

# Young People & Civil Justice Problems

# FACTSHEET

Young people are commonly perceived as a group with specific needs in relation to navigating the justice system, and obtaining advice.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence there has been some interest in providing advice services geared particularly towards young people. Organisations such as Youth Access have emphasised the importance of services orientated towards socially excluded young people - those who experience multiple social disadvantage and young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).<sup>2</sup> This factsheet details the experience of young people faced with civil justice problems, using findings from the Legal Services Research Centre's Civil and Social Justice Survey, a large-scale household survey of people's experience of and response to civil justice problems.

## ***Vulnerability to Civil Justice Problems***

- 36 percent of both 18 to 24 year olds and those aged over 24 reported one or more civil justice problem(s).
- 18 to 24 year olds who had left home reported problems far more often, as did those young respondents with children (irrespective of relationship status), NEETs and particularly young respondents with mental health problems.
- Other characteristics which exacerbated risk for young people included: being the victim of crime; having a long-term illness or disability; and living in high density housing.

## ***The Impact of Problems***

- As a consequence of experiencing civil justice problems, 15 per cent of 18-24 year olds suffered from physical ill health and 25 per cent from stress-related illness. These poor outcomes were more pronounced for 18-24 year olds who had left home, with 19 per cent reporting physical and 45 per cent reporting stress related ill-health.
- Young people's problems brought about loss of employment, loss of income, loss of home, loss of confidence and violence. Younger respondents tended to spend more time worrying about their problems than older respondents.

## ***How Problems Were Dealt With***

- Thirteen per cent of 18-24 year olds did nothing to try to resolve problems compared to just 9 per cent of older respondents. Eight percent of younger respondents also tried and failed to obtain advice and in total, 59 per cent faced problems without obtaining advice, compared to 49 per cent of older respondents.
- 18-24 year olds were the group least likely to obtain advice with the sole exception of people describing their ethnicity as black and were least likely to get advice in relation to social welfare law.<sup>3</sup>
- 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) but less likely to obtain advice from recognised independent sources (such as CABx, solicitors and other advice agencies).
- Thirty-five per cent of young respondents suggested that they regretted their problem resolution strategy (or lack of one). Most often young people said that they wished they had got advice, got more advice, acted sooner or tried harder to get advice. Obtaining advice had a demonstrable impact upon their reported achievement of objectives.<sup>4</sup>

## ***Mode of Contact with Advisers and The Role of Technology***

- Despite comparably high levels of access, use of the Internet to help to address civil justice problems was less common for 18-24 year olds compared to older respondents (6 v 11 per cent), with this figure lower still for disadvantaged young people. Young people who did use the Internet were also slightly less successful in doing so than their older counterparts.

In summary, disadvantaged young people, particularly those with mental health problems were far more likely to report civil justice problems<sup>5</sup>. The disinclination to act upon problems<sup>6</sup> alongside a lesser use of Internet advice-seeking<sup>7</sup> suggests that young people may be unsure of how to deal with problems independently. Some young people demonstrate a need for tailored guidance in order to minimise the impact of poor problem resolution<sup>8</sup>, particularly once they have left home.<sup>9</sup> This need for advice is all the more important given the multiplicity and relative severity of problems experienced by disadvantaged young people.

## FURTHER READING

- N.J. Balmer, T. Tam and P. Pleasence (2007) "Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey". London: Youth Access.
- Legal Services Research Centre (2009) "Young People, Advice and Mental Health: A Data Digest". London: LSRC.
- P. Pleasence and N.J. Balmer (2009) "Mental Health and the Experience of Social Problems Involving Rights: Findings from the United Kingdom and New Zealand", 16(1) *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, pp123-140.
- P. Pleasence, N.J. Balmer, A. Patel and C. Denvir (2010). "Civil Justice in England and Wales: Report of the 2006-2009 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey". London: Legal Services Research Centre.

## FORTHCOMING

- C. Denvir, N.J. Balmer and P. Pleasence "Surfing the Web – Recreation or Resource? Exploring the Internet as a Rights Advice Portal for Young People in the UK.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Youth Access. (2007). *Young People's Social Welfare Needs and the Impact of Good Advice. Issues Paper*. London. Youth Access.
- <sup>2</sup> J. Kenrick (2009). *Young People's Access to Advice - the Evidence*. London: Youth Access.
- <sup>3</sup> Balmer, N.J., Buck, A., Patel, A., Denvir, C. and Pleasence, P. (2010) *Knowledge, Capacity and the Experience of Rights Problems*. London: Plenet
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> N.J. Balmer, T. Tam and P. Pleasence (2007) *Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*. London: Youth Access; M. Sefton (2010) *With Rights in Mind: Is there a role for social welfare law advice in improving young people's mental health?* London. Youth Access.
- <sup>6</sup> P. Pleasence, N.J. Balmer, A. Patel and C. Denvir (2010). *Civil Justice in England and Wales: Report of the 2006-2009 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*. London: Legal Services Research Centre.
- <sup>7</sup> C. Denvir, N.J. Balmer and P. Pleasence (Forthcoming) "Surfing the Web – Recreation or Resource? Exploring the Internet as a Rights Advice Portal for Young People in the UK.
- <sup>8</sup> Legal Services Research Centre, (2007) *Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*, London: Legal Services Research Centre.
- <sup>9</sup> Parle, L.J. (2009). *Measuring young people's legal capability*. London: Plenet (Public Legal Education Network).