

3 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter describes the social characteristics of the homeless population in the Northern Territory. First, we compare the rate of homelessness in each state and territory and the number of homeless people. Then we investigate where homeless people were staying on census night. After that we describe the age and gender characteristics of the population. Finally, we comment on the number of Indigenous people.

3.1 HOW MANY?

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the number of homeless people in each state and territory on census night. Second, homelessness can be expressed as a rate per 10 000 of the population. This statistic is required for comparing states and territories of different sizes.

3.1 RATE OF HOMELESSNESS PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, 2001 AND 2006

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	42	42	69	68	53	53	248	42	53
2001	42	44	70	64	52	52	288	40	53

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 3.1 shows that in all states except the Northern Territory, the rates of homelessness did not change much between 2001 and 2006. In the southern states (New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory), there were 42 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006, similar to the rates recorded in those states in 2001. South Australia and Tasmania each had a rate of 53 per 10 000 in 2006, again similar to their rates in 2001. The rates of homelessness in the other states were higher. In Western Australia and Queensland, there were between 64 and 70 per 10 000 at both censuses.

In the Northern Territory there were 248 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006 compared with 288 per 10 000 in 2001. However, the census may have undercounted homeless Indigenous people.

Taylor and Biddle (2008, p. v) report that:

... substantial undercounting of the Indigenous population occurred at the 2006 Census. This certainty arises from the fact that the 2006 Post Enumeration Survey (PES) was extended for the first time to include a sample of localities in remote areas. Nationally, the net undercount rate was estimated to be 11.5 per cent, but in Western Australia and the Northern Territory it was as high as 24 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

If the 2006 Census undercounted the general Indigenous population by 19 per cent in the Northern Territory, then the census probably undercounted homeless Indigenous people by a similar percentage.

3.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS BY STATE AND TERRITORY, 2001 AND 2006

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	27 374	20 511	26 782	13 391	7962	2507	4785	1364	104 676
2001	26 676	20 305	24 569	11 697	7586	2415	5423	1229	99 900

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 3.2 shows the number of homeless people in each state and territory in 2001 and 2006. In the Northern Territory, it was 5423 in 2001 and 4785 in 2006. Bearing in mind that the census undercounted homeless Indigenous people, then a typical point-in-time figure is probably between 5000 and 5200, down from 5400 in 2001.

3.2 ACCOMMODATION ON CENSUS NIGHT

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population (Table 3.3). Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory the figure was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory were people staying temporarily with other households. They were 44 per cent of the homeless on census night, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in 'improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out', compared with the national figure of 16 per cent.

3.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	694	14
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	411	9
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	1588	33
	104 676	100	4785	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; and National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The proportion of people in various types of accommodation across the Northern Territory changed between 2001 and 2006 (Table 3.4). In 2006, the largest group in the Territory (44 per cent) was those staying with friends or relatives on census night, up from 39 per cent in 2001. The proportion in boarding houses declined from 17 to 14 per cent and the number in SAAP increased from four to nine per cent. The proportion in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough declined from 40 to 33 per cent (from 2151 to 1588 people).

3.4 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY, 2001 AND 2006

	2001		2006	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	929	17	694	14
SAAP accommodation	229	4	411	9
Friends and relatives	2114	39	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	2151	40	1588	33
	5423	100	4785	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

The census takes a 'snapshot' of where homeless people are staying on census night, but it is important to remember that homeless people often move from one form of temporary accommodation to another. There is a high degree of permeability between the four operational categories used to count the homeless population on census night. There would have been some people living in boarding houses on a long-term basis (tertiary homelessness) and some people living permanently in improvised dwellings (primary homelessness). However, most homeless people would have been moving between different forms of temporary accommodation, including friends and relatives, SAAP accommodation, boarding houses and improvised dwellings. Transience is the typical pattern.

3.3 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was thought that the homeless population was disproportionately made up of middle-aged and older men (de Hoog 1972; Jordan 1973, 1994). For example, Jordan (1994, p. 21) reported that there were few teenagers in the population and that 80 per cent of the men in his sample were aged 35 or older. De Hoog (1972) gives a similar impression in his ethnographic account of life on Sydney's skid row at the end of the 1960s.

Table 3.5 shows that the age profile of the population is now very different. First, we examine the national figures, then we look at the figures for the Northern Territory.

In 2006, 58 per cent of the homeless across Australia were in the younger age groups and only 42 per cent were aged 35 or older. Twelve per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with parents on census night. Another 21 per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own) and 10 per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24. The age profile of the population is now much younger than 40 to 50 years ago.

3.5 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	478	10	52
12–18	21 940	21	1102	23	
19–24	10 504	10	308	6	
25–34	15 804	15	633	13	
35–44	13 981	13	598	13	48
45–54	12 206	12	634	13	
55–64	10 708	10	718	15	
65 or older	7 400	7	314	7	
	104 676	100	4785	100	

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In the Northern Territory, the age profile of the homeless population was older than the national profile. Forty-eight per cent of the homeless in the Territory were age 35 or older, significantly above the national figure of 42 per cent. More than one-third (35 per cent) of the homeless in the Territory were aged 45 or older, up from 25 per cent in 2001 (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2004, p. 28).

Nonetheless, a majority (52 per cent) of homeless people in the Territory were in the younger age groups. Twenty-three per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Ten per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents on census night. Another six per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 13 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34.

3.4 MALES AND FEMALES

In 2006, men outnumbered women in the national homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3.6), and in the Northern Territory men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. In the Territory, there were slightly more females in the 12 to 18 age group (53 to 47 per cent) and in the 25 to 34 age group (51 to 49 per cent). From age 35 onwards, men outnumbered women, about 60 to 40 per cent.

3.6 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP

Australia

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	46	53	57	63	64	61	64	56
Female	48	54	47	43	37	36	39	36	44
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Northern Territory

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	56	47	55	49	60	59	59	63	55
Female	44	53	45	51	40	41	41	37	45
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 3.7 shows the proportion of males and females in different sectors of the homeless population on census night. Nationally, 72 per cent of boarding house residents were male and in the Territory the figure was 66 per cent. Amongst people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, men outnumbered women in the Territory, 56 to 44 per cent. There were also slightly more men than women staying with other households (51 to 49 per cent), and there were more men in SAAP (52 to 48 per cent).

3.7 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

Australia

	Boarding house (N=21 596)	Friends or relatives (N=46 856)	SAAP (N=19 849)	Improvised dwellings (N=16 375)	All (N=104 676)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	72	52	47	60	56
Female	28	48	53	40	44
	100	100	100	100	100

Northern Territory

	Boarding house (N=694)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All (N=4785)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	66	51	52	56	55
Female	34	49	48	44	45
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

3.5 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

In the Northern Territory, 30 per cent of people identified themselves as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 3.8 shows that Indigenous people made up 8.3 per cent of people staying with other households, 37.7 per cent of persons in boarding houses, 52.3 per cent of people in SAAP and 63.2 per cent of those in improvised dwellings. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in the Northern Territory, except amongst those staying with other households.

There is a risk that Indigenous people staying temporarily with other households were undercounted. The census asked for each person's usual address, and people with no usual address were asked to write this in. Indigenous people interpret this question within a different cultural frame of reference.

3.8 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY

	Boarding house (N=687)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All* (N=4778)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	62.3	91.7	47.7	36.8	65.4
Indigenous	37.7	8.3	52.3	63.2	34.6
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

Often, Indigenous people do not think of 'home' as a particular dwelling, because they are attached to their traditional land. Indigenous people also have extended kinship networks and they move between dwellings belonging to extended family members. When Indigenous people leave home to escape domestic violence or other family problems, they usually move in with households that are related to them. In these circumstances, it is not culturally appropriate to record 'no usual address' on census night, because 'home' is understood in a different way. This creates undercounting in this category.

3.6 SUMMARY

The number of homeless people fluctuates because people move in and out of homelessness. In the Northern Territory, we estimate that a typical point-in-time figure is about 5000 to 5200, down from 5400 in 2001.

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population. Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Northern Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory it was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory were people staying temporarily with other households, making up 44 per cent of the homeless population, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in 'improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out', whereas the national figure was 16 per cent.

Nationally, 56 per cent of homeless people were male and 44 per cent were female. In the Northern Territory, men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. The homeless population in the Territory was older than the homeless population in other states, with 48 per cent of the homeless aged

35 or older compared with 42 per cent nationally. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the population, except among those staying with other households, where there was probably undercounting.