

Rroma Project



The
Children's
Society

This is who we are

A study of the experiences of **Rroma, Gypsy
and Traveller** children throughout England

This is Who We Are

**A study of the views and identities of
Roma, Gypsy and Traveller young people in England**

Heather Ureche and Myfanwy Franks

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of The Children's Society

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An account of an extraordinary insider's view drawn from a telephone call to Heather Ureche

A woman rang me on a Friday evening and said her name was Mags.

She said she has a young grand niece in who had been to stay and told her about the visit I had made to their youth club while doing research for this study. She was ringing to tell me that she thought the time was right for her to speak out about her experiences.

She came to England after the war from Germany; she was Sinti, a Gypsy and came here when she was eleven to live with an aunt who had lived here from before the war.

Her mother had died in a camp called Birkenau from a fever, and her dad and her brothers never came back from Poland as far as she knows. Mags does not know what happened to them and she has never heard about them since. She remembers very little about the camps they were in, there were two or three camps, she thinks. What she does remember was the misery and the crying and the smell, mostly the awful smell.

What Mags wants to say is that she does remember how everyone in those dreadful times stuck together and helped, Rroma (or) Sinti, even Jews. She remembers also how quickly at the end of the war it all went back to normal, each small group staying in their own place, with their own kind and how they all argued for a bigger share than everyone else.

She doesn't want to meet me to talk about her life as I asked; she said it is all a long time ago and best left alone. Except to say that Gypsies everywhere should have learnt, but didn't, how they need to stick together to be strong.

She said she is worried now because people are turning more and more against the gypsies and particularly the Rroma that are coming now. And she says that she thinks it will get worse so all the Romany people need to be prepared to stand up for themselves – be more united. She says the English Gypsies should be the ones to help the Rroma not the non-Gypsy people. She says that she thinks of them as her own kind.

It is a small step, she says, from spitting at some one in the street or beating someone up to putting them in camps and killing them. She knows this from experience.

Heather Ureche, April 2007

Executive summary

Identity

As we spoke to the young people from Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities in this study it became clear that there were many similarities across the groups and they showed great tolerance for each other. They all had clear, and to them, definable ideas about who they are and where they came from culturally.

100 respondents told us what they preferred to be called and what they called themselves: 30% said Gypsy, 35% said Roma Gypsy and 35% Travellers. They had no problems with categorising themselves as Gypsy/Roma/Traveller, what they did have a problem with however, was the disparaging and offensive way such titles were often used by others, the effects that this stereotypical labelling had on their lives and the injustice of many external assumptions. They felt that there were few positive images of modern Gypsies and Travellers and those that existed tended to be the old romantic images of Romany cited by many in the street survey.

Recommendation:

People who do not have any Gypsy or Traveller friends are more likely to use derogatory words against them compared to those who do. This emphasises the importance of inter-group contact to lessen animosities against these groups.

Tradition

The young Gypsies and Travellers placed high value on the family, including the extended family, as a priority in their lives. They felt that their traditions made them who they are and valued those traditions even though in some cases they placed limitations upon their lives, for instance in terms of gender roles. Nevertheless few of the girls wished to move away from the more restrictive rules. Although the young people interviewed accepted the differences between the various groups within the study, there was a surprising lack of knowledge both within the target communities and outsiders about each other's traditions and cultures. Nevertheless there was recognition of a sense of shared roots among some of our participants.

Recommendation:

Develop fact sheets, positive information and training courses to dispel myths about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. This process needs to be carried out in

full cooperation and in consultation with Roma, Gypsies and Travellers themselves.

Education

Education was a key issue among respondents. Although most of the children and young people in the study reported that they had attended school at some point, only one third of them were in full-time education when the survey was conducted. The average age of dropping out for those children was 11.49 years. Slightly more than a third had dropped out by the time they reached 10, and three quarters by the time they were 13 years-old.

Some reasons for this drop out rate included: family mobility, gender roles and expectations, different views on age of maturity, concerns about sex education and peer influences.

It was also clear that lack of education about Travellers, Gypsies and Roma communities was contributing to the deficient knowledge and understanding about these groups, their culture and traditions.

In a street survey we carried out as part of this study, those people who had met with, made friends with and mixed regularly with Gypsies and Travellers had a more positive and open-minded attitude towards them. Many of those cross-cultural relationships were likely to have started at school.

There was also evidence that a lack of formal education at secondary level limited the career options of many of the young people, particularly the girls. There was a clear conflict between the expectations and requirements of culture and state.

Recommendations:

Single sex education should be made available as an option to girls from any community should they wish it.

Considerably more notice should be taken of the wishes of the young people and their parents when planning their education. Early consultation and greater understanding of how the present system impacts on their culture should be the norm.

Training and awareness-raising on Traveller, Gypsy and Roma issues should be a priority for professionals and community groups. They should be encouraged to engage more to increase understanding generally and initiate means of reaching these communities with appropriate provision

Roma, Gypsies and Travellers should be universally recognised as ethnic minorities.

Adults and young people from the communities should be involved in informing and drawing up policies and good practice guides.

Discrimination and bullying

The Roma, Gypsies and Travellers in this study experienced prejudice, bigotry and institutional racism as part of their daily lives. The Government's social cohesion strategy does not explicitly recognise Gypsies and Travellers as one of its target groups. Professionals are often unaware of the ethnicity, culture and traditions of these young people. Among the people interviewed in the street survey many held prejudiced views about all the groups, the most common of which was that they were all 'work shy or scroungers'.

It is clear throughout the study that such labelling creates a major barrier to resolving most of the issues facing our target communities.

Recommendations:

Involvement and empowerment of Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities through consultation is essential if sustainable, workable solutions to problems are to be found.

Serious concerns were raised throughout this study about consistently destructive media portrayal of these communities as well as media failure to respond to complaints. Efforts must be made by the appropriate authorities to ensure that anti-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller stories are not to be published unquestioned and that such portrayal is an incitement to race hatred.

Young Roma, Gypsies and Travellers and the youth justice system

More than a third of young people participating in study had been in trouble with the law and of these, Roma children were found to be the most likely to be in this situation. Some of the young people we spoke to did not understand the point of their sentence.

Recommendation:

Those young people who fall foul of the law should be able to complete their sentences in a manner that has some meaning to them and therefore some hope of a positive outcome. Youth Offending Teams and others dealing with these young people should receive cultural sensitivity training to enable them to devise appropriate ways of working.

Introduction

The research

This comparative study follows on from the earlier *That's Who I Am* (Ureche, Manning and Franks, 2004) published by The Children's Society. This study is more comprehensive in that it includes not only Romanian Roma but also Travellers, Gypsies and Roma from different backgrounds who at the time of the fieldwork, were living in England.

The authors are not aware of previous research, which includes children from diverse Roma, Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds. The study arose from work carried out by The Children's Society's projects where we became aware of similarities in patterns of need and exclusion. This study looks into whether such similarities do in fact exist. Further to these thoughts we felt that although recent writings have covered certain aspects of the lives of Roma Gypsy and Traveller families very little consultation has been carried out with the younger members of these communities and therefore we particularly wanted their voices to be heard.

The objectives of the study were:

- To carry out a child-centred survey to explore the issues that young Roma, Gypsies and Travellers had suggested were important to them and that affected their daily lives.
- To examine life from the perspective of children who had been brought up in the close-knit families of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- To explore what their attitudes to each other might be and to look at some of the similarities and differences in their experience of social inclusion and exclusion and discrimination.
- To explore external attitudes towards these peoples and what public awareness levels about them might be.
- To investigate what impact the young people's (or their family's) ethnicity, nationality, life experience and culture has had on their social inclusion, their ability to access services and their safety within the wider community in which they live.

- To examine differences or similarities that exists between five groups of young people drawn from the identified target groups.
- To briefly explore external perceptions of the members of these groups and the perceptions groups had of one another.

Methodology

In order to carry out this study we consulted 201 children and young people from which we have identified five different cultural groups: English/British Gypsies, Roma, Irish Travellers, other British Travellers and New Travellers. These categories are for the purpose of analysis only.

Below we discuss how the young people described themselves. We also spoke to some of the parents, carers and a number of practitioners who work face-to-face with them on a daily basis.

Data was collected through nine focus groups and eight one-to-one recorded interviews, the rest through questionnaires some of which were self completed and others completed with the help of an interpreter or other adult. The young people's national identities were varied: (Romanian, Czech, Polish, Slovakian, Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh).

The participants

More than half of the participants described themselves as English and a few as Romanian, Irish, Slovak, Polish, Welsh and Czech (see Table 1). However, their migratory roots spread across Europe since grandparents of about half of them came from 16 different European states (see Table I in appendix). Females (59%) outnumbered males (41%) in the study. Most of the participants were single, while only 16% were married. The mean age of the participants of the main survey was 13.89 years, with a range of 7-30 years. Half of them lived in a van on site and their father's employment was the main source of family income for two thirds of them. On average they had 4.31 siblings in a family, with a range of 1-9 years.

The focus groups were run at The Children's Society's and other organisations' projects, including youth groups and educational establishments working with members of the target communities. The questionnaires were distributed, carried out and collected by Heather Ureche with the assistance of Traveller Education Teams, The Children's Society projects and other professionals involved with these groups. This study covered most of the regions of England including London, West Midlands, Cheshire, South West England, Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

Table 1: Background characteristics of the children and young people in the study

Variables (n)	%	Mean
Gender (100)		
Female	59	
Male	41	
Marital status (100)		
Single	84	
Married	16	
Age (99)		13.89
Below 10	5	
10 - below 15	54	
15 - below 20	36	
20 - below 25	3	
25 – 30	2	
Ethnicity (100)		
Roma Gypsy	35	
Gypsy	30	
Traveller	21	
Irish Traveller	12	
New Traveller	2	
Nationality (99)		
English	59	
Irish	9	
Polish	5	
Slovak	7	
Romanian	18	
Other ¹	2	
Living place (100) *		

House/flat	48
Van on site	50
Van on road	21
Friends	5

Family income source (81) *

Father's employment	65
Mother's employment	20
Other's employment	12
Self employment	12
State benefit	21
Other ²	7

Children in family (100)

4.31

1-2	8
3-4	53
5-6	29
7 and above	10

Country of birth (100)

England	60
Ireland	5
Slovakia	8
Poland	6
Romania	17
Germany	2
Other ³	2

1 Welsh and Czech (one in each group). * Because of multiple response categories, the sum of percentages will not be equal to 100. 2 Asocial means. 3 Welsh and Czech Rep (one in each group).

In order to obtain a snapshot view of general attitudes to Travellers, Gypsies and Roma three sessions of brief questionnaire based interviews were carried out on the street with passers by on a specific day, Saturday 28th April 2007, in three centres, Nottingham, Leeds and London with 119 people from diverse backgrounds in the age group 10 to 70. Heather Ureche and a team of The Children's Society volunteers conducted the interviews. We asked for personal impressions of Gypsies and Travellers including views on media portrayal and

stereotypical images. Most of the participants (of the street survey) were white, with black, mixed, Indian and Bangladeshi comprising 19%. Again females (57%) slightly outnumbered males (43%). One-quarter of them were in the age group of 26-35 and the remaining were from diverse age groups ranging from 'below 10' to '70 and over' (See Figure 1 in appendix).

The main body of the fieldwork for this study was undertaken from October 2006 through to April 2007. A final focus group of young people was held in May 2007 in order to check out emerging findings.

Access

The need to be flexible in gaining access and collecting data is perhaps common to carrying out research with Travellers and Gypsies (Horton 2004). Given the difficulties of accessing these mobile families as well as the necessity of gaining their trust the participants were contacted through people already known to us and through this a snowball sample was developed.

I have had to learn to conduct interviews in the most awkward situations. I have learnt to take both written and mental notes whilst standing outside a caravan or in the rain, anywhere, when the opportunity presents itself.

(Horton 2004:5)

Aims

In recent years our work with the children of travelling families has extended to include those children of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers who live permanently or temporarily in houses. This is the case for The Children's Society's Roma projects which currently come under the umbrella of New Londoners in Newham.

With the growth in the numbers of Roma children in some areas of the country¹ we wished to explore the difficulties these newcomers were facing in an attempt to ascertain to what extent they experience shared difficulties with other Gypsy and Traveller groups. This would enable service providers and policy makers to include them in any plans for future provision. Other areas we wished to explore with the aim of informing practice were family and cultural attitudes as well as issues of identity. In the latter case we asked participants to tell us what they preferred to be called.

¹The Pan London Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment survey currently being undertaken reports that there are in excess of 15,000 Roma in the Greater London area at the present time.

I am a Gypsy, a Romany Gypsy, that's what I am. You can call me what you want it won't change anything. You can call me a robot but it won't make me something that I am not. I am proud of who I am.

(English Gypsy boy, 13)

As well as exploring the views of participants in relation to their own identity we also wanted to discover something about their attitudes to each other. We therefore asked about their contact (if any) with other Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people from different backgrounds from outside their specific group. Those who had experienced such meetings were asked what they thought about the 'outsiders' and how they had got along with each other.

Identity – self and ascribed identities

Gypsy and Traveller are contested terms both within and outside the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Cemlyn and Clark (2005) draw on the definition given by the Minority Rights Group which refers to Gypsies as:

...ethnic groups formed by a diaspora of commercial and nomadic groups from India from the tenth century, and subsequently mixing with European and other groups to 'Travellers' as predominantly indigenous European ethnic groups whose culture is characterised by self-employment, occupational fluidity and nomadism; and to 'Roma' broadly as European Romani speaking groups.

(Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995:6)

In Britain there are English Romany Gypsies and Travellers, Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy-Travellers and Irish Travellers; smaller groups of Roma from Central and Eastern Europe; and 'New' Travellers, now often in third and fourth generation (Cemlyn and Clark 2005). At The Children's Society we use the term Traveller and Gypsy children and young people in relation to the children we work with to mean:

Children and young people of Gypsy/Romany ethnic background, who either pursue their traditional nomadic way of life or live in a settled accommodation, and children and young people for whom a nomadic way of life is a cultural preference.

By 'nomadic way of life' we mean living in movable dwellings on either permanent or transit sites.

At The Children's Society we believe that every child has a right to self-definition. It is expected that different terms will be used when describing our work with specific groups of children from Traveller and Gypsy communities.²

² 'The term *Traveller and Gypsy children and young people* is inclusive of different groups such as English Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsies, Welsh Gypsies, New Travellers, Romanian Roma, Polish Roma, Czech Roma and many more.

In relation to ethnic Gypsy/Roma people there is an on-going international debate as to which term better represents this group of people. The most commonly used terms are *Traveller*, *Gypsy*, *Roma* also spelled as *Rroma*. The Council of Europe and UNDP use terms *Roma/Rroma/Gypsy/Traveller* in their official documents.

In this section we discuss the ways in which the participants describe their own identities. However, when we quote participants we use the identities above, which are ascribed by researchers rather than participants. The reason for this is the diversity of descriptions given by participants and the need for clarity in a research report.

In terms of exploring both the young people's self and ascribed identities we asked 100 respondents to tell us what they preferred to be called: 30% said Gypsy, 35% said Roma Gypsy and 35% Travellers. We do not discuss here the New (Age) Travellers who participated as their number was so small, however, they are discussed separately below. See Table 1 for self-defined ethnic background of participants.

In this particular study we were interested in what the children and young people prefer to be called and what they call themselves. There was no clear answer and the young people were far more concerned about the how rather than the what. For example, the young people's main complaint concerned the abusive epithets that were so frequently attached to the word Gypsy and the widespread nature of this kind of abuse. And also the way in which these labels stick to them and so often cause them problems.

I call myself a Gypsy, or sometimes a Traveller, my family are all Gypsies and proud of it. It is an old thing, we have been here forever, we are happy people and loving, we are not bad people like people say. We don't steal or things like that, we work hard like everyone else. I have a tee shirt I made at a craft day thing, it says 'Gypsy and proud of it'. I wear it sometimes.

(English Gypsy boy, 15)

If you tell the wrong person (you are a Gypsy) you get a lot of stick. It's always our fault if something gets nicked.

(Irish Traveller, 14)

When people in the street survey were asked to use words or phrases they associated with Gypsies and Travellers around the same number of instances of the use of neutral and derogatory terms occurred. When we compare the occurrence of these with the use of complimentary terms the occurrence of complimentary terminology was far less (see Figure 2 in appendix). However the complimentary terms may not always have been positive as they could relate to stereotypes of Gypsies which may also, in the long run, be unhelpful – for instance 'beautiful girls' or 'good footballers' (See Table 2). The terms that have been deemed more neutral tended to be based on a romantic view of Gypsies incorporating earrings, long hair, music and dancing. These share the same problems as the 'positive' words, especially when people are deemed not

Rroma has been used for about 10 years. This term is advocated for by Rroma associations, that believe that the term *Gypsy* has long been associated with persecution and has acquired pejorative connotations. The Council of Europe has approved the use of *Rroma* (*Gypsies*) in its official documents (CLRAE Recommendation 11 - June 1995). The term *Gypsy* is used more often in the UK both by the Government and by the Traveller and Gypsy groups. Many Gypsy people here are proud to be known as Gypsies and aim to dispel negative prejudices associated with their ethnicity.' From The Children's Society National Traveller and Gypsy Strategy Group unpublished paper written by Iryna Pona (2006).

to live up to the stereotype, for instance they are not a long-haired beautiful young woman or where they become entrapped in the possibility of only one potential career, for instance that of footballer. The derogatory terms consisted largely of negative stereotyping, and were dehumanising and abusive.

Table 2: Words used by the participants to describe Gypsy and Travellers

Derogatory words or phrases

Dirty	Disorganised	Trespasser
Criminal	Unmovable	Violent
Beggar	Scrounger	Unclean
Cheeky attitudes	Rough	Use children to make money
Messy	Fighting	Secretive
Thief	Poorly educated	Slavery
Crook	Manipulative	No rules
Trouble makers	Arrogant	Stereotyped
Noisy	Ignorant	Homeless
Chaotic	Uneducated	Burglar
Old fashioned	Stink	Threat
Disruptive	Litter	Nuisance
Sly	Charlatan	Swindler
Sponger	Weird	Lazy
Disgusting	Tramp	Frustrated
Non-human	Sweaty	Do not work
High temperamental	Pikey	

Complimentary words or phrases

Friendly	Funny	Decent living people
Happy	Colourful	Cool
Nice	Great music	Beautiful girls
Good footballers		

More or less neutral words or phrases ³

Ancient	Countryside	Close community
Tradition	Gold	Free spirit
Family orientated	Earrings	Flowers
Nomadic	Scrap metal	Long hair
Caravan with horses	Big families	Travel
Fortune telling	Black hair	Independent
Long dress	Wad of cash	Dark eyed
Free	Close community	Spanish dancing
Campers	Race carts	Living in groups
Dancing	Movers	

Some professionals, particularly teachers, expressed concern about language used by young people towards the Gypsy and Traveller children. They pointed out that such name-calling often triggered arguments, which could result in fights and disruption at school. Also they expressed concern about the emotional effect on the Gypsy and Traveller children of this unjustified labelling.

How young people identified themselves

Ways in which the young people described themselves were diverse and yet at the same time very specific. This may be confusing to the external observer:

³ These words or phrases may have negative meanings depending on the context in which they are used

*I am a Gypsy, **not** Roma I am a Romany Gypsy a Tiganca which means Gypsy girl.*

I am a Gypsy or a Traveller, a Gypsy Traveller.

I am a Slovak Roma or even a Gypsy in our language it's Gypsy or Rrom.

*I am a Traveller, **not** a Gypsy.*

*I am a Roma **not** a Gypsy, a Polish Roma.*

*I am Gypsy, a Polish Gypsy, **not** Roma.*

I am a Gypsy, an English Gypsy and I travel!

I am a Gypsy or sometimes a Traveller.

*I am a Gypsy **not** Traveller and I'm proud of it.*

I am a Romany, a Romany Gypsy and proud of it.

(All the above quotations were taken from questionnaire replies or from young people in the focus groups).

The children and young people had a strong sense of their own identity, and knew very well who they were, regardless of what name was ascribed to them by other people.

New Travellers

Only a small number of New (Age) Travellers (2) were included in the survey. Because of the tiny size of this sample they were not included in the statistical analysis. However we carried out four subsequent interviews with New Traveller children and young people. These young people belong to a group who are relative newcomers to the Travelling community and who are likely to have a number of marked differences from the other larger groups. It appeared to be the case that our participants were less likely to regard themselves as an *ethnic* group. What we suspected from practice was that many of these children were born into the travelling tradition and therefore have not chosen this lifestyle for themselves. The young people did not necessarily represent themselves in this way suggesting that they could change their lifestyle should they wish to do so.

I haven't always lived like this, we used to live in a house once for a bit, my mum lived in a house until she ran away. I could go back and live in a house again but it's the practical things that would finish me, how to open a bank account and pay bills and things, you see I never have done stuff like that.

(New Traveller girl, 14)

I know other kinds of Travellers, there are some Romany here on this site, horse drawn, they really are different, they know so much about the country and the ways. We are not like them if that's what you mean; with us it's more a life style choice, with them it's in their blood.

(New Traveller young woman, 17)

I love the freedom, the world I see. I don't know any other way and I like being different, not boringly the same as everyone else.

(New Traveller boy, 11)

The fact that they have been born into this lifestyle is not always taken into account by some members of the more traditional groups, who held a view that New Travellers *choose* to be Travellers rather than inheriting the way of life. They were referred to as being 'hippies' or not 'real Travellers'.

I think this is different for some English Travellers who choose to be Travellers, we are born Romani and can't decide we don't want to be Romani any more; it is a race a nation not a way you chose to live.

(Bosnian Gypsy girl; focus group)

The quote above from one of a group of Bosnian Rroma illustrates this type of attitude but is not universally shared. Many participants recognised that there are differing ethnic groups of Travellers and Gypsies who maintain a variety of lifestyles.

Researchers have identified a generational difference amongst New Travellers recognising that earlier Travellers adopted their lifestyle largely for ideological reasons. According to these researchers the younger post-1980 generation tend to have adopted or maintained the lifestyle from necessity as a by-product of the Thatcher era and the imposition of the Poll Tax, when this style of travelling became another form of homelessness (Pendragon 1993, Davis 1994, Martin 1998).

However, our earlier unpublished research (Franks, 2005) within The Children's Society's Traveller and Gypsy Strategy Group (pilot monitoring of Gypsy and Traveller work) shows that children who were living in New Traveller communities were the group of Travellers most likely to be living without basic facilities. This was certainly the case when the researcher visited the New Travellers' sites in the course of this study. The majority of families were found living without the essentials such as: running water, toilets, electricity or transport.

Through the interviews the young people suggested there was also a lack of any structure to their lives. Unlike the other groups surveyed the young people were really isolated, lacking the extended family and community support the other communities had. There was some evidence that there were cases where young people were acting as carers, fulfilling the parental roles for instance where the parents were heavily dependent on them for both everyday practicalities and decision-making.

I love my Mum, and yes I have a duty to her. She, after all, brought me into the world. I have to look after her, take care of her now I am able to, she doesn't always know how to do things. I don't think about it really I just do it. It's what I do. She has some problems and I have to make sure we survive don't I? Who would if I didn't? (Note: This single mother was frequently using drugs and alcohol)

(New Traveller girl, 15)

From talking to the three groups of New Traveller children and young people it seemed clear that almost all of them would prefer to live settled lives and as adults may choose to do this (many older siblings had already done so). However they appreciate some aspects of their travelling lives and would miss these. There was also a fear amongst many about how they would cope with the change of lifestyle and the practical demands that would entail.

Of all the young people involved in this study the long-term outcomes for children of the New Traveller community seemed to be most precarious. They suffered all forms of discrimination faced by the others without any of the historical coping mechanisms being in place, with little or no family support (the majority were from one parent families and had no contact with their parents' relatives) and without a community to reinforce behaviour and offer support.

Identification with group

There was no discernable difference from the answers we received between how members of the different Gypsy, Traveller or Roma groups (or genders within groups) perceived themselves. They all identified with their own group and recognised their roles within that group.

I don't really know what I am, I'm part Irish part English and part Hungarian (that's where I got my name), what I am is a Traveller boy.

(English Traveller boy, 14)

Like many of our participants, this young man's origins are complex but he appears to have an exact sense of his Traveller identity, which overarches nationality or ethnicity. He is proud of his Gypsy/Traveller roots, of his heritage and obviously loves and takes pride in his large family and all the things his way of life gives him.

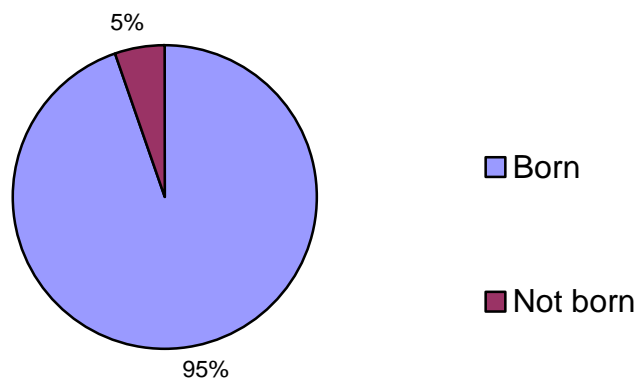
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Traditions

For many of the children and young people there was a shared belief in the value of their families and traditions. Many said that they thought family, tradition and travelling (see Figure 3 in appendix) were the best things about being who they were.

There was a largely shared view among participants about what constitutes a Gypsy, Traveller or Roma identity. Nearly all participants were certain that it was necessary to be born a Gypsy or Traveller in order to be counted as one (Figure I).

Figure I: Young people's opinion on changing their ethnic group (n = 95)



It was suggested that those who married in, even if the community accepted them at one level, would never be regarded as being the same.

Family

A large proportion of interviewees from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities reported a high level of respect for others within their community and particularly for older people. Their children were expected to respect their elders from an early age. Being part of a large clan (extended family) and an even larger community and love of travelling were repeatedly mentioned as being the aspects of their lives that they cherished and made them who they

are. Even the older teenagers, although some were at times frustrated by their lack of freedoms (particularly the girls) said that they rated their family, traditions and travelling respectively as the first, second and third most important influence on their happiness (see Figure 3 in appendix).

I live in a trailer and spend half the year on a site in Essex and half all over the place. It's great. I see all sorts, I have a massive family, hundreds of us, if you came to a burial or the wake or a wedding or first communion then you'd see what's best about being a travelling man, that's what best about being me.

(Traveller boy, 14)

Generally the young people in this study showed a strong sense of responsibility towards their families. Many said that they did not willingly help their mother in the home as often as they should nor take on enough of the communal chores on the sites, both duties that were expected of them as routine. The young people admitted that they smoked and should not, that they argued with their mothers and siblings, and that they often failed to walk away from difficult situations when they knew they should and, a few even, that they stole sometimes. It was also interesting that many said that they ate too much junk food or watched too much TV or that they were lazy. This behaviour is probably typical of many teenagers (and adults), yet this group recognised that in their cultures it was unacceptable and acknowledged it.

Because most of them rated respect as very important, particularly within the family and community (see Figure 4 in appendix), we asked who they considered was in a position to tell them what they could or could not do. In this regard the perceived trivial influence of anyone other than parents or other family members (elder brothers or grandparents for example) was evident in the ranking of 'external authority' in the third and fourth place in Figure III (below) and Figure II respectively.

Figure II Young people's opinion on the people who can tell them what to do (n = 97)

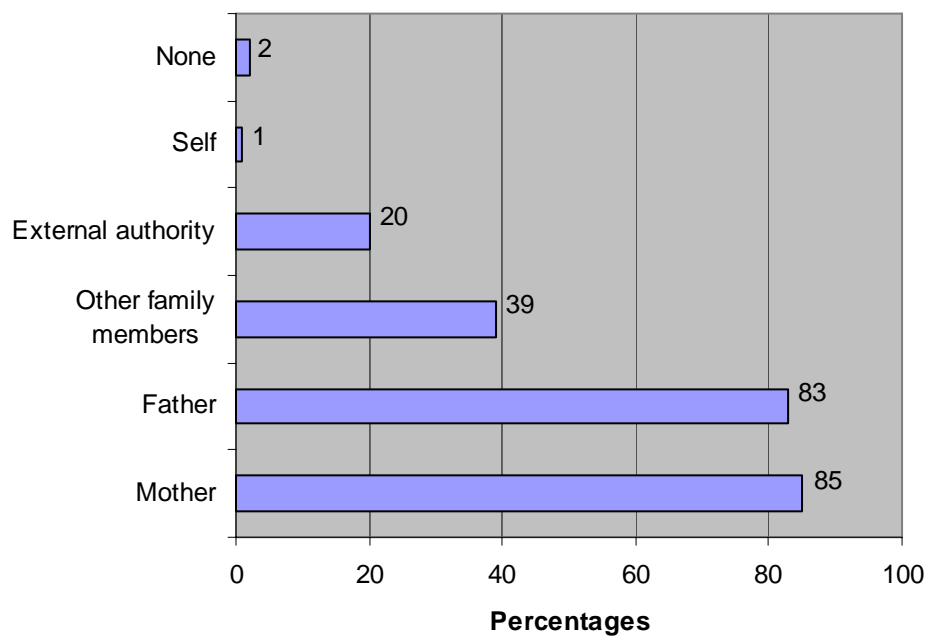
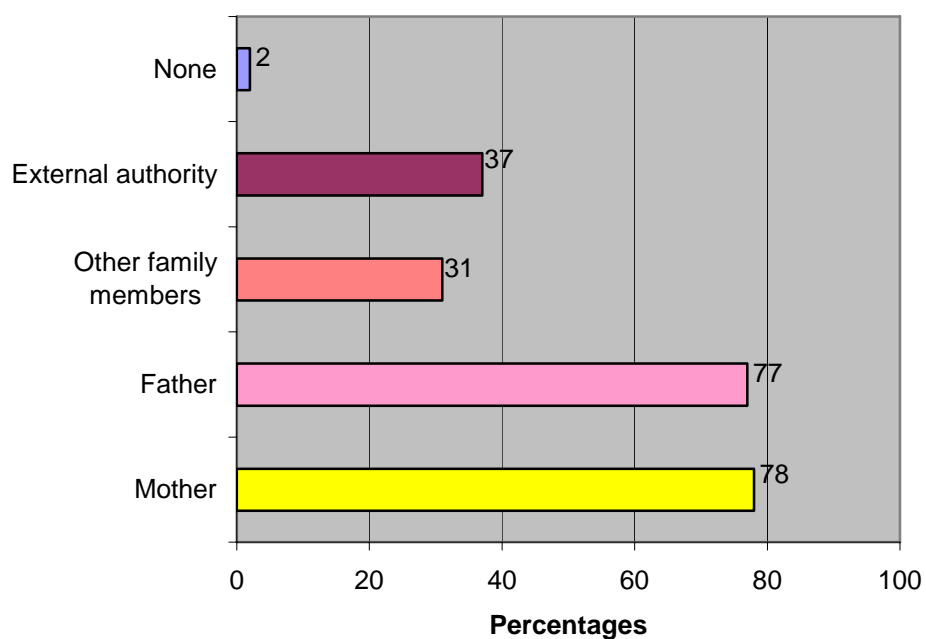


Figure III Young people's opinion on the people who can stop them doing things (n = 98)



Rights

When asked what rights they thought they should have the young people said that they felt they should be able to be themselves, to follow their traditions, to own their identity without abuse or discrimination and that they should have the same rights as anyone else (see Figure 5 in appendix). They valued their language, their history, the travelling and the visits to the fairs where they get to meet up with relatives and friends.

There was a definite acceptance and tolerance of the rules and restrictions that their culture placed on them and many mentioned this aspect of their lives with appreciation. However there were a few, mostly younger girls who felt 'over protected' and frustrated that they were not allowed to be as free as their brothers, as illustrated by the following quotes from girls and young women.

I should be allowed to go out in the town with my mates.

(English Gypsy girl, 15)

I should be allowed to wear trousers and play out like my brothers.

(Polish Rroma girl, 14)

I wish I could go swimming in the river like the boys.

(English Gypsy girl, 10)

Whether they lived in houses, on sites or on the roadside participants knew and respected the rules and obligations they had grown up with. It was apparent in the study that the young people had learnt these and respected the value of them. Many of their traditions were very old and had a practical origin for a people that had at one time been (and in many cases still are) on the move. Those children of Romany origins had many common rules about how they lived their daily lives albeit with minor differences depending on where each group had been raised.

Most of the young participants came from traditional two parent families, many of them had grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins close by and all felt that this was important. To most of them this structure was something they wanted for themselves when they were adults.

I want my kids to grow near my Mam, just like we have. I can't imagine living by myself like in a house or on an estate like miles from everyone.

(English Gypsy woman)

This desire was more frequently mentioned by the girls and young women than by the boys, who talked about continuing the family business or working like dad and granddad.

I have tried living in a house but we just couldn't do it, the problems we have with sites well it was a thousand times worse. The kids whinged all the time, they missed the rest and it took us an hour on the bus to get to me Mam's place. I never saw a soul all day and the bills they were, well we couldn't pay them. So we were broke and miserable for what? Just so they could get to school easier. Add to this how we was all treated by the so-called neighbours, never ending that was and we were clean and tidy, did the garden and everything. Well we were out of there in six months and back in a trailer, by me Mam and the rest of them, much better like this. We are Gypsies. We aren't made to be enclosed like that in bricks and fences it's against our blood.

(English Gypsy woman)

Many of the adults and young people were adamant that outsiders should not interfere in any aspect of their family lives. The fact that there were few references to external figures of authority may be because of the strength of the family unit and their traditions but it may also be an effect of social exclusion. In their world most of the external bodies that are empowered with the right of control over them, such as the police, teachers, bailiffs, local authority are all perceived as being in some way biased or 'against them'.

Gender

Another aspect of the question of control was the different freedoms afforded to boys and girls within the family unit. From the answers the children and young people gave it was clear that the men and the boys were the ones in charge. The majority (about three-quarters) of the children of all groups of Gypsies and Travellers said that they thought there was a marked difference in the way the sexes were treated or in the way they should be treated. This was exemplified earlier by the fact that many of the girls included their older brothers in the - who can tell you what to do category. This was not the case with boys, none of whom placed their older sisters in this position of authority. The older girls and young women were clear that men had the final say in important matters and from their answers they seemed to be happy with this situation.

The woman comes after the man, that is how it is in our tradition and that is how God made it.

(Young British Roma woman)

No girls and boys are different but we should all have respect.

(Irish Traveller girl, 11)

I reckon everyone should be treated the same but it's hard, we aren't the same. I'm not going to do girls' things and my sisters don't go out and play football.

(English Gypsy boy in South Yorkshire)

Clearly from the answers we received there is still a division in the gender roles across all the groups: the more traditional the culture they come from the wider the gender divide. Among all our participants less freedom was given to the girls regardless of their age. Parents said that this is to protect them, to preserve their reputation and to ensure that the cultural rules are not contravened in a way that would cause the family embarrassment or criticism.

Gender and Power

When asked, 'Who is the boss in the home?' respondents to the questionnaire answered as follows:

The majority of children said that 'dad' was the boss whilst a significant number said 'mum' was – some felt that mum and dad ruled equally (see Figure 6 in Appendix). It's our impression that the children saw their parents as 'boss' in different domains with mum being boss in the house. Mothers told us that they have primary responsibility for looking after the children while men generally carry out the major decision-making and most of the outdoor work.

Nevertheless there was evidence of some deviation from perceived traditional roles in so far as the majority stated that although the father was still the main wage earner (either by paid employment or self-employment), there were a number of families in the survey where the mother also went out to work (see Table 1). The survey showed that the mother was least likely to go to work outside the home in the Roma families.

However we know from our practice with Roma from different backgrounds that women might be engaged in informal self-employment, which includes fortune telling and begging.

In a focus group with young Romanian Roma we asked who they thought was 'the boss' in their homes and also whether they thought they were all treated the same, below are some of the answers:

'Who is the boss?' All the boys said 'dad', the girls said 'the men'.

'Are boys and girls treated the same?' All said that they felt that genders were treated differently.

I think girls have a hard life.

(Boy in Romanian Roma focus group)

We asked about family finance, a difficult subject to raise with any group of young people and particularly so with these groups who have strong resistance to discussing such private matters with outsiders. Although our sample is not necessarily representative of all Traveller and Gypsy families, it is interesting to note that the percentage of families in the sample who were in receipt of state benefits appeared to be lower (21%) than the average for the whole population (34%)(see Table 1) (National Office of Statistics 2007).

One of the older English Gypsy women pointed out that her contemporaries as well as those of her mother, were less likely to go out to work than previous

generations. The old traditional ways where the women went calling or picking⁴ is no longer commonplace and has given way to other ways of generating family income.

Women have always had their say in the finances of the family and nowadays they continue to be involved helping their men folk with the family business and of course they are also responsible for looking after the children.

(An employed Traveller woman)

Although times change there are still certain rules that generally apply, Traveller children find their feet early in life and are encouraged by their parents to do so.

(Oakley 1983)

Young people talked about work and what ambitions they had. Some boys, who said they intended to join their father and other male relatives in the family business when they grew up, were already learning how to do this. The girls also were learning traditional skills and ways of behaving, much of their work relating to the inside of the house or van. In a focus group a mother (an English Traveller) told us how an eight year-old girl would know exactly how to clean the interior of a caravan and to leave it spotless. Both the young people and the parents generally saw this as an important part of education. But the English Traveller mother above, who was now a professional and activist said that she now regards this requirement for young girls to do housework as 'slavery'.

We heard one or two quite derogatory comments from individual young people in the focus groups about 'foreign' Gypsies, yet in the consultations the majority, 84% said that they had met and spoken to Gypsies from other families, other traditions and other countries (see Figure 7 in appendix). They had met in a variety of situations, at school, church, fairs and youth groups. Not only had they had that experience but they had usually found these meetings interesting and enjoyable. They recognised the differences but they also saw that they had a lot in common with each other. Many of the children explained to us that these Gypsies or Roma, from other clans were part of their joint history, coming from the same roots.

I liked them they were nice. We couldn't talk very well but we managed a little. They are really just like us only different if you see what I mean.

(English Traveller Girl, Cheshire)

They are interesting, we have to get on with them they are our people.

(Roma girl, 15)

The main differences identified by participants were language and dress. The British children suggested that those from Eastern Europe were 'old fashioned'

⁴ Calling' is going selling or collecting and 'picking' refers to fruit and vegetable harvesting

and more traditional. Those who could speak Romany were surprised that they had any language in common even if the dialects were different. But the most striking thing was their ready acceptance that they were 'just like us'. They said they were 'humans the same as us'. The European Roma reminded one or two of the participants of old family photographs of grandparents or great grandparents who were themselves of the old tradition.

When carrying out an interview on a site in northern England the family albums were pulled out and old newspaper clippings in German with images of relatives and some old black and white photographs taken in the 1940s. These were compared to pictures of some young Rroma in London. It was the likeness that most excited the young people. It made them begin to consider their own history and ask questions about their family origins. This made us realise that it was not only outsiders who could learn more about Romany history. Of all the young people who responded to the questionnaire only 4% made any negative comments about those from other nations and clans (see Figure 8 in appendix).



girls are girls and



boys are boys

4

Education

Access to education

In a report produced by the Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange, quoted below, there is a concise explanation of how many parents felt about education. Although this report applies to the Leeds/Bradford area we found echoes of it throughout the country and within all the groups.

From a historical position of being excluded from school, Gypsy and Traveller children are now obliged to attend and this is increasingly popular among parents and children for primary education. However many parents are fiercely opposed to their children attending high school. Reasons given for this are: fear of racism and bullying; sex education lessons and knowledge amongst peers; fear of drug abuse; fear of loss of cultural identity; loss of opportunity to be trained by parents in self-employment practices. This has a clear impact on the aspirations and expectations of young people. Many parents wish to home educate their children but lack resources to provide a broad and interesting curriculum.

(Report by Leeds GATE on Better education for all 2004/05)

In general Gypsy and Irish Traveller children, particularly those of secondary age have lower levels of educational attendance than pupils of other groups.

By key stage 3, it is estimated that only 15-20% will be registered at or attend a school. Of these:

23% of Roma Gypsy pupils and 42% of Irish Traveller pupils in England obtained five or more A-C GCSEs compared to an overall 51% of the rest.

22% of Roma Gypsy pupils and 17% of Irish Traveller pupils obtained no passes, compared with an average of 6%. Statistics show that the percentage of boys and girls achieving 5+A-C at GCSE has increased for all ethnic groups apart from that of Travellers.*

(DfES, 2005)

We aimed to explore with our participants the extent of their access to school and where possible, through the focus groups their reasons for leaving. This is against a background where parents still have the right to educate them otherwise. What we discovered was that out of our survey sample of 100, more than half the children and young people in the study had attended school at

some time (see Figure 9 in appendix), although the majority were out of full-time education by the time the survey was conducted (see Figure 10 in appendix). The average age of dropping out from school for those children was 11.49 years. Slightly more than a third had dropped out from school by the time they reached 10 and three quarters by the time they were 13.

Our children go to school from a low age up to ten years old. They come out of school and they can't even read. Why? What are they doing? They put them at the back of the class and take no notice of them.

(Kathleen, Professional, Yorkshire)

The children and young people gave the following reasons for their non-attendance:

- They were travelling lots of the time
- School curriculum was not relevant to them
- Being bullied at schools
- Schools did not respond to complaints about bullying
- The behavior of other children in class
- They lacked previous schooling and had difficulty in understanding and catching up
- Parents wanted girls to stay at home once they reach puberty.

They had a different idea about the age of maturity

I got too big for school.

(Romanian Roma boy)

Dad said that was enough I was grown up and had to stay home and learn.

(Romanian Roma girl)

I don't have friends and the other girls push me and take my things and hide them.

(Slovak Roma girl)

It's boring and it doesn't have much for me really.

(Traveller girl, 14)

Comments on enjoying school

In answer to the question 'Do you enjoy school?' children told us about some elements of school they had enjoyed, for instance particular subjects, places, times or people they liked.

These included the following focus group comments:

Only some of it, art, music, games, playtime.

Sometimes when I was smaller, I enjoyed playing with my mates, football and history.

Yes (I enjoyed it) at the centre.

(This was a nurture group set up and run by a local EMAS worker)

Overall only seven participants said they unreservedly enjoyed school. (Where the children had said they enjoyed some aspect of their school experience they show in the statistics as having enjoyed school (see Figure 11 in Appendix).

Bullying

One of the consequences of the harassment and bullying children face in classrooms, playgrounds and also on the way to and from school, is that a large number of Gypsy and Traveller children are taken out of school as they approach the move to secondary education. In this study there were many children who regretted being withdrawn and missed going to school.

I miss the school I was at first but I think I know a lot of things that only travelling teaches you.

(English Traveller)

Some attributed their leaving full-time education directly to the bullying they experienced.

Yes, I went until some girls poured water all over me because I was a 'dirty Traveller'. My Mam went up to school and asked them what they were going to do about it but they did nothing so Mam said I wasn't going again 'cos it was disrespectful to ignore her complaints.

(English Gypsy)

It is clearly unacceptable that any child should feel so vulnerable at school that their parents feel that they have to withdraw them and teach them at home. It is not the purpose of this report to compare or comment on the advantages or otherwise of home education, other than to say that some of the children we interviewed said quite clearly that they missed going to school and would like to return but only if and when they felt safe there.

Some of those who managed to persevere with their schooling remarked in focus groups and interviews how they were glad they had done so.

My grandparents are big in the church, they are preachers and they think schooling is important so we all went to school right through to 16, but it was hard. We got name called and picked on by kids and some teachers. I am glad I stuck it out though and I have a good job to show for it. I would like to think that I am a good role model for others. But although I think that I benefited from my parents making us attend school I also understand how others think about it. I don't know a Gypsy child that has not suffered from what is after all racism.

(Traveller liaison worker, 19, North East England)

Case Study 1 - Education

Presenting issues

'A' a Polish Roma girl started school at age six as soon as her parents found out how to register her. Things went well and everyone was helpful and supportive. Problems started when she left primary school at the age of 11 and in the transition to secondary school left her friends behind.

After a few months 'A' was complaining of stomach problems, she lost weight and was always feeling ill and tired. Her doctor was consulted on a number of occasions but could find nothing wrong.

One day 'A' came home early from school in a frightened state. A boy had followed her to the girl's toilets. She had managed to escape but it had frightened her very much. It transpired that a gang of boys had been taking her dinner money (they had been doing this to others – not just to 'A') and anything else she had. The boy had been name-calling and telling 'A' to go back to 'where she came from'. She had not been eating at school and was afraid to tell her parents because she thought it would make things worse. She was aware how important her schooling was to her father.

Interventions

'A's father went to speak to teachers at the school and the perpetrator was excluded for a week. The father said this was not sufficient and suggested that 'A' should be transferred to another school. 'A' was scared to go back to school, as the school were not really supportive. The parents decided to move to an area where there was a girls' school and asked to be transferred there. They were told there was a long waiting list and that there was little chance of 'A' getting a place there. 'A' had been out of school for four months when eventually her previous school signed the transfer request. However there is still no place available for her at the girl's school.

Current situation

'A' feels frightened and isolated. The friends she had were too afraid to help her and when the boy was excluded threats were made against 'A' who as a result is frightened to go out alone. She has had support from her The Children's Society Project Worker and attended classes aimed at re-building her confidence.

Police and school have been informed of the situation but there is, as yet no resolution. The child wants to go to school but she also wants to feel safe and this is not possible in the current situation.

Traditionally, it is difficult for the parents to send a girl of 'A's age to a school where she has to mix with boys unsupervised. The school has shown little appreciation of how serious the parents consider this situation to be. There are only two possibilities the father can see – either 'A' stays at home or they find her a place at a girls' school.

The parents have been assisted by the project to find an appropriate solicitor so they have representation should they have court action taken against them.

The case study above demonstrates just how easy it is for misunderstandings to arise. The school realises that they have a problem with bullying of more vulnerable children but has not been effective in eradicating such behaviour. The parents are faced with friends and relatives saying that they 'knew this would happen in a mixed secondary school' and that is why they 'don't want their daughters to go there'. This frustrated the father, as he had felt sure his child would be safe at any school in this country and what has happened has proved him wrong and the others right. He also felt that his daughter's ethnicity was a factor in the way the situation has been handled. The practitioners who have been supporting the family can only offer support and advice until such time 'A' is offered a place at a new school.

Now many months down the line the child is still out of school, falling more and more behind. Not only will she add to the statistics demonstrating the failure of Roma children in the education system but also her parents are potentially at risk of court action being taken against them for their failure to send the girl to school. The incidents cited in this case study demonstrate one family's preference for single sex education for their daughter. When speaking to other parents about the reasons why their older daughters were not attending school the most frequently mentioned explanation was parental concern about the child mixing with teenage boys in an unsupervised situation. In the recommendations (at end of report) we suggest there is a need on the part of a number of communities for single sex education, particularly for their daughters.

Without education, training and skills these children and young people will not fulfil their potential. It is not, as some people within the Traveller and Gypsy communities believe, just a question of learning to read and write. Many parents told us that they recognised the need in this modern world for their children to be more literate than previous generations and for them to acquire new skills, which will help them obtain employment.

Many of young people had similar ambitions to other children: for instance to be famous, to be footballers, hairdressers, musicians or artists. However many more had ambitions to follow in their parents' footsteps, to take up traditional roles and employment. In a changing world which increasingly requires paper qualifications for trades which were previously practiced and handed down father to son (for example farriery), without education this may prove to be more difficult than they imagine.

One of the keys to overcoming social and economic exclusion is through education. In order to discover what would make education more attractive and less daunting to both the young people and their parents we asked some of the young people what they would do to change things.

The young people suggested:

Classes such as car driving and repair.

(Irish Traveller)

Not having to do subjects they are not good at or have no relevance to them.

(Irish Traveller)

Help with English language and literacy.

(Rroma)

Not being obliged to go to PHSE or biology classes.

(English Gypsy)

Including the history and culture of Travellers and Gypsies in the curriculum.

(English Gypsy)

Rroma young people from The Children's Society's Romanian Rroma Project in a focus group carried out for New Londoners (Franks et al 2007) suggested that the only way they would go to mainstream school would be if there was a project to work with their parents, many of whom were afraid that their children would be bullied. According to these young people some parents are also concerned that if children learn English language and customs, they will become rude and disrespectful.

The hard time faced by their children is not the only reason parents gave for opting for alternative education. There is generally across all the groups, anger at the insistence of schools that all children take part in PHSE and science classes, particularly those dealing with sex and relationships.

Most parents we spoke to felt that such subjects should not be taught to mixed sex groups, certainly not to the younger children and preferably not at all. Some felt that such discussions should be left to parents when they judged the time appropriate, usually at the time of marriage.

Additionally, in conversations held during the data collection process parents expressed fears that their children would be exposed to drug and alcohol use in secondary schools.

Professional viewpoints on inclusion in schools

An English teacher pointed out that above all else the current education system requires continuity but many Traveller and Gypsy children live on the roadside in constant fear of eviction and it is difficult for them to attend school. Due to the fact that Traveller and Gypsy children are likely to miss odd days or weeks they are never able to complete a module. The teacher was concerned that children who attended regularly would 'rightly scream unfair' if the teacher made exceptions for Traveller and Gypsy children. There is also difficulty in getting the Traveller children to do homework and the teacher maintains that part of the bullying results from their being seen to be 'getting away with things'.

The Traveller kids, once they get to fourteen or so, in the main are serving time. They don't want be here and it's very hard to engage with them. I do have some real success stories but they are few and far between. I have tried to make my lessons relevant to them, I have Travellers come in and talk about their lives and culture. I have special parents meetings. We have a large travelling community here, some settled and some transient, seasonal. And we recently have expanded the Traveller service, which is making a huge difference. I really do not know what the answer is other than time changing attitudes and funding Traveller services properly. The law says they have to be here and have to study certain subjects and that is right and fair but it's the old saying you can take a horse.... I personally get on very well with the kids and the parents and if I could teach them separately and pitch the lesson at their ability level and make it relevant to their lives, then I believe I could engage them and they would achieve far more. However we live in the real world and I can only do what I am able to do within the set up I have. That to be honest is not a lot.

(English teacher, Midlands)

The frustration of this teacher relates to the school system and resources, the 'set up' to which she refers, acts as a barrier to her being able to engage in educational activities that the children would find relevant to their lives. Further, some professionals admitted that they find prejudice rife within the system.

The prejudice is everywhere. We have both been amazed at how much prejudice there is and from where it sometimes comes from.

(Traveller professional)

According to Traveller professionals, two of the greatest challenges they face are counteracting this prejudice and building the confidence of the Traveller and Gypsy children. They take every opportunity to project positive images of these young people in an effort to negate all the negative stereotyping. Professionals often felt frustrated because short-term funding meant that it was never possible to make long terms plans.

The lack of time and the way that we are not sure how long we shall have funding and therefore be able to carry on not being able to make long term plans. The biggest challenge is this, trying to counteract the prejudice and ignorance and inject some positive images, then recognising that some of the fears of the clients are justified but not allowing these fears to deprive them of their ability to access services.

(Traveller professional)

If the objective is for this group of young people to feel able to participate in mainstream education then an equitable solution has to be found. We have to be able to ensure their safety, whilst offering education that has relevance to their lives. A mother interviewed by Oakley (1983) described how she had tried to enable her children to span two cultures:

I've got your (Gorgio)⁵ craft and the Traveller's craft... I'm sending my kids to school to learn yours and I am teaching them mine.... My children go out calling with me and my son sits next to me when I tell fortunes that is how they learn.

(Oakley, 1983)

Currently there is a debate within sections of the community and providers of education and at least two valid points of view have emerged. The first is that Traveller and Gypsy children should be encouraged only to access the National Curriculum in mainstream schools and every effort should be made to enable them to do so. The second is that special educational facilities should be available where they can learn appropriate knowledge, crafts and skills from their cultures.

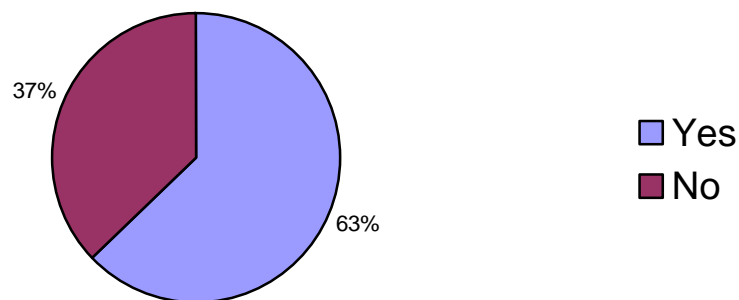
Both sides of this debate will deprive some Gypsy and Traveller children of opportunities. On the one hand they will be deprived of the chance, should they wish, to enter mainstream school and occupations. On the other hand they will be prevented from opting to stay segregated and gaining the certificates and qualifications that will enable them in the present time, to practice traditional crafts. Perhaps an amalgam of these two points of view could be arrived at?

⁵ The word Gorgio means someone who is non-Roma.

Discrimination and bullying

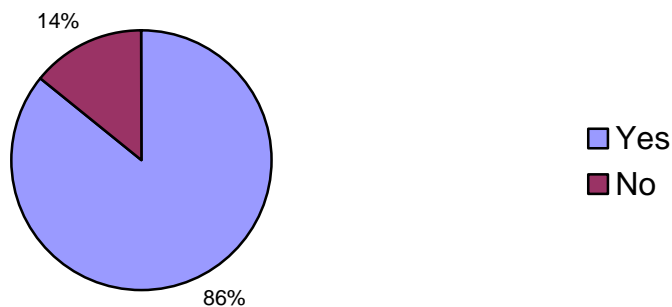
We have already touched upon issues of discrimination in the above chapters, especially in the case of education but clearly discrimination and marginalisation plays a large part in the life experience of Traveller, Gypsy and Roma children. From data collected through the survey we can see that the majority (63%) of our respondents have experienced bullying – sometimes in the form of a physical attack (Figure IV).

Figure IV Young people who were bullied or attacked physically (n = 97)



Furthermore most of the children we interviewed, from all the groups, had been subjected to racial abuse at some time in their lives (Figure V).

Figure V Young people who had received racist comments (n = 99)



Children who had experienced physical attack (Figure IV) reported:

- Being attacked in schools, in a shopping centre, in the street and at a fair in the UK
- Being frequently attacked when they lived in Slovakia, Romania and Poland.

This is what some of the young people said:

If they know then they use it against you. The police they do it worse than anyone. You're a 'T' so you must be up to something.

(Irish Traveller)

It's hard for Gypsy kids to mix and be proud of who they are. It's sad that you feel you can't be proud of your heritage.

(English Traveller)

They just don't like us. They think we are bad. Have you ever seen a Traveller policeman?

(English Traveller)

Although they were proud of their Romany identity, language and traditions three English Romany Gypsy girls and young women age 14-17 spoke about their experiences of discrimination. For instance, they did not like being called a 'Gypsy' when outsiders used it in conjunction with pejorative adjectives.

We don't like it when it's said like a name call... That's just racist.

(English Gypsy)

This leads them to want to keep their Traveller identity a secret from some people and in some places.

We don't like everyone knowing though. It's bad then (because) they put up signs saying 'No Travellers.

(English Traveller)



John (Age 9)

We just would like people to change the way they treat us. You know there are shops round here we can't go into and pubs, cafes, everything. They don't say it's because we are Travellers but that's why it is.

(English Traveller)

Yes and they kind of drag their children away like we have Aids or something.

(English Gypsy girl)

Other young English Gypsies also mentioned the issue of not being served in shops.

Sometimes the nature of interethnic discrimination was evident as suggested by the quote below.

Yes and the little shop up there says on the door only two kids from the site can go in at a time. And they (the shop owners) are Asian so they really are foreign, we're English.

(English Gypsy)

There are other ways that Gypsies and Travellers are ostracised by the local community:

My Dad says there is some club here where they get together and plan how to get rid of all the Travellers round here. Dad says we make it hard for them to make a lot of money from their houses. That's just stupid.

(English Gypsy girl)

Some Romanian Roma young people suggested that the problems are worse for females who wear traditional dress and are more easily identifiable:

People look at you as if you were rubbish or got the plague.

(Romanian Roma girl)

A young Romanian Roma participant described how people who exhibited racist attitudes towards them in the UK were from a variety of backgrounds and could also include people from other Roma and minority migrant groups. Unfortunately because of the degree of discrimination these young people experience in their lives, the majority of our young respondents see such attitudes as something they have to live with. Few people are interested in standing alongside them or helping them to try to improve the situation.

Them at the Traveller centre they are ok but they are more interested in politics and writing letters and things, not really helping us practically if you know what I mean.

(English Gypsy woman)

Differences and discrimination between Traveller, Gypsy and Roma groups (see above) can have a fragmentising effect, which weakens their position as a pressure group. Although evidence suggested that this was true amongst the adults we interviewed, it was not something that was equally shared by their children and grandchildren, who in our interviews were generally more accepting and inclusive of those from different backgrounds.

We think that all people are the same, all human beings, but we have much more in common with other Gypsies from all countries even if they do speak a slightly different language, than we do with non-Gypsy people.

(Participant in Bosnian Gypsy focus group)

Questions the young people asked

During the fieldwork process young people had some queries, which had been raised by the topics in the questionnaires.

They asked why nothing (apparently) was done to punish racists, why newspapers that frequently publish anti-Gypsy or Traveller stories were not prosecuted and why when they are bullied at school, or when fights break out (because they have been taunted with offensive comments) they are often the ones blamed. They also remarked that when they drop out of school no one tries to find out why. They feel there are marked differences in responses to prejudice against them compared to the racism aimed at other minority groups.

Gypsies or Roma arriving from Eastern Europe asked questions that highlighted similar issues. When there are laws to provide equality and protect human rights, why are they excluded from this protection? How is it possible that in some European countries a Gypsy girl can be hit or spat upon, molested or worse as she walks down the street and no one takes any action? Why don't

they have the same access to health care? Why are they discouraged or prevented from going to secondary school in their own countries? Why can they not get jobs? Why are the Governments of some European Union countries allowed to discriminate against them? Why don't people understand them, or at least try to find out more? How can they themselves start to change these things?

Sadly many of these questions remain, as yet, unanswered.

Interview with a young Traveller mother in the north of England

We just use this (park-up) because we don't have a slab. We have been waiting two years and that's with family here already. It's okay them saying that they are looking what they can do to improve things but then we get forced onto illegals and get moved on. It's no fun this time of year, my sister she's got a brand new baby and they have been moved on three times this week, the midwife can't find them to visit, they have been moved so often. They are down there, parked on the industrial park but she rang me and they think they will be moved again later today. That's three times in two days, and that's 'cos she can't get on here. You can see how crowded it is. There are not enough facilities for those of us that are here.

And then there is the prejudice from the shopkeepers, the council and particularly the police. I mean every time there is a problem it's 'let's go down the Gypsy site and see who we can find'. It's always us, always our kids. It's true we are not all angels but in about the last ten years only two from us have been sent down. Two out of a hundred at least and one of them was just a stupid kid whose Mam had given up on him. I've got four and not one of them's ever been in trouble. My man would kill them if they got into real bad trouble.

It's like I say we mind our own business and just want to live decently. We only need electric and water, bins, proper toilets and it to be safe for our kids. Not on a dump or near a road. Oh yes, and we need someone to make the doctors take us on. They don't want us. The only doctor that will take folk of this site is two bus rides away. It's like they think if they make it hard enough we will give up and go into houses. Well we won't. My family's lived the travelling life for donkeys' years and were not going to change just to suit them. It's plain bullying. That's what I think.

I grew up here in this town and we were okay but I remember going to visit some family with me Mam and the bailiffs came. I was little but I remember it and remember going back when they were on the roadside with nothing, the baby crying and all the vans damaged, all this women's china was smashed. Why don't they do something, it's not right is it? That was 20 years ago and nothings changed. They talk about it but nothing's done.

The interview above was carried out with the young mother of three children and we have included it here, because she is questioning why they have such problems finding anywhere to stay. This interview is full of the same kind of

questions the young people asked. After hearing and reading what these young people had to say, it was no surprise to us that we have a large number of young Gypsy and Travellers who feel that they are not part of mainstream society. Their reaction to the way they are treated, understandably and all too often, is to behave as if the rules and values of that society do not apply to them.

Those who work with children and young people see their first priority as that of ensuring the children's safety. All children have the right to feel safe whoever and wherever they are. They have the right to be able take pride in themselves, their culture and their history.



I wish you to know that if we were treated well by you we would treat you well as well – we are the happiest people if you just let us be!
(English Gypsy Girl)

Picture: A cooperative venture done at a focus group.

Discrimination and health

Research has exposed significant health inequalities between the Gypsy and Traveller population in England and their non-Gypsy counterparts. This is even when compared with other socially excluded groups and with other ethnic minorities (Parry et al 2007). They have shorter life expectancy, a higher perinatal death rate and suffer from more genetic disorders (Ureche et al 2004).

The Gypsies and Roma coming from Eastern Europe are more disadvantaged and suffer to an even greater extent. In short, the health of The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population of Europe, including those living in the United Kingdom has now been recognised as a major cause for concern.

It is difficult even at the most basic level for many families to access health care. In recent research in the Leeds area, many Travellers and Gypsies reported that they were unable to register with a doctor even on a temporary basis. They said that doctors' receptionists act as an impenetrable block to obtaining an appointment with a doctor.

Gypsies and Travellers are often left with no alternative but to go directly to the casualty department, even for the treatment of relatively minor elements. Because of the lack of adequate health records in cases where there may be a serious illness doctors can find it very difficult to discover the patient's history. (Horton M.2006). This becomes a matter of grave concern during pregnancy and childbirth.

Recent research has demonstrated that Gypsy and Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely than the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child (Commission for Racial Equality 2006). One young mother told us that she did not know one married woman within her community that had not lost a child. This participant, after many years of health problems, managed to find a consultant who understood the practicalities of her having to travel ten miles to the GP and accepted that she should have daily treatment direct from the hospital. The understanding of this particular doctor saved the life of her child and perhaps that of the mother. Unfortunately few of the families we spoke to in this study had the good fortune to have such an understanding and considerate doctor available to them.

It is not just the physical health of these families that is neglected. Emotional wellbeing can be seriously compromised by the effect of daily abuse and harassment. Both adults and children show signs and reactions to these kinds of stress already mentioned by teachers and other professionals in the section on education.

In our previous study, *That's Who I Am* (Ureche et al) it was found that much of the abuse suffered by the young Roma could be directly attributed to the negative press coverage they received. Initially, young people were almost completely unaware of the unfavourable press they were getting because they did not understand how the western media works. Most were not aware, largely because of their poor English or reading skills, of the stories that appeared about them in newspapers and on television and consequently they showed no anxiety in relation to the media. But as their language skills have increased so has their awareness and they have recognised, as have the other young people in our participant groups, that there is racism in certain quarters of the media and that this has a knock-on effect in the way they are treated by others. Although we found the children and young people were coping with this situation, the adults found living with this type of pressure extremely stressful.

A quote from Alvaro Gill Robles sums up the situation:

To judge by the levels of invective that can regularly be read in the national press, Gypsies would appear to be the last ethnic minority in respect of which openly racist views can still be acceptably expressed. I was truly amazed by some of the headlines, articles and editorials that were shown to me. Such reporting would appear to be symptomatic of a widespread and seemingly growing distrust of Gypsies resulting in their discrimination in a broad range of areas. If it is true that the traditional way of life of Gypsies is increasingly difficult to square with modern society, and that individual Gypsies and Travellers must themselves bear an equal responsibility for the maintenance of good relations with their neighbours, it is clear that much more serious efforts are required to accommodate their needs and promote greater tolerance towards them than are currently in evidence.

(Alvaro Gill Robles EU Commissioner for Human Rights)

In both parts of this study, whether speaking to people on the streets, professionals or members of the target communities, the media was mentioned as an organ of incitement and racism. Nothing appears to be done to stop this in spite of complaints being made to the Press Complaints Authority. In part because of their marginalisation, as individuals or even small lobby groups, these communities are not in a powerful enough position to take on the British media.

What we have discovered through this study should be sufficient reason to insist that more is done to protect these young people from such a quantity of abuse in the media.

It is not surprising that subjected to such prejudice, these children are unable to feel safe enough to talk about their lifestyles, their traditions or even to admit to their peers that they come from a Roma, Gypsy or Traveller background. Clearly in their position, continuously facing this kind of harassment day-in and day-out, they either stay where they feel safe (on their own territory) or they come out on the defensive ready for trouble.

Gypsy and Traveller young people and the youth justice system

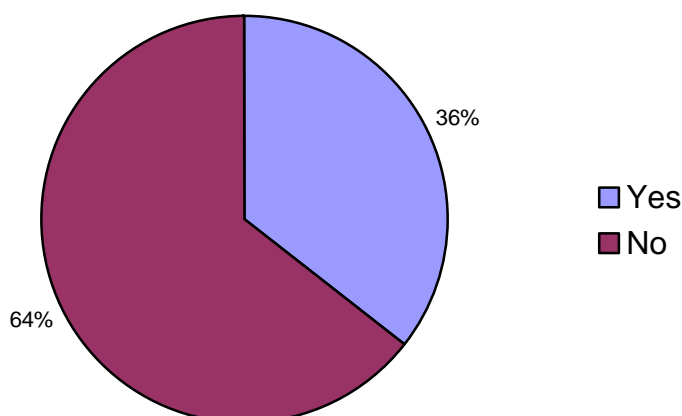
We asked the young people the following questions:

- If they had ever been in trouble with the law?
- What had happened as a result?
- What they thought of the sentences they had been given?

(Twelve respondents to the questionnaire chose not to answer these three questions).

Slightly more than one-third of the children and young people in the study said that they had been in trouble with the law at some time (Figure VI).

Figure VI Young people in trouble with law (n = 90)



Although the data did not reveal any gender difference

when it comes to getting into trouble with law, Roma children and young people were found to be most vulnerable.

I think it would be fair to say that very few of the young Gypsy and Traveller people that we work with get into trouble with the law as juveniles, it may happen later and certainly some of the lads do go that way but in all honesty not many. I wouldn't think that the numbers are any higher within this group than any other and maybe less than some. With the Roma that's different, they do tend to get into bother, usually petty crime, stealing, shoplifting that kind of thing but the factors pushing them into crime are greater, they are poorer and can't always find work. They are probably more tempted by the wealth they see around them and have been used to a different set of circumstances and values. It is all about survival, necessity as they perceive it.

(Two London EMAT team members)

Of the 32 young people who had at some time been in trouble with the law, 14 young Roma people and three of the English/Irish Gypsy group were taken to court and sentenced. Six received fines and eleven were given youth offending orders. None of the young people had received Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. As well as these thirty-two young people, there were seven respondents (who had never been in trouble with the law) who said that they had been subjected to police harassment.

Some of the young people and professionals also commented that it was noticeable that if a theft had been committed in the vicinity of a Traveller or Gypsy site, the police would often arrive at the site looking for the culprit, with nothing other than ethnicity to suggest Gypsy or Traveller involvement.

In the street survey the words 'thief', 'robber' and 'criminal' were popular choices used by respondents to describe Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (See Table 2). When we discussed this criminalisation with the young people, they

were despairing, they felt that this was the most persistent of all the labels placed on them and the one that they thought was most unfair and the hardest to shake off.

We asked the young people how they felt about the sentences they had been given. These were some of the comments they made:

Boring.

Didn't understand any of it.

Don't see what it did for me.

Okay but I didn't see the point of it.

It was a lot of money (fine).

It was not useful.

It was OK but I didn't understand what it was about.

I didn't have to do anything, it was a bit pointless.

We could consider whether such comments would be made by other young people who received youth offending orders or whether this lack of relevance was something particular to the children from our target groups (see recommendation below). Unlike children and young people born and raised in this country, two of the young Roma were able to make a comparison between sentencing in their home lands and here in the UK, where they felt they had been treated more fairly. Another five of those who had been given fines or youth offending orders also said that they felt that the punishment that they had been given was fair.

We do not have any official data, which would enable us to compare these groups of young people with other groups, as Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity is not universally monitored within the youth justice system nor by the police (see Table 3). However it is fair to say that 36% is a high number of young people to be involved with the youth justice system from such a small sample. It also appears to be the case that the younger offenders, mainly those of Roma origin were repeat offenders and also that none of them were or had been in any form of secondary education. This is something commented on by the Youth Offending team staff who were dealing with them.

They have real problems getting to grips with what the system aims to achieve. They all realise what they have done is unacceptable but just not how unacceptable it is and the effect it has on both their victims and themselves. They breach their orders more often than most other groups and will often get their orders extended for this and for re-offending during the period of the order. We also struggle to find ways to implement the objectives of the order because of the problems of language and culture. They seem more driven to offend by their social situation and don't seem to have any other way of surviving. They are often here without family support and the fact that they have no education doesn't help us to find alternatives.

(Youth Offending Team; North London)

From Police Service Monitoring

The police service has, routinely, recorded details of peoples' identity for many years in the course of detection and prevention of crime. This has taken the form of visual appearance as perceived by police. Ethnicity monitoring records something different. It does not relate to visible appearance but to people's self image in relation to their own cultural origins. The national census in 1991 was the first to seek universal information about ethnicity. At that time the categories used were simply 'white' and a number of sub-groupings of 'black' and 'Asian'. This census information has provided the benchmark for statistical analysis of ethnicity in relation to a host of different aspects of life. In relation to the public services, self-defined ethnicity and descriptive monitoring provide indications of disproportionate experiences of minority ethnic groups. Such disproportionality is a useful signpost indicating the need for action to identify and, where appropriate, to rectify the causes.

(Association of Chief Police Officers, 2001 – see below)

Table 3 Association of Chief Police Officers Guide to Self-Defined Ethnicity and Descriptive Monitoring

Major categories		Sub-groups	
Description	Code	Description	Code
White	W	British	W1
		Irish	W2
		Any other White background	W9
Mixed	M	White and Black Caribbean	M1
		White and Black African	M2
		White and Asian	M3
		Any other Mixed background	M9
Asian or Asian British	A	Indian	A1
		Pakistan	A2
		Bangladeshi	A3
		Any other Asian background	A9
Black or Black British	B	Caribbean	B1
		African	B2
		Any other Black background	B9
Chinese or other ethnic group	O	Chinese	O1
		Any other ethnic group	O9
Not Stated	NS		

Association of Chief Police Officers © Copyright 2001.

6

Street survey

At the outset of the street survey we had no idea what peoples' levels of knowledge or prejudice would be or what pre-conceived attitudes they might or might not hold about Travellers or Gypsies.

Of the media's portrayal of Gypsies and Travellers, slightly more than half of the people interviewed in the street survey thought that it was negative, more than one third regarded it as prejudiced or racially biased and about one-quarter believed it to be ill informed. In fact, only a few of those interviewed considered the media justified, accurate or fair and reasonable in its portrayal of Gypsies and Travellers (see Figure 12 in appendix).

For example one respondent explained:

Most of us only know anything about them from what we read in the press or see on the television and that is prejudiced and biased.

In the course of carrying out the survey respondent's prejudices often became evident, however we also observed that by asking the questions we seemed at times to have triggered a re-evaluation process, one or two respondents admitting to us that they were ashamed of the way they had taken on board what they had heard and read without ever trying to find out more. It would seem from the answers we received that negative attitudes toward Gypsies and Travellers are widespread. We did not categorise the people interviewed in the street by race and social status but analysis by age and gender partially supports the view that negative attitudes are held across age and gender differences. What did seem to have an effect was the increased incidence of positive comments amongst those who told us that they had friends from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The rate was even higher where respondents had met or had Traveller or Gypsy friends. The odds ratio of 7.80 indicates that those who do not have Gypsy and Traveller friends were eight times more likely than those who had such friends to use offensive terms to describe Gypsy and Traveller people (Table 4).

Table 4: Use of derogatory words against Gypsies and Travellers by having Gypsy and Traveller friends

Use of derogatory words	Have Gypsy and Traveller friends		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	5 (28)	30 (75)	35
No	13 (72)	10 (25)	23
Total	18 (100)	40 (100)	58

χ^2 (Continuity correction) = 9.68, df = 1, p = .002

Odds ratio Not having Gypsy or Traveller friends relative to having Gypsy or Traveller friends = 7.80

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

Many of those interviewed told us that they felt that even in the most 'politically correct' circles, casually made defamatory comments against Gypsies and Travellers were considered perfectly acceptable.

Very few of the people interviewed on the streets were able to name any famous or well-known figures, who were of Gypsy or Traveller origin. When we offered some suggestions such as John Bunyan, Elvis Presley, Charlie Chaplin, Mother Teresa they were greeted with amazement and disbelief. What the street survey showed was that people generally had little information available to them about Travellers and Gypsies in general and that what information they received through the media was negative, ill-informed, biased and, on occasions, openly racist. There were a number of respondents who recognised that this was the case but said that they felt such views were fair and accurate.

The answers given on the street also demonstrated that widespread hostility towards these groups was a reality and bears out much of what the young Gypsy and Traveller people had spoken about in their survey. It may in part explain why many of the children and young people we had consulted said that they felt many adults (professionals and others with a duty of care) were less than diligent in stamping on racist comments and bullying when it was aimed at children from Gypsy and Traveller communities.

In *Here to Stay* Margaret Greenfield sums it up when she says:

Common misunderstandings about the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain can be dispelled if some time, energy and commitment is put into improving community relations between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. In promoting a more tolerant climate in Britain where Gypsies and Travellers can integrate without being assimilated, we are seeking a new kind of multicultural future.

(Greenfield 2006)

Recommendations

Since this study reveals that people from the street survey who had no friends from the Gypsy and Traveller community were more likely to use derogatory terms against them, we can emphasise the importance of encouraging and facilitating inter-group contact as a way of lessening animosity and increasing understanding.

Traveller education needs to be informed by Travellers. Considerably more notice should be taken of the wishes of the young people and their parents when planning their education. Early consultation and greater understanding of how the present system impacts on Traveller, Gypsy and Roma cultures should be the norm.

Some Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities require that girls have access to single sex education and we recommend that this single sex education should be available to these and other groups who have this requirement in order that girls should not be excluded from education.

Serious concerns were raised throughout this study about media portrayal of these communities as well as the way in which media appeared to ignore complaints. Racism in any form is unacceptable, in the media as elsewhere. Efforts should be made by the appropriate authorities to ensure that anti-Gypsy, Roma and Traveller stories are not published unquestioned and unchallenged.

Those young people who fall foul of the law should be able to carry out their sentences in a manner that has meaning to them and therefore some hope of a positive outcome. Youth offending teams and others dealing with these young people from Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities should receive cultural sensitivity training to enable them to devise appropriate ways of working.

New Travellers who wish to change their way of life need help with the many basic practicalities of transition.

Final words

I am seven years old. I am an Irish Traveller and I want my voice heard just like other children.

(Youngest contributor to the study aged seven)

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Appendix

TABLE I Migratory roots young people's grandparents

Variables	%
Mother's country of birth (99)	
England	54
Ireland	8
Slovakia	8
Poland	6
Romania	19
Wales	2
Other ⁴	3
Father's country of birth (98)	
England	53
Ireland	11
Slovakia	5
Poland	4
Romania	19
Germany	2
Czech	2
Other ⁵	4
Grandparents' (mother's mother) country of birth	
England	44
Ireland	14
Slovakia	6
Poland	6
Romania	20
Wales	2
Czech	2
Russia	2
Hungary	2
Other ⁶	2
Grandparents' (mother's father) country of birth	
England	45
Ireland	12
Slovakia	7
Poland	6
Romania	19
Scotland	2

Hungary	3
Other ⁷	4

Grandparents' (father's mother) country of birth

England	43
Ireland	13
Slovakia	6
Poland	6
Romania	22
Germany	2
Russia	3
Other ⁸	5

Grandparents' (father's father) country of birth

England	34
Ireland	17
Slovakia	5
Poland	5
Romania	19
Wales	4
Russia	6
Ukraine	2
Bulgaria	2
Other ⁹	6

1 Welsh and Czech (one in each group). * Because of multiple response categories, the sum of percentages will not be equal to 100. 2 Asocial means. 3 Walsh and Czech Rep (one in each group). 4 Scotland, Spain and Czech Rep. (one in each group). 5 Wales, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary (One in each group). 6 Scotland and Ukraine (one in each group). 7 Wales, Russia, France, Moldova (One in each group). 8 Wales, Scotland, Ukraine, Hungary, France, Moldova (One in each group). 9 Scotland, Spain, Czech Rep., Hungary, France, Moldova (One in each group).

Figure 1 Percentage distribution of age of the participant in street survey (n = 118)

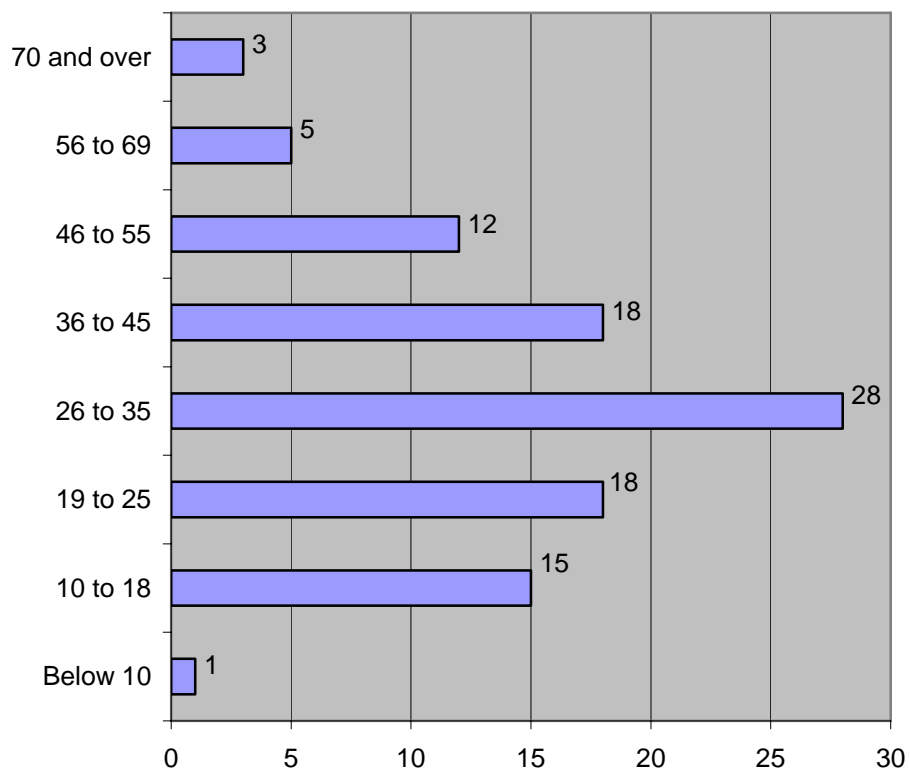
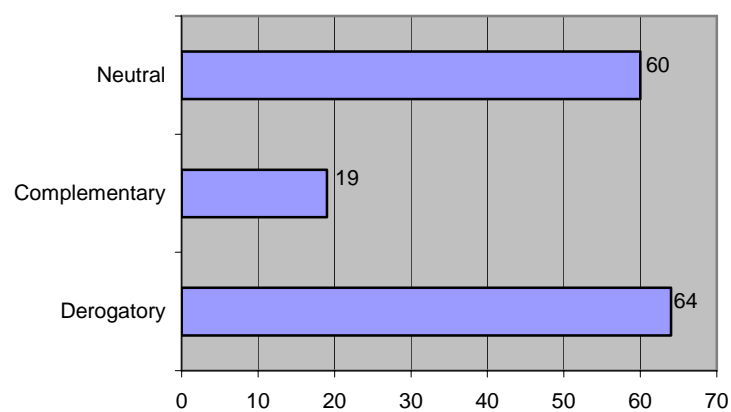


FIGURE 2 Type of words or phrases people in the street survey used to describe Gypsy and Traveller (n=103)



Note: Because of multiple responses, the sum of percentages is not equal to 100.

FIGURE 3 The best thing about being gypsies/travellers

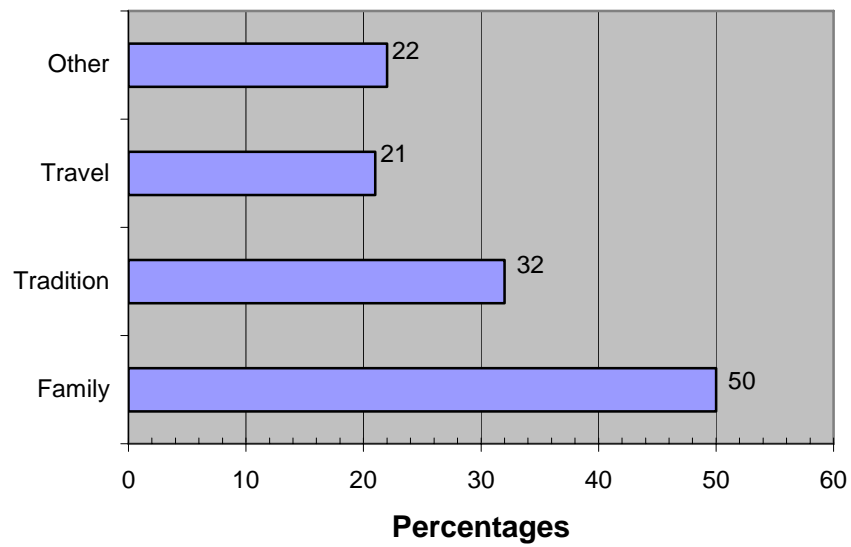


FIGURE 4 Things young people do not do but they should (n = 82)

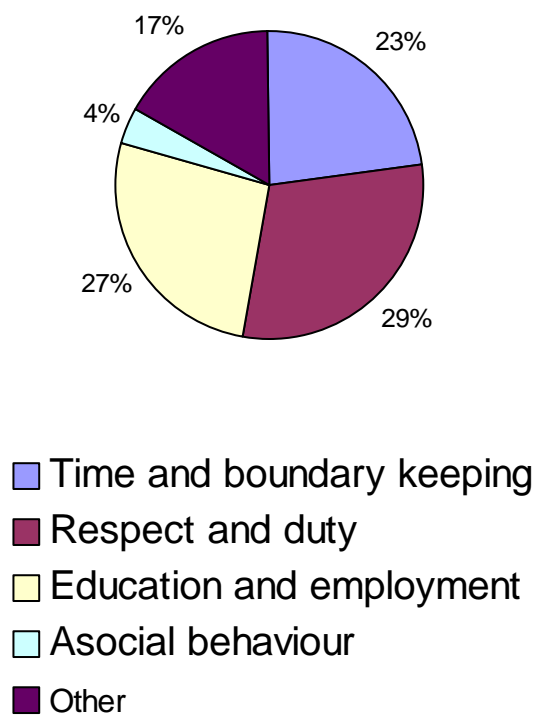


FIGURE 5 Rights young people expect to have (n = 86)

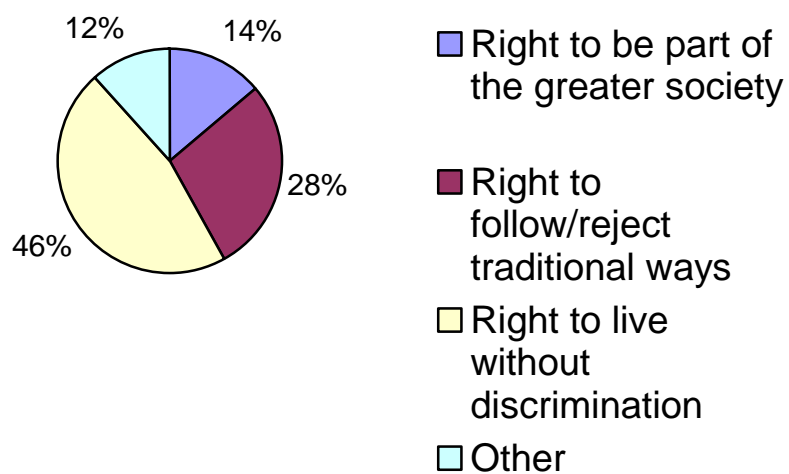


FIGURE 6 Young people's opinion on 'Boss' in their family (n = 100)

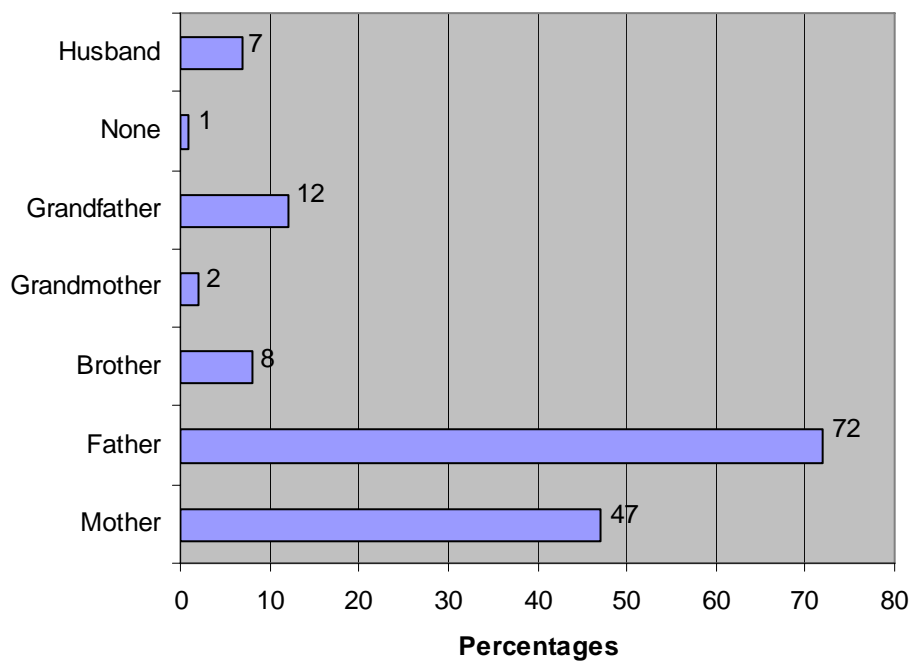


FIGURE 7 Meeting or speaking to Gypsies or Travellers from other countries (n = 97)

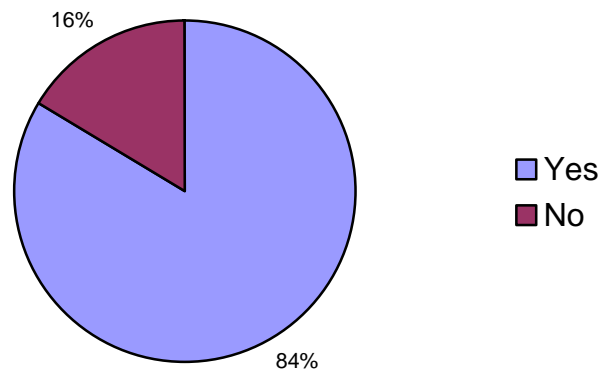


FIGURE 8 Young people's attitude towards Gypsies and Travellers whom they met or spoke with from other countries (n = 77)

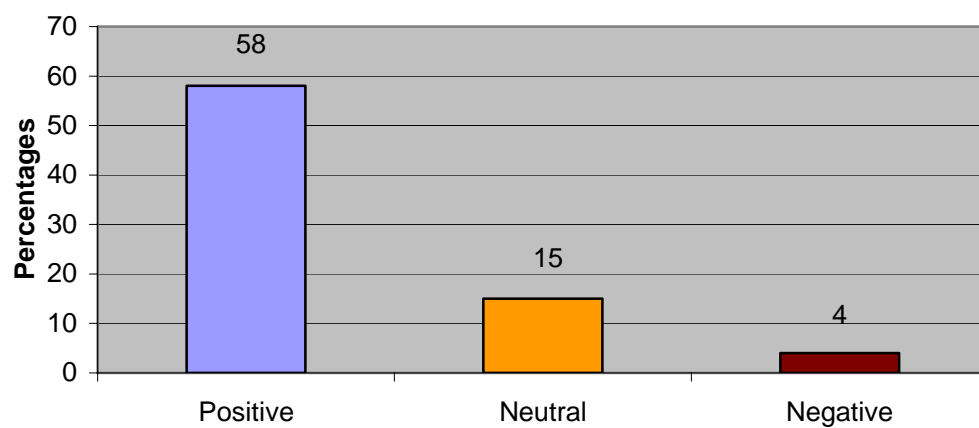


FIGURE 9 Young people attending school (n = 100)

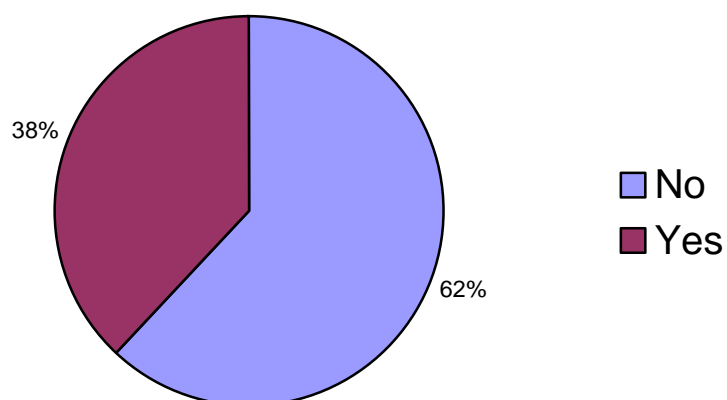


FIGURE 10 Young people who have been absent from school for a long period of time (n = 82)

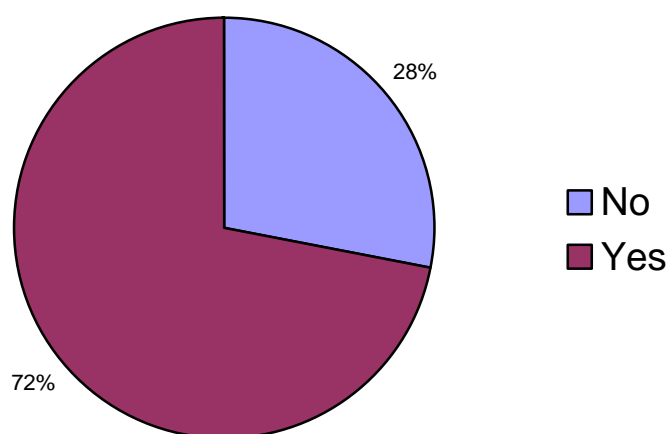


FIGURE 11 Young people's opinion on enjoying school (n = 92)

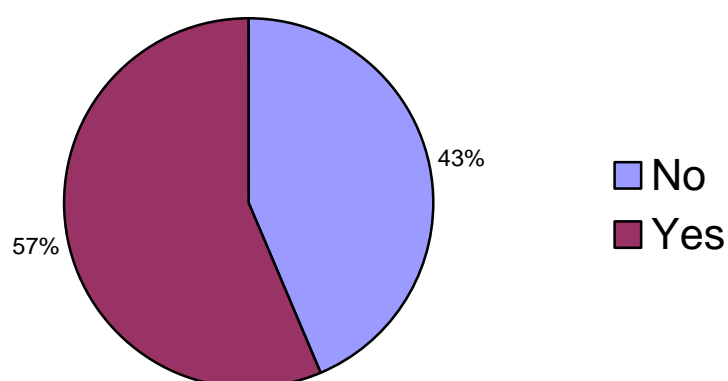


FIGURE 12 Opinion on portrayal of Gypsy and Traveller by media (n = 103)

