

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

IZA DP No. 17660

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and Employment in England**

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ABSTRACT

Youth Homelessness, Support Services, and Employment in England

This study aims to evaluate whether key factors related to homelessness and the utilisation of support services by homeless youth are associated with their employment outcomes. Data from 402 young people living in 21 housing accommodation buildings across three urban cities in England are used to evaluate the study's research aims. The results revealed that non-native and non-heterosexual homeless youth were overrepresented in housing accommodation and experienced lower employment rates compared to native and heterosexual homeless youth. The estimates indicated that employment levels among homeless youth were negatively associated with several factors related to homelessness, such as parental neglect, substance misuse, and inadequate social care during childhood. Conversely, the estimates showed that both employment levels and the duration of employment among homeless youth were positively associated with the use of well-being, educational, mentoring, and employment support services. A critical insight, however, indicated that discrimination in the labour market reduced their employment prospects. This study contributes to the literature by expanding the application of Capability Theory in the multidimensional study of youth homelessness. Furthermore, it develops and validates two new scales to capture both factors of youth homelessness and the utilisation of support services by homeless youth, facilitating evidence-based recommendations for policymakers. A policy approach should recognise the multifaceted nature of the challenges identified and advocate for a comprehensive strategy that integrates preventative measures, support services, and targeted interventions to address the root causes of homelessness while providing holistic support to vulnerable youth populations.

JEL Classification: E24, J21, J64, I3, M53

Keywords: Capability Theory, employment, homeless youth, support services, homelessness

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1. Introduction

The present study examines whether factors contributing to youth homelessness and the use of support services by homeless youth are associated with the employment outcomes of those living in housing accommodations. By collecting data between 2022 and 2023 from 21 housing accommodation buildings in three urban cities across England, the current study offers new insights. In England, the notable rise in youth presenting themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness underscores the urgency of the issue and the need for targeted interventions (Centrepoin, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017).

In relation to the first aim of the study, it is proposed that examining the relationship between factors determining youth homelessness and their employment levels could reveal whether factors such as household vulnerability and inadequate social care provision, which are associated with homelessness (Centrepoin, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013), are also linked to youth employment. This understanding is crucial for designing targeted interventions. For example, if inadequate social care provision during childhood is a significant factor in homelessness and is also associated with reduced employment among young people, well-coordinated interventions can be tailored to help achieve sustainable outcomes for at-risk youth, thereby assisting in breaking the cycle of homelessness and unemployment.

In relation to the second aim of the study, it is suggested that examining the relationship between the use of support services by homeless youth and their employment levels is a crucial step towards assessing the effectiveness of these services in facilitating employment opportunities. By exploring various support avenues, such as well-being, education, mentoring, and employment assistance, the study recognises the complex challenges faced by homeless youth and the corresponding support required. Identifying the services that contribute to improved employment outcomes allows programme designers to tailor interventions more precisely (Centrepoin, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Sage Foundation, 2017).

The present study contributes to the literature in three ways. Firstly, it employs Sen’s (1985, 1992) capability theory, along with Nussbaum’s (2000) extensions, to assess the employment experiences of homeless youth. This study evaluates the theory’s applicability and comprehensiveness in understanding the factors influencing the employment outcomes of homeless youth—an area missing in the literature. By applying this theory, the study highlights the importance of not only providing resources but also enhancing the opportunities and skills of homeless youth to utilise these resources effectively in achieving stable employment and improving their overall quality of life.

Secondly, this study addresses a quantitative gap by examining how various factors contributing to homelessness are associated with employment levels among homeless youth. A ten-item scale is developed to quantitatively evaluate these factors, encompassing aspects such as parental neglect, abuse, inadequate social care during childhood, and physical or mental health problems. This instrument is

essential for understanding the roots and complexity of youth homelessness and its association with employment levels, as well as for designing interventions that target prevention and support.

Thirdly, the study addresses another quantitative gap by developing a four-item scale to measure the utilisation of support services by homeless youth throughout their lives. The scale synthesises information on well-being, educational support, mentoring, and employment services provided by local authorities, charities, and councils. This facilitates the identification of service usage patterns, which are then analysed in relation to employment prospects.

The remainder of the study is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief literature review, followed by Section 3, which presents the theoretical framework of the study. Section 4 details the data gathering approach. Subsequently, Section 5 evaluates the dataset and scales, followed by Section 6, which presents the descriptive statistics of the study. Section 7 presents the estimates, and Section 8 discusses the outcomes.

2. Literature review

Studies have found that early experiences of homelessness and dependency on social care are positively correlated with youth homelessness (Grattan et al., 2022; Prince et al., 2019; Braciszewski et al., 2016; Brakenhoff et al., 2015). Moreover, adolescents from poorer neighbourhoods, and those with child behaviour problems are more likely to experience homelessness (Grattan et al., 2022; Prince et al., 2019; Braciszewski et al., 2016; Brakenhoff et al., 2015). Homeless youth face deteriorated physical and mental health statuses, resort to survival behaviours to earn money, and report high rates of substance misuse (Tanekenov et al., 2018; Slesnick et al., 2018).

Housing instability, mental health problems, substance misuse, disrupted education, lack of education and job skills, as well as discrimination and stigma, are prevalent among homeless youth and can serve as barriers to their ability to secure and maintain employment (Centrepoint, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Slesnick et al., 2018; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013).

Three review studies have examined, among other thematic issues, the association between support services and employment levels among homeless youth (Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010). Due to limited research on the subject matter, fewer than ten studies formed the three reviews' datasets. It was revealed that support services targeting homeless youth aimed to provide them with safe accommodation, health management, psychological support, behavioural therapy focused on drug and sexual risk behaviours, legal assistance, case management, mentoring, and counselling that placed emphasis on goal setting, preparation for employment through resume creation, job interview coaching, and vocational training (Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010).

In the first review, Morton et al. (2020) concluded, that the association between support services and homeless youth employment was inconclusive. Some studies found no improvements in homeless

youth employment, while others discovered improvements. In their second review, Dettlaff et al. (2017) concluded that there was a positive association between support services and homeless youth employment. However, they highlighted that either the positive changes in homeless youth employment had not been assessed for statistical significance or were not statistically significant. In the third review, Altena et al. (2010) concluded that there was a positive association between support services and homeless youth employment. In all reviews, there was a consensus that support services were associated with improvements related to homeless youth psychological measures, such as life satisfaction and self-esteem.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Defining capability theory

Sen's (1985; 1992; 1999) capability theory is characterised by three interconnected elements: capabilities, functioning, and agency. Sen (1992) defines capabilities as individuals' freedom to lead one type of life or another, emphasizing that individuals should have the freedom to achieve what they value. Functioning refers to things individuals value being or doing, such as being healthy, educated, and employed (Sen, 1992). Hence, capabilities represent people's freedom to achieve, while functioning is the actual achievement (Sen, 1992). Agency denotes individuals' capacity to act and bring about change, capturing what individuals are free to do and achieve in pursuit of their goals or values (Sen, 1985; 1992; 1999).

Capability theory recognizes people's diversity, unique needs, and the impact of their conditions on agency and functioning (Sen, 1992). It also acknowledges that not all individuals have equal access to resources needed to build capabilities and agency, highlighting the importance of considering socioeconomic factors in determining people's experiences and functioning (Sen, 1992). For marginalized communities, the focus should be on identifying and addressing constraints such as low income, and poor health, and limited alternatives for action and change (Sen, 1992).

Nussbaum (1992; 2000) evaluates ten capabilities that can enhance people's capacities to act. Factors that reduce these capabilities can adversely affect agency and functioning, while factors that enhance them can increase agency and functioning. Nussbaum (1992; 2000) states that people should be able to: (i) Have a sense of physical safety and enjoy a normal lifespan (Life capability); (ii) Meet basic needs for food, shelter, and basic healthcare (Bodily Health capability); (iii) Move freely and be secured against violent assault (Bodily Integrity capability); (iv) Develop themselves in terms of basic education, creativity, and intellectual activity (Senses, Imagination, and Thought capabilities); (v) Interact with others without excessive fear, anxiety, abuse, or ignorance (Emotions capabilities); (vi) Develop meaningful positive social relationships (Affiliation capability); (vii) Plan a good life as a result of enhanced capabilities (Practical Reason capability); (viii) Express care for the natural environment and

animals (Other Species capability); (ix) Flourish in terms of play, laughter, and recreational activities (Play capability); and (x) Take part in political processes to influence decision-making and boost economic well-being (Control Over One's Environment capability).

Nussbaum (1992; 2000) suggests that all capabilities are of central importance and distinct in quality. Moreover, Nussbaum (1992; 2000) indicates that vulnerable and minoritised population groups may require a higher level of resources to bridge the gap in their level of functioning compared to those not facing such disadvantages. Equity principles are fundamental in capability theory, as Nussbaum's (1992; 2000) list of capabilities encompasses themes of empowerment, including economic, socio-psychological, educational, and political dimensions (Tanekenov et al., 2018).

3.2 Applying capability theory in the study of homeless youth

Persistent multivariate disadvantages over the long term can hinder homeless youths' ability to take action and bring about change, which may affect their employment prospects (Tanekenov et al., 2018). For instance, homeless youths who have experienced parental neglect and/or abuse may lack a sense of physical safety and a normative lifespan, which are foundational to the 'Life' and 'Affiliation' capabilities (Centrepoint, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Slesnick et al., 2018; Sage Foundation, 2017; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000). Youths with such experiences may face significant challenges in achieving employment due to a lack of supportive environments, instability, low self-esteem, and lower academic achievement or even dropping out of school (Sidiropoulou et al., 2020; Centrepoint, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000).

Adverse experiences related to abuse within the household could lead to excessive fear and anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting in underdeveloped 'Bodily Integrity' and 'Emotions' capabilities in youth (Sidiropoulou et al., 2020; Centrepoint, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017). The inability to interact with others without fear and anxiety undermines emotional well-being, which is crucial for maintaining stable employment (Centrepoint, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013).

Additionally, economic difficulties in the household and inadequate social care provision could limit the ability to plan for a good life, as well as hinder educational and creative development opportunities, thereby affecting the development of the capabilities of 'Life', 'Practical Reason' and 'Play' (Centrepoint, 2023; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Sage Foundation, 2017; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000). The immediate survival needs of vulnerable populations often take precedence over recreational activities, long-term planning, and goal-setting, all of which are essential for employment (Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010). Living in a financially unstable household or relying on inadequate social care can cause stress, anxiety, and insecurity, which may impair confidence, motivation, and mental well-being, making it more difficult for individuals to pursue and sustain meaningful employment opportunities (Drydakis, 2023; 2024a).

Furthermore, deteriorating physical and mental health, along with substance misuse, can compromise the ability to meet ‘Bodily Health’ and ‘Bodily Integrity’ capabilities (Centreport, 2023; Drydak, 2022a; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000). Youths who struggle to maintain good physical and mental health are less likely to be employable or to sustain employment due to challenges and/or inability to search for new employment opportunities, and decreased productivity (Centreport, 2023; Taneknov et al., 2018; Sage Foundation, 2017; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000). Substance misuse can result in adverse physical and mental health, reduce productivity, and result in criminal records, which can create barriers to obtaining employment (Centreport, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000).

The study highlights the intricate interplay between individuals’ endeavours to attain capabilities and systemic shortcomings concerning adequate welfare programmes, access to social services, affordable housing options, healthcare, and quality education (Somerville, 2013; Gowan, 2010). Additionally, stigma, discrimination and exclusion due to vulnerability may intersect with and worsen systemic deficiencies across housing, education, health, employment and social protection systems (Hassani-Nezhad et al., 2024; Drydak, 2022b; 2023). Structural inequalities rooted in factors such as ethnicity and LGBTIQ+ status may perpetuate systemic injustices, disproportionately leaving marginalised and minoritised communities vulnerable to homelessness and its associated challenges (Hassani-Nezhad et al., 2024; Drydak, 2022b; 2023). These realities exacerbate the barriers faced by individuals striving to break the cycle of vulnerability and develop their capabilities for employment (Drydak, 2024a; Hassani-Nezhad et al., 2024; Gowan, 2010; Nussbaum, 1992; 2000).

Drawing from the presented arguments, the first hypothesis concerning the factors influencing youth homelessness and homeless youth’s employment prospects is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a negative association between the factors contributing to youth homelessness and the employment levels of homeless youth.*

The present study underscores the crucial role of support services in addressing the challenging realities faced by homeless youth (Morton et al., 2020; Taneknov et al., 2018; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013). The study indicates that the utilisation of support services by homeless youth can address Nussbaum’s (1992; 2000) capabilities. It posits that these services, acting as ‘employment enablers’, could enhance the capabilities of homeless youth, thereby increasing their agency and improving their functioning in skill acquisition, goal setting, and ultimately, employment attainment. This enhancement of capabilities is crucial as it empowers homeless youth to transition from mere survival to leading a life they value.

Drawing from the available literature (Centreport, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Taneknov et al., 2018; Slesnick et al., 2018; Sage Foundation, 2017; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013; Altena et al., 2010;

Bourdieu, 1983), the study posits that physical, mental health, and well-being services can aid homeless youth in developing the capabilities of ‘Life’, ‘Bodily Health’, ‘Bodily Integrity’, ‘Emotions’, and ‘Play’. These developments could assist in boosting safety, stability, health, and mental health, which are fundamental prerequisites for engaging in employment. By ensuring that homeless youth have access to adequate healthcare and mental health support, they are better positioned to pursue and sustain employment opportunities (Morton et al., 2020; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010).

Moreover, the utilisation of educational, and vocational training services by homeless youth can develop the capabilities of ‘Senses, Imagination, and Thought’, ‘Affiliation’, and ‘Practical Reason’. Education plays a pivotal role in expanding cognitive abilities and fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. These capabilities could enhance human and social capital, making homeless youth more skilful and increasing their chances of higher employment (Centrepoint, 2023; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Sage Foundation, 2017). Additionally, education fosters a sense of belonging and social inclusion, which are critical for personal development and societal engagement (Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the utilisation of mentoring, life-skill, and legal advice services by homeless youth can enhance the capabilities of ‘Bodily Health’, ‘Bodily Integrity’, ‘Senses, Imagination, and Thought’, ‘Emotions’, ‘Affiliation’, ‘Practical Reason’, and ‘Play’. These services could help homeless youth navigate social and legal systems, ensuring their rights and personal safety are protected (Centrepoint, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017). By offering support in securing sustainable lifestyles, these services could help homeless youth maintain good health, develop resilience and coping strategies, and plan better life goals, thereby boosting their employment prospects (Centrepoint, 2023; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Sage Foundation, 2017; Altena et al., 2010).

In addition, the utilisation of employment, and job search support services by homeless youth can develop ‘Practical Reason’ and ‘Senses, Imagination, and Thought’ capabilities, helping them set employment goals and make informed decisions. These services provide career counselling, networking opportunities, job placement assistance, and skills training, enabling youth to identify their career interests and pathways, which could enhance employment (Centrepoint, 2023; Morton et al., 2020; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010).

It is evident that employment services exhibit greater efficacy when integrated into a comprehensive support system addressing the multifaceted factors contributing to social exclusion (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013). Recognising employment as a fundamental objective of public policies targeting the improvement of homeless youth (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013), this study argues that capability theory offers a robust framework for understanding the trajectory of support services aimed at advancing the

prospects of homeless youth (Centrepoint, 2023; Tanekenov et al., 2018; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2013; Altena et al., 2010).

Given the aforementioned considerations, the second hypothesis regarding support services and homeless youth’s employment is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: *There is a positive association between the utilisation of support services by homeless youth and their employment levels.*

Figure 1 presents the Model of Barriers and Enablers to the Employment of Homeless Youth. It suggests that the driving factors of homelessness act as barriers to employment. However, the utilisation of support services acts as an enabler of employment. The model also indicates that minoritised demographic characteristics and societal bias are additional barriers to employment.

[Figure 1]

4. Data gathering

In 2020, the research team, through internet-based research, identified certain bodies, namely local authorities, charities, and councils working on youth homelessness in England, and subsequently made e-contact. In the initial approach, information on the nature of the study was provided. The aim of the research was to collect data from homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 25, residing in housing accommodation. The research team requested permission from the bodies to visit the actual housing accommodation buildings and distribute questionnaires to the tenants. Participant information sheets, participant consent forms, and research ethics clearance from the university’s ethics panel were provided to the bodies to familiarise them with the nature of the study. The research team requested meetings with the bodies, and four bodies positively responded to the initial request. These bodies granted permission to visit a total of 21 housing accommodation buildings, located in three urban cities across England.

Between September 2022 and February 2023, the research team visited the housing accommodation buildings and distributed the participant information sheets, participant consent forms, and questionnaires to the tenants, along with pencils. According to instructions, tenants interested in participating in the survey were required to submit completed questionnaires by placing them in boxes positioned on the receptionist desks of the housing accommodation buildings. Reminder notices inviting tenants to complete the survey and place the questionnaire in the box were posted within the buildings, specifically in public areas such as the reception, living room, kitchen, and stairs. The research team revisited the housing accommodation to collect the boxes. In total, 402 responses were received.

5. Data set and scales

5.1 Demographic characteristics

Participants were required to provide information about their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of education, and employment status. Additionally, questions related to childcare responsibilities and student status were incorporated into the surveys. The survey utilized the SF-36 General Health dimension to assess general health status (Ware, 2000). The SF-36 General Health dimension is designed to evaluate perceived health status using five items that gauge individuals' perceptions of their current health and expectations regarding their future health (Ware, 2000), with higher scores indicating better perceived general health. Moreover, labour market discrimination was measured using the employment discrimination item from the Scheim and Bauer (2019) Intersectional Major Discrimination Index. This item asks participants: 'Because of who you are, have you ever been fired or dismissed from a job, or been turned down for a job you interviewed for?' The response options are: 'never', 'once', and 'more than once', with higher scores indicating greater discrimination.

5.2 Factors of Youth Homelessness scale

This study introduces the Factors of Youth Homelessness (FYH) scale, a quantitative tool designed to measure the factors contributing to youth homelessness. Developed following DeVellis's (2003) eight-step framework, the scale aims to ensure a robust and reliable measurement instrument. Its primary purpose is to assess the multidimensional factors driving youth homelessness, grounded in Capability Theory and supported by insights from existing literature, including studies by Centrepont (2023), Morton et al. (2020), and Tanekenov et al. (2018).

To create a comprehensive measurement tool, a total of 17 items were initially generated. A Likert-type response format was chosen for the scale, a standard approach in social science research, as it facilitates the capture of subjective perceptions and behaviours while ensuring consistency and variability in responses (DeVellis, 2003). The initial pool of items underwent a thorough review by a panel of 12 experts, drawn from diverse fields such as social work, psychology, law, and healthcare, alongside six former homeless youth. This review process refined the scale to ensure clarity, relevance, and ethical sensitivity. The finalised version of the FYH scale includes 10 core items: parental neglect (FYH_{PN}), relationship breakdowns (FYH_{RB}), physical abuse in households (FYH_{PA}), verbal abuse in households (FYH_{VA}), personal history of substance misuse (FYH_{PSM}), substance misuse of a household member (FYH_{HSM}), economic problems (FYH_{EP}), inadequate or inappropriate living conditions (FYH_{LC}), inadequate social care during childhood (FYH_{ISC}), and a history of personal physical and/or mental health illness (FYH_{PMH}). Participants respond to these items on a scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree,' with higher scores indicating a greater presence of factors associated with youth homelessness.

The validity of the FYH scale was rigorously assessed through pilot studies involving homeless youth, ensuring it met standards for face, content, construct, criterion, discriminant, and convergent

validity. For instance, items related to family dynamics were carefully reviewed to confirm that they accurately captured experiences of parental neglect and abuse. The scale was pilot-tested in two phases. In the first phase, 42 homeless youth completed the refined 10-item scale alongside validation questions, and correlation analyses confirmed the internal consistency of the items with the intended constructs. In the second phase, the full survey, including the FYH scale, was administered to the study's participants. Exploratory factor analysis demonstrated strong factor loadings (≥ 0.6) for all 10 items, indicating they effectively measured the intended construct. The scale also exhibited high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, which reflects good reliability. Fit indices further validated the scale's robustness, with a Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.05 and a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.9, both suggesting a strong model fit. Efforts to optimise the scale by reducing the number of items revealed a decline in reliability, highlighting the necessity of retaining all 10 items.

5.3 Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth scale

Following DeVellis's (2003) framework, the Support Services Utilised by Homeless Youth (SSHY) scale was developed to quantify the range of support services accessed by homeless youth. Drawing on the literature, including works by Centrepoint (2023), Morton et al. (2020), and Altena et al. (2010), the scale examines support services provided by local authorities, charities, and councils. Twelve items were initially identified and later refined into four combined items to enhance focus and minimise overlap. The SSHY scale utilises a Likert-type format, capturing responses ranging from "never" to "always." The four combined items assess the use of physical, mental health, and well-being services (SSHY_{PMH}); educational and vocational training services (SSHY_{EV}); mentoring, life-skills, and legal advice (SSHY_{MLS}); and employment and job search support (SSHY_{EJS}). Higher average scores on the scale indicate greater utilisation of support services. Validity was assessed through face, content, construct, criterion, discriminant, and convergent validity. For example, the theme of health and well-being services was evaluated using questions such as whether participants accessed counselling or relied on external support systems while in housing accommodation. These questions ensured the scale captured the breadth of services and their impact on participants' lives. Closed-type responses facilitated a quantitative approach, as agreed upon with an expert panel comprising professionals and former homeless youth.

A pilot study with homeless youth participants demonstrated that the four items correlated strongly with related validity constructs, confirming their relevance and reliability. Subsequent exploratory factor analysis indicated all items had factor loadings above 0.8, demonstrating a strong relationship with the underlying construct. The scale's internal consistency was excellent, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. Fit indices, including an SRMR of 0.01 and a CFI of 0.9, confirmed the scale's

validity and alignment with the model. Efforts to reduce the scale diminished its reliability, confirming the need to retain all four combined items.

6. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of homeless youth residing in 21 housing accommodation buildings. It is observed that the mean age was 22 years, 41.0% were men, 19.9% were non-British, and 18.1% identified as non-heterosexuals. Based on census data, 12% of non-UK-born residents in England and Wales were young adults (Migration Observatory, 2015). Moreover, approximately 9.2% of young people in the UK identified as non-heterosexual (Office for National Statistics, 2023). Hence, it appears that in the present study non-native and non-heterosexual homeless youth were overrepresented in housing accommodation.

In Table 1, it is observed that 6.4% had higher and/or vocational education, 3.2% were studying (student status), and 10.4% had childcare responsibilities. Moreover, it was found that 43.0% had been living in their current housing accommodation for more than 6 months.

Regarding labour market status, 26.3% were paid employees, 43.7% were unemployed, and the remaining youth were inactive. During the same period, the youth unemployment rate in the UK was 13.0% (House of Commons Library, 2024), indicating that homeless youth experience a critically high level of unemployment.

The results revealed that non-native homeless youth experienced lower employment rates compared to native homeless youth (12.5% vs 29.5%, $z=3.81$, $p<0.01$). Moreover, it was found that non-heterosexual homeless youth experienced lower employment rates compared to heterosexual homeless youth (5.4% vs 31.0%, $z=4.57$, $p<0.01$).

It is further observed that only 5.7% of homeless youth were employed upon entering the present housing accommodation. The improvement in employment level (i.e. from the day they entered the present housing accommodation to the day they completed the survey) constitutes a statistically significant outcome (5.7% versus 26.3%, $z=7.9$, $p<0.01$). Among the employed individuals, they had been in their current job for 4.1 months.

[Table 1]

Table 2 indicates that homeless youth 'agreed' that the factors of living in the present housing accommodation were parental neglect (by 39.0%); relationship breakdowns (by 36.0%); physical abuse (by 28.8%); verbal abuse (by 33.0%); personal history of substance misuse (by 37.5%); substance misuse of a household member (by 26.8%); economic problems (by 47.0%); inadequate or inappropriate living

conditions (by 47.2%); inadequate social care during childhood (by 19.4%); and a history of personal physical and/or mental health illness (by 34.0%).

[Table 2]

Table 3 indicates that homeless youth have ‘often’ utilised physical, mental health, and well-being services (by 18.9%); educational and vocational training services (by 11.9%); mentoring, life-skill, and legal advice services (by 14.2%); and employment and job search support services offered by bodies supporting homeless youth (by 14.4%). The data indicates that, on average, more than 30% of homeless youth have never utilised the aforementioned support services.

[Table 3]

Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients of homeless youth. It is found that homeless youth’s employment levels are negatively correlated with the factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale, $r=-0.16$, $p<0.01$); non-native status ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.01$); non-heterosexual status ($r=-0.22$, $p<0.01$); and childcare responsibilities (-0.14 , $p<0.01$). Conversely, homeless youth’s employment levels are positively correlated with the utilisation of support services (SSYH scale, $r=0.31$, $p<0.01$); good general health status ($r=0.43$, $p<0.01$); and older age ($r=0.16$, $p<0.01$).

[Table 4]

7. Estimates

7.1 Determining factors of employment

In Table 5, Model I presents the employment estimates for homeless youth. The empirical framework evaluates the likelihood of employment compared to unemployment and economic inactivity. A negative association is found between the factors of youth homelessness and the employment levels of homeless youth (m.e. = -0.101 , $p < 0.01$). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in the FYH scale, there is an expected 10.1 percentage point decline in homeless youth employment, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Additionally, there is a positive association between the utilisation of support services and the employment levels of homeless youth (m.e. = 0.080 , $p < 0.01$). Specifically, for every one-unit increase in the SSYH scale, there is an expected 8.0 percentage point increase in homeless youth employment, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2.

Model II presents a robustness specification where the observations of inactive homeless youth are excluded from the regression. As can be observed, Hypotheses 1 and 2 can be re-accepted.

[Table 5]

7.2 Determining factors of employment: Testing scales’ items

Table 6 presents that homeless youth's employment levels are negatively associated with parental neglect (Model I, m.e.=-0.047, p<0.01); relationship breakdowns (Model II; m.e.=-0.078, p<0.01); personal history of substance misuse (Model V; m.e.=-0.059, p<0.01); economic problems (Model VII; m.e.=-0.039, p<0.05); inadequate or inappropriate living conditions (Model VIII; m.e.=-0.050, p<0.01); inadequate social care during childhood (Model IX; m.e.=-0.061, p<0.01); and history of personal physical and/or mental health illness (Model X; m.e.=-0.044, p<0.01).

[Table 6]

Table 7 indicates that homeless youth's employment levels are positively associated with the utilisation of physical, mental health, and well-being services (Model I; m.e.=0.065, p<0.01); educational and vocational training services (Model II; m.e.=0.079, p=0.01); mentoring, life-skill, and legal advice services (Model III; m.e.=0.059, p<0.01); and employment and job search support services (Model IV; m.e.=0.061; p<0.01).

It is concluded that Hypotheses 1 and 2 can be re-accepted given alternative empirical specifications.

[Table 7]

7.3 Determining factors of duration of employment

In Table 8, Model I presents estimates on the duration of employment (i.e., months of employment in the current job) for employed homeless youth. Model I estimates a positive association between the duration of employment and the utilisation of support services by homeless youth (b=1.385, p<0.01). This means that for every one-unit increase in support services utilisation by homeless youth (SSYH scale), there is an expected 1.3 month increase in the time a homeless youth works.

[Table 8]

7.4 Determining factors of employment: Discrimination in the labour market

In Table 8, Model II presents employment estimates incorporating information on labour market discrimination. Model II estimates a negative association between labour market discrimination and employment levels among homeless youth (b=-0.123, p<0.01). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in labour market discrimination, there is an expected 12.3 percentage point decline in homeless youth employment.

8. Discussion

8.1 Evaluation of the outcomes

The study yielded substantial findings, supporting the proposed Model of Barriers and Enablers to the Employment of Homeless Youth, with several thematic insights emerging. First, the descriptive

statistics revealed that non-native and non-heterosexual homeless youth are overrepresented in housing accommodations, with their numbers exceeding the UK average for the relevant youth categories. The study acknowledges that stigma related to demographic characteristics may disproportionately expose marginalized communities to homelessness (Drydakis et al., 2023; Drydakis, 2024a; Gowan, 2010).

Second, the descriptive statistics indicated that only a quarter of homeless youth in housing accommodations were employed, with unemployment rates among this group significantly exceeding the UK average for youth unemployment. Correlation analysis further suggested that non-native and non-heterosexual homeless youth experienced lower employment levels than their native and heterosexual counterparts. An intersectional approach is necessary to assess the lived realities of these youth and to design appropriate employment support for those facing higher unemployment rates (Drydakis et al., 2023; Drydakis, 2024a).

Third, the descriptive statistics demonstrated a significant increase in the employment rate of homeless youth in housing accommodation. This pattern suggests that homeless youth may experience positive employment outcomes once they enter housing accommodation and receive support (Centrepoint, 2023; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013).

Fourth, the descriptive statistics showed that a substantial proportion of homeless youth living in housing accommodation had never accessed the support services provided by local authorities, charities, and councils. This finding highlights the practical implications of capability theory, suggesting that policies must not only provide resources but also ensure their accessibility and effective use (Nussbaum, 2000).

Fifth, the regression results revealed that several factors, such as parental neglect, substance misuse, economic difficulties, inadequate social care during childhood, and deteriorating physical and/or mental health, were linked to reduced employment levels among homeless youth. These factors can be mapped to Nussbaum's (2000) capabilities framework, illustrating how deprivation in one or more areas can significantly impair the overall functioning and agency of homeless youth. The study advocated a multidimensional approach to understanding the factors contributing to employment rates among homeless youth.

Sixth, the regression results indicated that employment levels among homeless youth were positively associated with access to physical and mental health services, well-being support, educational and vocational training, mentoring, life skills and legal advice, as well as employment and job search assistance. This pattern underscores the effectiveness of policies implemented by organisations supporting homeless youth (Centrepoint, 2023), aligning with Nussbaum's (2000) view that various capabilities are essential and should be addressed collectively.

Seventh, the regression outcomes suggested that the duration of employment (i.e., the actual months of employment) was positively associated with the use of support services by homeless youth.

This reinforces the positive impact of support services provided by organisations catering to the needs of homeless youth (Centrepoint, 2023; Sage Foundation, 2017). This finding contributes to capability theory by demonstrating that support services can lead to relatively long-term improvements in employment among homeless youth, highlighting the importance of ongoing and consistent interventions.

Eighth, the regression outcomes indicated that labour market discrimination can reduce employment prospects for homeless youth, drawing attention to the multiple challenges and stigmas they may experience in society (Drydak, 2024a; Centrepoint, 2023).

8.2 Policy implications

A comprehensive strategy should incorporate preventative measures, support services, and targeted interventions to tackle the root causes of youth homelessness and offer holistic support to vulnerable youth populations. The objective is to enhance the capabilities, functioning, and agency of vulnerable youth, empowering them to lead fulfilling lives and achieve their goals. Policymakers should consider the effectiveness of early interventions, which could save significant money in the long run by reducing the risk of youth remaining homeless, entering the correctional system, or developing worsening health conditions (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013). Implementing preventative measures such as family reunification interventions, family counselling, and conflict resolution programmes can address issues before they lead to homelessness (Grattan et al., 2022; Braciszewski et al., 2016). Schools and local councils can play a pivotal role in identifying at-risk youth and providing necessary support.

Addressing inadequate housing through assistance programmes and initiatives to improve housing quality can provide essential stability for vulnerable youth (Grattan et al., 2022; Braciszewski et al., 2016). Furthermore, integrating mental health support services can address challenges that may hinder youth employment prospects, fostering a more holistic approach to supporting vulnerable youth. Substance misuse treatment programmes can also help address interconnected issues, providing assistance to vulnerable youth grappling with addiction and its consequences.

If youth experience homelessness, building their capabilities through support services should cover a range of domains, including safety, shelter, food, physical and mental health, education, financial support, meaningful social relationships, mentoring, life skills, intellectual skills, and employment training (Morton et al., 2020; Dettlaff et al., 2017; Altena et al., 2010; Nussbaum, 2000). Homeless youth should have easy access to housing accommodations to ensure they are not excluded from available support services (Braciszewski et al., 2016; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013). Collaborating with housing associations and local councils to develop schemes that provide long-term housing solutions is essential. Designing educational programmes that correspond to in-demand market skills is also crucial for smooth integration into the labour market (Drydak, 2024b). Furthermore, creating partnerships with local

businesses to offer internships and apprenticeships provides hands-on experience, helps homeless youth develop practical skills, and builds a professional network (Tanekenov et al., 2018).

Finally, policymakers should implement measures to address disparities in access to quality social support and introduce policies to counter systemic biases, with the aim of fostering a more equitable environment where the efficiency of social care is ensured for vulnerable population groups (Drydak, 2024a; Somerville, 2013; Gowan, 2010). These interventions should also aim to reduce stigma, discrimination, and exclusion within social care and society.

8.3 Limitations and future work

Despite the rich outcomes presented, the current study has limitations. The realities of homeless youth who did not participate in the research are not captured, leading to results that are not representative of the entire population. Similarly, social desirability or recall bias might be present if homeless youth provided answers, they believed were more socially acceptable or favourable, and inaccurately remembered or reported past events or experiences.

The study focused on three urban cities in England. A sampling bias might occur if the study's sample did not accurately represent the population. Future research should aim to collect data from a wider array of geographical locations across the UK to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting homeless youth's employment prospects. Similarly, the study focused on homeless youth aged 18 to 25, living in urban housing accommodations. Future studies should consider including a broader age range and diverse living conditions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and needs of homeless youth.

Finally, future research should employ longitudinal designs to establish causality, helping to understand the direct and indirect pathways through which support services influence employment outcomes among homeless youth.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics. Socio-demographic characteristics of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

Variables	Means (standard deviations)
Age (c.)	22.0 (1.64)
Men (%)	41.04 (0.49)
Non-British (%)	19.90 (0.39)
Non-heterosexuals (%)	18.15 (0.38)
Higher or vocational education (%)	6.46 (0.24)
Students (%)	3.23 (0.17)
Childcare responsibilities (%)	10.44 (0.30)
Employed (%)	26.36 (0.44)
Unemployed (%)	43.78 (0.49)
Duration of employment; months (c.)	4.18 (2.60)
Living in the present housing accommodation for more than six months (%)	43.03 (0.49)
Employed when entering the present housing accommodation (%)	5.72 (0.23)
General health status (c.)	55.68 (8.82)
Labour market discrimination (c.)	1.5 (0.77)
City 1 (%)	50.74 (0.50)
City 2 (%)	24.12 (0.42)
City 3 (%)	25.12 (0.43)

Notes: Observations n=402. (c.) Continuous variable. Source: Author's own creation.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics. Factors of youth homelessness. Means, standard errors and standard deviations.

Scale's items	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither disagree nor agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Continuous value (c)
Homelessness due to parental neglect	12.93 [0.01]	14.42 [0.01]	14.42 [0.01]	39.05 [0.02]	19.15 [0.01]	2.37 (1.29)
Homelessness due to relationship breakdowns	4.97 [0.01]	18.40 [0.01]	16.16 [0.01]	36.06 [0.02]	24.37 [0.02]	2.56 (1.18)
Homelessness due to physical abuse in households	30.09 [0.02]	19.65 [0.01]	14.42 [0.01]	28.85 [0.02]	6.96 [0.01]	1.62 (1.35)
Homelessness due to verbal abuse in households	12.18 [0.01]	27.36 [0.02]	7.71 [0.01]	33.08 [0.02]	19.65 [0.01]	2.20 (1.35)
Homelessness due to personal history of substance misuse	8.95 [0.01]	19.15 [0.01]	19.15 [0.01]	37.56 [0.02]	15.17 [0.01]	2.30 (1.20)
Homelessness due to substance misuse of a household member	22.38 [0.02]	13.93 [0.01]	28.10 [0.02]	26.86 [0.02]	8.70 [0.01]	1.85 (1.27)
Homelessness due to economic problems	5.72 [0.01]	11.94 [0.01]	11.94 [0.01]	47.01 [0.02]	23.38 [0.02]	2.70 (1.12)
Homelessness due to inadequate or inappropriate living conditions	6.71 [0.01]	11.19 [0.01]	12.18 [0.01]	47.26 [0.02]	22.63 [0.02]	2.67 (1.14)
Homelessness due to inadequate social care during childhood	27.11 [0.02]	16.91 [0.01]	23.63 [0.02]	19.40 [0.01]	12.93 [0.01]	1.74 (1.37)
Homelessness due to a history of personal physical and/or mental health illness	13.68 [0.01]	17.16 [0.01]	14.92 [0.01]	34.07 [0.02]	20.14 [0.02]	2.29 (1.33)
Factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale)	-	-	-	-	-	2.23 (0.80)

Notes: Observations n=402. Standard errors are in brackets. Standard deviations are in parentheses. (c.) Continuous variable.

Source: Author's own creation.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics. Utilisation of support services by homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings . Means, standard errors and standard deviations

Scale's items	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Continuous value (c)
Utilisation of physical, mental health, and well-being services	35.57 [0.02]	24.87 [0.02]	14.67 [0.01]	18.90 [0.01]	5.97 [0.01]	1.34 (1.29)
Utilisation of educational, and vocational training services	39.55 [0.02]	21.39 [0.02]	18.40 [0.01]	11.94 [0.01]	8.70 [0.01]	1.28 (1.32)
Utilisation of mentoring, life-skills, and legal advice services	32.08 [0.02]	30.09 [0.02]	15.67 [0.01]	14.42 [0.01]	7.71 [0.01]	1.35 (1.27)
Utilisation of employment, and job search support services	29.10 [0.02]	36.81 [0.02]	14.67 [0.01]	14.42 [0.01]	4.97 [0.01]	1.29 (1.17)
Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth (SSHY scale)	-	-	-	-	-	1.32 (1.16)

Notes: Observations n=402. Standard errors are in brackets. Standard deviations are in parentheses. (c.) Continuous variable.

Source: Author's own creation.

Table 4. Correlation coefficients. Employment levels of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

	Panel I: Employment levels
Factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale)	-0.16 (0.00)***
Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth (SSHY scale)	0.31 (0.00)***
Age	0.16 (0.00)***
Men	-0.01 (0.72)
Non-British	-0.15 (0.00)***
Non-heterosexuals	-0.22 (0.00)***
Higher or vocational education	0.02 (0.59)
Students	0.05 (0.31)
Childcare responsibilities	-0.14 (0.02)***
General health status	0.43 (0.00)***
Living in the present housing accommodation for more than six months	-0.02 (0.55)
Employed when entering the present housing accommodation	-0.01 (0.97)
Labour market discrimination	-0.78 (0.00)***

*Notes: Observations n=402. P-values are in parentheses. (***) Statistically significant at the 1% level. Source: Author's own creation.*

Table 5. Probit estimates (marginal effects). Employment levels of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

	Model I[^]	Model II^{^^}
Factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale)	-0.101 (0.023)***	-0.126 (0.039)***
Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth (SSHY scale)	0.080 (0.016)***	0.119 (0.029)***
Wald χ^2	132.93	100.07
Prob> χ^2	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R ²	0.363	0.329
Log pseudolikelihood	-147.64	-125.231
Observations	402	282

*Notes. Observations n=402. (^) Model I includes observations for employed, unemployed, and inactive individuals. (^^) Model II includes observations for employed, and unemployed individuals. Each model controls for age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, higher or vocational education, student status, childcare responsibilities, general health status, living in the present housing accommodation for more than six months, employment status when entering the present housing accommodation, year, city and housing accommodation fixed effects. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. (***) Statistically significant at the 1% level. Source: Author's own creation.*

Table 6. Probit estimates (marginal effects). Employment levels of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI	Model VII	Model VIII	Model IX	Model X
Youth homelessness due to parental neglect	-0.047 (0.015)***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to relationship breakdowns		-0.078 (0.015)***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to physical abuse in households		-	-0.021 (0.015)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to verbal abuse in households		-	-	-0.022 (0.014)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to personal history of substance misuse		-	-	-	-0.059 (0.015)***	-	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to substance misuse of a household member		-	-	-	-	-0.008 (0.015)	-	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to economic problems		-	-	-	-	-	-0.039 (0.017)**	-	-	-
Youth homelessness due to inadequate or inappropriate living conditions		-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.050 (0.015)***	-	-
Youth homelessness due to inadequate social care during childhood		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.061 (0.013)***	-
Youth homelessness due to a history of personal physical and/or mental health illness		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.044 (0.013)***
Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth (SSHY scale)	0.081 (0.017)***	0.074 (0.016)***	0.083 (0.017)***	0.081 (0.017)***	0.084 (0.016)***	0.082 (0.017)***	0.078 (0.017)***	0.076 (0.017)***	0.081 (0.016)***	0.081 (0.017)***
Wald χ^2	128.05	138.47	127.04	129.40	130.36	125.44	125.11	135.73	143.17	132.84
Prob> χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R ²	0.345	0.374	0.331	0.332	0.354	0.328	0.338	0.344	0.364	0.345
Log pseudolikelihood	-151.77	-145.13	-154.93	-154.89	-149.68	-155.75	-153.52	-151.95	-147.37	-151.73
Observations	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402

Notes. Each model includes observations for employed, unemployed, and inactive individuals. Each model controls for age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, higher or vocational education, student status, childcare responsibilities, general health status, living in the present housing accommodation for more than six months, employment status when entering the present housing accommodation, year, city and housing accommodation fixed effects. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. (***) Statistically significant at the 1% level. (**) Statistically significant at the 5%. Source: Author's own creation.

Table 7. Probit estimates (marginal effects). Employment levels of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Utilisation of physical, mental health, and well-being services	0.065 (0.014)***	-	-	-
Utilisation of educational, and vocational training services	-	0.079 (0.015)***	-	-
Utilisation of mentoring, life-skill, and legal advice services	-	-	0.059 (0.015)***	-
Utilisation of employment, and job search support services	-	-	-	0.061 (0.015)***
Factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale)	-0.098 (0.023)***	-0.105 (0.023)***	-0.102 (0.023)***	-0.098 (0.023)***
Wald χ^2	133.50	133.88	133.35	128.71
Prob> χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R ²	0.355	0.376	0.346	0.345
Log pseudolikelihood	-149.48	-144.69	-151.53	-151.77
Observations	402	402	402	402

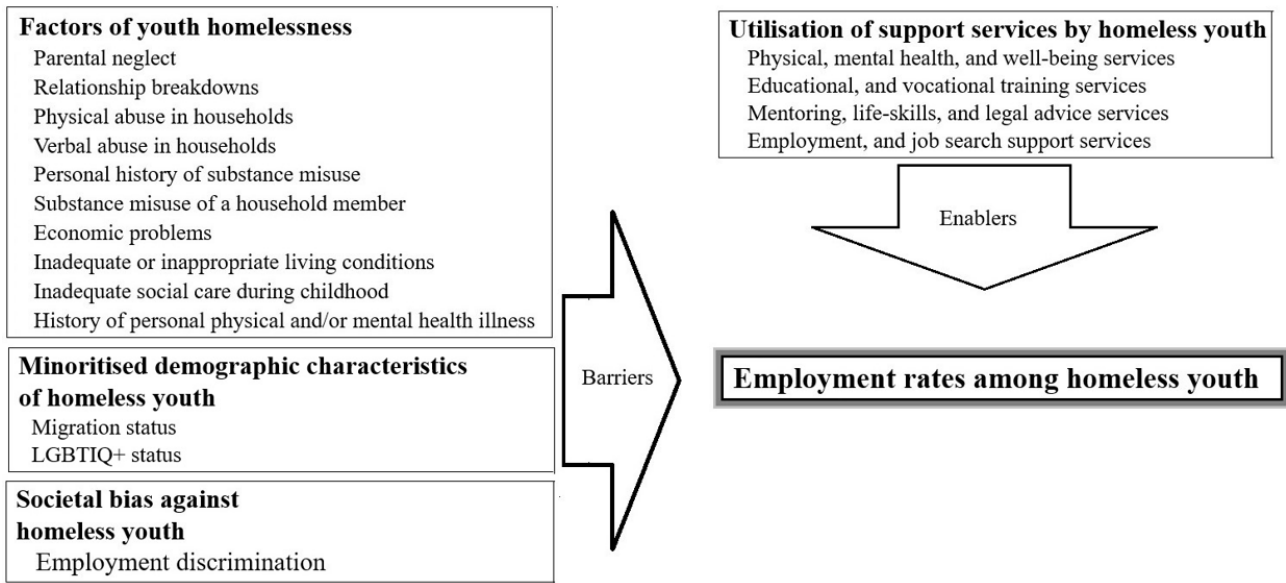
*Notes. Each model includes observations for employed, unemployed, and inactive individuals. Each model controls for age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, higher or vocational education, student status, childcare responsibilities, general health status, living in the present housing accommodation more than six months, employment status when entering the present accommodation, year, city and housing accommodation fixed effects. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. (***) Statistically significant at the 1% level. Source: Author's own creation.*

Table 8. Estimates. Duration of employment (months) and employment levels of homeless youth living in housing accommodation buildings

	Model I[^] Duration of employment (months). OLS	Model II^{^^} Employment levels. Probit (marginal effects)
Factors of youth homelessness (FYH scale)	0.111 (0.257)	-0.042 (0.021)***
Support Services Utilized by Homeless Youth (SSHY scale)	1.385 (0.142)***	0.021 (0.011)***
Labour market discrimination	-	-0.123 (0.057)***
F	36.87	-
Prob>F	0.000	-
R-squared	0.725	-
Root MSE	1.649	-
Wald x ²	-	138.84
Prob>x ²	-	0.000
Pseudo R ²	-	0.773
Log pseudolikelihood	-	-52.44
Observations	106	402

*Notes. (^) Model I includes observations for employed individuals. (^^) Model II includes observations for employed, unemployed and inactive individuals. Each model controls for age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, higher or vocational education, student status, childcare responsibilities, general health status, living in the present housing accommodation for more than six months, employment status when entering the present housing accommodation, year, city and housing accommodation fixed effects. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. (***) Statistically significant at the 1% level. Source: Author's own creation.*

Figure 1. Model of Barriers and Enablers to the Employment of Homeless Youth



Notes: Figure 1 highlights barriers, such as the causes of homelessness, minoritised characteristics, and societal bias, which hinder the employment of homeless youth. Simultaneously, it shows how the utilisation of support services serves as an enabler, helping to improve employment opportunities for homeless youth. Source: Author's own creation.