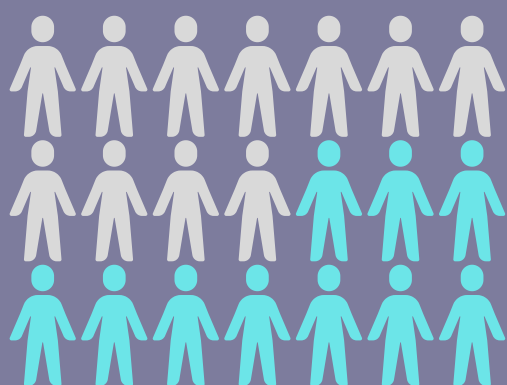


Home Matters 2021

Debt Adviser Survey Responses

This ESRC-funded project explores the court system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It questions the extent to which it has proven effective in addressing the risks and challenges posed by the pandemic and what lessons, if any, we might want to take forward into the post-pandemic era.

This leaflet offers a summary of the data provided by debt advisers. An analysis of the data will follow soon.

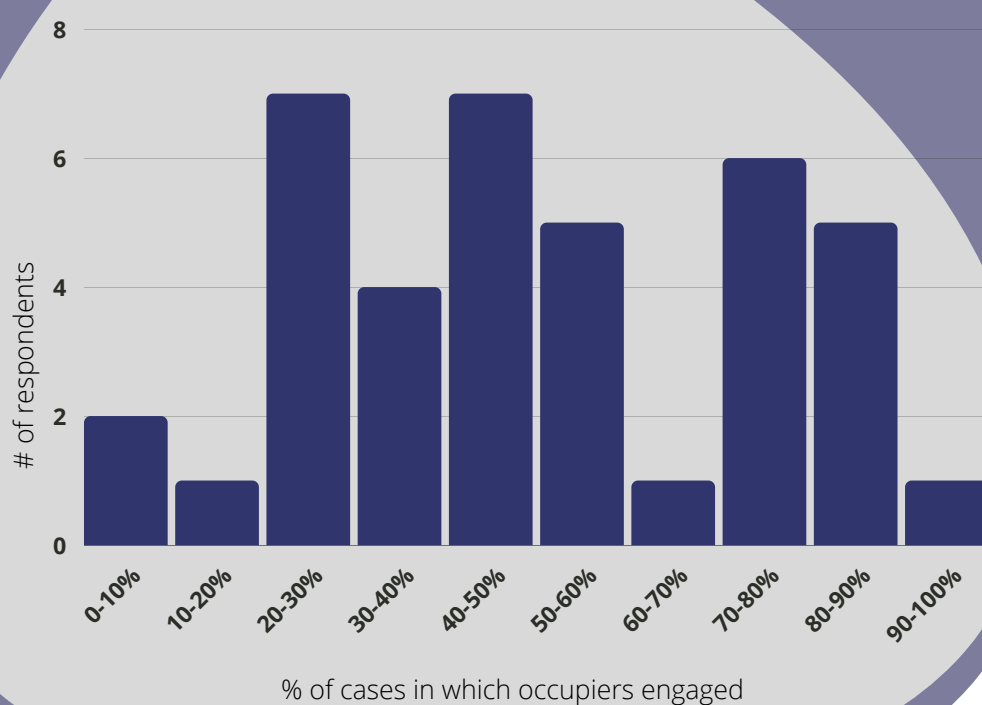


Between 15 June and 31 July 2021, an online survey was made available to debt advisers. Responses were received from 43 debt advisers who advised clients located in England, Wales and NI. We would like to thank those who took the time to complete the survey.

Occupier Engagement in the Arrears and Eviction Process

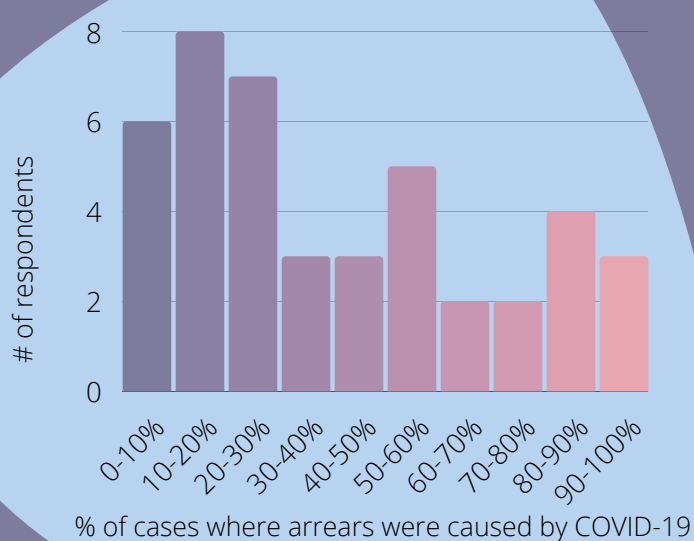
There was a mixed response to the question of whether clients engaged with their housing provider and/or the court system.

"Most people are genuinely terrified and tend to ignore their position until they are at crisis point."



"Most of my clients have mental health issues and so can go through a cycle of engagement and disengagement, and back again."

"Some clients are able to identify and look to address the problem whereas others are so overwhelmed due it being one of many problems and it falls into the same pile as their other debts that they cannot afford."



The Impact of COVID-19

A significant proportion (21 out of 43) of debt advisers indicated that very few of their clients cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a major cause of their arrears.

"The majority of my clients had rent arrears long before the COVID situation."

"Many have cited the pandemic but this is not the whole story. Clients who have claimed benefits consistently throughout the pandemic have seen their income increase slightly and... council tax has fallen. Leisure and travel costs have fallen too mostly. Obviously there are other costs like gas and electric and food that have gone up. It's not clear cut.."

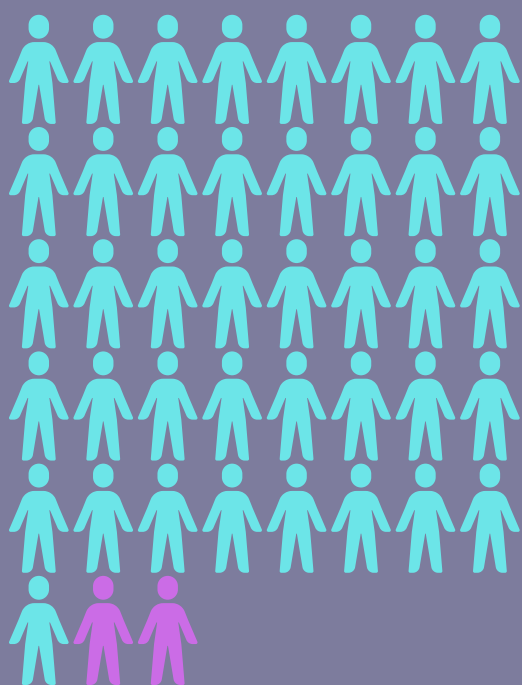
The Response to COVID-19

An overwhelming majority (38) of debt advisers thought that the variety of measures (particularly those designed to tackle household debt) put in place since March 2020 have been effective, at least in part, in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

"Some of the measures have been useful but in reality it was just a sticking plaster over a large wound."

"Kicked the can down the road only."

"The support has only put a temporary stop or slowed down action. The fundamental issues of clients either not budgeting and getting into debt or being in unaffordable tenure has not gone away. The mechanism to evict has been slowed/stopped during the pandemic but this is now moving forward once again."



Evictions in the Future?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 41 of the debt advisers expect to see more clients threatened with eviction in the coming months.

"COVID restrictions and support are easing but this does nothing to address the problems caused by the pandemic that sadly do not end with the relaxation of social distancing."

"I expect the real impact of COVID on household finances won't kick in until furlough has ended and the government have removed the UC uplift."

"Definitely expect more cases as courts pick up the pace on those who benefitted from forbearance during the pandemic. Support measures have now stopped in the main and we are already seeing action starting to ramp up."

"Undoubtedly coupled with the phasing out of the UC uplift this is going to explode."

"I have seen a lot of tenants accruing much higher rent arrears and landlords not taking action due to the government restrictions and rules changes. However, once these changes relax I think many landlords particularly private landlords will want their money back and will seek possession."

"Given the mountain of rent arrears this is inevitable but, where do the evictees go?"

Further information

If you have any questions about the survey or would like a copy of the full report when it's published please contact us at:

homematters@hull.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank all the respondents who took part in this survey. Sharing your experience with us will help develop an improved understanding of the possession process. It will also help us to put forward informed proposals that could help to shape the process into the future.

Special thanks go to the ESRC for funding this project.