



# Breaking the Silence

Addressing Harmful Practices and 'Honour'-based Abuse in Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller Communities

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**December 2025**

### **About the Traveller Movement**

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

# Contents

1	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
2	<b>Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
3	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>7</b>
4	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>9</b>
5	<b>Quote from Irish Traveller Survivor of HBA</b>	<b>11</b>

## Acknowledgments

This peer led report would not have been possible without the bravery, trust and dedication of the Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller individuals who took part in this research – either as peer researchers, survey respondents and/or interviewees. Our sincere gratitude goes to all the individuals who shared their experiences and insights with us. We deeply appreciate the time, honesty, and trust shown by those who completed the survey and took part in interviews. Speaking about such sensitive issues requires great courage and generosity. We recognise that, at the outset of this project, there were differing views and some unease within parts of our respective communities. Despite this, many still chose to engage constructively in an open and thoughtful way. Your contributions have made this work possible and will help to build greater understanding, safety, and support for others in the future. We want to also extend our sincere thanks to the support organisations who agreed to partake in this research, the contributions we received have been truly invaluable. In recognition of the highly sensitive and sometimes controversial nature of this work and to protect confidentiality and safeguard all those involved, individual names have not been included. This report stands as a collective effort made possible through trust, courage and shared commitment to improving understanding and safety for all women and girls within our communities. The Traveller Movement would also like to thank our funders The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), London Community Foundation and Tudor Trust for their support of this critical work.



# 1 Introduction



It is a real honour to write the foreword for this landmark report by the Traveller Movement. The courage, insight, and honesty of the survivors who contributed to this research cannot be overstated. They have generously shared experiences that are deeply personal, and in doing so, have created a powerful foundation for understanding and action. The Traveller Movement's leadership in centring these voices, and in guiding this work with sensitivity and respect, is truly exemplary.

At Karma Nirvana, over the past year, our national honour-based abuse helpline has responded to 14 cases from the Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller communities. We know this represents only the tip of the iceberg, as this report carefully highlights. Countless individuals are affected but may not yet recognise their experiences as abuse or may not feel able to reach out for support. While the helpline has supported a relatively small number of cases from Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller communities, it highlights the importance of understanding and responding effectively to different needs. To ensure that their voices and perspectives are central to our work, Lisa, a member of the Traveller community, sits on our Survivor Advisory Panel, bringing vital lived experience and insight to guide our approach.

This report provides crucial insight into the lived realities of Honour Based Abuse in Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish, and Irish Traveller communities. It emphasises the urgent need for safe, confidential, and culturally informed support, and the importance of listening to survivors on a case-by-case basis rather than making assumptions based on “culture” or community identity.

Work like this is transformative. By shining a spotlight on these abuses, acknowledging their existence, and providing practical guidance for support, the Traveller Movement and the survivors who contributed are driving the shifts and changes needed to protect future generations and ensure that every victim-survivor can be seen, heard, and supported.

This report is not just research – it is a call to action. It is a testament to the bravery of survivors, the dedication of the Traveller Movement, and the urgent need for all of us to act. May it inspire services, policymakers, and communities alike to ensure that no survivor of Honour Based Abuse is ever left invisible or unheard again.

**Natasha Rattu CEO,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Natasha Rattu'.

**Karma Nirvana**

## 2 Overview

**This report primarily aims to examine the prevalence and forms of ‘harmful practices’ (HP) and “honour” based abuse’ (HBA) within the Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities. The research also explores whether this terminology should be used in reference to the different communities and what support organisations can do to better support victim-survivors from the Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities. A secondary aim of this research has been to raise awareness amongst individuals from the different communities about HP and HBA, and to start up the conversation about these difficult topics.**



## **The report concludes that support organisations should avoid making assumptions about individuals from the different communities and their experiences with different forms of HP and HBA.**

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In undertaking this research, the Traveller Movement has aimed to ensure that:

- Victim-survivors are supported to understand their rights and recognise when behaviour crosses into control or abuse, even when it is justified as protecting family honour or reputation;
- Mainstream and specialist services are equipped to respond with cultural understanding and sensitivity, and
- Community and sector organisations have the confidence and knowledge to identify, address, and safely refer cases where there is risk.

The findings, gathered from surveys and interviews with community members and support organisations, indicate that some forms of HP and HBA do occur within the different communities. The evidence points to the following:

‘Shame/Scandal’ is the most cited form of HP and HBA by community members and representatives from support organisations. Community members highlighted the high level of importance placed upon maintaining one’s reputation, particularly for women. The consequences of bringing shame and/or reputation damage upon oneself can be severe. Community members almost unanimously identified a need for support services to understand the impact of reputation damage on victim-survivors from the different communities;

The use of ‘lie detectors/swearing on the Bible’ was also commonly cited by both community members and representatives from support organisations as examples of HP and HBA that occur within the communities.

“‘Forced/early’ marriage’ was also cited by Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller respondents and representatives from support organisations as an example of HP and HBA within the communities. However, Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller respondents clarified in their interviews that ‘forced’ marriages were uncommon within the communities, although not unheard of. Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller communities more frequently referenced ‘pressured’ or ‘encouraged’ marriages as practices that may occur to protect a woman’s reputation and/or fix a damaged reputation.

Both community members and support organisations provided mixed responses with regards to the question of whether to use the term “‘honour’-based abuse’ in reference to the different communities.

**Crucially, the research findings indicated that *only* 56.82% of support organisations surveyed said they were aware of how to engage and support members of Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities who are experiencing HP and HBA.**

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The report concludes that support organisations should avoid making assumptions about individuals from the different communities and their experiences with different forms of HP and HBA. Crucially, the research findings indicated that *only* 56.82% of support organisations surveyed said they were aware of how to engage and support members of Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities who are experiencing HP and HBA. Based on the themes identified through the research process, the Traveller Movement team worked with the project's peer researchers to develop recommendations to tackle this lack of understanding. These recommendations consist of actions applicable to multiple stakeholders across the sector.

To ensure individuals receive the appropriate support, cases should be handled on a case-by-case basis. The report's core recommendation is the need for culturally appropriate, co-produced educational resources for Romani (Gypsies), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities on these issues. For community members to identify with language that is used predominantly by services, there needs to be a greater awareness amongst community members about what 'harmful practices' and "'honour"-based abuse' entails. Only then will victim-survivors from the different communities be able to make informed decisions about whether their experiences are adequately reflected in the language used by service providers.

# 3 Key Findings

- 1 Overall, **94.3%** of Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller survey respondents stated that having a good reputation is either ‘extremely important’ or ‘very important.’ Most interviewees from the Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller communities also highlighted the importance of reputation.  
.....
- 2 **57.2%** of Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller survey respondents said that they began to think about the issues of shame, scandal and reputation between the ages of 11-15, and **25.7%** said they were under 10.  
.....
- 3 ‘Shame/scandal’ and the use of ‘lie detectors/swearing on the Bible’ are two forms of HP and HBA that survey respondents across all four ethnic groups stated they have heard instances of within their communities.  
.....
- 4 The awareness of the term HBA varied amongst survey respondents to the communities’ survey. Combining the data from the survey and interviews, **51.5%** of community members in this data set said they had heard of the term HBA. **48.5%** stated that they were not aware of the term.  
.....
- 5 **51.6%** of Romani (Gypsies) and Irish Travellers interviewed said that the term “‘honour”-based abuse’ should be used for their community. **35.5%** of participants stated that the term shouldn’t be used, and **12.9%** were unsure whether the term should be used in reference to their communities.  
.....
- 6 **65.71%** of community survey respondents agreed that individuals from their communities could be at risk of HBA from their families or community.  
.....
- 7 **79.5%** of support organisations stated that they had supported victim-survivors of HP and HBA from the Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities.  
.....

## 3 Key Findings

**8** **Just over half (56.82%)** of support organisations surveyed said that they were aware of how to engage and support members of the different communities, however **38.64%** were not aware and **4.54%** were 'unsure'. This highlights the need for more services to receive community led training to ensure they are all providing effective support to victim-survivors from the Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller communities.

.....

**9** Representatives from support organisations provided mixed responses to whether HP and HBA frameworks should be used for victim-survivors from the different communities although most agreed that they would use this language if community members identified their experiences as such.

.....

**10** Support organisations identified a need for greater partnership working between different organisations to ensure that victim-survivors can access holistic support.

.....

**11** Support organisations also identified a need for training and improved understanding of the different communities, as well as the need for awareness-raising programmes for community members. Community members also expressed a need for culturally appropriate education on HP and HBA.

.....

# 4 Recommendations

Based on the themes identified through the research process, the Traveller Movement team worked with the project’s peer researchers to develop recommendations. These recommendations consist of actions which are applicable for multiple stakeholders across the sector.

- 1 Support services should adopt a person-centred approach and not make assumptions about individuals from the different communities or their experiences with forms of HP and HBA. Each case should be reviewed on its own terms, recognising the diversity within and across communities.  
.....
- 2 Training should be delivered to support services by representatives of the different communities around the impact of shame and reputation damage on individuals from Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller backgrounds.  
.....
- 3 Support services should seek to employ representatives from the different communities and provide culturally appropriate education to Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Travellers to ensure that community members are able to access information about HP and HBA in a culturally informed way.  
.....
- 4 Identify their experiences with the language used by services, namely HP and HBA. Service providers should use the language that victim-survivors feel is best for them and is reflective of their experiences.  
.....
- 5 All efforts should be made to ensure that support services are accessible, and that victim-survivors are provided with safe ways to communicate, flexible appointments, and face-to-face support if needed.  
.....
- 6 Statutory agencies and voluntary organisations should work together to ensure that victim-survivors can access holistic support, including legal advice, housing, education, mental health and advocacy services.  
.....
- 7 Education programmes addressing HBA, consent, and healthy relationships should include input from community voices to ensure relevance and cultural sensitivity.

# 4 Recommendations

- 8 Schools and youth services should be supported to deliver accessible materials that help young people understand boundaries, safety, and respect within their own cultural contexts.

.....
- 9 All agencies should improve the accuracy of recording Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller ethnicity within crime and safeguarding systems, including for cases involving HBA, coercive control, and domestic abuse. Without correct data, victims and trends remain invisible.

.....
- 10 The Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care should ensure that Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller women and girls are explicitly referenced in all national frameworks addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and 'Honour'-Based Abuse.

.....
- 11 Government departments, police forces, and local authorities must correctly record and monitor ethnicity data for Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller people across all safeguarding and VAWG datasets. Current gaps mean that abuse within these communities may be hidden or misrepresented. Better data collection will enable accurate policy responses and resource allocation.

.....
- 12 VAWG partnerships and funders should proactively reach out to and invest in small, trusted, community-led NGOs working with Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller women. These organisations often provide the first, and sometimes only, safe contact point for victim-survivors, yet remain chronically under-resourced.

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- 13 National and regional VAWG boards and wider services should include representation from Romani (Gypsy), Welsh, Scottish and Irish Traveller-led organisations and ensure accountability for inclusion in all planning, delivery, and evaluation.

.....
- 14 Although under 18s were not included in the research, the majority of community members surveyed (57.2%) indicated that they were between the ages of 11-15 and 25.7% said that they were under 10 when they became aware of concepts such as 'shame' and 'scandal,'. These findings indicate a need for tailored support for under 18s, particularly for those who are unable to leave the family home to access support.



When I was a very young child. I loved to colour in pictures with crayons.

I vividly remember colouring with great joy and freedom. It was a great big, coloured scribble. I loved it.

I showed my work to everyone. Then one day, I was told, ‘(\_\_\_\_) *you need to stay within the lines*’.

I was shocked, a bit disheartened, but I was determined to get it right.

The next colouring picture I was summoned every ounce of concentration I had and began to colour in with extreme intensity and carefulness. I did go outside lines slightly. I was crushed but tried and tried to get it right over the course of my childhood.

Little did I know this would be the plot of my life. Staying within the line of a picture that I didn’t draw. To me, this sums up honour-based abuse. You are expected to stay within the lines of the culture. Not daring to go outside of the lines even by accident. Again, it takes every ounce of concentration not to. The pressure is immense, and I became aware of it at just 4 years old.”

Quote from an Irish Traveller survivor of HBA





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