



Issues in estimating the number of homeless in Australia

A paper to inform a review of *Counting the Homeless* methodology

The ABS welcomes your written response to the issues raised in this paper, or any other comments you may wish to provide on *Counting the Homeless* methodology. The ABS will use the comments it receives in its review but will not attribute comments to any person or organisation. ABS will not publish the names of persons or organisations making comments without first obtaining their permission to do so.

You can provide written input until 20 November 2009 to

Teresa Dickinson
Assistant Statistician – The Australian Bureau of Statistics
Outposted to FaHCSIA Homelessness Branch

Teresa.dickinson@abs.gov.au
Teresa.Dickinson@fahcsia.gov.au

Mobile: 0439 430 577

Review of *Counting the Homeless 2006* methodology

1 Purpose of this paper

The ABS, in conjunction with FaHCSIA and AIHW, is conducting a review of the methodology used by Associate Professors Chris Chamberlain (Swinburne University) and David MacKenzie (RMIT University) to produce the publication *Counting the Homeless 2006*. This review will identify improvements in how homeless counts may be constructed in future.

This paper briefly sets out the methodology that has been used by Chamberlain and MacKenzie to construct their counts of the homeless after the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses. It describes definitions and assumptions employed, calculations made and, as far as possible, the processes and procedures that impact on the figures used. Against each of the key elements issues for consideration are raised.

2 Background

2.1 Why are counts of the homeless important?

Reducing homelessness is a priority for the Australian Government and all state and territory governments. In January 2008 the Australian Government, in its white paper *The Road Home*, announced the development of a comprehensive, long term plan to tackle homelessness. The Australian Government, with the agreement of state and territory governments, has set two headline goals to guide the long term response to homelessness:

- halve the rate of overall homelessness by 2020;
- offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020.

At present the best published national count of the homeless, as published in *Counting the Homeless 2006*, is compiled by Chamberlain and MacKenzie, and uses a range of sources and methods. They have produced their count two to three years after each of the last three Censuses. While Chamberlain and MacKenzie modified their methodology in 2001 and in 2006, there has not been a review of the methodology since it was first used. There is wide-spread agreement that the numbers reported in *Counting the Homeless* are indicative rather than necessarily being entirely appropriate for performance indicator construction, and may well overestimate the count of homeless people in Australia in general, and that of homeless youth in particular.

2.2 The review

The review will:

- provide input to field procedures and instructions for conduct of some aspects of the 2011 Census, in order to improve counting of people in certain situations that may indicate homelessness;

- provide guidance for ABS' consultation with States and Territories regarding the comprehensive classification of supported accommodation properties the 2011 Census;
- guide how timely release of the first and second release variables from the 2011 Census in mid 2012 can be presented to better understand homeless numbers;
- inform work on the supported accommodation dataset currently under development by AIHW;
- provide input to the HHIMG on methodological issues in counting the homeless.

The outputs of this review will be:

- recommendations for changes to collector instructions for the 2011 Census to ensure clarity of procedures used to enumerate people in certain circumstances that may be relevant to homelessness;
- recommendations on how the ABS might change its timing and content for release of Census data to enable users to better understand its use in Australia's homeless;
- recommendations on how Census data, in conjunction with other sources, might be used to compile an estimate of the number of homeless people and households in Australia.

In order to allow for input into field instructions for conduct of the 2011 Census the review needs to be completed by the end of 2009.

2.3 Overview of the process for producing *Counting the Homeless 2006*

This section describes, in broad terms, how the figures provided in *Counting the Homeless* were produced by Chamberlain and MacKenzie. Various aspects of the methodology are then described in more detail in following sections.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie used the cultural definition of homelessness in compiling their counts. This definition distinguishes between primary, secondary and tertiary categories of homelessness as described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The model of homelessness used in Counting the Homeless

Culturally recognised exceptions where it is inappropriate to apply the minimum standard, e.g. seminaries, goals, student halls of residence	Tertiary homelessness: people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure
	Secondary homelessness: people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses
	Primary homelessness: people without conventional accommodation (living on streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks etc.)

The Census captures information about each respondent’s address on census night and their usual address, as well as some information about the dwelling at which respondents are spending Census night (ownership status, if rented ownership type and housing cost).

Special measures are put in place to find and correctly enumerate those staying in special circumstances (i.e. in improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out...) who may be experiencing homelessness. If these measures were entirely effective (i.e. every person enumerated in improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out could be located) and if sufficient information about their housing status obtained these Census data could, theoretically, be used to classify these people in ways that would better reflect a concept of ‘primary homeless’.

In practice, some researchers use ABS Census counts of people enumerated in the ‘improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers’ dwelling category, and who report no other usual residence, as being a measure of primary homelessness.

Researchers also use a number of adjustments and estimation factors when using data in generating their estimates of secondary and tertiary homelessness, often with the view that the Census does not/cannot obtain information they consider is necessary to correctly allocate homeless status for every person.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie use data from two sources in addition to the Census to contribute to, or create, their estimates for certain parts of their homeless count. Because not all States and Territories supply ABS with sufficient information to classify supported accommodation dwellings correctly in Census processing, SAAP data provided to AIHW and Chamberlain and MacKenzie is used to replace Census data in the Chamberlain and MacKenzie counts of secondary homelessness in such dwellings. In 2006, only for Victoria was it possible for the ABS to obtain a complete list of hostels, refuges etc. so respondents at those addresses could be accurately classified as being homeless.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie also conduct a national census of homeless school students the results of which, combined with an adjustment factor they derive from

SAAP data to estimate non-school youth that may be homeless, is used to derive an estimate of visitors to private dwellings with ‘no usual address’.

A description of the range of adjustments used by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in deriving their counts of homelessness is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Chamberlain and MacKenzie adjustments to Census data

Conceptual Category	Operational Category	Adjustments
Primary Homelessness	Improvised home, tent, sleepers out	Standard Census cross-tab of dwelling type and usual residence to exclude people with a usual address elsewhere
Secondary Homelessness	Hostels for the homeless, night shelter, refuge	Replace Census data with a special estimate compiled using SAAP data collected during Census week for all states and territories other than Victoria Use Census data for Victoria
	Visitors to private dwellings on Census night who reported ‘no usual address’	Include an estimate of about 15,000 for the difference between those young people identified as visitors with no usual residence in the Census and the independent estimate made by Chamberlain and MacKenzie Exclude those actually in SAAP accommodation but estimated by Chamberlain and MacKenzie to be incorrectly counted in this category
Tertiary homelessness	Boarding house/private hotel	Exclude owners and staff Exclude travellers with a usual address elsewhere Exclude dwellings identified as hotels and staff quarters Include boarding houses misclassified as hotels and staff quarters Include dwelling misclassified as ‘other’ which fit boarding house criteria Include boarding houses misclassified as private dwellings

In the remainder of this paper issues in generating a count of homeless people using Census data as an input are explored. In some categories of homelessness the issues will include both whether the Census enumerated the person at all and whether or not there is sufficient information to allow researchers to classify the person as homeless for their purposes.

In other categories of homelessness the issues relate less to absolute enumeration levels and more to providing sufficient information for researchers to correctly classifying the person (i.e. they have been counted in the Census but it is difficult for researchers to correctly assign them a homelessness status).

3 Issues in counting people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address

3.1 Defining those experiencing primary homelessness

In Chamberlain and MacKenzie's *Counting the Homeless* a person is classified as experiencing primary homelessness if:

- they are enumerated in the Census as being in the dwelling structure category of "Improvised home, tent, sleepers out" AND they meet one of these additional conditions:
- they stated they were counted at home at their usual residence on Census night; OR
- they stated that they were not counted at home on census night but reported having no usual address.

Once someone is located spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' dwelling it is usually straightforward to ascertain whether they have a usual residence or not. There is a risk of undercounting those people spending Census night in such dwellings. However, there is also a significant risk in assuming that people whose usual address at the time of the Census was an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' must be experiencing primary homelessness.

3.2 ABS Special enumeration strategy in relation to primary homelessness

In order to manage risks around enumeration of the people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' ABS developed a Homeless Enumeration Strategy for the 2006 Census in consultation with service providers. ABS offices in each state and territory were then responsible for developing an operational plan for their jurisdiction based on this strategy

The strategy was comprehensive and Figure 3 describes elements of the strategy in relation primarily, but not only to, people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and gives examples of how the strategy was operationalised.

Figure 3. Description of ABS' Homeless Enumeration Strategy in relation to people spending Census night in an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out' dwelling

Element of homeless enumeration strategy	Description and Examples
Raising awareness	<p>Briefing service providers on the need to promote the Census to their clients</p> <p>Providing information on how census forms should be completed</p> <p><i>In Victoria a 'Counting the Homeless' forum was held to promote the Census amongst service providers. Specialist area supervisors visited all service agencies in their area with a suite of promotional material about the strategy.</i></p> <p><i>In the NT presentations to service organisations were augmented with a media release about the importance of counting the homeless which resulted in television exposure of the issue.</i></p> <p><i>In NSW information was sent to a range of service providers stressing the need for their clients who are neither spending Census night in supported accommodation nor have a usual address other than an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out' to record 'none' at the usual address question.</i></p>
Counting the people spending Census night in an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out'	<p>Field staff working with providers to identify locations of people spending Census night in an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out'</p> <p>Handing out forms through some service agencies and other points e.g. mobile food vans</p> <p>A short Census form that could be completed by field staff with an interview</p> <p>Use of a substitute form when a people spending Census night in an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out' be observed but not interviewed</p> <p>Undertaking the count over three or four days, rather than on Census night alone</p> <p><i>Only in NT and the ACT was the count conducted on census night alone. In Western Australia and Victoria the count was conducted over Monday to Friday of census week (Census night was a Tuesday) and in other jurisdictions the count of people spending Census night in an 'Improved home, tent, sleepers out' occurred over 3 nights.</i></p>

3.3 Issues

The accuracy of the Census count of those people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address relies on the efficacy of the approach to enumerating this group. This in turn, involves two considerations:

- was the strategy optimal (i.e. did its design give the best opportunity to locate each people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and count them once only)? and
- how well the strategy was enacted.

The ABS Census program has undertaken an evaluation of the 2006 Homeless Enumeration Strategy in preparation for the 2011 Census. Key findings of this evaluation include:

- the strategy is appropriate and, when viewed overall, offers the best chance of enumerating those people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address;
- recommendations in relation to 2011 relate to building necessary relationships with service providers and ensuring necessary expertise in the field force to deploy the strategy effectively. In particular it is recommended that:
 - engagement with Local Governments and service providers should commence earlier to build the relationships and local knowledge necessary to maximise the usefulness of the support these groups can offer;
 - ABS homeless enumeration managers in each state and territory should be brought together at the beginning of planning (a homelessness conference) so that they can meet each other and discuss ideas, as well as meet the national coordinator;
 - regular teleconferences to keep ABS homelessness managers up-to-date and allow sharing of ideas should be held;
 - a specific national training package should be developed which incorporates a training guide for ABS homeless managers and a special collector (homelessness) manual; and
 - feedback to larger service agencies after the 2011 Census should be provided and they should be involved in developments for the 2016 Census.

These recommendations aim to share best practice across Australia while still allowing for necessary differences in specific locations when the strategy is deployed.

However, analysis of the characteristics of those people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address reported shows many of these people have well paid jobs or large mortgages. The 'improvised' nature of their dwelling perhaps represents significant lifestyle choices that they can afford, or cost effective responses to employer-supplied mobile accommodation that suits their working arrangements.

Issues for consideration:

1. Are there other elements/approaches that should be considered by ABS in developing their enumeration strategy for those people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address?
2. How might ABS further improve the deployment of its strategy to enumerate people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address?
3. Are there aspects of the characteristics of people spending Census night in an 'Improvised home, tent, sleepers out' and with no other usual address that are most important for ABS to report with the basic counts to assist researchers in understanding the data and how it may relate to the issue of homelessness?

4 Issues in counting and classifying those people that researchers may seek to classify as experiencing secondary homelessness

4.1 Defining those experiencing secondary homelessness

In *Counting the Homeless* Chamberlain and MacKenzie identify two groups experiencing secondary homelessness: those staying in other households and with no usual residence; and those staying in emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels (SAAP premises). Separate definitions and calculations are required for each group.

4.1.1 Those staying in other households on census night

Those staying in other households are defined by Chamberlain and MacKenzie as persons enumerated in an occupied private dwelling that was NOT an improvised home, tent, or sleeping out AND they were either reported as having no usual address or, in the case of youth aged 12 to 18 years, it can be assumed that the positive Census response to the usual address question is wrong and that these youth can be imputed as having no usual address.

4.1.2 Those staying in SAAP accommodation

The count of people staying in SAAP accommodation from the Census relies on addresses of SAAP facilities being correctly identified by States and Territories and these addresses being provided in confidence to ABS so that these dwelling records can be coded in processing as 'hostels for the homeless, night shelters and refuges'. The count of those staying in SAAP accommodation is then simply the addition of all residents at those addresses, excluding staff and visitors.

However there are practical issues with the implementation of this definition, which are described in following sections. In order to improve the accuracy of the count of

those in SAAP accommodation on Census night, the quality of the lists of dwellings supplied to ABS needs to be improved. In the absence of comprehensive lists being available to ABS, Chamberlain and MacKenzie simply substitute Census counts with estimates compiled from data derived from SAAP program special data collection activity.

4.2 ABS Special enumeration strategy in relation to people spending Census night in hostels, night shelters, and refuges

Figure 4 shows elements of the ABS' Homeless Enumeration Strategy in relation to people spending Census night in hostels, night shelters, and refuges gives examples of how the strategy was operationalised.

Figure 4. Description of ABS' Homeless Enumeration Strategy in relation to people spending Census night in hostels, night shelters, and refuges

Element of homeless enumeration strategy	Description
Raising awareness (strategy as for that used to support count of those enumerated in improvised dwellings)	Briefing service providers on the need to promote the Census to their clients Providing information on how Census forms should be completed
Counting the population in SAAP accommodation	Consultation with the relevant departments of each state and territory government to try and obtain a list of all SAAP properties. These lists would be kept confidential, but used in processing to classify properties as hostels etc Working directly with SAAP service providers to enable them to identify their property as supported accommodation by means of returning their forms via mail (i.e. not handed back to a Census collector) and placing a green sticker on the envelope. This allowed the data processing centre to identify the accommodation as a SAAP facility.

A major risk to the quality of a homeless count from the Census results from the incomplete identification of hostels etc. The failure to obtain either a complete list of relevant properties or a 'green stickered' response from all relevant properties means that alternate data sources are required. For all states and territories other than Victoria, the Census count is replaced with a special estimate derived from a SAAP enumeration undertaken during Census week, which is about 75% higher than the Census count. Aside from any issues that may directly affect the quality of the SAAP special estimation, the lack of coherence in the data source runs the risk of people being counted in both the separate SAAP estimate and in another component of the Census that is used to compile a homeless count. In addition, in compiling their latest *Counting the Homeless* report, the SAAP based estimates were not available to

Chamberlain and MacKenzie until April 2008, nearly a year after Census results were released.

Issues for consideration:

4. How might ABS engage better with jurisdictions and service providers to ensure full coverage of hostels etc for the 2011 Census to avoid the additional cost, provider load and delay associated with the previous approach?

4.3 Issues

4.3.1 Issues with the count of those staying in other households on Census night

The instruction booklet accompanying the Census form states that if there is no usual address for a respondent this should be written on the Census form by writing 'none' in the usual address field.

If a homeless person staying in another household does not write 'none' in the usual address field on the Census form when they are, in fact, homeless they will not be visibly homeless in Census output.

For all states and territories except Victoria, the substitution to use SAAP data rather than from the Census can result, in the Chamberlain and MacKenzie methodology, in some small double counting of those staying with family and friends. This arises when those staying in SAAP accommodation on Census night record that they have no usual address AND the property is not identified as a SAAP location, but as a private dwelling, in Census processing. They are counted once by Chamberlain and MacKenzie from the SAAP national data collection data and again from the Census. The proportion of those who were identified by the Census as being in SAAP accommodation but who reported 'no usual address' in each state and territory was used to estimate the correction required (319 people).

Chamberlain and MacKenzie also make an addition to the numbers of homeless staying in other households to account for the difference between the Census count and their independently sourced estimate of homeless youth (12-18 years old) in this category. Their view is that their independent estimate of homeless youth is sufficiently robust to replace the Census count. The view they express in *Counting the Homeless* about the very large difference between their estimate and the Census count is that it may result from parents considering friends of their children to be visiting when, in fact, they are homeless on Census night.

The numbers of homeless youth are estimated by Chamberlain and MacKenzie from a national census of homeless school students that they conduct. This census contacts all government and Catholic secondary schools in Australia and asks welfare staff to identify homeless students at their schools using the cultural definition of homelessness. This identifies those experiencing secondary homelessness, from which those in SAAP accommodation can be removed from the adjustment, leaving those

who are presumed to be staying with family and friends. A large under coverage adjustment is made by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in determining their estimate of 7,035 homeless school students aged 12 to 18 years.

The major component of the Chamberlain and MacKenzie methodology for estimating their total for homeless youth is an assumption that, based on analysis of SAAP data, they assume that the homeless school students account for 32% of homeless youth. By dividing their estimate for school students by 0.32, they estimate total homeless youth at 21,940. Chamberlain and Mackenzie themselves note that this assumption cannot be independently verified.

While there may be methodological issues with both the Chamberlain and MacKenzie schools Census and with the adjustments they make to the counts for homeless school students, the major risk to the quality of the Chamberlain and MacKenzie youth homeless estimate is the factor they then use to estimate the total for all youth (0.32). It requires that the moving average of the school/non-school proportions derived from SAAP data are relevant in estimating total youth homelessness across all forms of homelessness, and particularly for those staying with friends and relatives. The proportion of school to total youth homeless identified in the census across each of the forms of homelessness, including in SAAP, is stable at about 62%. Using this factor would halve the estimated number of homeless youth.

Looking at the issue of coherence between the Chamberlain and MacKenzie method and the recorded Census data provides another perspective on the quality issue for homeless youth estimates. Looking at the 39,966 youth aged 12 to 18 and visiting friends and relatives on Census night, 21,326 were attending school. For those 18,640 youth no longer at school and counted as visiting friends and relatives, the Chamberlain & McKenzie methodology assumes 11,562 out of the 18,640 visitors were homeless. However, the visiting youth counted in that group include about 4,300 youth in full time employment.

In summary, the independent methodology used by Chamberlain and MacKenzie to estimate homeless youth does not appear to be reasonably related to the Census count. There are options for integrating the approaches, for example, conducting a sample survey of schools to locate homeless youth and linking their information to the Census to eliminate the incoherence between the current sources and methods.

Issues for consideration

5. What feedback is there on the overall Chamberlain and MacKenzie approach of conducting a national census of school students? What other alternatives might there be to improve the estimate of homeless youth staying in other households on census night?

4.3.2 Issues with the count of those in SAAP accommodation

As noted in section 4.2, if a list of all SAAP facilities could be provided confidentially to ABS for use in Census processing, counting their residents on Census night would be straightforward.

The SAAP national data collection is in the process of being replaced, and scoping of the new collection is underway by AIHW. The collection will take effect on 1 July 2011, two months before the next Census. At this time it is unknown whether the new collection will be able to be used to estimate counts in every SAAP premises on a particular night. However, even if it can be used for this purpose, issues will still arise in the incoherence with Census data if these people are counted in SAAP dwellings but classified as other forms of accommodation. Elimination of substantial double counting will be difficult and imprecise unless the Census achieves near complete identification of SAAP like properties.

Issues for consideration

6. For the 2011 Census and beyond ABS emphasis should be placed on improving the identification of SAAP accommodation. If this strategy is not successful, how might researchers approach the issue of incoherence between the Census measures and any future SAAP count at Census time?

5 Issues in counting those experiencing tertiary homelessness

5.1 Defining those experiencing tertiary homelessness

The tertiary homeless reside in boarding houses. Identifying boarding houses from the 20 categories used to code non private dwellings in the Census is not straightforward. Moreover it is not always easy for Census collectors to correctly classify premises. For example, it is sometimes difficult to tell boarding houses, certain types of hotels and staff quarters apart.

The way that boarding houses have been defined by Chamberlain and MacKenzie has evolved over time. Figure 5 Shows how boarding houses are currently defined. Counts of those resident in boarding houses (those experiencing tertiary

homelessness) exclude owners and staff members who were sleeping over on census night and guests who reported a usual address elsewhere.

Figure 5 Definitions of boarding houses

Inclusions	
Inclusion	Why
Census category 'boarding house, private hotel'	Meets basic definition of a boarding house
Dwellings in the 'staff quarters' category if 60% of their residents were not working and had incomes of less than \$600 per week	These are determined to be boarding houses
Dwellings in the 'hotel' category where more than 20% of their residents were living there permanently AND 75% of residents were either unemployed or outside the labour force and had incomes of less than \$600 per week	These are determined to be boarding houses
Residents of the 'hotel, motel' category who reported 'no usual address' either outside the labour force with an income of less than \$400 per week	These residents, given their circumstances, could not have been staying in a conventional hotel/motel and so they were included in the boarding house population
Residents of other types of non-private dwellings such as psychiatric hospitals and other welfare institutions who reported 'no usual address'	These people were determined to be homeless, but in long term type accommodation so were included in the boarding house population
A range of dwellings in the 'other' category that, according to a set of rules, were deemed to be boarding houses – see below for a further explanation.	Some of the dwellings in the 'other' category are boarding houses and this is an attempt to locate them
Private dwellings that had 5 or more unrelated adults AND meeting five rules relating to employment, income, study status, need for care status of the residents and number of bedrooms in the dwelling	This aims to capture small boarding houses that have been coded in the 'private dwelling' category
Exclusions	
Exclusion	Why
Dwellings in the 'boarding house' category if 60% of their residents were working and had incomes of \$600 or more per week	These are determined to be either hotels or staff quarters
Private dwellings containing 2, 3 or 4 unrelated adults	These are determined to be share households

The approach that Chamberlain and MacKenzie took to identifying dwellings in the ‘other’ category was to develop rules that excluded dwellings that were probably something else, namely:

- retirement villages and nursing homes;
- boarding schools, residential colleges and halls of residence;
- convents, monasteries, other religious institutions;
- hotels, motels and staff quarters that were inadvertently coded to ‘other’; and correctional institutions for children.

5.2 Issues

Issues in counting those experiencing tertiary homelessness relate to appropriate identification of properties as boarding houses by Census field staff and to the set of definitional inclusion/exclusion criteria developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie to both adjust for both the under identification of such dwellings, and the over-count of homeless people when dwellings identified as boarding houses contain many people unlikely to be homeless.

The Chamberlain and MacKenzie approach to estimating those experiencing tertiary homelessness relies substantially on (i) re-classifying Census dwelling identification based on individual person responses that may be indicative of the dwelling’s use by homelessness people; and (ii) seeking to exclude various categories of dwellings which are not indicative of homeless and determining, by subtraction, that the remainder of the dwellings are homeless accommodation. No deduction is made for high income residents in such dwellings.

Issues for consideration

7. Given that boarding houses range from large establishments in inner suburbs to smaller establishments, which may be physically indistinguishable from private dwellings, how might ABS improve the identification of boarding houses, either when undertaking Census fieldwork, or by other means?
8. Comment is invited on the appropriateness of the methodology used by Chamberlain and Mackenzie to count residents of boarding houses – both in terms of a broad approach and in terms of particular dwelling inclusions and exclusions. Which groups/dwelling definitions may have been missed and which may not be indicative of homelessness? Should adjustments be made for the residents in the reclassified dwellings if their circumstances indicate that homelessness is unlikely?

6. Estimating the number of homeless households

Service providers deal primarily with homeless households, so determining the number of homeless households in the population is important. *Counting the Homeless 2006* provides estimates of the number of single person, couple only and family with children homeless family groups.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie provide a brief overview of how data from the Census can be used to estimate households numbers and notes that this type of estimation is also possible from SAAP data, although do not describe how this is done.

In summary, private dwellings usually receive a household Census form on which the relationships between individuals in a dwelling on Census night are explored. Residents in non-private dwellings (including boarding houses) are supplied with an individual form that does not record family relationships beyond marital status.

For people enumerated in ‘improvised dwellings....’, a household form (which is usually used) would capture family relationships among a family group sleeping in the same location on census night. Sometimes a short Census form, which does not explore family relationships, is used for people enumerated in ‘improvised dwellings....’.

6.1 Issues

6.1.1 Capacity of the Census to capture family relationships

The way that information on relationships between those in a dwelling on Census night is obtained is by recording the relationship of each individual in the dwelling to a reference person known as ‘Person 1’ or ‘The Householder’. Where there is a homeless family staying in a household, and particularly where none of the members of the homeless family are related to ‘Person 1’ it can be difficult to determine the family relationships in the homeless family.

For example, if the homeless family in this scenario comprises a husband, a wife and one child and they are staying with a friend of the wife (who is ‘Person 1’ on the Census form) then the census should record that the wife is a friend of ‘Person 1’ but, unless the husband and child record themselves as being ‘husband of friend to ‘Person 1’ and ‘child of friend to ‘Person 1’ it will not be possible to determine that they are a family group. This problem is compounded if there are multiple homeless families residing in one dwelling – a situation in which those in the more complex and difficult of circumstances may find themselves.

6.1.2 Family relationships amongst those in boarding houses

The personal form used by those in boarding houses only records marital status. The following assumptions are made:

- where an individual ticked that they were ‘married’, that they are in the boarding house with their spouse (note that does not capture de-facto relationships unless a person in a de-facto relationship answers that they are married);
- no estimate of de-facto couples in boarding houses was made;
- that every child in a boarding house aged 14 or younger is accompanying one or both parents;
- each family unit in a boarding house had, on average, 1.8 children; and
- half of the families in boarding houses on Census night were single parent families and the other half are two parent families.

Issues for consideration

The methodology to estimate the number of families for the Chamberlain and Mackenzie estimate that uses the Census-related aspects of homelessness (i.e. people enumerated in 'improvised dwellings...', non-youth staying with friends, boarding houses and SAAP residents in Victoria) relies heavily on (i) the capacity of respondents to correctly describe potentially complex relationships to 'Person 1' in a household; and (ii) a range of assumptions about family dynamics and fertility that, to a certain extent, require that we accept that these things are similar between homeless and non-homeless groups in the population.

9. To what extent are these assumptions likely to be justified? Should they be modified? If so, how?

10. What other ways may exist to estimate the number and types of households that comprise the homeless population?

7 Marginal residents of caravan parks

There is debate about whether marginal residents of caravan parks should be included in the homeless count. Chamberlain and Mackenzie conclude that they should not, but this paper is a useful place to expose the arguments for and against them being included.

Marginal residents of caravan parks are defined as those who are (i) renting their caravans; and (ii) where all persons were at their usual address; and (iii) no-one in the dwelling had full time employment. This definition allows for exclusion of holiday makers, caravan owner/dwellers and those living in caravans but who are employed.

It is reported that caravans are sometimes used as an alternative to boarding houses outside capital cities and that SAAP workers sometimes send homeless people to caravan parks if there is no SAAP accommodation available in their community. Analysis presented in *Counting the Homeless 2006* reports that, in terms of social and income characteristics, marginal residents of caravan parks are more similar to those in boarding houses than to those staying with friends and family. The publication puts forward some hypotheses to explain this.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie argue against marginal residents of caravan parks being classed as part of the tertiary homeless on the bases that:

- the wider community may find it hard to accept this definition as they associate caravans with holiday makers; and
- caravan parks now tend to have a higher proportion of cabins, which do not meet the definition of tertiary homelessness, and they estimate that between one quarter and one half of those classed as marginal residents of caravan parks are actually living in cabins, and therefore not homeless.

In addition, there is an increasing proportion of older people who are travelling for extended periods as a way of life, sometimes in expensive vehicles, and have sold their former home pending a future life stage transition.

Issues for consideration

11. Should marginal residents of caravan parks be included as part of the tertiary population if those in caravans, as opposed to cabins, can be identified? How might the identification of the potentially homeless be made?

8 How to respond to this issues paper

The ABS welcomes your written response to the issues raised in this paper, or any other comments you may wish to provide on *Counting the Homeless* methodology. The ABS will use the comments it receives in its review but will not attribute comments to any person or organisation. ABS will not publish the names of persons or organisations making comments without first obtaining their permission to do so.

You can provide written input until 20 November 2009 to

Teresa Dickinson
Assistant Statistician – The Australian Bureau of Statistics
Outposted to FaHCSIA Homelessness Branch

Teresa.dickinson@abs.gov.au
Teresa.Dickinson@fahcsia.gov.au

Mobile: 0439 430 577

Social Conditions Statistics Branch
Australian Bureau of Statistics
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