



March 2021

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women in Prison

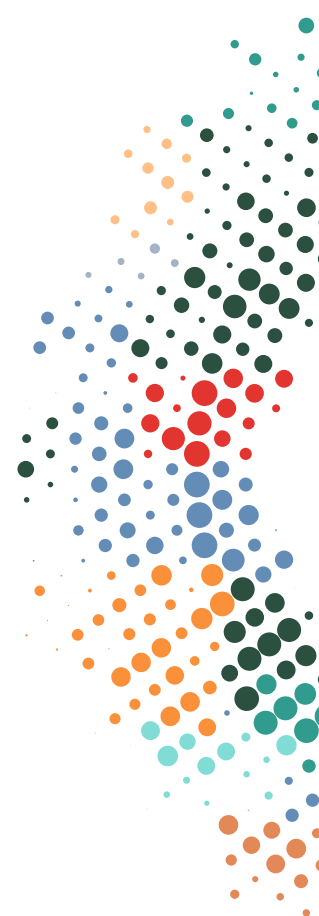
About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT). The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

Visit: <https://travellermovement.org.uk/>

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Acknowledgments

The Traveller Movement wishes to thank Professor Margaret Greenfields, Diane Curry OBE, Nancy Carney, and Women in Prison for their timely and constructive feedback.

We would also like to thank the research participants, and our funder the Lloyds Bank Foundation for making this possible.



Executive Summary

Gypsy/Traveller women had some of the poorest outcomes of any ethnic group in the 2011 census. We believe these poor outcomes, across health, employment and education are no different, and often accentuated for migrant Roma women.¹ The discrimination and marginalisation Roma, Gypsy and Traveller women face in broader society only become accentuated when they enter the Criminal Justice System.

Gypsy/Traveller women are overrepresented in the Criminal Justice system, forming **approximately 6% of the prison population, and 0.1% of the general population**. The population of Roma women is again on top of this number. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are over-policed, contributing to this overrepresentation.² Yet, their distinct needs are poorly understood and overlooked. Many experiences the severe pain of family separation, and they are often homeless on release, due to poor exit planning and a lack of appropriate housing assessment on release. **Over 50% of women in prison are survivors of domestic abuse.³ This will be no different for Gypsy Roma and Traveller women**, who will have differing needs when it comes to accessing support for domestic abuse. To support survivors in prison, there needs to be targeted support, specialist intervention and emphasis on placed release planning to aid rehabilitation.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women's **poor experiences of custody are in keeping with system wide critiques** of a Criminal Justice System that disproportionately impacts minority women through over-policing and disproportionate rates of custodial sentencing. As opposed to this system, which is largely made up of short-term custodial sentences for non-violent crime, The Traveller Movement promotes, **the use of out of court disposals, community sentences, better sentence planning and trauma informed rehabilitation**. If these reforms take an intersectional approach and actively include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women, a system wide move away from custody will benefit the GRT women in prison.

“Over 50% of women in prison are survivors of domestic abuse. This will be no different for Gypsy Roma and Traveller women”

1 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/whatdoesthe2011censustellusaboutthecharacteristicsofgypsyoririshtravellersinenglandandwales/2014-01-21>

2 Traveller Movement, The Preliminary Report: Policing by Consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Irish Travellers and the Police” Policing by consent https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/userupload/criminal-justice/TTM-Policing-by-consent_web.pdf

3 http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic_abuse_report_final_lo.pdf

Introduction and purpose of this briefing

The experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women in prison and the wider criminal justice system have been overlooked. However, The Lammy Review helped us shed light on the disproportionality of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in the Criminal Justice system and we are beginning to see more research that includes Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women's experiences in wider discussions on minority experiences of the Criminal Justice System.

This document aims to highlight the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women in Prison by bringing together sources of information, along with discussing how broader policy debates and discussions of wider reform can impact Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women. We also aim to highlight the different and diverse range of insights within the 'GRT' cohort and the varied and distinct experiences women who may identify as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller may have.

In addition to bringing together a range of research, we have provided examples of good practice through our own case studies and knowledge, as well as recommendations to implement reform that will benefit Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women. We have done this, alongside flagging a range of inequalities, poor outcomes and barriers to essential services that will define some Gypsy, Roma or Traveller women's experiences of prison.



Recommendations

1. There should be an increase in the use of Out Of Court Disposals (OOCs) for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women.⁴ There needs to be consistent ethnic monitoring to capture how these are implemented by the Police and address concerns that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are not being given OOCs.
2. Awareness of Public Sector Equality Duty and its positive obligations should be mandatory for all HMPPS staff, specifically in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women.
3. HMPPS should be reaching out and resourcing third-sector organisations, with specialisms to inform and deliver aspects of their race equality strategies.
4. There needs to be increased support for women accessing services on release and targeted educational programs that can build on entry level skills, and English as a foreign language.
5. Literacy may be a barrier for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women when making complaints. There needs to be more targeted support to make complaints in prison, and the system of complaints should be reformed to be more inclusive of foreign nationals, varying literacy skills and neuro-diverse needs.
6. HMPPS needs to accommodate for digital exclusion and digital illiteracy in setting up video-calling (to help maintain family ties whilst in custody) There needs to be assistance, to set up calling for prisoners, along with provisions given to all families of prisoners to ensure that they have access to the correct equipment and knowledge to make virtual contact accessible. This should include families not located in the UK.
7. Prisons need to become a trauma-informed place to inform best practice. Those with VAWG expertise and expertise in addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences such as bullying and discrimination, should be commissioned by HMPPS to develop a better understanding of the intersecting needs of GRT women, and how to overcome barriers within their own services.
8. Improved data collection. There needs to be professional safeguards in place to protect the privacy of Gypsy/Irish Travellers and Roma people, who disclose their ethnicity. This will encourage disclosure without fear of repercussion.
9. Roma ethnicity must be introduced into ethnic monitoring by Criminal Justice organisations. This will allow the experiences of Roma women to be better recorded and better included in calls for reform.
10. The Sentencing Act 2020 should be amended to create a presumption against short term custodial sentences. Community sentences, such as rehabilitative programs offered by Women's centres should be the presumption for women. Most women in the system serve short-term custodial sentences that produce poor outcomes. These women, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women would be better served in the community. This needs to go hand in hand, with providing further provision for women's centres to allocate funding for specialist training on GRT women's experiences and provision for any specialist services.
11. If a custodial sentence must be given, rehabilitation, education and a housing needs assessment should be integrated into sentencing plans to better support women on release.
12. Self-harm, mental health problems, gambling and substance misuse are potential key drivers for offending in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women in Prison. As part of a sentencing plan, women need targeted drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and targeted treatment of any other addictions in a non-judgmental and confidential environment. When sentencing there needs to be a continual questioning of what environment will best overcome the drivers of this women's offending.

⁴ Howard League, Arresting The Entry of Women into the Criminal Justice System. <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/APPG-Arresting-the-entry-of-women-into-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf>

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) ethnic groups

Gypsies, Roma and some Traveller ethnicities have been recognised in law **as being ethnic groups protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010**. Migrant Roma are protected both by virtue of their ethnicities and their national identities.

It is important to remember that similar to the acronym BAME, (used to refer to Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people), the acronym GRT refers to different ethnic groups and cultures.

The background for each of these three ethnic groups should be considered on an individual basis, as people within this defined category will have different experiences of discrimination based on their specific cultural, ethnic and religious background.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Public sector organisations are subject to the requirements of the Public sector Equality Duty to:



Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;



Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;



Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.⁵

However, the lives of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are blighted by discrimination and social exclusion. A Traveller Movement report from 2017 showed that 91% of GRT surveyed had experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity.⁶

In 2019 an inquiry by the Women and Equalities committee found that **successive governments had comprehensively failed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**.⁷ The committee's inquiry found that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a range of areas, including education, health, employment and the Criminal Justice System. This, along with evidence of systemic discrimination and over-policing are all casual factors that have led to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people being overrepresented in the criminal justice system.⁸

The 2017 Lammy Review also helped bring GRT people, into the discussions of disproportionality and poor treatment of minority persons in prison and the criminal justice system. Although none of the 35 recommendations were aimed at Gypsies, Roma or Travellers, it did highlight that these groups experience some of the worst outcomes. Further, the inclusion of Gypsy Roma and Traveller experiences led to the GRT Stakeholder forum that works alongside GRT organisations, professionals and Gypsy, Roma or Traveller individuals to allocate specific goals and strategies to improve the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in the justice system.

⁵ Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Equality Act 2010

⁶ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/reports?download=88:sep-2017-the-last-acceptable-form-of-racism-the-pervasive-discrimination-and-prejudice-experienced-by-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities>

⁷ Women and Equalities Committee, Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities, 5 April 2019 at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-summary.html>

⁸ Policing by Consent, n2

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women in Society

Gypsy Roma and Traveller women play an essential part in society and within their family. For example, the National Traveller Women's forum observe:

Traveller women play a central role in Traveller society. In the domestic sphere, they assume responsibility for child rearing, care of the home and the welfare of both their immediate and extended families.⁹

Gypsy Roma and Traveller women, similar to women in the settled community, are often the **key point of contact with frontline service providers** such as GPs, PHNs, local authority personnel with responsibility for accommodation, schools, etc. In this context, the well documented existence of **institutional discrimination and prejudice directed at members of the Traveller Community is more likely to affect women** than men.¹⁰

Times are changing and many young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women are staying in school for longer and obtaining a higher level of educational success. There is also an increased number of Traveller women undertaking voluntary work and engaging with society outside of the home. However, this is not the experience of all women, and as for all women, **norms around the gender roles are clearly divided**, with distinct divisions between expectations, decision making authority and the sense of value associated with each sex.¹¹

As with broader society, men are the dominant grouping (undoubtedly with exceptions), with more access to power, control and decision-making authority.¹² In addition, **strongly held beliefs, traditions and expectations** around accepted social and sexual practice remain prevalent among some Travellers, and **some women may have experienced shame and judgement if they have been seen to not conform**.

Further, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women still show poor outcomes across a range of factors.

For example, Roma women are more likely to have poorer physical health and the average life expectancy for Irish Traveller Women is 11 years less than the general population.¹³

Additionally, older Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women, still show less academic attainment due to **experiences of discrimination and exclusion in schools, and high levels of illiteracy**. Roma women may have faced segregated education in different EU countries, and may likely have negative experiences of education and engaging with services.

9 National Traveller Women Gender position paper (2013) <https://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/NTWF-Gender-Position-Paper.pdf>

10 ibid

11 ibid

12 ibid

13 Friends Family Travellers, Health Inequalities (2020), https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SS00-Health-inequalities_FINAL.pdf and Hearing Their Voices, Traveller Women in Prison <https://www.ssgt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Hearing-their-Voices-Traveller-Women-in-Prison.pdf>

Roma, Gypsy and Traveller experiences in prison

The 2019/2020 HMIP prisoner survey recorded the experiences of Travellers in prison. When comparing their experiences to Non-Travellers, some notable comparative data stands out:

- **64% of Travellers recorded having mental health problems**, compared to 46% of non-Travellers.
- **53% recorded having a disability**, compared to 35% of non-Travellers.
- **66% have children under the age of 18**, compared to 47% of non-Travellers.
- **37% said they had been prevented from making a complaint** when they wanted to, compared to 28% of non-Travellers.
- **29% of Travellers recorded drug and alcohol problems** compared to 17% of non-Travellers.
- **24% had spent one or more nights in the segregation unit** in the last 6 months, compared to 9% of non-Travellers.
- **62% of Travellers reported feeling unsafe**, compared to 47% of non-Travellers.¹⁴

As the male prison population is much larger, these survey responses will likely reflect the experiences of men. Gypsy and Traveller women will experience this and more. **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women will have accentuated needs arising from the intersection of being a woman, a convicted offender, and the racial discrimination and hate crime they may have experienced.** Regarding the later a 2017 report from the Traveller Movement found that 91% of Gypsy Roma and Travellers surveyed had experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity.¹⁵ Therefore, **these women will have distinct needs** that are not observed in these HMIP findings and the framing of the questions will not reflect the entirety of what led these women to offend, their experiences of prison and their fears about release and resettlement.

Further, picking up on the complaints statistic, Travellers are also less likely to submit complaints due to **general mistrust, and /or poor understanding of the prison complaints system.** This is the same for Roma, and unfortunately the lack of support in submitting complaints can allow poor literacy to form a barrier. **Several Traveller women in a study conducted in Ireland said that they either didn't know how to put in a complaint or had fears that making a complaint would make matters worse for them.**¹⁶ This observation of making matters worse, fits in with the HMIP finding that a disproportionate rate of Travellers are deterred from filing complaints.

The Traveller Movement advises that the HMPPS and HMIP includes Roma as a category on ethnic monitoring. **Roma people are an often unheard and overlooked group in prisons** and wider society. Despite Gypsy/Traveller being recorded in prisons following the 2011 Census, the Census is only recognising Roma this year (2021). We have noticed a trend to use GRT when discussing prison data that only records Gypsy/Irish Traveller, **it is important to differentiate that Roma people are not included in current prison data on Gypsy/Irish Traveller.** The data from HMIP surveys and all ethnicity recording across the Criminal Justice system is extremely valuable, but to date Roma has been left out. Emphasis needs to be placed on bringing a better understanding of Roma women's experiences, as a distinct group from Gypsy/Irish Traveller into understandings of disproportionality across the Criminal Justice system.

¹⁴ HMIP report https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/HMI-Prisons_Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2019-20-WEB.pdf

¹⁵ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/reports?download=88:sep-2017-the-last-acceptable-form-of-racism-the-pervasive-discrimination-and-prejudice-experienced-by-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities>

¹⁶ Hearing Their Voices, Traveller Women in Prison <https://www.ssgt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Hearing-their-Voices-Traveller-Women-in-Prison.pdf>

The Female Prison population

Women make up a considerably smaller percentage of the prison population than men. As of Friday the 20th of November, there was 75,580 men in prison, and 3,258 women. Not only is this a much smaller population, but there are distinctive differences between the male and female prison population. Including:

1. The Women's prison population consists of shorter custodial sentences and the use of community sentences have halved in the past decade.¹⁷
2. The proportion of women serving very short prison sentences has risen sharply. In 2018, 60% of sentences were less than 12 months.¹⁸
3. 80% of Women's offences are non-violent.¹⁹
4. In the UK, around 12,000 women are imprisoned each year.²⁰
5. Women account for around 10% of the probation caseload.²¹
6. Due to a smaller population, there are fewer Women's prisons. For example, there are no Women's prisons in Wales and the average distance for women is 64 miles but is often significantly more. This has an impact on visitations, family and resettlement services.
7. Over 50% of Women in Prison have experienced domestic abuse.²²
8. Coercion is a key element in many of the crimes that place Women in prison.
9. More than 17,240 children were estimated to be separated from their mother by imprisonment in 2010.²³
10. Minority Ethnic Women, (inc. Roma, Traveller and Gypsy) were 40% more likely to be convicted at magistrates' court.²⁴

A key area of concern is the poor outcomes for Women on release, as many face specific challenges and distinct challenges.

- 6 in 10 Women that leave prison face Homelessness.²⁵ Key drivers in this include, the lack of release planning, and the distance between women's homes and where they end up in prison, effectively severing family ties and previous support networks.
- On release, Women are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those who served community sentences.
- 58% of women are reconvicted within one year of leaving prison. This rises to 73% for sentences of less than 12 months and to 83% for women who have served more than 11 previous custodial sentences.²⁶

17 Prison Reform Trust, Winter Briefing (2019). <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Winter%202019%20Factfile%20web.pdf> pp.35

18 ibid

19 Table 2.5b, Ministry of Justice (2019) Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2019, London: Ministry of Justice

20 PRT (2019) n10

21 Ministry of Justice *Female offender strategy*, (2018) available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

22 Prison Reform Trust, Domestic Abuse, n3

23 PRT (2019) n,10 pp.34

24 Hibiscus – Evidence matters at <https://hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk/evidence/>

25 October 2020, Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison, Prison reform Trust, St Martin in the Field and London Prison Missions at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f452b14193e515746f79fcf/t/5f8631c5fca7701efa67344e/1602630087459/Safe+Homes+Initiative+briefing+FINAL.pdf>

26 PRT, n3.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller women

We believe a solution to the poor experiences and outcomes women face in custody is **to reduce the amount of short-term custodial sentences**. Minority women, are disproportionality imprisoned, therefore reducing the rate of short-term custodial sentences and allocating rehabilitative community sentences will take a step towards improving the outcomes of minority women, including Gypsy Roma and Travellers. These short-term sentences are rife in the Women's justice system and prove extremely ineffective, due to the negative impact they have on women's lives post custody. **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women are impacted by the destructive pattern of reoffending that short-term sentences create, and the experience of short-term sentences are disruptive, traumatising and have poor outcomes for these women.**

The Traveller Movement's ambition is to advocate for a reduction in the number of short-custodial sentences given. As noted above, these give rise to poor outcomes for all, including Women, GRT people and at the intersection, GRT Women. In agreement with the ambition of the Female Offender Strategy (2018) to reduce their use, **measures should now be taken to create presumptions against short sentences**. This is something The Smarter Approach to Sentencing (2020) should have included in its community sentences proposals for change, to help move the system toward creating a norm of community sentences.

As opposed to short term-custodial sentences, **community programs run by Women's centres in cohesion with HMPPS should have greater funding, and become the norm not the exception.**²⁷ These programs allow women, who may be victims of crime themselves, a first opportunity to engage with services that can help them with their intersecting problems arising from a range and culmination of: financial trouble, poor mental health, alcohol and drug problems, and allow them a chance to access support for abuse. Some women may have experienced or still be at risk of modern slavery and trafficking. **Prison is not the best place for these women** and despite the presumption that custody is a form of 'protection' (in reference to the 1967 Bail Act), **prisons are not suitable environments for women or men in crisis.**²⁸ Provision should also be allocated by HMPPS, for Women's Centres to uptake specialist training with other third sector organisations, to ensure they can accommodate the needs of different groups, including Gypsy Roma and Traveller women.

"In some cases, Irish Traveller] women have been stuck in cycles of reoffending due to being released into precarious housing, such as temporary accommodation, or being placed far away from supportive family networks. Some of the Irish Traveller women I work with initially reached out for support due to being released from prison into shared accommodation with male offenders. For survivors of abuse, this is unsafe and retraumatising"

Irish and Irish Traveller Domestic Abuse Worker.

²⁷ Nottingham Women's centre has a CHANGES program that has shown success in supporting female offenders.

²⁸ <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/APPG-For-their-own-protection-FINAL.pdf>

Even before this, in line with The Lammy Review recommendation 10 **there needs to be policy to encourage the use of Out of Court Disposals (OCCDs)**.²⁹ Lammy highlighted that minority people are not being offered OCCDs and we believe this is the case for Gypsy Roma and Traveller women. There needs to be reform to target this and it should go hand in hand with addressing disproportionality in the justice system. Gypsy Roma and Travellers, like other minority groups are over policed.³⁰ We endorse pilots such as the Female Offender Diversion Pilot, but recommend that specific emphasis needs to be put on diverting minority women, who are over policed and overrepresented.³¹ This should also include a trauma-informed approach to diverting women by addressing to root causes of offending. Women should be referred to women's centres for support as an OCCD, examples of police-led diversion programs include Checkpoint Plus and Triage.³²

Targeted provision should be given to better equip police with a greater knowledge on the barriers minority women face, and how **an OCCD can serve both the individual and society better**. There needs to be an intersectional approach to highlight that Gypsy Roma and Traveller women, and other minority women face disproportionate rates of imprisonment and poor outcomes following detention, the first step to moving away from this disproportionality, should come reforming women's initial interaction with the criminal justice system.

Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women in prison

Data problems

Currently, **Gypsy/Irish Traveller women make up 6% of the prison population**. This is higher in some prisons: 9% of women at HMP Foston Hall, 9% at HMP Bronzefield, and 10% at HMP Peterborough self-identified as Gypsy/Irish Traveller as part of HMIP survey responses.³³

However, this data does not include Roma women as they are not included in ethnic monitoring and is likely an undercount of Gypsy/Irish Traveller women. This is a shocking rate of **disproportionality as estimates for the population of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the UK are around 0.7-1%**. The 2011 Census recorded 0.1% of the population of England and Wales was Gypsy/Traveller, but this is widely recorded to be an undercount, and did not include a category for Roma.

The Irish Chaplaincy's Voices Unheard report, observed that data provided by staff of HM Prisons does not wholly enumerate the size of the Irish Traveller population in prison in England and Wales.³⁴

Further, what data we do have is not without barriers. The recent HMIP Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation and release planning report highlighted that GRT prisoners were routinely misidentified, across the system.³⁵

29 The Lammy Review, September 2017. (Recommendation 10).

30 Traveller Movement, Policing by Consent https://travellermovement.org.uk/phocadownload/userupload/criminal-justice/TTM-Policing-by-consent_web.pdf

31 Female Offender Diversion Pilot 2018 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/governance-and-decision-making/mopac-decisions-0/female-offender-diversion-pilot>

32 <https://womenip.fi-dev.xyz/support/our-support>

33 Prison Reform Trust, Counted out Black, Asian, Minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system (2017) <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Counted%20Out.pdf>

34 Irish Chaplaincy, Voices Unheard: A Story of Irish Travellers in Prison, (2011) https://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Voices-Unheard-June-2011_SMALL.pdf

35 HM Inspectorate for Prisons, Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: A thematic review, (2020) Section 7. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners: identification, relationships with key staff and rehabilitative work at <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/inspections/minority-ethnic-prisoners-experiences-of-rehabilitation-and-release-planning/>

There are several causes for this. Firstly, a **lack of confidence in disclosing ethnicity** for fear of discrimination from staff or insecurities around what the data is used for. Further, from preliminary findings of the Zahid Mubarak Trust and the Traveller Movement's A Record of Our Own campaign, we believe **there is confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the white ethnic category**, especially for Roma who are not included in W3 Gypsy/Irish Traveller (Research forthcoming, 2021).³⁶ This finding strengthens our call that there needs to be better communication and understanding around ethnic monitoring.

Further, greater training around ethnic monitoring is timely, as **Roma will be introduced to the Census in 2021**, but more work needs to be done to ensure meaningful participation and engagement. High levels of mistrust will impact Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, however Roma may be unfamiliar with ethnic monitoring across all CJS systems. This is because the UK is the only country in the EU to record ethnicity data as historically **for many ethnic groups across Europe this has been used to facilitate discrimination**.³⁷ To this day, this mistrust is well founded as, improper use of personal sensitive data by the police is common in Europe and contribute to minorities' lack of trust in data collection.³⁸ Therefore, levels of mistrust will be high in services that record data and confusion around the purpose of monitoring within prisons will undoubtedly form a barrier against engagement with monitoring.

This desperately needs improving. To do so, **trust needs to be built around data collection. There needs to be greater education around what, when, and how the data will be used.** Further, measures should be taken to ensure that there are protections in place for those that disclose.

The consequences of this are that there are **only small amounts of data covering the intersection of Gypsy and Traveller women's experiences of custody and the criminal justice system** and very little covering Roma women's experiences. However, it can be deduced from statistics regarding all Gypsy/Irish Traveller individuals in the prison system, and that of women in prison, that Gypsy, Traveller or Roma women's experiences are unlikely to be better than their peers. In fact, the specific intersections that occur over the two, **extenuate Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women's need for specialised and trauma-informed support in the Criminal Justice System.**

36 A record of Our Own webpage: HOME | Arecordofourown

37 European Network Against Racism, Equality Data Collection: Facts and Principles. https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/edc-general_factsheet_final.pdf

38 ibid



Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women in Prison and Domestic Violence

A further point of concern was the finding that **over 50% of women in the CJS are survivors of Domestic Abuse**, with coercion being a factor in many women's crimes. This is an area where GRT women in custody are likely to have many intersecting problems, and successfully tackling these, requires targeted approaches.³⁹

There is no accepted evidence to suggest that the rates of violence and abuse against women is higher for Gypsy Roma and Traveller women than the settled population. However, structural inequalities such as **discrimination, lack of educational attainment, unemployment, lacking access to accommodation and significant health inequalities** make it more difficult for Traveller women to move out of violent or abusive relationships and seek help through mainstream services.⁴⁰

The Women and Equalities Committee "Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities" notes that GRT women face domestic violence differently than other women, due to specific barriers in place for them when it comes to accessing help, reporting, and utilising essential services such as refuges.⁴¹ For Roma women, this may include **language barriers, literacy and intersecting issues regarding their migrant status or citizenship** post Brexit that hinder their ability to access essential services.

This has an impact in terms of probation. The Traveller's Equality Project stated that domestic violence was raised as a key concern when working with Traveller offenders. Several probation officers said they had dealt with Traveller women who were being victimised by their partners but were unwilling to report it.

Reporting

Like all women there are many reasons why there is a reluctance to report. For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women there are specific issues that service providers should be aware of that may be causing this.

This includes historical issues with the accessibility of police reporting due to mistrust and history of discrimination against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in the UK and the rest of Europe. As with many minority women, there is **a reluctance to call the police** and a well-founded perception that calling the police does not mean they will get the help they need or want. Further, there is a fear that **reporting violence or abuse to the police will engage social services and following a history of discriminatory practice within social services** against Gypsy Roma and Traveller families, there is a fear that children will be taken away from their families.

"Several [Irish Traveller] service users have recounted that their offending behaviour was linked to their experience of domestic abuse: either through coercion on the part of the perpetrator (including coercion into substance use) and/or offending due to destitution after fleeing domestic abuse."

Irish and Irish Traveller Domestic Abuse Worker.

39 Prison Reform Trust, http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic_abuse_report_final_lo.pdf

40 Gender Position Paper – National Traveller Women's Forum <http://www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/NTWF-Gender-Position-Paper.pdf>

41 Women and Equalities Commission, Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, pp.54

A leaflet by the Roma Support Group notes that health professionals need to be aware that **victims of rape and domestic violence are often stigmatised by their peers**, leading to an understanding that deters survivors from talking about their traumas.⁴² This is something that impacts Traveller women, as talking about abuse can be seen as “airing dirty laundry” and the interactions between a families or a husband and wife are considered to be private. Further, for some Irish Traveller Women, their understanding and experiences with their Catholic faith can be a powerful cause that deters divorce. Of course, times are changing, and not all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women will have experienced these attitudes and among the younger generation there is increased openness for the topic. However, this won’t have reached everyone, and as with the settled community, **rape, abuse and violence can be stigmatised**. This means a sensitive and carefully planned approach should be taken when professionals aim to cover these topics with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women in prison.

Accessing services and homelessness

Further, there are **issues with adequate domestic abuse services** being available to Gypsy Roma and Traveller women, as many organisations do not know how to reach out to these groups and make themselves known. For example, **Refuges have been known to turn women away as there is a Traveller site near**, or there is another Traveller family on location and many women are turned away as **they cannot bring sons over a certain age** with them. Negative experiences with services will be a barrier for women discussing their experiences freely, and discrimination across all services, direct or indirect should be acknowledged when seeking to offer support and build trust.

Finally, there **a lack of support for Traveller women when it comes to finding housing**. When looking for housing post-refuge there are pervasive barriers Traveller women face. It has been noted that “high rental costs in the private rented sector, failure on the part of the state to define domestic violence in housing legislation and failure by of Local Authorities to provide Traveller specific accommodation, result in Traveller women facing significant barriers to private and public housing”, creating barriers to sustainably leaving violent partners behind.⁴³ This makes **the finding of high levels of homelessness on release for women across the prison estate a point of concern for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women** who face barriers to housing on many levels. Provision needs to be given to resettlement and emphasis needs to be placed on finding women sustainable housing on release.

“Few of the [Irish Traveller] women I’ve worked with received domestic abuse advocacy during their time in prison and many believe this is down to the tendency for short-term custodial sentencing – leaving survivors with little time to develop a trusted rapport with staff to disclose abuse and receive specialist support”

Irish and Irish Traveller Domestic Abuse Worker.

“While in custody, survivors deserve trauma-informed rehabilitation and organised support pathways—across housing and domestic abuse services—prior to their release”

Irish and Irish Traveller Domestic Abuse Worker.

⁴² The Roma Support Group, The Roma Community leaflet <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/roma-info-leaflet.pdf>

⁴³ Hearing their Voices, n16

Loss of identity and implementing cultural competence

On an emotional level there is a **loss of identity, family and community** when women are relocated from abusive households and into the settled community and they will experience an enormous lifestyle change if they move from living in a trailer their whole life to housing.⁴⁴ These learning lessons also **apply when Women are moved into a prison environment** and away from a social setting they have known their whole life.⁴⁵ **This change can have enormous impacts on levels of anxiety, depression.**

In terms of offering support, it should also be a model of good practice for staff **to engage Irish Traveller women with the Prison Chaplain** throughout their time in prison. A priest can offer support, comfort, and a sense of normality through connecting positively with their religion. When looking to discuss issues such as loneliness, abuse, fear, mental health and so on, **women may not be comfortable turning to professionals or other essential service providers in prison due to a general of mistrust.** All women, not just Irish Travellers may be more comfortable turning to priest or other faith leader for support.

In line with this, it is important to make sure Chaplaincy is equip to accommodate these needs, through **ensuring adequate time, provision and training to enable the best support for the women** who may turn to them. Further, we believe that **education programs in prison given by faith leaders, to promote an understanding divorce in instances of domestic abuse is permitted and encouraged, can be enormously impactful** in reframing understandings of marriage.

The Traveller Movement recommends that due to the high rates of survivors in the system, **strategy must take a trauma-informed approach** to support women, and take a targeted approach to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors in custody. Importantly for all these women a trauma-informed approach must accommodate the specific and systemic socio-cultural barriers they face and acknowledge the interesting need and difference of experience within the 'GRT' cohort.

However, at a structural level, the function of short-term custodial sentences is a barrier to successful support itself as there is simply **not enough time to establish successful release planning and trauma informed interventions.** The need to address trauma, should inform a move from short term custodial sentences.

Irish Traveller Woman on her experience of leaving a long-term violent and abusive marriage:

“Were it not for my Priest stopping me and saying he would grant me a divorce; I would probably be dead.”

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ Margaret Greenfields and David Smith, A question of identity: the social exclusion of housed Gypsies and Travellers (2011) http://www.ssr.org.uk/members/files/2012/01/GreenfieldsSmith_3.pdf



Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women in Prison and Family

Family contact is important for the well-being of prisoners. This is no different for Gypsy, Roma or Traveller prisoners. Like many people, Gypsy Roma and Travellers often consider family to be of the highest importance. Therefore, **separation is often a particularly difficult aspect of imprisonment.**

Both men and women will suffer with the pain of separation. However, we believe the negative consequences are accentuated when Traveller women go to prison. A recent study by Clinks found that **far more women are primary carers for children**, causing a disproportionately negative impact to women's mental health and their responses to prison regimes, discipline and interventions.

This is no different for Traveller women who are at the centre of family and community life.⁴⁶ As noted earlier, Traveller women form the pillar of their family and any community networks they may be linked in with. They are also likely to have care responsibilities from a young age, meaning a support network may be removed when they are imprisoned.

The impacts of separation are further impactful on parent-child relationships. This is a concern, as statistically Travellers are more likely to be parents - the annual 2020 HMIP survey found that **66% of Travellers had children under the age 18**, compared to 47% of Non-Travellers. Furthermore, it was held that **7% of Traveller persons were arranging care** for dependents compared to 3% and **41% of Travellers were still contacting family**, compared to 29% of Non-traveller respondents.

⁴⁶ Clinks, Women in the Criminal Justice System at https://www.clinks.org/our-work/women-criminal-justice-system?utm_campaign=womensnetwork&utm_medium=Email&utm_source=October2020

Trouble contacting family

A point of concern for Gypsy Roma and Traveller individuals in prison and family contact was raised in the Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation report, that stated:

GRT prisoners were **more likely to report needing help to get in touch with family** and friends while in custody than other prisoners. There was **little strategic focus on this issue in prisons**.⁴⁷

This needs to be given attention, as with all groups, **maintaining healthy family bonds is key to rehabilitation** and this is no different for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women. However, the implications for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women who have families, and played a key role within often large family structures are, anxiety, stress, disengagement, fear for loved ones, loss of identity and so on.

This struggle for contact will have only worsened due to COVID-19. The **changes to visitations and family contact is something of key concern** for GRT women, as the restrictions to family visitations due to Covid-19 restrictions is likely to have a large impact due to the close family ties. The HMIP report observed the concern surrounding the loss of visits for prisoners and that delays in the promised national roll-out of video-calling had added to their frustrations and anxieties. We highly recommend that this be rolled out as soon as possible to maintain personal relationships. However, many GRT families face issues of digital exclusion that may leave them excluded.

It should also be noted, that **Migrant Roma women may have immediate family abroad**. Some Roma Women will come to the UK to work and send money to their family. This means their family structure and support network may not be in the UK. This should be accommodated for when supporting the implementation of successful remote visitations and maintaining family bonds.

In line with this, The Traveller Movement recommends that video-calling be rolled out with the amendment that support be given to ensure that families that are facing digital exclusion can maintain contact.

“On our tutoring project we found that many families only had access to mobile phone and the data package that came with it. Not having a stable internet connection makes video calls difficult, adding to an already stressful situation. As well as this, a lot of video calling software needs downloading, installing and having an account. For those with limited digital literacy this is a further barrier to communication”

Chrissie from TM explaining the problems around digital communication many Traveller families faced when they started TM's tutoring project.

⁴⁷ HM Inspectorate for Prisons, Minority Ethnic Prisoners experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: A thematic review, (2020) <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web.pdf>



Mental Health and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women

Gypsies, Travellers and Roma were found to suffer poorer mental health than the rest of the population in Britain and they were also more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.⁴⁸

In a 2010/2011 study of Irish Travellers prisoners in England and Wales, MacGabhann reported that, **64.7% of Irish Traveller Women were identified as having Mental Health Problems.**⁴⁹ A National Needs Assessment of Roma in Ireland also found that levels of reported poor mental health were extremely high. **51.3% of Roma respondents reported that for more than 14 days of the previous month their mental health was not good.**⁵⁰

Mental health is treated as a greater taboo than any other health problem and is rarely discussed. For many Women mental health problems may have negative connotations attached. This will impact on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers women's experiences of prison as there will likely be a reluctance to talk about their mental health and may have limited understanding of what this can include.

Suicide and self-harm

The government's safety in custody statistics recently outlined some disturbing findings of the impact COVID-19 has had in prisons. In the most recent quarter May-September 2020 there were 14,167 self-harm incidents, **up 9%** on the previous quarter, comprising a 5% increase in male establishments and a **24% increase in female establishments.**⁵¹

This is highly concerning for Traveller women as self-harm and suicide has been flagged as an issue disproportionately impacting Traveller people in prisons. **Traveller women are 5 times more likely to commit suicide** than the general population.⁵²

Shaming and 'scandalisation' of women are central to some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women's experiences of custody, divorce and domestic abuse. There is also a concerning trend Walker observed, that the shame and stigma which took place following an alleged criminal act or when awaiting trial for a criminal act, created a shamed suicide.⁵³ Thus, showing the intersection between shaming practices and the serve impact it has on mental health. On entering and leaving prison, women may be facing extreme external pressures that will hinder rehabilitation both within prison and on release. Professionals need to be made aware of the power online and in-person shaming structures can have on Traveller women and offer trauma-informed assistance around these. Support may be needed to ensure safety on release. Capacity building around addressing and overcoming feelings of shame and loss-of self would underpin a targeted approach to helping to support Traveller Women and enable them to have the tools to enhance Mental Health.

48 EHRC, Dec 2017: Race report: Healing a divided Britain, EHRC report on the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy

49 MacGabhann 2011 Voices Unheard, A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison <http://travellersuicide.ie/userfiles/file/VoicesUnheard.pdf>

50 Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality (2018) Roma in Ireland – A National Needs Assessment; page 97 <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf>

51 HMPPS, MOJ, "National Statistics Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2020 Assaults and Self-harm to September 2020", Published 28 January 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-september-2020/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-december-2020-assaults-and-self-harm-to-september-2020>

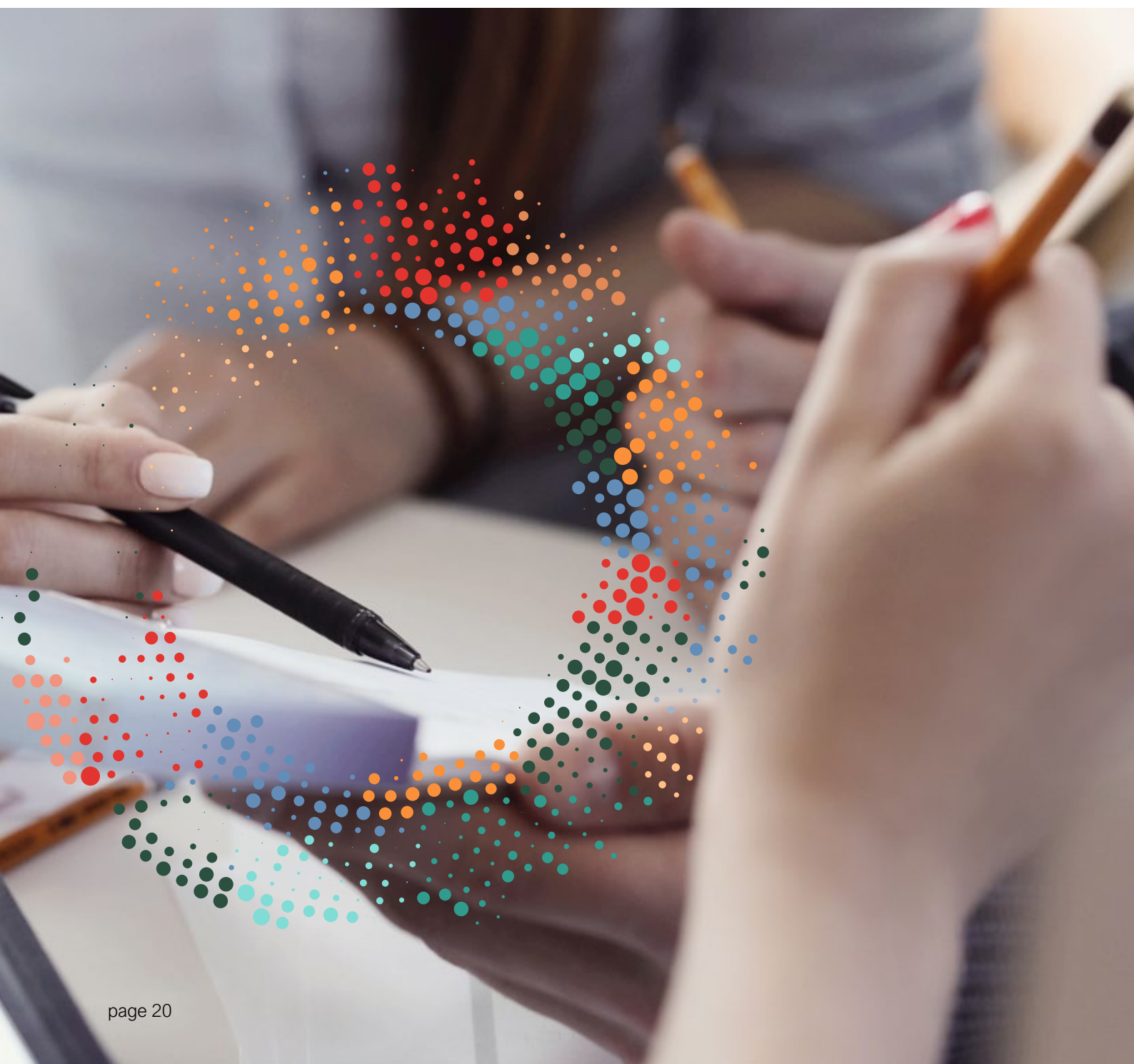
52 Pavee Point, Evidence & Recommendations on Mental Health, Suicide and Travellers <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Handout-Mental-Health-A5-8pp.pdf>

53 Walker, M.R. (2008) Suicide Among The Irish Traveller Community 2000-2006. Wicklow: Wicklow County Council, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/research/suicidetravellercommunity.pdf> pp 88-89

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