

Locating families with children at risk of housing insecurity: a multidimensional index

Jamie O'Brien, Emma Coombes, Anne-Marie Burn, Hannah Fairbrother, Eleanor Holding, Nick Woodrow, Sarah E. Rodgers

Introduction

- An estimated 1.5 million UK families with children live in the private rented sector, supported by tenancies of one year or less.
- Around one third of homes in the private rented sector fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- The increase in families living in the private rented sector has been driven by factors including the cost-of-living crisis, and relationship breakdown.
- Substandard private rental housing has been associated with fuel poverty, weak access to services, and poor health and well-being.
- Children experiencing housing insecurity have lower educational attainment, compared to their peers in secure housing.

The UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities, 2024, places emphasis on the need to mitigate housing problems and support families with children at risk of homelessness.



Photo: Enfield Dispatch

To support housing and policy practitioners, we developed the Families at Risk of Housing Insecurity Index (FRoHII) to locate and prioritise households experiencing housing insecurity.

Composing the index

A systematic literature review revealed a set of drivers of housing insecurity in England: Cost of living, insecure tenures, relationship breakdown, quality of housing, quality of living environment, ethnicity, and mental health.

For each driver we identified a suitable small-area metric in England, sourced from public data. Composing the index in this way allowed for consistent data-mapping to Lower Super Output Areas.

We validated the metrics for inclusion in the index with a panel of housing experts, who were recruited from the project's local authority partnerships.

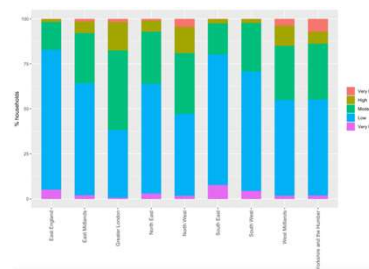
The expert panel reached consensus to rank and weight the metrics. This meant that the drivers were represented in the index in proportion to their importance to housing insecurity affecting families with children.

Variable	Type	Weight
Eligibility for free school meals	Percentage	0.5
Income deprivation affecting children	Decile	0.5
Residential churn	Decile	0.4
Pre-1919 housing stock	Percentage	0.3
Households in fuel poverty	Percentage	0.3
Households with lone parents	Percentage	0.3
Households with dependent children in which the reference person is of Asian or Asian British	Percentage	
Black, Black British, or Caribbean ethnicity		0.2
Mental health index (SAMHI)	Decile	0.1

A table of the weighted variables from which the risk index was composed

For each small area in England, the variables were multiplied by their weights and summed to produce a raw risk score. The risk scores were then stratified into five levels, from very low to very high risk.

Data analysis



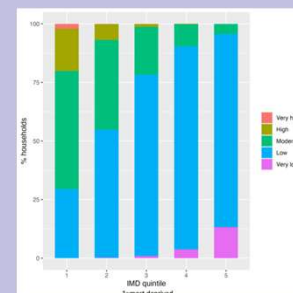
Analysis of the stratified risk scores showed how most areas feature low to moderate risk of housing insecurity.

Regions with greater proportions of higher risk areas include Greater London, North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Housing and deprivation

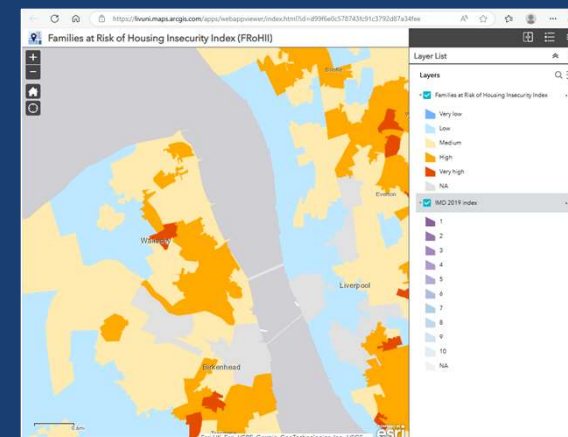
Analysis of the index to compared patterns of housing insecurity risk with multiple deprivations. We found that housing insecurity affected households in less deprived areas, as well as those in the most deprived.

Further analysis found that a higher density of properties built before 1919 in those areas, which are more likely to be of substandard quality.



Public resource

The Families at Risk of Housing Insecurity Index (FRoHII) has been made available publicly via the Place-Based Longitudinal Resource. The index can be downloaded as a table, or interacted with as a digital map.



- Zoom to specific areas to explore the data
- Compare patterns of housing insecurity risk with those of deprivation
- Download the data table and link to a geographic file for further study

Policy applications

- The FRoHII can be used by children's practitioners to maintain links with schools in high-risk areas, where children transferring to the school may be experiencing the negative impacts of housing insecurity.
- The index can be a resource for Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) in the UK, which include GP leads, health, social and well-being practitioners, to help address the comprehensive needs of community members.
- The FRoHII can help social or health professionals to become aware of housing insecurity risk levels within their catchments.