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Thousands suffer legal problems

Hundreds of thousands of people are failing to deal with their legal problems because they do not know their basic rights, according to a report.



People in temporary housing are more likely to have legal problems

Issues like debt and poor housing are going unresolved as a result, the Legal Services Research Centre said.

Vulnerable groups like the unemployed, single parents and those in temporary housing were most likely to suffer according to the three year study.

Calling for action, the authors said: "No one should suffer in silence."

Social exclusion

The study said one in three adults in England and Wales had suffered a civil law problem over a three-and-a-half year period.

Pascoe Pleasence, head of the Legal Services Research Centre, told BBC News Online an "enormous range" of problems were involved.

Civil law problems experienced by:

80% of people living in temporary accommodation.
66% of single parents
54% of unemployed people
37% of all people

He said: "It could be anything from problems with faulty goods, to mismanagement of pensions schemes and landlords not doing repairs."

One in five of those questioned had taken no action to solve their problem.

And almost half of those reporting a problem reported multiple issues, "which can increase their vulnerability to social exclusion".

Too scared

There were many reasons why people failed to tackle their problems, but for one in three people it was a lack of knowledge about their rights.

One in 10 people thought their problems were not serious enough to merit action, while others were too scared or thought that finding a solution would be too expensive or time consuming.

“ Too many people struggle alone with their problems ”

Clare Dodgson
Legal Services Commission

People were least likely to take action when they faced difficulties involving more serious issues like mental illness, clinical negligence, unfair police treatment, personal injury or

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domestic violence.

Clare Dodgson, chief executive of the Legal Services Commission, the body responsible for publicly-funded legal services, said: "Too many people struggle alone with their problems.

"It is our challenge to educate people about their basic civil rights in partnership with government, the legal profession and not-for-profit advice organisations."

The study was funded by the Legal Services Commission and the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

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