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Study Reveals Black Households in England Face Significantly Higher Risk of Homelessness

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A new report from Heriot-Watt University has revealed that Black people in England are almost four times more likely to become homeless than their White counterparts, while also being significantly less likely to secure social housing. The findings raise urgent questions about the fairness and function of the current housing system.

The three-year study, conducted by the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research, analysed data from 750,000 households across England between 2019 and 2022. It found that only 10 percent of Black families going through the statutory homelessness system were offered social housing, compared to 24 percent of White families. Further, 43 percent of Black-led households spent over two years in temporary accommodation, with 18 percent remaining for more than five years, figures that far exceed those for White households.

The researchers noted that racial inequality persisted even after adjusting for poverty, regional location, and levels of homeownership. Participants described having to adopt English-sounding names or neutral accents in order to be taken seriously by housing officers and landlords. One participant said she used to call herself “Gillian” just to get through to someone on the phone.

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, who led the research, stated that both historical structural racism and present-day discrimination are contributing to the crisis. She emphasised the need for systemic reforms rather than superficial adjustments.

Households from other minority ethnic backgrounds also fared worse than White households. Pakistani and Bangladeshi families were over seven times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions. All non-White groups experienced lower rates of social housing allocation and longer stays in temporary accommodation.

Charities such as Shelter and Race on the Agenda have backed the report’s findings, calling for a landlord ombudsman, mandatory ethnic monitoring, and better enforcement against discriminatory practices. The

report recommends abandoning so-called “ethnicity-blind” policies in favour of tailored solutions that acknowledge cultural and structural barriers.

From a centre-right viewpoint, addressing such disparities demands practical, market-based reforms rather than ideological posturing. Enforcing accountability through transparent metrics and fair regulation of the private rental sector will be far more effective than bureaucratic restructuring. Real reform should empower local authorities and responsible landlords to allocate housing based on need and merit, not political trends.

The challenge now is not simply to recognise the inequality, but to act decisively and fairly to correct it.