% of respondents felt they had been treated unfairly because of their age, and also that age was the biggest area of discrimination experienced by respondents (Willow et al. 2007).[64] While less than one-third (29%) of the under-11s in the survey felt that they had experienced age discrimination, nearly two-thirds of older teenagers (64%) reported this.

Social services

There is little data available on young people's needs for advice on social services issues. However, advice services targeting young people report the following failures on the part of local authorities as generating significant advice needs amongst children and young people:

- denials of access to assessments and services to children in need aged 16+ who have left home;

59 www.raineronline.org/gen/Eighty_per_cent_of_young_people_in_debt_by_21.aspx

60 *The Independent*, 27th November 2007.

61 *Money is No 1 worry for young adults, says new poll:* www.youthaccess.org.uk/news/money-is-no-1-worry-for-young-adults.cfm.

62 Although differences may not be significant, given the small numbers involved, it is worth noting that the proportion of 18–24-year-olds experiencing employment and discrimination problems has been higher than average in the 2001, 2004 and 2006 CSJS surveys.

63 This research included a representative sample of 1,864 adults aged 16 and over.

64 The research was conducted for the Department for Children, Schools and Families and involved over 3,900 under-18s in an online survey.

- weaknesses in the assessment of children in need when the young person's home situation has broken down;
- reluctance to discharge the duty to accommodate children in need in emergency situations;
- inadequate responses to the breakdown of care placements;
- pressure on young people in the care system to move on too early from stable foster placements into supported housing arrangements; and
- failure to accommodate and support unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Education

There is little data available on young people's needs for advice on education issues. However, advice services targeting young people report the following as common areas of education advice work:

- assisting school-age children in ensuring that their Special Educational Needs can be met, including tribunal work;
- challenging exclusions to ensure young people are not unnecessarily excluded from school and get better support within school;
- challenging admission and transfer decisions;
- intervening in cases of bullying; and
- funding and financial issues, e.g. relating to the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

Consumer rights

CSJS data indicate that people aged 18–24 report fewer consumer problems than the over 24s (7% vs 11%; see Figure 3.3) and that consumer problems are less likely to be reported by disadvantaged young people than those in mainstream education or employment. Consumer problems may also be less likely to lead to a need for advice than many other types of problem. Nevertheless, consumer problems are still the most *numerous* problem experienced by young people. In addition:

- Only 43% of 16–18-year-olds felt informed about their consumer rights, compared to 78% of the population as a whole (OFT 2005). They were also least likely to have made a consumer complaint.
- Young people as a group know least about their consumer rights and should be viewed as a vulnerable consumer group (GCCNI 1999). Only 27% of young people (aged 15-24) in Northern Ireland felt informed about their consumer rights.
- A majority (71%) of children and young people felt they had been 'ripped off' at times when they had bought things (Mayo 2005). Many young people surveyed felt passionate that they had been discriminated against and treated differently, as second-class consumers.
- Young people feel discriminated against because of their age and lack of knowledge of their rights. They felt they were 'fobbed off' by retailers and treated with mistrust. Those with some understanding of their rights often stood their ground or enlisted support from parents; the remainder tended to accept the retailer's decision and take no further action (Solihull Consumer Support Network 2002).

CHAPTER 6

The relative importance of addressing young people's advice needs

This chapter examines the coincidence of young people's advice needs with the key areas of work undertaken by the not-for-profit advice sector. It also outlines the relative severity of young people's problems and the disproportionate impact of both problems and advice on disadvantaged young people.

Relevance to the not-for-profit advice sector

The previous chapter examined young people's needs for advice in key areas of social welfare law. Given the evidence that the pattern of young people's advice needs differs from that of people aged 25 and over, the author was keen to test to what extent their needs were focused in the key areas of law that fall within the remit of the Community Legal Service and that are traditionally the core areas of work for the not-for-profit advice sector – housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, debt and employment – as well as in the emerging area of discrimination.

Analysis of data from the CSJS in 2004 and 2006, in which 11% of respondents were aged 18–24,[65] shows that in all, 18–24-year-olds accounted for around 16% of all people with problems in these subject areas.[66] Taking only the two biggest areas of work for the not-for-profit advice sector as a whole – housing/homelessness and welfare benefits – the figures were even higher.

The BMRB Omnibus poll for Citizens Advice in 2008 also revealed higher percentages of 18–24-year-olds reporting problems in virtually all key social welfare areas (see Figure 3.4).

This evidence may be of particular relevance to advice providers in the not-for-profit sector, as it suggests that young people increasingly account for a disproportionate number of all people with problems in the key subject areas with which they tend to deal. It is also worth noting here that equivalent data from the CSJS indicates that young people were particularly unlikely, compared to other age groups and other subject types, to *obtain* advice in relation to problems in many of these same areas of social welfare law – see companion paper, Y*oung People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*, for full details.

Severity of problems

The LSRC has reported that young people experience relatively severe problems:

> *'Our results show that young people experience different types of problems compared to all other age groups. The high incidence of homelessness problems indicates that, when they do report problems, the youngest respondents in the LSRC national survey report problems of a severe nature.'* (Buck et al. 2005).

A further sign of the relative severity of young people's problems is the way they access advice. There is mounting evidence indicating that young people are far less likely to access advice via the telephone or the Internet than older adults, and that they have a marked preference for face-to-face advice (Balmer et al. 2007). Research has found that people least able to resolve their problems need more intensive forms of advice, with websites being at the least intensive end, telephone helplines in the middle and face-to-face advice at the most intensive end (DCA 2006). Adverse consequences of problems tend to be worse for people accessing advice in person than by phone, indicating that people may be more likely to need in-person advice for more complex and serious problems (Pleasence 2007). Whilst the reasons for young people's advice-seeking behaviour are complex, their preference for face-to-face advice may reflect their relative vulnerability and inability to resolve their problems without help. (For more on this issue, see also companion paper, *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*.)

65 Taking the two surveys together, 874 18–24-year-olds responded to the surveys, representing 11% of the total number of respondents (8,005).

66 See also Chapter 3, which highlights evidence indicating that reporting of CSJS data may generally under-estimate problem incidence amongst young respondents. Note also that under-18-year-olds are not included in the 16% figure.

Impact of problems

The disproportionate impact of the problems they report provides additional evidence for the contention that young people experience more severe problems than other age groups.

Data from the 2004 CSJS indicates that disadvantaged young people, including NEETs[67] and 'socially isolated'[68] young people, are significantly more likely than the population as a whole to worry about their problems and to report (as a result of their problems):

- stress-related illness
- violence (aimed at them)
- loss of home
- loss of confidence
- physical ill-health (Balmer et al. 2007).

In general, vulnerable groups are more likely to experience adverse outcomes as a result of their problems (Pleasence 2006) and it is perhaps merely common sense to expect that young people, who have relatively little experience of 'the system' compared to older groups, should fare worse than average when they have a problem.

In addition, it should be noted again that young people are less likely to obtain advice than older age groups, rendering it less likely that their problems will be resolved and the impact of their problems ameliorated.

The difference made by advice

Evidence of the impact of legal advice for young people is currently developing[69] and is not intended to be a focus of this particular report. However, it is worth mentioning here that the findings from a limited study conducted for Youth Access (see MBA 2007) indicate that legal advice may make a significant contribution to improving young people's well-being and achieving outcomes that are relevant to a number of public policy objectives, including the five Every Child Matters outcomes and a number of key Local Area Agreement indicators.

Further, initial analysis by the LSRC of fresh data from CSJS respondents between January 2006 and September 2008[70] indicates that younger respondents were twice as likely to meet their objectives where they managed to obtain advice in comparison to when they handled their problems alone, whereas older adults met their objectives only slightly more often where they obtained advice (see Fig. 6.1 below). This data suggests strongly that advice may make a greater difference for certain types of clients than others and it could be particularly important to ensure that young people are helped to get good advice to deal with their social welfare problems.

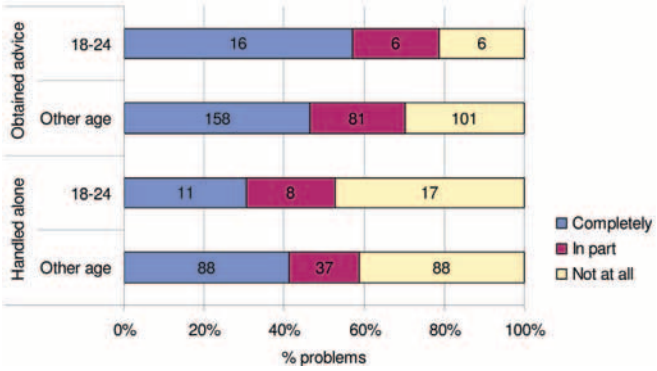

Fig. 6.1 **Extent to which objectives were met by strategy and age**
(Source: Supplied by LSRC, based on 2006-2008 CSJS data)

Thus, it is argued that not only do young people experience relatively severe problems, but they are more vulnerable to experiencing adverse outcomes from their problems simply because they are young and are therefore more likely to need advice than people with greater experience when they have a comparable problem.

It is also worth noting here that there is some evidence that outcomes achieved for young people by mainstream adult advice agencies are not as good as those obtained by specialist advice services for young people (Kenrick 2007). It is suggested that further research into the potential economic benefits of targeting advice at young people would be beneficial.

67 The increased incidence of worry amongst 18–24-year-old NEETs experiencing civil justice problems has been identified in unpublished analysis by Youth Access of 2004 CSJS data. See also LSRC 2009.

68 Balmer et al. 2007 examine the role of social isolation on problem experience, by looking separately at the experience of those young respondents living apart from their parents or any other adult over the age of 24.

69 See MBA 2007. Note also that Youth Access is currently piloting advice outcome monitoring tools with a number of youth advice agencies. Contact james@youthaccess.org.uk for further information.

70 The CSJS is now a continuous survey. The LSRC analysed data for Youth Access on the extent to which respondents met their objectives relating to 9,591 adults aged 18 and over, including 841 young adults aged between 18 and 24, interviewed between 12th January 2006 and 31st September 2008.

APPENDIX 1

Predicting future need and demand and estimating the number of young people who need but do not obtain advice

Given the desire amongst planners, commissioners and providers to predict advice need and demand amongst young people, we have attempted to estimate:

- how many civil justice problems requiring advice young people aged 16–24 will experience over a one year period;
- how many of those problems will be experienced by NEETs and non-NEETs;
- in relation to how many of those problems young people are likely to go on to seek advice;
- in relation to how many of those problems young people will actually manage to obtain advice.

The Legal Services Research Centre has assisted this work by supplying fresh data from the 2006-2008 CSJS, providing comments on our methodology and checking our calculations.

Our estimates are based on the following data and assumptions:

1. The number of young people in the UK

- There are around seven million young people aged 16–24 in the UK (ONS 2006 *Social Trends*).

2. Evidence of problem incidence amongst young people

- The 915 18–24-year-olds in the 2006-08 CSJS reported 533 problems over the three-and-a-half-year survey reference period. This equates to 0.58 problems per 18–24-year-old. However, the LSRC have found that 325 (around 61%) of the problems reported by 18–24-year-olds in the 2006-8 CSJS started in the most recent year,[71] equating to 0.36 problems per 18–24-year-old per year.
- As only those aged 18 and over are included in the CSJS, we have had to estimate the number of problems experienced by 16– and 17–year-olds. CSJS data indicates a rise in problem incidence between the ages of 18 and 24 with age, which might suggest lower than average problem incidence amongst 16–17–year-olds. However, the experience from youth advice agencies suggests the needs of 16–17-year-olds may actually be higher than those of 18–24-year-olds. Although somewhat arbitrary, we have decided to conservatively adjust the average number of problems experienced by 16–24-year-olds slightly downwards to 0.34 problems per individual to take account of 16–17-year-olds.
- Multiplying the number of young people (7 million) by the number of problems per individual (0.34) produces a total of 2,380,000 problems each year that are experienced by this age group and that are likely to lead for a need for advice.[72]

3. Evidence of the unequal distribution of problems between NEETs and non-NEETs

- NEETs are more likely than non-NEETs to report problems. NEETs accounted for:
  - 17.5% of all 18–24-year-olds reporting problems in the 2006-8 CSJS;
  - 20.7% of young people with problems;
  - 25.7% of problems reported by young people.[73]
- Applying this higher prevalence amongst NEET 18–24-year-olds across the 16-24 age group would equate to NEETs accounting for around 612,000 of the 2,380,000 problems experienced by young people each year.

71 This is a higher proportion than that for the population as a whole, suggesting that the extent of young people's problems may be under-estimated by the simple problem incidence figures from the CSJS that are often reported.

72 Given the triviality threshold used in the CSJS, we have assumed that every problem might reasonably be said to require an advice intervention. However, see box discussing the relationship between 'problem incidence', 'need' and 'demand' in Chapter 3.

73 Note that NEETs are considerably more likely to experience multiple problems. In the 2004 CSJS the equivalent figures (as reported in Chapter 3) were even more striking: NEETs accounted for 27% of young people reporting problems and 39% of problems reported by young people.

4. Evidence of young people's advice-seeking behaviour

- Young people in the 2006-08 CSJS who reported problems said that they went on to try to get advice in relation to 50.3% of problem instances. The majority of these (41.8% of all young people with problems) obtained advice, but a significant number tried to get advice, but failed (8.5%). Those who did not seek advice either handled their problems alone (36.8%) or did nothing (12.9%).
- Using the above figures produces advice-seeking by young people in relation to around 1.2 million problems, of which just under 1 million result in obtaining advice and around 200,000 in failed attempts to get advice.

In summary

Over a typical one-year period, we estimate that 16–24-year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million legal problems requiring advice (of which over 600,000 would be experienced by NEETs).

Of these, young people can be expected to seek advice in relation to around 1.2 million problems.

Young people will not seek advice in relation to a further 1.2 million problems.

Young people will obtain advice in relation to around 1 million problems, but around 200,000 problems experienced by 16–24-year-olds will result in failed attempts to obtain advice.

Notes

The LSRC have commented that these calculations are more likely to under-estimate unmet need than to over-estimate it. They certainly appear conservative when read in the context of research for Citizens Advice that has estimated that 7¼ million people in Great Britain receive no help with their problems.[74]

The calculations also fail to take account of the impact of the current recession affecting the UK. The numbers of young people not in employment, education or training has been rising rapidly in recent months and there is growing evidence of increased demand for legal advice services.

It should also be noted that as youth disadvantage is not evenly distributed across the country, it would be reasonable to assume that the proportions of young people needing and seeking advice for social welfare problems in areas with high youth disadvantage are likely to be higher than the above estimates (and the proportions in areas with low youth disadvantage are likely to be lower).

The author hopes that the data presented here can be used as the basis for further research into the cost of failing to provide social welfare legal advice to every young person in need.

Comments on these calculations are welcomed and should be directed to James Kenrick at Youth Access (Email: james@youthaccess.org.uk).

74 MORI, *Unmet Demand for Citizens Advice Bureaux: Research study conducted by Citizens Advice*, Citizens Advice, 2004.

APPENDIX 2

Key data on young people

The youth population

- There are around seven million young people aged 16–24 in the UK, representing 11% of the total population (ONS 2006 Social Trends).
- 17% of 0–19-year-olds in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups (ONS 2007 *Population Estimates*).
- Multiple deprivation data suggests there is a correlation between areas where there are high concentrations of people aged 16–24 and areas of deprivation.[75]

Housing and homelessness

- 36,770 young people aged 16–24 were accepted by local authorities as homeless in 2005/06 – representing 39% of all acceptances (DCLG 2007).
- Around a quarter of all rented housing problems and a third of all homelessness problems requiring advice in 2004 were experienced by young people aged 18–24 (Kenrick 2007).
- In 2001 young people were seven times more likely to have experienced a homelessness problem than adults over the age of 25, but eleven times less likely to have obtained advice (Kenrick 2007).
- Stable accommodation can reduce re-conviction rates of ex-prisoners by 20% (SEU 2002).
- Homelessness almost trebles a young person's chances of developing a mental health problem (SEU 2005).

Unemployment and poverty

- Around 1.1 million 16–24-year-olds in Great Britain are NEET (not in education, employment or training) (SEU 2005).
- Over 40% of 18-year-olds in England were NEET in 2005 (DfES 2006).
- Those groups most likely to be NEET include: teenage parents (73% of whom are NEET), persistent truants (32%), young people excluded from school (32%) and disabled young people (13%) (DfES 2004.).
- The unemployment rate amongst 18–24-year-olds in 2006 was over double that for all ages (ONS 2006, Labour Force Survey)
- 627,070 16–24-year-olds (almost 10%) were claiming out-of-work benefits in 2007, including 165,740 on incapacity benefits.[76]
- Four-fifths of single Entitled Non-Recipients of Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance are young people aged under 25 (DWP 2005).
- An estimated two million 16–24-year-olds are living below the poverty line.[77]
- Young people are at particularly high risk of poverty when they have recently left home or had a child (Iacovou and Aassve 2007).

Employment

- In 2006 92% of workers aged 16–17 and 67% aged 18–21 were 'low paid' (defined as earning less than £6.67 an hour), compared to just 14% of workers aged 30–39 (Cooke and Lawton 2008).
- Only 69% of young people are aware of the National Minimum Wage – 93% had no idea who to turn to for help if they were paid too little (British Youth Council 2004).[78]
- Three out of ten young workers cannot expect an accurate payslip and one in four have experienced bullying at work (Amicus 2007).

75 Presentation by Social Exclusion Unit's Young Adults Team, 2005.

76 Figures released in a Parliamentary answer, quoted in article in *The Daily Telegraph*, 18/02/08, *'Lost generation' rely on benefits.*

77 Ibid.

78 Research by the British Youth Council, cited in *Young Workers Have Rights*, Young People Now, 5-11 May 2004.

Education

- 229,110 pupils had statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in England in January 2007 – representing 2.8% of all pupils in England. An additional 1.3 million children were SEN but without statements (DfES 2007).
- Pupils with statements of SEN are over three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than the rest of the school population (ONS/DfES 2007).
- 9,000 young people were permanently excluded from school in 2004/05, 85% from secondary schools (DfES 2004/05).
- 60% of young people excluded from mainstream education have offended (Youth Justice Board 2004).

Crime

- One in four 10–25-year-olds (25%) report committing an offence in the last year (Home Office 2005).
- The peak age for offending is 14 (Youth Justice Board 2004).
- In October 2006 there were 2,518 15–17-year-olds in prison, representing an 85% rise over ten years (National Offender Management Service 2006).
- 95% of young sentenced prisoners aged 15–21 suffer from a mental disorder (SEU 2002).
- Between 40 and 49% of young people in custody have had some experience of the care system (SEU 2005).
- Three-quarters of male offenders aged 18–21 re-offend within two years (SEU 2005).
- 16–24-year-old males' chances of being a victim of violence are four times higher than average (Home Office 2005/06).

Social care

- There are 570,000 disabled children in England (4.9% of 0–18-year-olds); 100,000 have complex care needs (DWP 2005, *Family Resource Survey*).
- The official figure for young carers in the UK is 175,000, but there are many more 'hidden carers' coping alone with a range of social and emotional issues without receiving the support they need (Barnardo's 2006).
- In February 2005 nearly 400,000 children and young people in England (4%) were on the books of social services (DfES 2005).
- More than 60,000 children and young people are looked after by local authorities at any one time (DfES 2005, *Statistics*).
- Looked-after young people typically leave care aged 16 or 17 – well before the average age for young people to leave home, which is 23 (Office of the Children's Rights Director 2006).
- Within two years of leaving care, half of care leavers will be unemployed; a third will be parents or pregnant; a fifth will be homeless (Sergeant 2006).

Health

- Around a quarter of 16–24-year-olds report a long-standing illness (SEU 2005).
- Up to 20% of 16–24-year-olds have a mental health issue, mostly anxiety and depression – suicide is the cause of a quarter of deaths amongst 16–24-year-old men (ONS statistics for 2000, cited in SEU 2005).

Immigration

- In 2005 48% of male and 42% of female applicants for asylum in the UK were aged under 25. Nearly a quarter of all applicants were aged 15–19 (Home Office 2005 *Asylum Statistics* UK).
- About 3,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children enter the UK each year,[79] of whom 54% are aged 16 or 17 (Home Office 2005 *Asylum Statistics* UK).
- Only 2% of unaccompanied asylum seekers aged 17 and under are granted asylum, 72% are granted discretionary leave, 14% are refused. Of those who have reached 18, 94% are refused (Home Office 2004 *Asylum Statistics*).

Debt

- Four out of five young people have been in debt by the age of 21 (Rainer 2007).
- A third of young people have owed more than £5,000 (Rainer 2007).
- Delays and complexities in the benefits system are a major cause of youth debt (Rainer 2007).
- Consumer Credit Counselling Service clients aged 18–24 in 2005 owed an average of £15,000 (Consumer Credit Counselling Service 2005).
- More than half of all 16–24-year-olds say money is the issue currently worrying them the most, with nearly one in three saying that they worry 'all' or 'most' of the time about their problems.[80]

79 According to the Refugee Council

80 *Money is No 1 worry for young adults, says new poll*, press release issued by Citizens Advice, Youth Access and adviceUK, based on GfK NOP poll of 2000 people aged 16 and over, 18

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Feedback

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Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for a network of 200 youth information, advice and counselling services.

Through its members, Youth Access is one of the largest providers of youth advice and counselling services in the UK, dealing with over 1 million enquiries a year on issues as diverse as sexual health, mental health, relationships, homelessness, benefits and debt.

Youth Access provides the training, resources, research, campaigning and other infrastructure support to ensure high quality services exist to meet young people's diverse needs.

For more information about Youth Access, including a national directory of youth information, advice and counselling services, go to www.youthaccess.org.uk.

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