

Working Together to Safeguard Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families

Part of the World Social Work Month Series



11th March, 2021





“You will have anti-GRT prejudices and biases. You aren’t to be blamed for it but acknowledge your biases...and do the work to unpick them. Engage with GRT organisations and activities. Read widely to actively combat anti-GRT media and stereotypes”

Chelsea McDonagh
Irish Traveller
MA Student, Kings College London

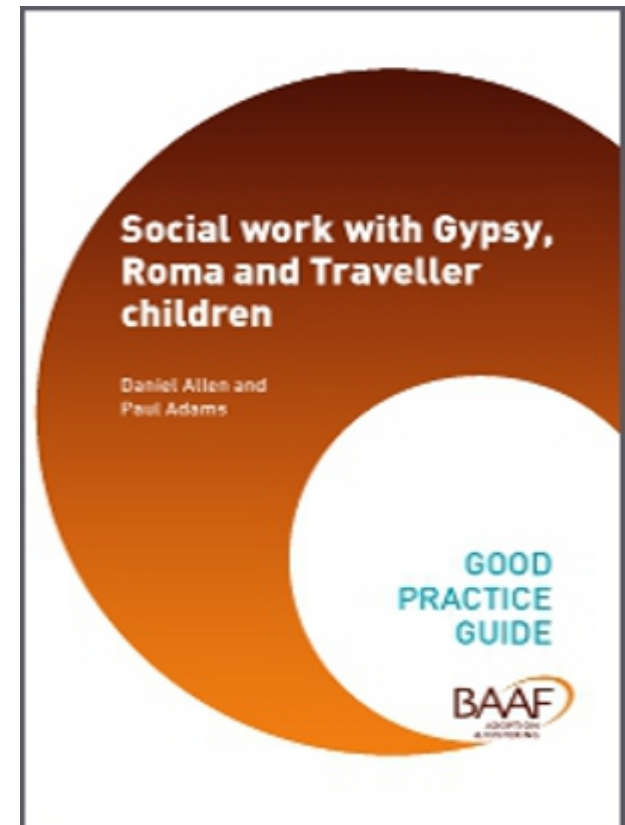


Time-line – a brief context

- 53 BC Travelling fairs are first recorded in Britain after the Roman invasion.
- 1100s AS Travellers first recorded in Ireland. Travelling blacksmiths mentioned in Scottish records.
- 1498 Four 'Egyptians' (Gypsies) travel to the New World with Christopher Columbus.
- 1530 'Egyptians' (Gypsies) are forbidden to enter England under Henry VIII. Those already living in the UK are deported.
- 1554 The Egyptians Act passed. This is the only time that fraternising with an ethnic community has been punishable by death.
- 1889 The Moveable Dwellings Bill.
- 1939-45 World War II - the Porraimos (the devouring)
- 1998-00 The amended Race Relations Act recognises Irish Travellers, Romany Gypsies and Scottish Gypsies and Travellers as an ethnic minority.



“Gypsy” “Roma” “Traveller”?



Questions



Contextualising Markers of Social Exclusion

- Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged people in the country and have poor outcomes in key areas such as health and education (UK Government/Women and Equalities Committee, 2019)
- Gypsies and Travellers also have the lowest rate of economic activity of any ethnic group, at 47 per cent, compared with 63 per cent for England and Wales overall (ONS, 2013)
- 26 per cent of Census respondents who were economically inactive (of working age) were disabled or long-term sick - the highest proportion across all ethnic groups". (ONS, 2011)



Contextualising Markers of Social Exclusion

2011 UK Census records a significant undercount in G/T population enumerating 39% of the G/T population were aged below 40 years of age. Median age: 26 years.

Average life expectancy of G/T populations in the UK has been estimated variously as 10-12 years below that of 'other' White British citizens (Parry et al., 2004).

The health status of an average 60 year old G/T person is similar to the average 80 year old White British person (Watkinson et. al. 2021)



Contextualising Markers of Social Exclusion

- Low educational attainment is often associated with disrupted educational experiences (linked to evictions/nomadism/early school leaving etc).
- Bullying in schools – strongly linked to negative stereotypes, racism and discrimination has been reported intergenerationally
- These experiences and a fairly wide-spread response of “take children out of school if they are not safe” has profound impacts on both educational attainment and trust in ‘authorities’ given wide-spread evidence that teachers often fail to recognise or appropriately challenge bullying towards GRT pupils. (ABA/FFT, 2020)



Contextualising Markers of Social Exclusion

- Only 3-4 per cent of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population aged 18-30 years accessed higher education compared with 43 per cent of 18-30 year-olds in the general population (Mulcahy et al. 2017; Greenfields, 2019)
- The HE Pledge
- Small but increasing numbers of young people from the community are remaining in education and evidence exists too of older/mature women learners entering HE following on from access programme; often as a result of skills developed through community work/activism or as they support children in education
- <https://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/gtrsb-into-higher-edu-pledge>



Hate Crime 'Hate as Regular as Rain'

- Research from Traveller Movement (2017) and Report Hate GRT (2019/2020); offer underpinning evidence of extraordinarily high levels of experiences of racism/discrimination experienced by communities
- 2020 Publication of report (Greenfields/Rogers, 2020) linkage between experiences of hate crime and suicide amongst the GRT communities
- Alongside high level of depression/anxiety/self-harm, suicide rates are x6 that of non –GRT population (Traveller Movement, 2020)



Hate Crime 'Hate as Regular as Rain'

Greenfields and Rogers (2020) *"Hate as Regular as Rain"* –
Comments from UK local papers 2020/21:

*"Let's face it the filthy bas@@@rds will camp anywhere and leave their
crap"*

"Send than back to Ireland"

"...because they are thieving scum and a blight on our planet"

"aren't a race any more than Liverpudlians are a race"

"Outer Mongolia have loads of free space for nomads"



What is the problem?

- Cemlyn (1998, 2000) survey/research into social work policy and provision for Gypsy and Traveller families) found evidence of low levels of contact other than associated with eviction, with assessment of need generally linked to enforcement action
- Issues of low levels of trust between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations and social workers were found in several studies (Cemlyn, 2000; Greenfields, 2002; 2006, Allen and Riding, 2018) linked to historical 'removal' policies



What is the problem?

- SW interventions predominantly occasioned by 'neglect' of child typically associated with poverty/lack of knowledge of the health/welfare system
- When social work interventions occur participants spoke about 'lack of support' from social workers in relation to underlying stressors – poor accommodation, welfare benefits issues, housing etc
- Stress of poverty/poor housing and lack of understanding of social work intervention can become part of a toxic stew increasing downward spiral. Housing issues repeatedly stressed



What is the problem?

- Lack of social work education and training
- Distrust of the system and external (non-GRT) society
- Conflict between *acculturation* (cultural change; what is expected) and *enculturation* (socialisation; how adapting)
- GRT hiding of problems because fear of stigma *within* the community
- Lack of understandable info/adequate translation
- A lack of representative statutory sector workforce (minimal GRT staff)



Questions



An initial visit

- In 2018, Allen and Riding (2018) interviewed 155 social workers with the aim to shed some light on the scale and nature of child protection practice with Romani and Traveller communities in England.
- During the interview, the authors asked each person to imagine that they had received a child protection referral about domestic abuse and that they had been asked to visit a child and family to verify the risk of harm.
- As they were shown each of the following images, they were asked to describe their thoughts and feelings, and to consider how these thoughts and feelings might impact on their practice.
- As you look at the following images, what do you think that they might have said?



Initial visit?



Initial visit?





What do social and say?

"...if I am asked to work with a Gypsy family. I will be afraid and have low confidence in my ability to dig deep and to carry out a detailed assessment. I would be so fearful of getting through the front door and if I thought that the parents will become more aggressive my ambition will be to get the kids out."

"Domestic Abuse can be common in the Gypsy and Traveller culture. Statistics suggest that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse. They are also culturally close-knit, less likely to report domestic abuse or ask for help because of what will be felt within their communities. To me that is scary - a major risk."

What next?

- The paradox of aversive racism – social workers, who, by nature of their professional status, publicly sympathise with victims of injustice, support the principle of equality, and regard themselves as non-prejudiced, but who actually possess negative feelings, views, and beliefs about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- **Anti-racist practice step 1** - promote the diversification of leadership within the child protection system.
- **Anti-racist practice step 2** - recognise that child protection for some Gypsy Roma and Traveller families is multi-issue.
- **Anti-racist practice step 3** - emphasis on grassroots organising
- Barriers and opportunities?



Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association/BASW AGM Motion



- Set up in June 2020
- Members from Romani/Traveller backgrounds & allies
- BASW affiliated

Key aims:

- Safe space for GRT social workers
- Improve understanding between GRT communities and social workers
- Improve social work knowledge/practice
- Initiate primary research/influence policy & strategy
- Further info: Allison Hulmes : Wales@basw.co.uk

Further reading



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- Allen, D., and Riding, S. (2018). The Fragility of Professional Competence: A Preliminary Account of Child Protection Practice with Romani and Traveller Children in England. European Roma Rights Centre: Budapest. Available at: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/the-fragility-of-professional-competence-january-2018.pdf [Accessed 25th January 2021]
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