



Young People and Civil Justice:

Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey

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*Youth Access
2 Taylors Yard
67 Alderbrook Road
London SW12 8AD
Tel: 020 8772 9900
Web: www.youthaccess.org.uk*

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The Civil and Social Justice Survey is funded by the Legal Services Commission (LSC). The Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) is the independent research division of the LSC. The LSC is responsible for the provision of legal aid in England and Wales and helps over 2 million people deal with their problems every year.

Foreword

Youth Access is delighted to have had a part in bringing the findings in this paper to greater public attention. We are indebted to Pascoe Pleasence and his colleagues at the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) for their time and expertise and also their willingness to collaborate with us in this venture.

Youth Access has had a longstanding concern about the level and complexity of social welfare need amongst young people. We first brought some of these issues to the fore in our 2002 report *Rights to Access: Meeting young people's needs for advice*, which attempted to pull together the then current evidence about young people's needs and advice seeking behaviours. This paper goes many steps further in building the evidence of need amongst young people by revealing a wealth of data – much of which is new and groundbreaking. It offers the clearest picture yet of the scale of social welfare need amongst some young people and the impact that getting or not getting advice has on their lives and circumstances.

Youth Access' collaboration with the LSRC has been made possible through the funding and support of our colleagues at The National Youth Agency. This collaboration marks part of our journey to raise the issue of young people's need for legal rights-based advice services and our desire to work with policymakers, commissioners and providers to improve the services available to meet those needs.

Barbara Rayment
Director, Youth Access



Acknowledgements

This study is based on data drawn from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey. It would not have been possible, therefore, but for the contributions of, literally, thousands of people. They cannot all be detailed here, but I would like to acknowledge the enormous contribution of Bruce Hayward, Andrew Phelps, Carole Maxwell, Tim Hanson and Eleanor Storey of BMRB, who expertly prepared and piloted the questionnaires and managed the fieldwork for the survey, along with the many BMRB fieldworkers who conducted the 2004 survey interviews. I would also like to pay tribute to the 5,015 people who gave up their time, for no personal reward, to be interviewed about sometimes very personal and life-changing experiences. Their generosity continues to make a difference. Finally, I would also like to thank the many people at the Legal Services Commission and Department for Constitutional Affairs, past and present, who supported and made a reality of the survey, and The National Youth Agency and Youth Access for providing resources so that we might conduct this particular study.

**Pascoe Pleasence
London, February 2007**



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Nigel J. Balmer, Tania Tam & Pascoe Pleasence
Legal Services Research Centre¹

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Introduction

This summary report presents findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey (CSJS); a survey of people's experience of and response to 18 broad types of civil law problem. In particular, it sets out the experience of the youngest respondents: those between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. Broader findings from the survey can be found elsewhere.²

The 2004 survey involved 5,015 interviews, of which 525 (11 per cent) were with respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. The survey examined problems that were 'difficult to solve' and occurred within a 3½ year period. Some of the reported problems will have been experienced when respondents were as young as 14 years old.

As well as describing the experience of 18 to 24 year old respondents, this report also examines 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. In all, 72 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds had an adult over the age of 25 living in the same household.

While the CSJS is a 'representative' survey, like other major surveys it includes only people living in residential households. This has the effect of excluding many of the most vulnerable people within society, such as those living temporarily in hotels and hostels and those who sleep rough. A 2001 survey of people living in temporary accommodation highlighted the particular vulnerability to the experience of civil law problems of people living in temporary accommodation.³ Further research into the experience of hard-to-reach groups would be valuable.

¹ The Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) is the independent research division of the Legal Services Commission (LSC).

² Pleasence, P. (2006) *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice* (second edition), Norwich: The Stationery Office.

³ Pleasence, P., Buck, A., Balmer, N.J., O'Grady, A., Genn, H. and Smith, M. (2004) *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice* (first edition), Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Demographics of young survey respondents

Eighteen to 24 years old 2004 CSJS respondents had a very different demographic profile to older respondents. For example, they were more likely to be black or minority ethnic (14 v 8 per cent), live in high density housing (47 v 35 per cent), live rent free (42 v 4 per cent), be in education (25 v 1 per cent) or be unemployed (6 v 4 per cent) than older respondents. They were less likely to own their homes (20 v 75 per cent) or have their own personal motorised transport (50 v 79 per cent).

There were some differences between respondents of different ages within the 18 to 24 years range. For example, 22 to 24 year olds were more often lone parents (6 v 4 per cent) and less often in education (11 v 36 per cent). Around 1 in 7 respondents aged 18 to 21 years old was not in education, employment or training. This compared to almost 1 in 4 respondents aged between 22 and 24.

The experience of civil law problems

Overall, 35 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds reported one or more civil law problem. This compared with 33 per cent for those aged over 24. Problems tend to peak in people's mid-30s. However, 'socially isolated' young respondents (those not living in households containing adults over the age of 24) reported problems far more often. 47 per cent of these respondents reported problems, compared to just 30 per cent of other young respondents. Also, while numbers were small, there seemed to be an increase in problem incidence within the 18 to 24 years age range, with more than 40 per cent of 23 and 24 year olds reporting one or more problems.

Using binary logistic regression it is possible to identify that, within the 18 to 24 years age range, characteristics such as being the victim of crime, having a long-term illness or disability and living in high density housing are all significant in increasing the likelihood of reporting civil law problems. Thus, incidence amongst younger respondents with a long-term illness or disability was 51 per cent, much higher than incidence in general. Interestingly, this was also higher than incidence among older respondents with a long-term illness or disability (37 per cent), owing to the effect ceasing for people of retirement age.

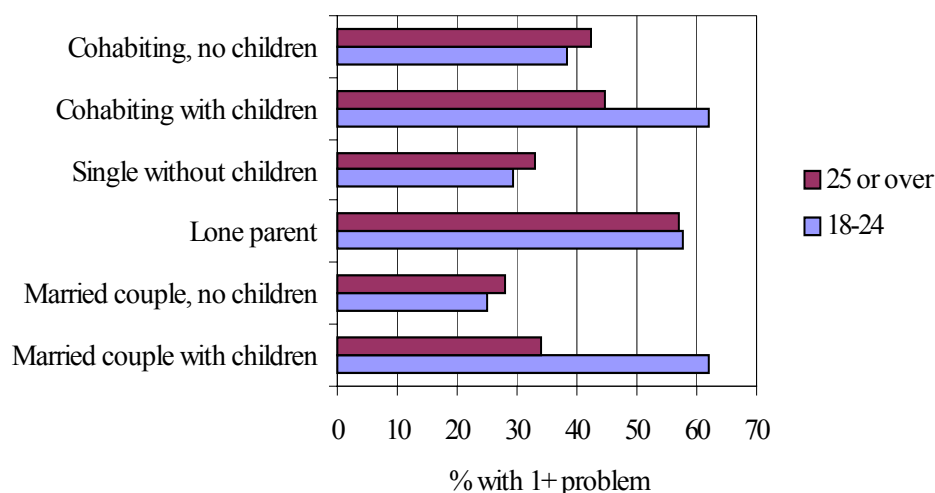


Figure 1. Problem incidence by family type, split by age.

Family type was also significant to the risk of problem incidence. However, unlike in general – where lone parenthood has been associated with increased likelihood of reporting problems – for 18 to 24 year old respondents, all parents were markedly more likely to do so (Figure 1).

As Figure 2 shows, there 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 (Figure 2).

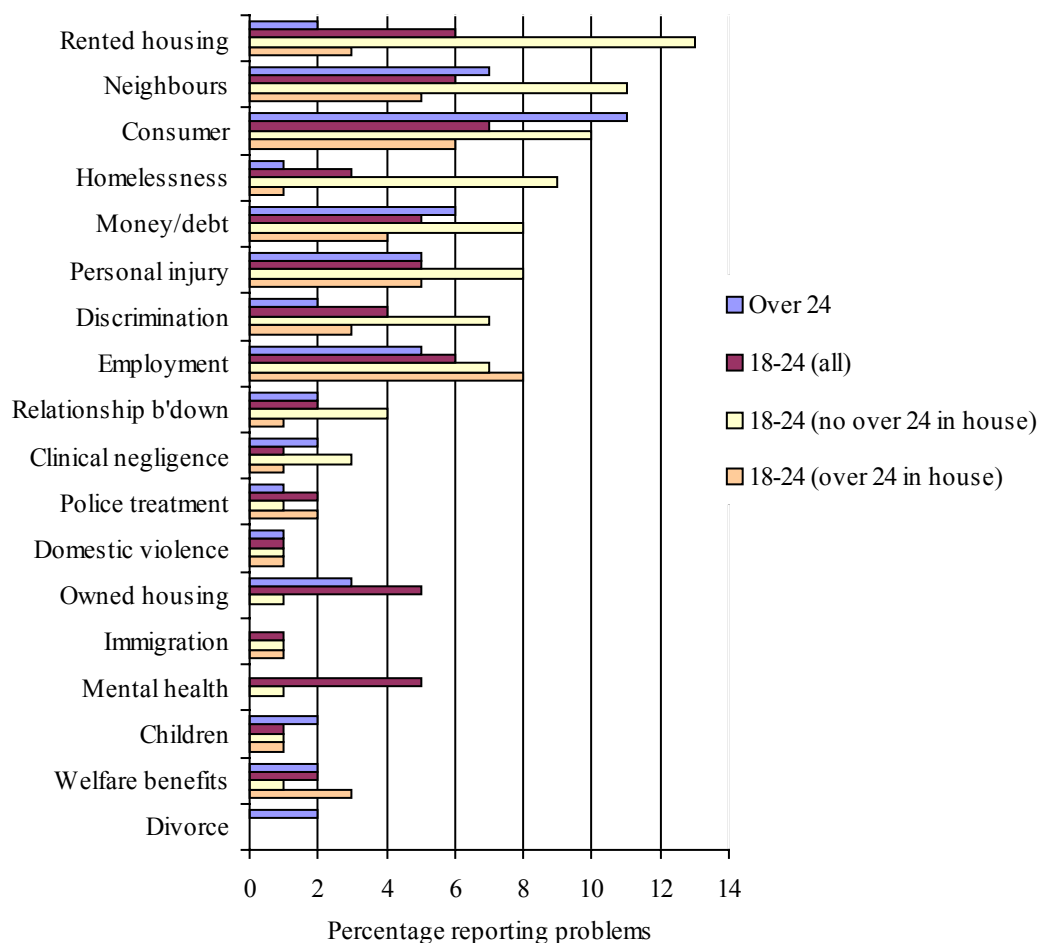


Figure 2. Problem incidence by problem type and age

As indicated above, young respondents aged between the ages of 22 and 24 tended to have the highest percentages of problems, with increases over the youngest respondents for problems concerning, for example, employment, rented housing and neighbours. The youngest respondents, meanwhile, had a marginally higher percentage of discrimination problems. While based on small numbers, incidence of problems such as those concerning rented housing and homelessness is particularly acute for socially isolated younger respondents. Nine per cent of socially isolated young respondents reported homelessness problems.

Table 1. Number of problems reported by age group and isolation.

Type of split	Category	N	Mean number of problems
Age group	18 to 24	182	1.82
	25 +	1462	1.72
Expanded age group	18 to 21	81	1.55
	22 to 24	101	2.04
Social isolation	Socially isolated 18-24	68	2.25
	Non-isolated 18-24	114	1.57

Those between the ages of 18 and 24, who made up 11 per cent of the sample, experienced 12 per cent of the problems reported in the 2004 survey. Within this group, though, 22 to 24 year olds suffered substantially more problems (Table 1). Also, socially isolated younger respondents reported a greater number of problems than non-isolated respondents (a mean of 2¼ problems per person). This is in addition to the increased general incidence observed earlier.

As detailed elsewhere,⁴ certain problems have a tendency to be reported together. However, respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 years old experienced 'problem clusters' that were subtly different from those experienced by the general population. The numbers of problems in some of the clusters we examined were small, so should be treated with caution, but there 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.

Impact and severity of problems

For each problem, 2004 CSJS respondents were asked what, if any, adverse consequences they had suffered as a result. It was striking how frequent adverse consequences were. Taken together, it has been estimated that the cost to individuals, health and public services of civil justice problems amounts to at least £13 billion over a 3½ year period.

Looking at just 18 to 24 years old respondents, 15 per cent suffered from physical ill health and 25 per cent from stress-related illness as a result of problems. 11 per cent even suffered physical ill-health as a result of non-health related problems.

However, for socially isolated younger respondents the picture is even more stark, with 19 per cent reporting physical and 45 per cent stress related ill-health even for non-health related problems (Figure 3).

⁴ Pleasence, P. (2006) *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice* (second edition), Norwich: The Stationery Office.

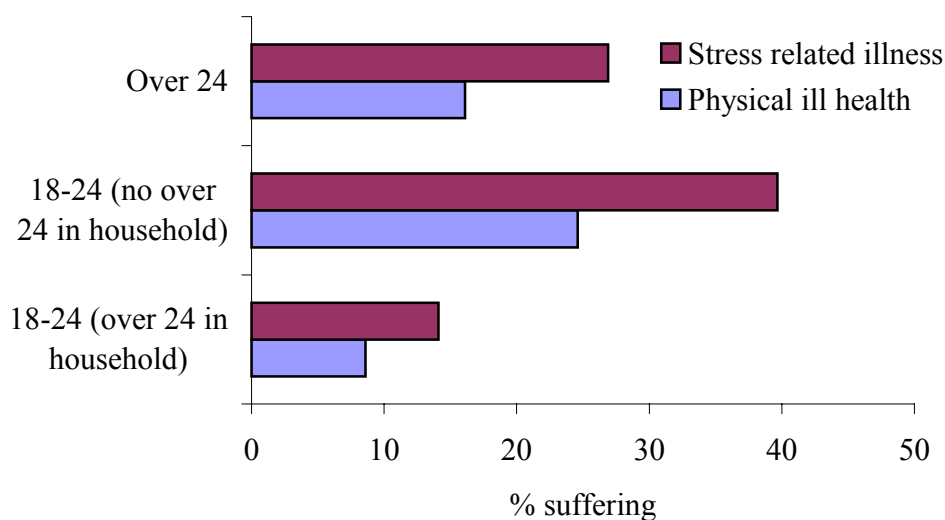


Figure 3. Impact of civil law problems

A proportion of those who said they had suffered physical ill-health were asked whether this caused them to visit a GP, hospital or other health care worker. 58% of 18 to 24 year olds said yes. Of 18-24 year olds saying 'yes', 55% also went to hospital.

Problems were also reported to lead to loss of employment, loss of income, loss of home, loss of confidence and violence. As can be seen from Table 2, socially isolated younger respondents reported having to move home far more often than other groups, and also reported slightly higher percentages of damage to property and personal violence. This links to incidence of rented housing and neighbours problems. Non-socially isolated respondents, on the other hand, more often reported losing their employment or income. This links, at least in part, to incidence of problems concerning employment and welfare benefits.

In addition, a small proportion of problems (excluding divorce and problems ancillary to relationship breakdown) were reported to lead to relationship breakdown.

Table 2. Other adverse consequences of problems

	Form of adverse consequence					
	Employment %	Income %	Home %	Confidence %	Violence %	Property Damage
18-24 (over-24 in house)	10	24	4	10	4	4
18-24 (no over-24 in house)	6	7	15	25	9	7
Over 24	6	15	5	17	4	6

Younger respondents tended to spend somewhat more time worrying about their problems than those aged over 24. This was especially the case for socially isolated younger respondents. Twenty-five per cent of socially isolated respondents facing problems spent all of their time worrying about them (compared to less than 20 per cent of others). Twenty-nine per cent spent most of the time worrying (compared to 24 per cent).

Strategy and Advice seeking

Fifteen per cent of 18 to 24 year olds did nothing to try to resolve civil law problems they faced, compared to just 10 per cent of older respondents. Furthermore, 58 per cent faced problems without obtaining advice, compared to just 47 per cent of older respondents. Younger respondents were also more likely to have tried and failed to have obtained advice (12 v 7 per cent). Of 18 to 24 year olds, 18 to 21 year olds were more likely to take no action to resolve problems (16 per cent) and handle problems alone (35 per cent). Twenty-two to 24 year olds were more likely to fail in attempts to obtain advice (16 per cent).

While there was no difference in the rate at which socially isolated young respondents took no action to deal with problems, they were much more likely to obtain advice. Forty-seven per cent did so, compared to just 38 per cent of other young respondents, while only 25 per cent handled their problems alone compared to 36 per cent of other young respondents. Fourteen per cent of socially isolated young respondents also failed in attempts to obtain advice, meaning that more than 60 per cent sought advice; slightly more than for older respondents.

Young respondents most often obtained advice on problems concerning children (100 per cent), relationship breakdown (82 per cent) and personal injury (79 per cent). They less frequently obtained advice on problems concerning unfair police treatment (0 per cent), consumer transactions (18 per cent), welfare benefits (20 per cent), money/debt (27 per cent), neighbours (27 per cent), discrimination (33 per cent), homelessness (44 per cent), employment (49 per cent) and rented housing (55 per cent).

Respondents who did nothing about their problem were asked why this was so. The single most common reason for inaction for all respondents was not thinking that advice would make any difference to the outcome. This was slightly more common among 18-24 year olds.

23 per cent of young respondents who were unable to correctly identify any advisers in their locality did nothing to resolve their problem, compared to 9 per cent of those who were able to.

Figure 4 (overleaf) contrasts the advisers that 18 to 24 year old respondents and older respondents turned to. For both age groups a broad range of advisers was utilised, some of whom will have offered mainly formal 'rights-based' advice (e.g. solicitors), some of whom will have provided mainly 'personal' advice (e.g. doctors).⁵ Eighteen to 24 year olds were most likely to turn to the local council (especially if socially isolated: almost 20 per cent), doing so far more frequently than older people. In contrast, they made relatively little use solicitors and advice agencies. While Figure 4 accounts for differences in problem profiles, the frequent contact between young people and local councils (particularly in relation to housing problems) is likely to be a factor in strategy choice.

⁵ Kenrick, J. (2002) *Rights to Access: Meeting Young People's Needs for Advice*, London: Youth Access

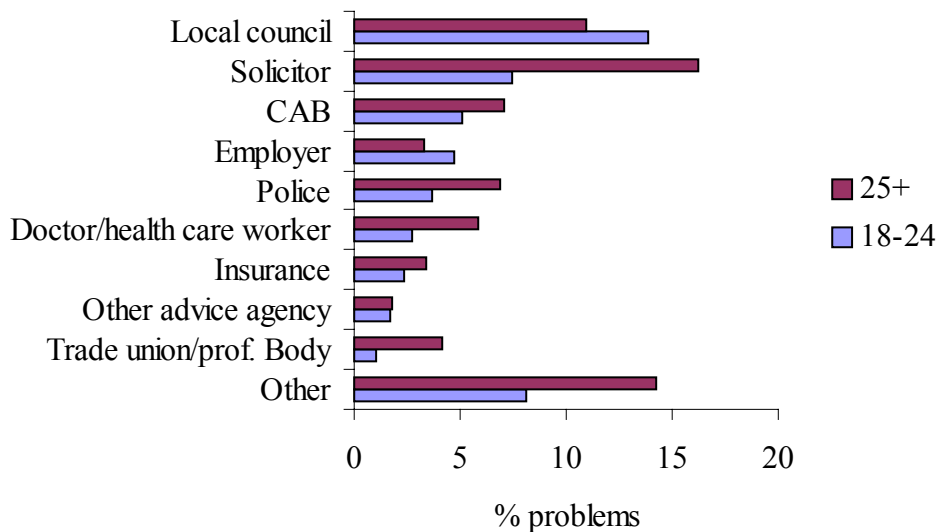


Figure 4. Advisers from whom respondents obtained advice (weighted to control for problem type)

Young respondents used fewer advisers than their older counterparts. The mean number of advisers used was 1.27, compared to 1.43.

Compared to other age groups, 18-24 year olds had a reasonable degree of success in obtaining the information they needed from solicitors (77 per cent obtained 'all of the advice they needed') and council departments (64 per cent), but fared less well with the police (45 per cent getting 'none of the advice they needed').

Those aged from 18 to 24 years old were significantly more likely than older people to contact first advisers in person in the first instance (67 v 40 per cent). As a consequence, they were less likely to contact first advisers either by telephone (17 v 27 per cent) or by telephone and then in person (17 v 33 per cent). Though based on relatively small numbers, this tendency to contact first advisers in person was even more marked for 18-21 years olds. 71 per cent of 18 to 21 year olds contacted first advisers in person, with 21 per cent doing so by telephone and 8 per cent by telephone and then in person.

62 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds reported having access to the internet, a slightly higher figure than the 56 per cent for those over 24; although the main contrast was with people of retirement age. There were, though, important differences between socially isolated and other young respondents. While some 71 per cent of non-isolated young respondents had access to the internet, just 39 per cent of socially isolated young respondents did. Indeed 8 per cent of the latter did not even have access to a telephone (compared to 1 per cent of other young respondents).

Despite a high percentage of young respondents having access to the internet, use of the internet to obtain information to try and resolve problems was far less common among this group than among older respondents (6 v 11 per cent). Even more significantly, socially isolated younger respondents used the internet to obtain information about only 2 per cent of problems (compared to around 8 per cent for other young respondents). Moreover, those young respondents who did make use of the internet were less successful in obtaining information than their older counterparts. Twelve per cent of 18 to 24 year olds obtained all of the information they needed, compared to 25% of those over 24.

Outcomes, regrets and awareness of advice

There were significant differences in problem outcome patterns, as between those aged 18 to 24 and those over 24. Eighteen to 24 year olds were somewhat more likely to have done nothing or subsequently given up trying to resolve problems. This accounted for 30 per cent of problems faced by young people, rising to 37 per cent among 18 to 21 year olds, compared to 27 per cent for older respondents. Young people were also significantly less likely to resolve problems through courts, tribunals and other processes such as mediation and Ombudsmen (5 v 11 per cent).

Fifty-eight per cent of those aged between 18 and 24 felt that the help they received from their first advisor helped to bring about a better outcome to their problem. Thirty-six per cent felt it brought about the same result, and just 3 per cent felt it brought about a worse result.

Trying but failing to obtain advice had a significant impact upon whether respondents met their objectives, with only 11 per cent meeting all of their objectives, compared to over 40 per cent for those obtaining advice or handling problems alone. Of the small sample of 18-24 year olds who sought advice but failed to obtain any, 41 per cent said that they wish they had got advice. Common reasons for this were that advice would have improved the outcome and that problems were more serious than they appeared initially. Of the even smaller sample of young respondents who wished they had got advice, 1 said they wished they had consulted their local council, 2 a Citizens Advice Bureau, 1 a trade union, 1 a solicitor.

More generally, 35 per cent of young respondents suggested that they regretted their problem resolution strategy (or lack of one). This compares to 28 per cent of other respondents. Most often young people said that they wished they had got advice, got more advice, acted sooner or tried harder to get advice.

This paper has been developed in partnership with Youth Access and funded by the National Youth Agency's Research Programme.

