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## Disability and Discrimination in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in the UK –The Last Acceptable Face of Racism?

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# This Presentation

- Will explore what you know about Gypsy , Roma and Traveller communities
- Discuss the social work role with these communities –past and future
- Analyse a recent piece of research regarding Disabled members of Gypsy Roma and Traveller Communities



What do you know about Gypsy Roma and Traveller Communities?



Video: *Gypsies, Roma, Travellers: An Animated History* available on YouTube at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6wSLfGBVGY&t=7s>

TRUE OR FALSE?

Gypsies / Travellers are Criminals



They leave a mess don't they?



Gypsies can predict the future and  
lay  
curses



Gypsies are dirty

Only Travellers in Bow top wagons are  
Real Gypsies!



Gypsies and Travellers are work shy





All Gypsies live in caravans

# Why do most Travellers live in houses?

- Forced into bricks and mortar by lack of legal stopping places.
- Refused medical treatment unless they 'settle down'.
- Financial reasons
- Ill health
- Marriage

# What does this mean for the families ?

- Often feel that they have failed within their own culture
- Often feel isolated- neighbours may not understand some of the cultural practises
- Experience of racist hostility is described by families who are housed.
- Hate Crime



## Social Work Should Challenge Discrimination – until very recently we have not collectively done this with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (Kidd, 2020)

- Social workers are required to challenge the ways in which individuals and institutions discriminate against others (BASW 2014; IFSW and IASSW 2018).
- However, this can 'feel risky' (Dunk-West 2013, p.86) and require 'courage' (Trevithick 2012, p.347).
- Research has detailed the extent of risk, deprivation and social exclusion among children and young people of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities (Parry et al. 2004; Parry et al. 2007; Cemlyn et al. 2009; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2016).

# History, Policy and Power (Kidd, 2020)

- Marginalisation of the GTR community in Europe reached its climax with the Holocaust, or as it is known by the Roma people themselves, the Porrajmos, or the Devouring (Hancock 1987, 2007).
- More recently GTR communities have been subjected to policies based on racist notions that Gypsies and Travellers are in need of “saving” or corrective treatment (Powell 2008), resulting in a mixture of adaptation, evasion, conformity and conflict (Mayall 1988; Crawley 2004; Mayall 2004).
- The stereotype of nomadism imagines the entire GTR community as “involved in criminal activities, irreverent towards religion, harbouring sinister magical powers and primitive, as evidenced in promiscuity, dancing and baby-snatching” (Woodcock 2010, p.471).

# Challenges to Social Work

- How well do social workers know their GRT communities?
- What policies/ protocols / training do you have in your workplace?
- How might safeguarding standards be interpreted within GRT culture?
- Would friends and family be looked to as potential carers/adopters if a GRT child was judged unable to live at home?
- Do services for disabled adults in mainstream society, compare with those for GRT communities?
- Why is the suicide rate 6-7 times higher in GRT communities? (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2020)

# Discriminatory attitudes (Kidd, 2020)

- There is evidence of a lack of trust between social workers and GTR communities (e.g. Cemlyn 2000; Clark and Greenfields 2006; Cemlyn 2008; Greenfields et al.; Saltiel and Lakey 2020).
- Evidence of ill-equipped and unsupported professionals and widespread discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes (Garrett 2005; Greenfields et al. 2014; Allen and Riding 2018).
- As with other minority groups (Penketh 2000) intervention is more often at the controlling end of social work, with a lower level of provision of preventative services (Cemlyn et al. 2009)
- A lack of understanding and validation of GTR culture and lived experience can lead to “inadequate responses and the pathologisation of families” (Cemlyn et al. 2009, p.130), seeing their problems as related to cultural and lifestyle issues

# Project Call – 'MISSING VOICES' OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UK

- Very little was known about disability within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.
- We know a lot about the poor health in GRT communities because report after report has told us this e.g. Cromarty, 2019; Traveller Movement, 2017
- However, nothing has really changed for GRT communities in recent decades and oppression continues –housing policy / overnight stopping proposals / media coverage

# Mixed Methods



Steering Group –Disabled people,  
GRT members, Academics.

Met key GRT organisation's / Focus Groups.

Surveys via Social Media.

Film idea from communities (Action  
Research?).

Attended GRT Events / Conferences.

# The Research was carried out in 'Co-Production' with 'Shaping Our Lives'

Many different views on 'co-production'

- 'Co-production is not just a word, it's not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them'(Think Local Act Personal, 2011).



What do you think were the key ethical issues  
in this research?

A woman with a white towel around her neck is speaking. In the background, a man in a black shirt is signing. The scene is set in a room with a blue couch and a bookshelf.

and actively mimicking me,  
and it's left me with PTSD from the experiences

# Our Research



- Was designed to find out the views in GRT communities about disability – how it is viewed, how any services are accessed and any barriers that exist.
- At the same time we asked Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) whether their organisations were used by GRT communities and, if not, why not?

# Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs)



- Across the UK there are many DDPOs whose aim is to influence government policy and improve services for Disabled people.
- Most DDPOs state that 'their doors are open to all'.

# Combining Voices



We wanted to find out if there might be benefits, from both points of view, about joining Disabled people's voices together to improve the ways in which all Disabled people are treated and involved.

A QUESTION TO BEAR IN MIND? -



Is the real social policy drive to assimilate GRT communities? – traditional employment disappearing/ housing policy does not invest in sites / criminalisation of overnight stopping

Assimilation  
or  
integration?

# **THE TERM 'GRT' AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE CONVENIENCE**

**'GRT' DOES NOT RECOGNISE THE SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES**

**CONSULTING WITH GRT ORGANISATIONS, AND ASKING THE COMMUNITIES WE MET WE USED THE TERMS-**

- ENGLISH GYPSY**
- ROMA**
- IRISH TRAVELLER**
- WELSH GYPSY**
- SCOTTISH GYPSY TRAVELLER**

# 'COMMUNITY CONNECTORS'



- SLOW START – OVER-RESEARCHED / OTHER PRIORITIES
- COMMUNITYCONNECTORS-KEY TRUSTED ROLES-HELPED ACCESS
- ELEVEN FOCUS GROUPS (106 attendees incl. 10 men)
- VOUCHERS

# SUMMARY DDPOs' RESPONSES

- DDPOs who were interested in GRT issues had low levels of knowledge and contact, an 'our doors are open to all / we do not discriminate' type of approach being evident.
- It was encouraging to see acknowledgement that DDPOs have much to learn about GRT and that some interest was expressed in reaching out to GRT communities.
- Points were made about not collecting data on ethnic backgrounds but unless there are some measures of GRT usage, then the nature and extent of Disabled people's issues in such communities will never be quantified, making it easy for disinterested politicians or professionals to continue to marginalise such needs and lived experiences.

# Findings from Online Survey – GRT Communities

Distributed via social media by the Traveller Movement and Friends, Families and Travellers, resulting in 32 Responses. (26 female; 6 male) :

- **Age range: 22 - 68**
- **English Gypsy: 16** responses (15 female / 1 male)
- **Irish Traveller: 10** responses (7 female / 3 male)
- **Roma: 2** responses (1 female (31) / 1 male (41))
- **Scottish Gypsy Traveller: 3** responses (2 female / 1 male)
- **Welsh Gypsy: 1** response (female)

# Findings from Online Survey – GRT Communities (cont'd)

- Eight respondents tried to get help from a charity for Disabled people –most went to friends and family for help
- Complex and bureaucratic systems, plus long waiting times for services were cited across communities as deterrents
- Themes of mistrust and not being taken seriously ran through the responses

# Findings from Focus Groups

## Lack of knowledge

- First barrier would be language, I think, and second would be lack of knowledge of the existence of such services. They don't really know that they exist. (Roma)
- We didn't know that we had to get stuff, we could get stuff off the NHS, because nobody told us. We bought his bed, we bought his nebuliser, everything. (Welsh Gypsy)

# Shame and Stigma

- You wouldn't tell people what was wrong, you would go into denial. You don't want to be judged, you don't want people to look at you or talk about you differently. Especially men wouldn't want to talk about it. (English Gypsy)
- I think it's fear... I think it's fear because of being discriminated against so much in the past. (Scottish Gypsy Traveller)
- Back in the days it was like a big thing to have like a Disabled person in the community, it was a really big shame. But now it comes more often we see, we have kids, and we're trying to be more welcoming and understanding. (Roma via Translator)

# Presumptions made about the caring capacities of GRT communities

...when it comes to physical disabilities within the Gypsy Traveller community there's a very caring culture...there's a lot of kind of shared caring. People share it within families but also if you live on a site, a lot of people in the site will do what they can to help people who have a physical disability. I think when it comes to mental health issues, I think it's slightly different if people are maybe a bit more reluctant to talk about that. It's much more hidden.  
(Community Connector, Scotland)

## Presumptions made about the caring capacities of GRT communities (cont'd)

- So, the OT sent me a letter saying that because I was a traveller and I had a husband and travellers were very family orientated, that she didn't have to put a ramp in. So they never bothered for years.(Scottish Gypsy Traveller)
- If one family has a crisis, the family's all there for them, they help out each other. And if it's a disability we would help a little bit more in help as well with the disability, families that has disability, because we don't get much information, like we have to look for it our self (Irish Traveller)

# Houses or Sites – Differential Services

Further complications for Disabled GRT people arise depending on whether they live on sites, travel regularly or live in houses. One particularly stark example was given by an English Gypsy whereby moving to a house address brought about access to a GP and other health-related services 'overnight'

- ...services seeing that the only solution for Gypsy Travellers living on sites and in caravans is to move into settled accommodation and the only way their needs can be met is by being in mainstream housing .... There doesn't seem to be any sort of creative thinking around more culturally appropriate solutions. It seems to be just, the only way we can work with you is if you move into settled accommodation. (Community Connector, Scotland)
- There's lack of providers of housing, and most of them would go through private landlords, and they usually don't really accommodate disability, no. (Roma)

# Previous bad experiences of accessing support

- The majority of respondents reported numerous examples of previous poor access:
- ... they would give me some leaflets in English and would send me home, that's it. And they expect [me] to understand everything. (Roma)
- The doctor tells you they're fully booked, they don't give you appointments. (English Gypsy)
- One surgery said 'I'll take you on, but don't tell the others'. (English Gypsy)

## 'Doctor's Receptionism'

Remember that time ...you'd just get in the queue, tell her your name and she used to let a load of people in front of me, and I got fed up with it. So I stood up and told her... I got up and complained to the doctor. The doctor came down and gave her a bit of abuse anyway. (Irish Traveller)

# Previous Positive Experiences of accessing support

- Any doctor or nurses that I've ever seen with anything, they've been always very good. (English Gypsy)
- They give you good advice don't they? That's one thing I can say about them. (Irish Traveller)
- Some GPs suggest some places for you to get help and some places don't. We, as Roma, you know, we're very welcome people. Even though they have disabilities or they don't have disabilities. (Roma)

# Willingness to join DDPOs or similar disability organisations

Two of the eleven focus groups thought that they would not approach DDPOs, especially as they have never been reached out to previously. However, most groups were more willing to see what such organisations might offer to Disabled GRT, even with some reservations. In Northern Ireland, mainstream services seemed well attended;

- Yeah, I've been to a lot...I do go to them. (Irish Traveller)
- I mix in with not only my own community; I mix a lot with the community..... I enjoy mixing in with other people... (Irish Traveller)

# Willingness to join DDPOs or similar disability organisations (cont'd)

Most Roma participants had also either accessed some kind of disability organisation or were prepared to do so:

- On her son's part he will love to go to some place like that, because he likes to go some places like that (Roma-via translator)
- The Romas are quite friendly, in my experience they're quite sociable, and if given a chance they would, I believe so, yeah (Roma)
- Scottish Gypsy Travellers were more mixed in their opinions about whether they would welcome mainstream disability initiatives, or would only attend if 'run by our own'. Others reported already using a carers' centre and being really welcomed and accepted. Similarly, several Welsh Gypsies were able to report positive involvement in mainstream disability groups, both for adults and children.

# How to improve matters for Disabled GRT community members –Roma Views

- The Roma groups focused on language barriers and suggested that Roma interpreters should be made more readily available within disability services and organisations.
- Roma people were generally positive about using mainstream disability services .
- The potential of formats such as video were thought to be positive ways forward as was the use of social media.
- There was some support for forming a Roma disability network which might meet regularly have drop-in sessions locally.

# How to improve matters for Disabled GRT community members – Gypsy and Traveller Views

Gypsy and Traveller groups had more hesitation than the Roma groups regarding embracing outside disability organisations, largely because of previous discriminatory practices, which have largely not been the contemporary experience of many UK Roma.

The importance of reaching out early regarding mental health problems was emphasised, especially in relation to men, the need to get younger people to be more open being seen as important:

- 'I think you have to start from young mental health like the teenagers. Because the older ones, they're like they're set in their ways. And it takes a lot for to get through to them. So I think what they'd have to do is start to the younger ones and let them talk about mental health more. (Scottish Gypsy Traveller)

# Conclusions and Recommendations

- New ground was broken in opening up the discussion about disability within GRT communities
- Lack of trust, historical and present-day oppression of GRT communities continues, both at government and street levels, despite the work of community connector organisations, who are small in number
- Given the expressed commitment of organisations such as DDPOs to social justice and social inclusion of all, these organisations might now make more proactive approaches to Disabled members of their local GRT communities and begin to explore new partnerships.
- The four video films which accompany this report bring the above issues to light, and they also break new ground in the exploration of inter and intra-generational disability issues within GRT communities.
- The 'Missing Voices' project has started the disability conversation within GRT Communities, and we all have a part to play in further converting this conversation into action.

# Returning to the Social Work Challenges

- How well do social workers know their GRT communities?
- What policies/ protocols / training do you have in your workplace?
- How might safeguarding standards be interpreted within GRT culture?
- Would friends and family be looked to as potential carers/adopters if a GRT child was judged unable to live at home?
- Do services for disabled adults in mainstream society, compare with those for GRT communities?
- Why is the suicide rate 6-7 times higher in GRT communities? (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2020)

# **BASW INITIATIVES 2020**

Motion passed by BASW UK AGM – 'This Annual General Meeting calls on BASW Council and Executive to take a strategic approach to righting this imbalance in our profile, working together with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to bring about mutual understanding and respect for each other's cultures'

GRTSW Association Formed –to promote social justice / inclusion / best practice

Webinars / Seminars - expanding our reach

So, this is a turning point for social work and **WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY!!**

# Films from the Research (Film 1 -Rural Media; Films 2-4 RosaCenSis Productions)

- Film 1 – ‘The Missing Voices of Disabled Gypsies & Travellers’

<https://f.io/Uy8voDRp>

- Film 2 – ‘Missing Voices of Disabled Members of UK Roma Communities- Overview’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY5AMGtqRHU&feature=youtu.be>

- Film 3 - ‘Our Doors are Open to All’

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhWi\\_6YVEGg&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhWi_6YVEGg&feature=youtu.be)

- Film 4 – ‘Missing Voices- Voices of Disabled Roma in UK’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOtYaplatlY>

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