



A Good Practice Guide: Improving service provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller domestic abuse survivors

February 2022

About the Traveller Movement

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

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Acknowledgements

The Traveller Movement wishes to thank the all the courageous Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors who shared their experiences with us. This report is your report, and we hope it will help other survivors to get the help they deserve and need.

We also want to thank all the service providers who took time to fill out our survey and especially those who agreed to be interviewed. Your insights were crucial in writing this report.

Finally, we want to give an enormous thank you to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, for giving her support for this work and to the MOPAC VAWG Grassroots fund for funding this work.

Foreword

It is my firm belief that no victim or survivor of domestic abuse should ever be prevented from accessing the support they need because of who they are. That belief is the driving force of my work as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. I believe in championing all survivors of domestic abuse in my work to raise awareness of key issues and best practice, and to hold local and national government to account so they improve their response to domestic abuse.

For too long, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) victims and survivors have been left behind. This Good Practice Guide from the Traveller Movement is a truly valuable tool in raising awareness of the barriers that GRT survivors face when it comes to accessing support. The guide outlines what specialist services, statutory agencies, local and national Government must do to ensure that GRT victims and survivors of domestic abuse get the support they need.

It also makes the case that there needs to be long term sustainable funding for specialist domestic abuse services aimed at the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

I welcome the Traveller Movement's recommendation to strengthen important partnerships between wider domestic abuse services and specialist 'by and for' services for GRT victims and survivors, including targeted outreach strategies for GRT survivors of domestic abuse.

As Domestic Abuse Commissioner, one of my key priorities is to improve the pathways to support and protection for migrant victims and survivors of domestic abuse. I am highly concerned by the report's findings that some Roma survivors don't have the vital documentation they need and face significant barriers to regularise their stay in the UK through routes like the EU Settlement Scheme.

My Safety Before Status report calls for improved pathways to support for migrant victims who have No Recourse to Public Funds, and for greater awareness and understanding of immigration abuse – whereby perpetrators use victims and survivors' insecure immigration status as a tool of coercive control.

A fear of their data being shared with immigration enforcement also prevents many Roma victims and survivors from reporting abuse and reaching out for support from public services. I support the Traveller Movement's call for a firewall between the police and immigration enforcement so that migrant victims can report domestic abuse without fear of deportation and detention.

This Domestic Abuse Good Practice Guide by The Traveller Movement is an excellent resource for any organisation working with victims and survivors of domestic abuse from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. I hope the report's findings and recommendations will help drive change to improve support for victims and survivors.



Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse
Commissioner for England
and Wales

“For too long, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) victims and survivors have been left behind”

Executive summary

This report outlines good practice in domestic abuse services in the UK and the main barriers to engagement for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors of domestic abuses. The results are based on 176 survey responses and 18 in-depth interviews.

Without a shadow of a doubt much more needs to be done to support GRT survivors experiencing domestic abuse. As this research succinctly demonstrates, further improvements are necessary to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors and will require **education, flexibility, political will and sustainable funding**.

In this research we identify the themes that emerged from discussions on good and bad practice; provide good practice initiatives and case studies and highlight the survivor's voice and recommendations for practice in the future. The presenting issues include: discriminatory practice; unmet literacy needs; inadequate safety planning; mutual lack of trust and; miscommunication.

From this research, and our advocacy work more generally, it is clear that mainstream services who support survivors of domestic abuse are often unaware of the issues that affect Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. This lack of understanding impacts the GRT survivor's experience of the service and has led to fatal misunderstandings in the past.

In the few cases where good practice was evident, services provided the following:



Flexibility in practice



Insight into the GRT communities



Respect and a commitment to inclusion

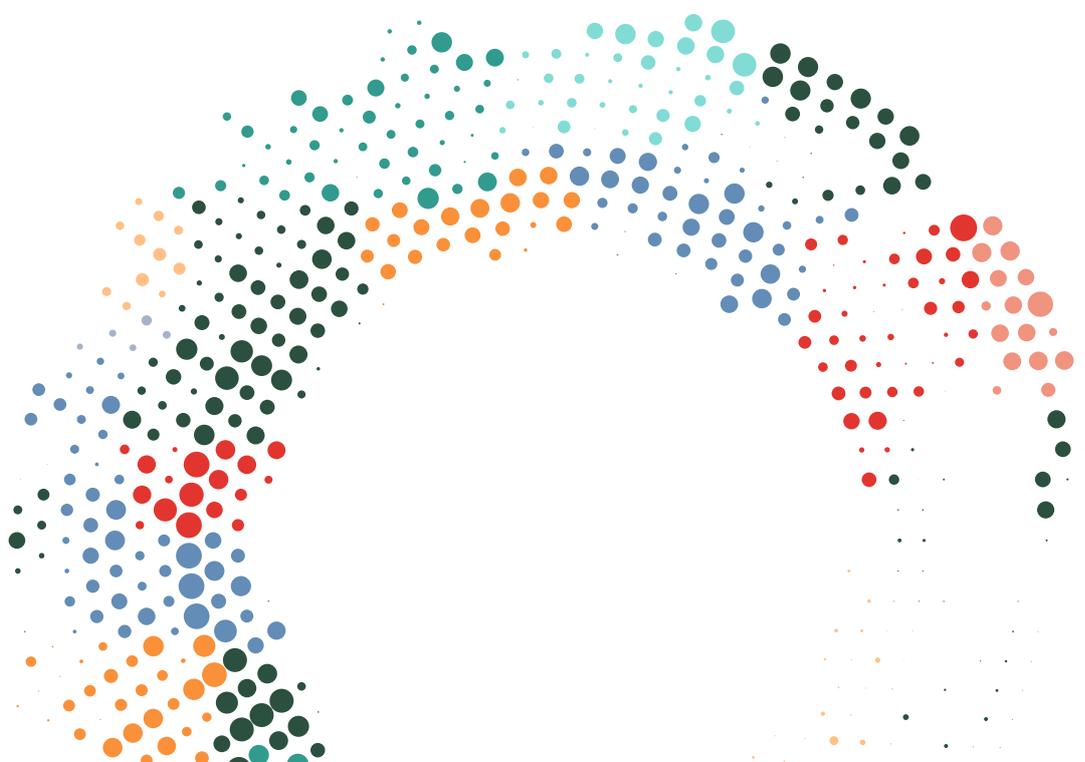


Long-term support



Clear and honest communication

Throughout this report we use the acronym GRT to mean Gypsy, Roma and Traveller. We do not suggest that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are the same, but this acronym is used for the sake of brevity.



Key findings

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Survivors

- Survivors do not have confidence or trust in services because services lack awareness and education of GRT survivors and culture.
- Many survivors do not disclose their ethnicity to professionals for the fear of discrimination and abuse.
- Many GRT survivors lose their whole family and community when leaving the abusive relationship and therefore need support rebuilding their lives from scratch.
- 'Honour-based abuse' and shame can be a part of some GRT survivors experience of domestic abuse, but it is not part of all GRT survivors' experience.
- GRT survivors are often treated as victims of their culture and not as victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
- The fear of social workers has deterred GRT survivors from calling the police. An increasing number of Traveller women are taking their own lives after having been approached by the Children's services.
- Immigration is an issue for Roma survivors who are afraid to access support and risk deportation.

Service Providers



24%

of domestic abuse service providers did not know whether any Romany Gypsies, Roma or Travellers lived in their areas, either on caravan sites or in bricks and mortar housing.



66%

of domestic abuse service providers did not feel their service was aware of how to successfully engage and accommodate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women.



79%

of domestic abuse service providers had not received targeted domestic abuse awareness training about GRT communities and survivors.



88%

of domestic abuse service providers had not implemented GRT outreach strategies.



60%

of domestic abuse service providers do not offer targeted support to overcome language or literacy barriers.



80%

of domestic abuse service providers believed they have worked with Gypsies, Roma or Travellers in the past.



98%

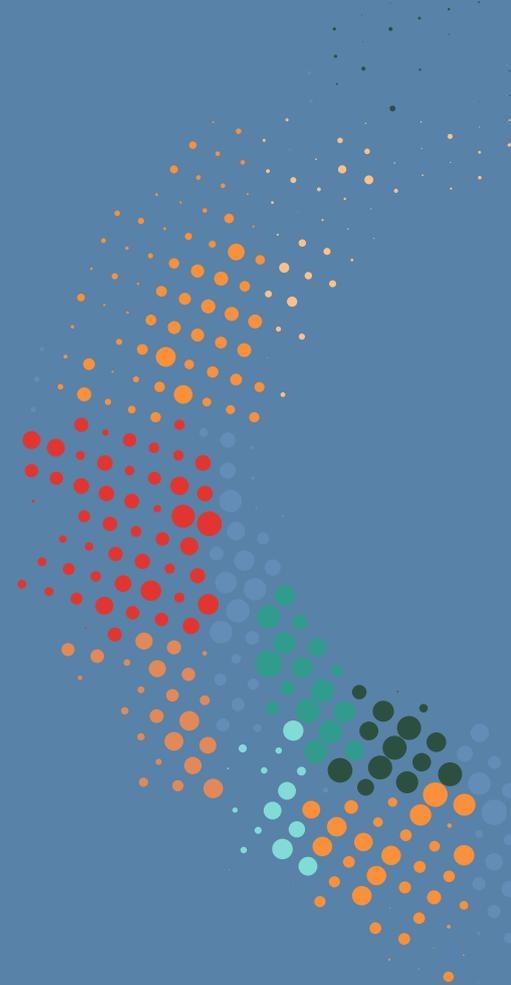
domestic abuse service providers believe there is a need for more training about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women's experiences of domestic abuse.

A photograph of a group of women, likely in a religious or cultural setting. The woman in the foreground is wearing a grey jacket and has her hands clasped over a white cloth. Other women in the background are wearing traditional headscarves and are also looking towards the camera. The image is slightly blurred, focusing on the woman in the foreground.

“a Traveller woman will try maybe 100 times before she finally walks away because the barriers for her is first and foremost the religion. Walking away is putting scandal on her name, giving herself a bad name, even if she’s abused.”

Recommendations

- Central government and wider funding bodies should adopt a person centred commissioning model to support VAWG services
- More sustainable and longer term funding options need to be explored urgently for specialist services, mainstream support services and perpetrator programmes in order to provide much needed first point of contact and long-term holistic support.
- Funders should remove unnecessary funding constraints that are target-driven and time limited for small and medium sized charities.
- Following the work of charities Southall Black Sisters and Liberty, we recommend the introduction of a complete firewall between the police and the Home Office applicable to victims and witnesses of all crimes.
- Mental health and youth services should be allocated more funding in order to address the root causes of VAWG.
- 'Honour-based abuse' (HBA) should be considered on a case-by-case basis by IDVAs, ISVAs and Refuge Workers, regardless of the survivors' culture, religion or ethnicity. HBA should not be assumed as a part of any culture, religion or ethnicity and not taken as a stamp on policy towards all GRT survivors.
- Social workers, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs), Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) and other mainstream support workers must receive GRT led cultural competency training and this should be integrated into formal education curricula and training structures.
- Larger mainstream domestic abuse services should consider partnerships with specialist services to develop Service Level Agreements and other initiatives of equal partnership work.
- Larger mainstream domestic abuse services should explore collaborative working opportunities with faith groups to further their reach and service provision for marginalised communities.
- Specialist services should partner with the charity Pause (and other similar) programme(s) to adapt available supports to GRT parents' post-permanent removal of children from the home.
- GRT organisations and wider service providers should strengthen relationships and collaborate with 'Parent, Family and Allies Network' (PFAN) and 'International Parent Advocacy Network' (IPAN) to develop targeted outreach strategies and empower GRT parents to become peer advocates.
- Local Authorities and the charity sector should offer targeted and more holistic support for GRT survivors who are in contact with Children's Services.
- Mainstream service providers should undertake more direct 121 advocacy to address potential digital exclusion and literacy issues of GRT survivors.



Introduction

For over a decade, Traveller Movement have been undertaking work to raise awareness of how domestic abuse impacts Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) women. This project has been at the heart of our work and we have since branched out to new areas including advice and support, training for service providers and GRT women. In our domestic abuse training for service providers, we are continually asked questions on barriers, accessibility and engagement. Noticing this gap in knowledge, we sought to research good practices to better inform domestic abuse services on how they can support GRT survivors.

All our projects are delivered by and with GRT women with lived experiences of domestic abuse, ensuring a deep level of understanding and sensitivity of the complexities of such relationships, and the difficulties and barriers to accessing support and advice. GRT women will experience services differently. Among many of the larger domestic abuse support providers, there has been a push to focus on how services impact minority women, and how to improve outreach and engagement to these communities. Our research aims to find how this can best be done for GRT women by giving the opportunity to GRT survivors of domestic abuse to tell us what they need. Through interviews with survivors, we will answer the questions of what more is needed, what is missing from services and what is working well, but needs expanding.



Background – what do we know so far?

The London Equality and Human Rights Commission state “the topic of domestic violence is still predominantly invisible in policy and practice [for GRT communities] which appears to reflect the overall institutional failure to mainstream the needs of Gypsies and Travellers across all areas”¹. No large-scale studies on domestic abuse in GRT communities have been conducted in the UK, and certain small-scale studies have been misleadingly and unethically generalised. A 2007 study claimed that 61% of married Romany Gypsy women and 81% of married Irish Traveller women experienced direct domestic abuse². Although these statistics have been quoted in a variety of sources, the lack of transparency around methodology, recruitment and sample size undermine their validity. Ethnicity monitoring is a concern that obscures the reality of domestic abuse in GRT communities. Where data collection on ethnicity is gathered, there can be high risks of inaccuracy, inconsistency and unpredictability. For example, although the census now collects data on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations, the Metropolitan (and most other) police forces do not, nor does the NHS³.

Consequently, little peer-reviewed research exists on the relationship between service providers and GRT survivors of domestic abuse. Whilst Mary Allen tackles this topic with regards to Irish Travellers and social work⁴, Gypsies and Roma survivors were not included and the research does not extend to the British context. This Good Practice Guide (GPG) aims to challenge unfounded claims by grounding our recommendations in both quantitative and qualitative data. There are good practice guides available, but none have focused on the accessibility needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors in the UK context. In 2011, Pavee Point developed a useful GPG to better engage Travellers in the Republic of Ireland⁵, but this does not reflect the realities of good practice in the UK. While certain similarities in relation to discrimination, racism, distrust of services and a lack of support arose in the Pavee Point GPG, police protocols, family law, refuge criteria and domestic abuse service provision can and does vary in the context of the United Kingdom.

This Good Practice Guide aims to build on recommendations from previous research in a way that is adaptable to the current climate. In 2019, the Women and Equalities Committee published a chapter on violence against women and girls within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities⁶. The women they interviewed recommended that “a ‘key worker’ who understood the specific needs that they had and would not ask ‘intrusive questions’ in a way that the women found offensive and confusing” would be beneficial. In 2009, Friends, Families and Travellers produced a leaflet for professionals on *Supporting Gypsies and Travellers living with Domestic Violence*⁷. As a result of discrimination, poor health, high illiteracy levels and a ‘belief that [service] provision is not appropriate or welcoming, or that services are unavailable to them’,⁸ GRT women face additional barriers to accessing information, services and protection from violence, which place them at further risk of domestic and sexual violence.

1 Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Matthews, Z., Whitwell, C. (2009) ‘Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review’, *Equality and Human Rights Commission*, available at: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research_report_12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

2 Lewis, H.J. (2007) ‘A multi-method evaluation of a community initiative intended to improve the quality of healthcare in the Gypsy and Traveller communities’, *PhD Thesis*, Cardiff University: Cardiff

3 NHS England (2015) *Monitoring Equality and Health Inequalities: A Position Paper*. Leeds: NHS England/Equality and Health Inequalities Team, available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/monitrg-ehi-pos-paper.pdf>

4 Allen, M. (2012) ‘Domestic violence within the Irish travelling community: the challenge for social work’, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 42(5)

5 Pavee Point (2011) ‘Section Three: Principles for Good Practice’, *Good Practice Guidelines for Services Working with Traveller Women Experiencing Domestic Abuse*, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/VAW-Best-Practice-Guidelines-for-Service-Providers.pdf>

6 Women and Equalities Committee (2019) ‘Violence against women and girls’, *Tackling Inequalities Faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities*, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html#heading-13> [accessed 14/11/21]

7 Friends, Families and Travellers (2009) ‘Supporting Gypsies and Travellers living with domestic violence’, available at: <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/10.06.09-DV-leaflet.pdf>

8 *ibid*

With the recent introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Traveller Movement echoes the concerns of Southall Black Sisters⁹, the Latin American Women's Rights Service and the End Violence Against Women Coalition. Migrant women are not offered equal protection and support through this new law and Roma survivors are no longer recognised as EEA nationals that have a right to live in the UK. Roma Support Group spoke to the change in Home Office guidance 2016 which saw the "up scaling of various approaches to the administrative removal of EEA nationals, including Roma, from the UK"¹⁰. The joint Home Office, local authorities and Met police operations have been using Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) to justify their removal as "rough sleeping is considered to be an abuse of free movement rights,"¹¹.

"While experiencing the need to escape abusive partners or faced with homelessness after the breakdown of a relationship, Roma women have been threatened with having to either accept coach or plane tickets back to their country of origin or being made street homeless (with the subsequent threat of having their children removed from their care)."

Throughout our review of the existing literature, we struggled to find survivors' voices and failed to find sources that centred survivors' voices. Racism and discrimination impact women's help-seeking efforts and generic services are rarely designed with GRT voices and needs in mind.

"There is a distinct absence in generating the voice of Roma women in policy decisions... includ[ing] the availability of culturally competent health care (including maternal health). This leaves many Roma women facing the choice of using male relatives as interpreters and decision makers on their health or having no access to health care at all. There is a corresponding difficulty in accessing other services including domestic violence support, including the ability to have an empowered interaction with children's services."

There is a lack of evidence about what GRT survivors want and a lack of research that is grounded in domestic abuse services and how they support survivors. This Good Practice Guide seeks to centre the voice of the survivor and understand better how GRT survivors view domestic abuse support services and what they would like to change. In our interviews, we touched on the support offered by refuge, social work, police and local authorities.

Methodology

We conducted in-depth interviews with 7 Irish Traveller, Romany Gypsy and Roma survivors and, alongside the perspective of the survivor, individual interviews were also carried out with 16 members of staff from the domestic abuse sector. Certain interviewees occupied both the position of GRT survivor and service provider. We created a survey and distributed it through our networks, contacts and social media channels, to maximise the response rate. Our surveys received responses from 176 domestic abuse service providers working with survivors. The results from this research will be strengthened by the institutional knowledge Traveller Movement has gained in working directly with and helping GRT survivors over the past 20 years.

9 Liberty and Southall Black Sisters (2018) *Super-Complaint on data-sharing between the police and Home Office regarding victims and witnesses to crime*, available at: <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/liberty-and-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-on-data-sharing-between-the-police-and-home-office-regarding-victims-and-witnesses-to-crime/> [accessed 18/01/22]

10 Roma Support Group (2017) '8.7. Administrative Removals and Roma', *June Newsletter*, p23 available at: https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/june_2017v2.pdf [accessed 18/01/22]

11 *ibid*

“I think, in general services, and I do need to remember that we are an ethnic minority, and we have our own culture. Now our culture is not to hurt children or adults. ... Because it was only in the 1960s, they could take your children into care for being a Gypsy”



Results

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors

We interviewed 7 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors about their experience engaging with domestic abuse services in the UK. The key themes that emerged surrounded their experiences of **discrimination in services, inadequate safety planning due to ignorance about domestic abuse in GRT communities, and unsustainable support**. Where good practice was identified, survivors spoke of one consistent person who had built a relationship with them and understood their experience. In these instances, long-term support was offered in order for greater flexibility in practice and greater space to heal.

Discrimination and Racism

Survivors spoke of the lack of awareness and education of domestic abuse services which resulted in a loss of confidence and trust. Interviewees recounted instances in which their safety plans were inappropriate and unsafe due to mainstream services lack of understanding around GRT ethnicity and cultures. Confirming previous research,¹² survivors felt they needed to educate professionals on their ethnicity and culture.

“The first thing is just like to learn about these communities, because I literally had someone telling me that, Oh, I’m Roma, this means I’m from Rome in Italy.” Roma Survivor

Many survivors did not disclose their ethnicity to professionals for the fear of discrimination and abuse. Some survivors who had revealed their ethnicity, told us they noticed a change in the service providers behaviour. Survivors felt less supported upon disclosure, from support workers distancing themselves to refuge workers who actively put-down Traveller women for “always going back to the abuse.” As services are lacking in awareness of GRT needs and can behave discriminatorily, GRT service users have little trust in the process. For services to be able to rebuild trust, they need to dedicate time and resources to long-term relationships:

“it’s long-term engagement, but it’s actually putting in the effort to engage and not being so I guess impatient, is maybe the word, with Travellers ... some of them are not educated or equipped to know, a lot of things like, they can’t just fill in application forms, or they’re missing letters. I don’t think services are engaging enough; they’re not calling or visiting, you know, for someone to build a trust with you, you need to, they need to feel comfortable with you” Irish Traveller survivor

“[The police are] literally your abuser, you don’t ask for help, to the same people who are murdering people in the community; who are abusing you; who are kicking you out of your house, and so on.” Roma survivor

“it’s hard to trust [social workers], the same people that already have an idea in their head about who you are, what you are. And then you have to supposedly trust them with your life and with your children’s life,” Irish Traveller survivor

¹² Thompson, R., Stone, B. and Tyson, P. (2021) 'Mental health support needs within Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities: a qualitative study', *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 10.1108/MHSI-09-2021-0066.

Survivors felt that there needs to be greater representation of GRT people in the domestic abuse service sector – but not as a substitute for organisation-wide training. Interviewees who held both the role of professional and survivor found that they have felt tokenised in their role and the organisation has sidestepped their responsibility as an organisation to become culturally competent:

“A lot of organisations just rely on their workers who are part of diverse minority groups, but I think it’s wrong because you cannot, like just rely on one person that knows this.”

Roma survivor

It is also important that services do not overstate the cultural, religious or ethnic differences between GRT communities and the wider population. One Roma woman spoke to the problems with mainstream services assuming cultural differences:

“You are just basically blaming the community and it’s the community’s fault. They are this, this is their culture and you cannot intervene and so on. And I feel like just like an excuse that it’s like really easy to use...It’s not the ethnicity. It is like just patriarchy.” **Roma survivor**

While it is important to be aware of potential risk factors, over relying on difference produces the same problem of inadequately risk assessing the situation. Despite the existence of IDVAs, GRT survivors are still often passed around multiple services and treated in a compartmentalised way instead of taking a holistic approach. One Irish Traveller recommended *“one support officer that kind of explains everything to you. So, you don’t have multiple calls coming in.”* She felt there had not been consistent support from any services she had been in contact with.

Ignorance about culture and barriers

“I think the biggest difference between like Travellers and settled people is that they’ve got a support system and Travellers don’t.” **Irish Traveller survivor**

Irish Travellers are often devoted Roman Catholics and therefore divorce may not be an option for many women, even if they are been abused by their husband. Some of the survivors we spoke to explained that their priest would be the only person they would confide in and, depending on his reaction, make the decision to stay or leave the relationship. Traveller Movement believes that in order to help GRT victims of domestic abuse, domestic abuse services should consider partnering with faith leaders to inform them of the local services available.

Those GRT women who decide and manage to leave an abusive relationship can face shaming from their own community and even family. In the worst cases, the women can be ostracised from their community as ‘dirty women’.

“a Traveller woman will try maybe 100 times before she finally walks away because the barriers for her is first and foremost the religion. Walking away is putting scandal on her name, giving herself a bad name, even if she’s abused. The family, the pressures, she’ll lose, you know, she’ll lose her community and she may lose her all immediate family.”

Irish Traveller survivor

The shame and scandal¹³ for leaving a relationship can be a reason why survivors return to the abuse. In order to save the family from the shame that separation can bring, families can be complicit in the abuse, side with the perpetrator or shame the survivor for leaving the relationship or seeking support. The abuse does not necessarily end when the survivor leaves the abusive partner. Isolation, minimising and shaming of survivors can be used by the whole community as a way to police so-called ‘unacceptable’ behaviour.

¹³ Traveller Movement (2021) *‘Under the Magnifying Glass’ A report on shaming within Gypsy and Traveller communities.*

“I’m in a different country. I’m in a house that is not mine. And with a family that is his family that whenever I ask for some advice, they’ll be like, well, you should be ashamed for even asking” Roma survivor

“It does change your life in a way that, even though I made the right choice and people know I went through, people will still look down at you. So, you know, things like attending family events, such as funerals, and so on, isn’t as not as easy to turn up.” Irish Traveller survivor

From our advocacy work with GRT survivors and from the interview findings, we know that it is not uncommon for certain family or community members to assist the perpetrator in locating the survivor and coerce them into returning home. One survivor told us that another Irish Traveller woman (related to her ex-husband) in the refuge befriended her and informed her ex-partner where she was. For this reason, some refuge policies have been known to prohibit two Traveller women from sharing accommodation. While we support this safety measure, the decision should be communicated with each GRT survivor to ensure an accurate risk assessment has been undertaken. When community involvement is present, it is important to consider the survivor’s emotional wellbeing, isolation level and to explore alternative avenues to rebuild support networks.

A number of survivors we spoke with likened their experience to that of so-called honour-based abuse (HBA). One survivor spoke of the benefit in recognising GRT communities as victims of HBA as they would be afforded greater safeguarding measures:

“If we get a victim of honour-based violence from that community ... we will help you to find the house that’ll keep you safe or like, photograph your ID. We’ll take your fingerprints, we’ll take your DNA, we’ll take a photograph of you. All the safeguarding support, you know what I mean, because we believe you’re in greater danger.” Roma survivor

Services are not aware of the community pressure that can be present for GRT survivors. For these women, it can feel easier to remain in the abusive relationship than to lose their family and community, and to enter a society that is often hostile towards and/or ignorant about them. The shame does not only impact the reputation of the survivor, it can extend to their children and family as well. Therefore, in deciding whether to leave or not, GRT survivors often feel they have no choice but to stay; the alternative is leaving behind your relationship, your family, your community and possibly your children.

“it’s the shame and, you know, if they did leave, you know, 99% of chances they’re going back, it’s not gonna last because of the pressure of, you know, what people think of them or what people are going to say about them because they’re looking after not only their reputation, but the reputation of their children and their family.” Irish Traveller survivor

“You will have all the community coming after you and you like, it’s not an easy thing. Most times, you just leave the community. I mean, this is what happened with my family. So, it’s a big thing, you’re basically losing all the ties you’ve had. So, you’re really thinking like, Is it worth it? I mean, to lose everything, or to just stay here?” Roma survivor

“My whole family disowned me, told me I was a dirty woman for getting a divorce and Travellers don’t do that. I have five children - my two eldest children stopped talking to me, 3 youngest came with me.” Irish Traveller survivor

“It mentally destroys you inside because, when your family doesn’t speak to you and stuff and it feels like you’ve done wrong. Then sometimes I often thought to myself, I shouldn’t have left if I had to stay then maybe I would still be speaking to my family now.” Irish Traveller survivor

From the testimonies above, we can see how services need to support GRT survivors to “rebuild [their] lives from scratch.” Mainstream services are ill-equipped to deal with the potential added risks which are not assessed through the DASH risk assessment.

However, it is important to remember that so called honour-based abuse and shame can be a part of some GRT survivors' experience of domestic abuse, but it is not part of all GRT survivors' experience. This needs to be assessed with each individual survivor and not as a stamp on policy towards all GRT survivors.

For those GRT survivors who are facing community pressure and abuse, safety planning has to take into consideration the potential risks of relocating them where other GRT residents are as they may be part of the wider family and support the abuser. Where refuge spaces, emergency accommodation or peer support is offered, service providers must explore the potential additional risks GRT survivors may face with them.

(Un)Sustainable support

GRT survivors spoke of the need for greater support in all areas of life: financial support; support transitioning from sites to bricks and mortar; support through the Child Protection process; support in refuges; support in education, housing, welfare and, crucially, support from trained staff who understand the needs of GRT communities.

"I'll never forget it; I saw a fridge inside full of mould. It stunk. I said to her 'do you want that?' She said 'if you can do anything with it take it', so I took it back that day, gave it a good bleaching out, but I've never done anything like that you know, but it was when I was desperate. I didn't have a fridge. I didn't have anything. I had to rebuild my life. I think there should be more financial support for women," Romany Gypsy survivor

Refuge provision

All the interviewed survivors who had been placed in a refuge spoke about the feeling of total isolation they had experienced whilst there. The adjustment had been especially difficult for those who had lived on caravan sites surrounded by their family and community. One survivor we interviewed had never lived in a house before refuge and compared it to the feeling of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of GRT survivors, however, always lived in bricks and mortar housing but that did not make the adjustment to refuge any easier. The shared kitchens with other women with different cleanliness standards and rules are difficult to adapt to for GRT women whom live by strict cleanliness rules.¹⁴

One Romany Gypsy survivor spoke about not having any support in accessing welfare or when searching for employment. She recommended a live-in support worker that could offer emotional support and practical information. She described the process of leaving the relationship as a lonely one that needed re-building brick by brick.

"You come away with nothing. Just the clothes on your back...when you go [a refuge], straightaway, you haven't got no support and you feel so alone. You're in a room on your own with the children and there's no one to talk to... I think there should be someone there 24 hours living in to support these women" Romany Gypsy survivor

This woman said if she needed support, she would need to wait for 2 or 3 weeks to see a refuge worker and otherwise was advised to search the internet for support and information. She compared her experience in refuge to living in a prison and felt like she was being punished for her ex-partner's abuse. An Irish Traveller woman spoke of the discrimination she experienced in refuge by the professionals working there:

"Her job was not to be judgmental; it was a job like for domestic violence, you should not be judging or to speaking to anyone like that," Irish Traveller survivor

¹⁴ Okely, Judith (1983) *The Traveller-Gypsies*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

While it can be a safety issue for two Traveller women to be housed in the same refuge, this explanation can also lead to discriminatory practice:

“As soon as they’ve said their ethnicity to refuge. Suddenly the vacancy is no longer available... it’s really important to monitor it and report it where we can, again, people across the sector, domestic abuse professionals should be accountable for that.” **Specialist Outreach Worker**

Child Protection

The lack of understanding of the role of social workers and the child protection process, and historical and current discrimination/ignorance by social workers, is resulting in an increasing level of fear of social work intervention within the GRT communities. The Traveller Movement has been hearing about increasing numbers of Traveller women taking their own lives after having been approached by child protection services in relation to domestic abuse in the family. One Irish Traveller survivor said that the legal duty to refer to social services is preventing other survivors from calling the police or telling their GP. She believes this will lead to more death and suicides.

“The biggest thing for them now is social services straight away. It’s worse now than it was 20 years ago because the law now is giving men a license to kill” **Irish Traveller survivor**

In one case, an Irish Traveller woman had thought that if she took her own life, her children could be looked after by her parents and not have to be adopted by strangers². In another case, the woman did not understand what the word ‘cooperation’ meant when the social worker said cooperation was needed in order for her to keep her children. She ended up taking her own life out of the fear of losing her children, and having to face the pain and shame. These and numerous other tragic cases demonstrate the need for capacity building within social and children’s services about the culture and needs of GRT survivors and communities.

Echoing the recommendation for greater GRT representation in the sector, one survivor spoke of how important it is in the context of social work:

“If I saw that there was more Travellers becoming social workers...not just the same judgmental people that we’ve grown up knowing...the same people that already have an idea in their head about who you are and what you are. And then then you have to supposedly trust them with your life and with your children’s life,” **Irish Traveller survivor**

Traveller Movement recommends that all social workers must receive GRT specific training as part of their qualification. In the interim, GRT survivors need support throughout the child protection process and aftercare if their children are removed. Another Irish Traveller survivor said that the issue will not be resolved until social workers have the capacity to build genuine relationships with survivors and partner with them.

“So, unless there’s more the government can do something to take off the pressures off social workers and caseworkers, I can’t see a change and I can’t see it getting any better.” **Irish Traveller survivor**

One Romany Gypsy mother recounted a positive experience of engagement with social services (see case study 2). Although her children were temporarily removed from her home through a court order, she was grateful for their involvement and believed that they were stern at times because they cared about her children’s welfare. This survivor found aspects of the process hostile, but ultimately trusts that social services have her children’s best interests at heart and is willing to engage with them for support going forward.

“Social services saved my life. Because if I was with him and stayed with them, I could have been dead now” **Romany Gypsy survivor**

Immigration

Migrant women are not offered equal protection and support in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Roma survivors are no longer recognised as EEA nationals that have a right to live in the UK. The Home Office and MET police have been involved in the administrative removal of Roma survivors and justify their removal through Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) that see rough sleeping as “an abuse of free movement rights”. Roma survivors of domestic abuse are then faced with the choice of homelessness and the removal of their children or deportation.

“I think that the biggest problem is the immigration because so many of us were here like just on the EU basis, like where you can just walk around freely, wherever and now the Brexit is here, a lot of them just woke up that they have no more rights here, no more housing, no more, they cannot work anymore.” Roma survivor and frontline worker

“I feel like it’s pretty bad for all EU citizens. But when you really think about Roma, they also have like so many other disadvantages, they have the poverty, they have the lack of access to technology.” Roma survivor and frontline worker

In relation to Roma survivors, and following the work of Southall Black Sisters¹⁵ and the recent Domestic Abuse Commissioner report¹⁶, we agree on the introduction of a complete firewall between the police and the Home Office applicable to victims and witnesses of all crimes. This would enable Roma survivors with insecure immigration status to access justice and support, without fear that their personal information will be passed on to immigration enforcement.

Grassroots projects and multi-faceted support

Grassroots by-and-for support is needed in order to build trust with GRT survivors. Mainstream services need to work in partnership with specialist services in order for them to build trust with GRT survivors and to address their needs better.

A Traveller organisation ‘One Voice 4 Travellers’, who provide domestic abuse support for GRT survivors, say that the guiding principle in all their work is “sticking to your knitting”. OV4T supports GRT survivors with their areas of expertise and know when to involve external organisations who can offer other specialist services. By engaging with GRT communities first, specialist services can lay the groundwork and create a safe environment in which they can ask for further support.

“I feel like at first it should be just something within where we just support one another. Because if you just get some white saviours coming and telling you like, you know, your husband is raping you, you will just reject this.” Roma survivor and frontline worker

One survivor spoke highly about ‘E-Romnja’, a Romanian association that promotes Roma women’s rights. Roma women are helping other Roma women with a variety of issues and, once their relationship is established, they approach more sensitive topics. In this model of working, grassroots activism incorporates support with education, housing and childcare, and opens discussions about more difficult subjects such as domestic abuse and healthy relationships. This interviewee told us that many of the Roma women who have taken part in the project now consider themselves “fierce feminists” and provide support to other women in the community.

¹⁵ Liberty and Southall Black Sisters (2018) Super-Complaint on data-sharing between the police and Home Office regarding victims and witnesses to crime, available at: <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/liberty-and-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-on-data-sharing-between-the-police-and-home-office-regarding-victims-and-witnesses-to-crime/> [accessed 18/01/22]

¹⁶ Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2021) Safety before Status: Improving pathways to support for migrant victims of domestic abuse, available at: <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Safety-Before-Status-Report-2021.pdf> [accessed: 18/01/22]

When mainstream services partner with specialist services and grassroots projects, targeted outreach must follow. Services must go to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites and bricks-and-mortar accommodation to demonstrate the effort they are willing to make. Generic services should adopt a similar approach to the grassroots projects by offering general support initially and building foundational relationships. Regular contact and long-term support are crucial to determining the success of this approach.

“I would definitely start like with the outreach. And I would definitely start like with grassroots projects in those communities, because you cannot expect them to just start coming to you. And I would start like, just helping them like, I don’t know, for example, enrolling their children in school and giving them emotional support, like in the community without asking them to come to you, and earning their trust,” **Roma survivor and frontline worker**

Collaborative working is essential to rebuilding trust in services and offering comprehensive support. If mainstream services partnered with faith leaders, specialist services, and incorporated targeted outreach and engagement strategies into their core work, GRT survivors would have a team around them who could support their recovery – brick by brick.



Women's services' experience working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors

UK statutory and non-statutory domestic abuse services were surveyed and interviewed on the services they provide and their experiences with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors. The following results are based on 176 survey responses and 16 in-depth interviews that detailed the strengths and weaknesses of prior attempts at outreach and engagement. Overall, services identified their own shortcomings, as well as systematic shortcomings, that hindered their ability to offer accessible services. They recognised **lack of education, lack of sustainable funding, lack of flexibility, and lack of will/effort to build trust**, as barriers to successfully engaging with and helping GRT survivors.

Lack of education

When it came to GRT survivor awareness, 79% of the respondents had not received targeted domestic abuse awareness training about GRT communities and survivors. Some respondents had received limited training about GRT as part of wider BAME or cultural awareness training.

"I am not familiar with further detail as such information is not shared by the council as part of induction or training." **Early Help Domestic Abuse Lead**

"I don't feel the organisation that I worked for had considered the barriers to successful engagement and accommodation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Women,"
Housing Support Lead

"I don't think we have considered the issue at all." **Money Advisor and Caseworker**

"I feel comfortable with this on a personal professional level because of prior training, but I don't think we are reaching/engaging Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Women at the referral stage or an organisational level" **Multiple Discriminations ISVA**

"All I know is how much I don't know!"

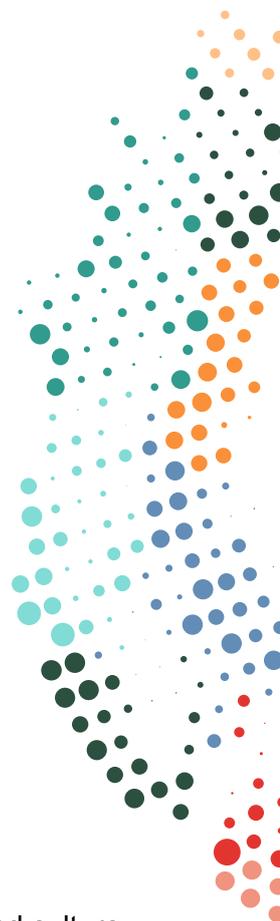
Money Advisor and
Caseworker

Further, 24% of the respondents did not know whether any Romany Gypsies, Roma or Travellers lived in their areas, either on caravan sites or in bricks and mortar housing. Respondents who did know whether GRT people lived in their area mostly referenced sites. Drawing on the advocacy work Traveller Movement undertake, the lack of awareness about GRT living in bricks and mortar housing can have dangerous consequences. The pervasive misconception that 'all Travellers travel' has historically led to inadequate support and, in one recent case, a young Irish Traveller woman died as a result.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of culture and tradition results in service providers either overemphasising the role of cultural difference or rendering GRT survivors' experiences invisible. As one service provider noted, it is important that services understand "that culture and abuse aren't aligned. It's actually our biases that have put that together." The services interviewed pointed to the various avenues in which GRT discrimination took form – presumptions about cultural differences, geographical isolation, digital exclusion, distrust of GRT populations, and outright racist language and behaviour. Most interviewees recognised that they are responsible for making their services more accessible to survivors of all backgrounds and that the framing of marginalised communities misplaces this responsibility:

"With marginalised groups, they're marginalised because we've never engaged with them. We've never listened to them. And we have basically been racist towards them in the past, which is why it's like that now." **Services Development Manager**

88%



of the respondents stated their service had not implemented GRT outreach strategies. Of the minority who had, respondents listed weekly site visits; Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer positions; Service Level Agreements and establishing relationships with relevant agencies, local authorities and people within the GRT community.

“The local authority utilises through an SLA the services of [GRT organisation] as an intermediary between the local authority and the community” **Housing Manager**

“Most of our outreach has been through building relationships at the school gate and local parks” **Salvation Army Church Leader/Domestic Abuse Lead**

“We have established contacts within the community as we have been operating for approx. 25 years. We use our contacts on each of the sites that we are aware of. We have a [woman’s group] which has been very successful.” **Operations Manager**

“We run training with GP’s, shop keepers, hairdressers etc within Traveller areas” **IDVA**

“We rely mainly on word of mouth within the community and referral from agencies. We are known to the communities as an agency that they can trust to capture their voices” **Project manager**

By asking the survivor what their service needs are, and by learning about their identity and culture, services can operate from a needs-based model and avoid essentialising the communities they are attempting to support. For example, acknowledging the nature of tight-knit communities and domestic abuse that is perpetrated by family members may be useful in understanding the added pressure a GRT survivor may be experiencing. Similarly, one local authority employee explained how they paired IDVAs that GRT survivors could relate to or respect in some way. An IDVA who grew up in the same area, practiced the same religion or, was older in age, could more easily create a shared trust and understanding. While every survivor has their individual journey and story, sharing some aspects of the survivor’s culture can deepen one’s understanding of that journey and the help that is needed.

Generic or mainstream domestic abuse services can unintentionally be designed and targeted for white, middle-class British women by default, unless they actively undertake targeted outreach for other communities. While aware of the concerns GRT communities can have in engaging with the police and social workers, those surveyed did not always identify the assumptions within their own practice. One participant, who identified both as a GRT survivor and service provider, highlighted the inaccessibility and exclusion of generic VAWG and DA services:

“They are giving services that are targeting a completely different type of survivor... the people who they are targeting don’t really come for the service because they have the money, they have alternatives, they will not come to us to live in a hotel or in temporary accommodation.” **Roma survivor and frontline worker**

Service providers use general statements in promotional materials to avoid the possibility of alienating any survivor of domestic abuse. Without adopting targeted approaches to engagement, mainstream services will continue to fail to reach minority communities such as GRT.

“In our literature we state that we are open to anyone who is a survivor of domestic violence.” **Project co-ordinator**

80%



of the respondents believed they have worked with Gypsies, Roma or Travellers in the past. From the perspective of GRT survivors, domestic abuse service providers can harbour prejudices against them and survivors either had lived experience of discrimination or never saw engagement with mainstream services as an option for them. Another element of this is whether a trustworthy environment was created in order for someone to disclose their ethnicity:

“I suppose I hadn’t really considered how the people might not disclose [their ethnicity], because of the prejudice they’ve already received, and that is sort of arrogant in a way, isn’t it? Another assumption. My assumption being well, we wouldn’t discriminate, we wouldn’t judge you, so just tell us and you’ll be fine. But that’s not their experience of the world. So, I can see why they wouldn’t.” **IDVA**

“In my 18 years’ experience...I have never supervised any women from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities and have never been aware of any other cases. I find this unusual given we have a travellers site within our area” **Probation Officer and Women’s Lead**

98%



of respondents believe there is a need for more training about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women’s experiences of domestic abuse. While many respondents spoke to their ability to create non-judgemental and inclusive spaces for all, the majority saw a need for deeper understanding GRT cultures, beliefs and community pressures. Services spoke of wanting to overcome the existing barriers by making their service more accessible and specifically aware of the needs of GRT survivors.

“I don’t think there are enough people that understand the complexities that come with working with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. I have previously worked with women who have fled the community and there have always been far more vulnerabilities and considerations in those cases which many workers may not understand. I know I would appreciate training in order to understand more about the community itself and the dynamics.” **Domestic Abuse Community Worker**

“I think it would be incredibly helpful first of all to receive training on the systemic racism and discrimination inflicted on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities by the wider society and what this means for the community and the women in particular, and how this compounds their experience of domestic abuse. I think it would be also incredibly important to receive cultural awareness training and then additional training on barriers raised by the society preventing the women from accessing support. Then specific training on how best to support women in the communities.” **Early Help Domestic Abuse Lead**

Services must prioritise targeted training and develop targeted advertisements and outreach strategies. It is imperative that, alongside deepening one’s understandings of GRT communities, needs-based models of practice are adopted to avoid making assumptions or adopting inaccurate safety measures.

Lack of flexibility

Interviewees remarked that, out of the few cases they had with GRT survivors, almost all had complex needs. Just 40% of surveyed service providers offered targeted support to overcome language or literacy barriers with clients.

66%



did not feel their service was aware of how to successfully engage and accommodate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women.

Examples included general interpreters and language line which do not often include Romani. Brochures, posters, council webpages and videos were also referenced as tools for advertising domestic abuse related services. Most employees had a general understanding that services' engagement strategies were not accessible to GRT survivors, however, a small number of survey responses stated that GRT 'cooperation' was the key barrier to engagement. Without understanding the specific needs of the communities, GRT survivors have been categorised as 'uncooperative' or 'hostile'.

Traveller Movement knows from our work with GRT survivors that to overcome their understandable distrust of mainstream services and councils, long-term outreach and engagement strategies are needed. We believe short-term interventions are preventing holistic support that has a transformative impact for many survivors. Interviewed service providers reflected on single or short-term attempts to engage that were unsuccessful:

"I think it was a bit naivety...I think. If I'm brutally honest, I think we just thought, 'well, if we go there, then they'll come along, and it'll be fine'" **IDVA**

"The biggest bad practice is that they are time limited. They just come in and come out, you know, crisis intervention and signposting... It can't be target driven."

Specialist Organisation Director

Another service provider with lived experience highlighted that domestic abuse services need to be prepared to offer "support to build their lives from scratch, because it's something [the survivor] would have to do." As a GRT survivor and service provider, she recommended joint work between large charities and by-and-for charities, as well as grassroots projects to develop trust and provide holistic support:

"I would definitely start like with the outreach. And I would definitely start like with grassroot projects in those communities, because you cannot expect them to just start coming to you. And I would start like, just helping them like, I don't know, for example, enrolling their children in school and giving them emotional support, like in the community without asking them to come to you, and earning their trust." **Roma survivor and frontline worker**

Partnering with specialist services was echoed throughout survey and interview responses. Other interventions included employing minority liaison officers, offering one-to-one services and providing certain skills-based screenings and courses.

"We also have within our staff teams BAME Support workers who are specialists in immigration, NRPF, Asylum and related issues" **Services Development Officer**

"Work in a range of ways, face to face, phone calls, texts, emails - whatever works for them" **Independent Sexual Violence Advisor**

"Each person supported is asked how they would like their communication needs to be met" **Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Commissioner**

While generic service providers are trained to support the individual woman in front of them, certain risks and needs may be obscured without providing flexibility and building a trusting relationship. From our advocacy work we have witnessed how GRT survivors have been placed into dangerous situations by refugees and housing officers in local authorities.

Refuge criteria that cannot accommodate multiple children or older sons, automatically excludes many GRT families from mainstream avenues of support. Where a GRT survivor does secure a refuge space or is placed in emergency accommodation by the council, they are often identified by other members of the GRT community and forced to return to the abuse. While some refuges are aware and have policies on the number of Travellers that can be accommodated in one place, this is not a uniform approach and local authorities are rarely aware of the risks in other forms of accommodation.

In carrying out risk assessments, service providers should mirror the approach used for survivors of honour-based abuse in order to identify whether their family or community may be involved in locating the survivor and returning her to the abusive home. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers should be understood as requiring additional access needs and discuss potential locations and risks in detail before housing them.

Lack of sustainable funding

“Services can’t be target driven. People are people. They’re very messy, with complex histories and emotions.” **Specialist Organisation Director**

Most domestic abuse services are forced to deliver inappropriate services due to unsustainable funding. As a result, there is little capacity for flexible or creative needs-led model or the resources for targeted outreach, which hinders a services ability to build trust with marginalised communities.

“Funding is probably the biggest barrier, and you’re paid to do a job and that’s what you do. You don’t have the capacity to do outreach, but you also don’t have the capacity to be as flexible.” **Services Development Manager**

Underfunding and unsustainable funding results in short-term contracts, poor staff retention and inadequate time limits on service provision. The majority of the surveyed and interviewed service providers critiqued the crisis model they have been cornered into operating from:

“You can fire fight and you can constantly react to issues but you can’t prevent without sustainable funding.” **Services Development Manager**

Where good practice has been demonstrated, funding has been central to whether it continues or disappears abruptly. Numerous examples of good practice mentioned throughout surveys and interviews no longer exist as funding sources dry up and short-term targets are reached.

“In the past we have had BME outreach workers, but the funding has ended for these posts.” **Independent Domestic Violence Advisor**

“We applied for a grant to help with translation services, but were not successful.” **Administration and Communications Officer**

As a result, we found that survivors repeatedly engaged with services over a long period of time, as they were not able to access the holistic support they needed initially.

“It doesn’t transform women’s situations. Right? It’s like, it’s like, you’ve got a leak in your pipe in you plus you plaster over it. Yeah, let’s stop the leak. This temporary measure...it kind of doesn’t do the holistic, wider change that needs to take place for women to kind of stay away from abuse, you know, and, and survive and be independent and feel that they can cope.” **Specialist Organisation Director**

Rather than centring survivors and building GRT survivors' needs into service providers core work, funding focuses on segregated short-term projects. Sporadic projects, that disappear once funding dries up, damages the relationships built during that time. As a result, GRT survivors have little trust or confidence in mainstream services that reach out temporarily to meet their project outcomes and then retreat.

Some interviewees stressed the importance of incorporating outreach as part of the central practice of domestic abuse services. There needs to be further funder and government support if domestic abuse services are to create lasting relationships with GRT communities and to provide holistic support for the survivors. Prohibitive funding criteria and restraints results in specialist services rarely having the capacity to write funding bids and project reports. Larger domestic abuse services who receive funding will continue to be target driven and therefore never meaningfully engage with by-and-for services nor the minoritised communities themselves. To fix this, we believe services need to move away from project-oriented funding and demand permanent funding.

Lack of will and effort

While unsustainable funding reproduces the short-term crisis model response that alienates the most vulnerable service users, the political will and drive can also be missing from funders, politicians, services and local authorities alike. Interviewees noted that high quality outreach strategies and methods of engagement were inconsistent and dependent on the dedication of specific employees rather than council-wide or service-wide initiatives. When reflecting on an attempt at targeted outreach, one participant spoke to the lack of institutional motivation or will:

“But if I’m honest, it just fell off the wayside after that... there was far more we could do for sure.” **IDVA**

Council employees spoke of council’s reluctance in commissioning specialist services under the umbrella of violence against women and girls, and their preference in commissioning generic services. Despite this, most interviewees saw community involvement, grassroots projects and by-and-for services playing a significant role in improving services for survivors. They highlighted that if GRT survivors’ needs were understood appropriately, tailored support would be easier to offer. Depending on the individual survivor, this could be faith leader involvement, healthy relationship education and / or providing tailored domestic abuse support and safety plans.

“a priest...giving advice around and healthy or unhealthy relationship goes a lot further among some communities than like a poster campaign, or an Instagram post, or like their GP telling them” **Violence and Vulnerability Coordinator**

In considering who are the critical friends and supports around GRT survivors, service providers named priests, friends and family. If mainstream domestic abuse services supported a community-led holistic approach that also included education, welfare, housing and health, they would be better placed in creating the conditions for a lasting and trusting relationship. Long-term multi-layered support is necessary to overcome the historical discrimination and exclusion of GRT people that has led to this breach in trust.



“I think social services get a lot of stigma, a lot of like, ‘they’re bad people’ but they’re not actually not if you work with them, they’re actually very supportive and actually support me now with [my daughter], with her needs, because I’m in a new relationship.”

Good Practice

Initiatives

Solace Women's Aid – Traveller Movement service level agreement

Solace Women's Aid (SWA) have a Service Level Agreement with Traveller Movement (TM). Within this agreement, SWA fund an Irish and Irish Traveller Caseworker position who offers long-term support to survivors of domestic abuse at any stage in life. This Caseworker supports those who are categorised as 'standard' or 'medium' risk and can partner with other services in instances of high-risk cases. As part of the agreement, SWA funds TM's women's worker, advocacy trained Irish Traveller survivor, who provides early help before referring to SWA. TM operates a domestic abuse helpline which is advertised regularly on its social media platforms, making the service known to GRT women.

The partnership works well as some survivors prefer to be helped by another Traveller / Traveller organisation whereas others are hesitant to speak to anyone from their own community and prefer to be signposted to a mainstream organisation with the knowledge about and experience of helping Traveller survivors.

As Irish Travellers are not a homogenous group, the SWA Caseworker recommends asking the question: *"What do you want me to know about your identity and culture to ensure I can support you in the way that you want me to?"* To follow good practice, service providers must value that people are unique whilst also valuing identity and culture.

The SWA caseworker includes 'honour-based' abuse as an element of the domestic violence where it is appropriate and assists survivors in accessing supports (i.e., automatic referrals to MARAC). 'Honour-based' abuse is therefore not a blanket phenomenon but service providers are made aware of the community involvement if relevant. Similarly, GRT survivors can struggle finding refuge spaces as certain policies prohibit two or more GRT women from occupying one refuge. In some cases, this can be a valid safety measure while in others this can be an excuse for discriminatory practice. SWA currently funds for one designated space that is for GRT families but more is needed.

"Just assuming that there's going to be some sort of link, or there's going to be any sort of trouble without actually asking the two women again about how they perceive the risk...is bad practice."

As services have had to adapt their approaches as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SWA Caseworker sees greater flexibility in practice and is better able to support GRT survivors with access needs. Phone only claims, remote appointments disabled user-friendly methods are increasingly common.

"I think, in a way, because we're all now used to working in this way, I think we're that naturally considering people who are like excluded from text, because it would just be so obvious that they wouldn't be able to access the service if the service is exclusively online...my experiences of calling, let's say Universal Credit with a service user who is unable to read or write so can't access that online journal. Before that's been a real struggle with getting Universal Credit to the understanding of that."

One survivor who used this service spoke of feeling understood more than in a generic service: "they don't judge you". The survivor had experienced high risk domestic abuse and her mental health was suffering. The SWA Caseworker supported her with refuge, housing and counselling and she feels a noticeable difference in her life: "I used to cry every day. Like every single day I used to cry and that was bad, but now I think I do have something to look forward to, like a new future."

One Voice 4 Travellers

One Voice 4 Travellers (OV4T) is a GRT domestic abuse service based in Wisbech and delivers services across East Anglia. A crucial part of their work is to build community involvement into each project to encourage sustainable outcomes. OV4T consults the GRT community to assess their self-defined needs before applying for funding; forms an interest group with motivated members, and, if funding is secured, this group becomes the steering group for the project.

One of their projects spanned five years and focused on informing and supporting GRT women and girls in East Anglia who may have been affected by domestic abuse. OV4T ran a number of workshops and bought two trailers (caravans) for short-term emergency accommodation. The trailer refuge spaces were offered as an interim support that forms part of a planned re-engagement process or assists GRT survivors leaving the community. OV4T discusses the survivor's options and prepares them for what living in a safe house might be like. They also make explicit what confidentiality means, where the limits are and engage the survivor in the process by drawing up an agreement. Although funding for this project has come to an end, OV4T secured different funding in order for the trailers to remain in use for appointment purposes. OV4T would like to see this replicated at a national level once appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. There were issues around purchasing inconspicuous trailers, safe and discreet parking locations, and ongoing maintenance and cleaning costs.

“‘what is it like moving into a house?’ and I remember one woman she says ‘when I moved in, I decorated it said my family come over and they said you’ve painted it like the inside of a wagon’. One woman had taken all her doors off.”

Although the above initiative is focused on the 25% of GRT who still live on sites or are nomadic, OV4T also engages in group work for all GRT community members. They look at digital exclusion and develop word search activities that help survivors to identify the letters on a keyboard. Their workshops on domestic abuse have additional focuses – such as dress-making or cookery classes – so as to mitigate the risks of survivor's attendance and provide an alibi.

OV4T are also eager for other services to be linked in with the GRT communities. Their approach is based upon the marketing principle ‘stick to your knitting’, meaning stick to what you know. Once they have gained the trust of one service user, they often receive further calls regarding other issues surrounding housing, education, finance, legal, etc. and OV4T will regularly ask their permission to pass them onto other mainstream services that can offer GRT survivors in depth information and support. Specialist services can more confidently vouch for mainstream services and mainstream services can better engage with marginalised groups through this partnership working.

“I think, in general services, and I do need to remember that we are an ethnic minority, and we have our own culture. Now our culture is not to hurt children or adults. ... Because it was only in the 1960s, they could take your children into care for being a Gypsy. Invariably, when Travellers get together, we’re the greatest storytellers in the world and invariably, one of those stories will come up.”



Advocacy

Case study 1 – Help with Children’s services



Kerry, an Irish Traveller mother, had her children removed and she felt unfairly treated by the social workers in her case. Social workers had escalated to the Child Protection stage due to concerns of domestic abuse and named Kerry’s lack of cooperation and engagement with the process.

The Skills Development Co-ordinator from London Gypsies and Travellers’ (LGT) first gathered information on the case by speaking with Kerry about her situation. By giving Kerry the space to express herself, LGT was able to identify the communication barriers present, as well as her health and wellbeing needs. The Co-ordinator asked Kerry to join LGT’s domestic abuse programme ‘Phoenix Arise’ and, through this support, Kerry learned what it meant to experience coercive control and how it impacts herself and her children. The Co-ordinator created a safe space for Kerry to express herself without worrying about facing judgement or discrimination.

As the Co-ordinator built this relationship with Kerry, she was able to act as a mediator between her and the assigned social worker. Due to misunderstandings and miscommunication, the relationship had been tenuous. Kerry felt frustration and grief at losing her children and this resulted in frequent contact with social workers. LGT spoke to Kerry about how she could express her frustration and grief going forward and they decided that Kerry could send the Co-ordinator voice notes about the situation when she needed it. As LGT could provide her with that grieving space, the Co-ordinator noticed that Kerry did not feel the need to vent as much as she did initially. They identified other needs together, and Kerry was referred to various agencies for further practical and emotional support.

LGT assisted Kerry in obtaining an Injunction Order, moving house, literacy courses and 12 psychotherapy sessions. LGT partnered with other specialist support organisations in order to give Kerry the level of support she needed. Partnership working was especially useful in this situation as Kerry was undergoing the reunification process which is relatively rare in practice. By having multiple specialist support workers on the case, Kerry had holistic support and specialist services with limited capacity could share the workload. In providing this support and acting as a mediator with generic services, Kerry was empowered to maintain relations with her social worker independently.

Unfortunately, the social worker Kerry rebuilt a relationship left post and there was a need to re-build relations with a new social worker – again. LGT recommended that for communities who have faced historical discrimination, such as GRT families, there should be an emphasis on maintaining consistency throughout the child protection process. This way, the process of re-building trust between survivor and service provider can be developed in the first instance and not constantly in need of repair. The Co-ordinator spoke of the appreciation social workers have for LGT’s service and their Phoenix Arise programme. The good relations between LGT and social workers in the vicinity means that LGT often receive referrals and there is an open line of communication.

Once Kerry’s children are enrolled in a school in her new neighbourhood, she will be able to care for her children again. Kerry was empowered to engage in the process and developed a relationship with her social worker. Through this, she advanced from supervised access, to unsupervised access and overnight stays. Kerry is now looking into volunteering with her local GRT organisation to support women like her through situations of domestic abuse.

Case study 2 – Good social work practice



Rose is a Romany Gypsy mother of three. She previously experienced domestic abuse and social services became involved. Although her children were removed from her home through a court order, Rose is grateful for their involvement and said she would “give them some flowers because they really did help [her] a lot.” In spite of the trauma that she experienced through this process, she praised the social workers engaged with as supportive and honest:

“They’re there to help you, support you and look out for the welfare of your children.”

At the beginning, Rose concealed the abuse at home and refused to engage until the perpetrator attacked her on the street in front of witnesses and could no longer hide it. She physically defended herself and was arrested. The call she received from her social worker gave her two options: temporarily live with their father or apply for immediate care order proceedings. This was Rose’s turning point as she saw how the social workers were allowing the children to stay with their father.

During the court proceedings, Rose recalled how the social workers highlighted her parenting ability and made it clear to her that they wanted her children to remain with her but that her abusive relationship made it unsafe to do so. In fighting to get her children back, she was required to end the relationship. Rose’s social worker warned her that she would not get her children back if she continued to return to the abusive situation and she was grateful for their approach as she understood it was for her children’s welfare.

“Social services saved my life. Because if I was with him and stayed with them, I could have been dead now”

Rose found leaving the relationship incredibly difficult and believes it’s impossible to completely move on, but that she built her life back up from scratch. She had to sacrifice her home, leave the community, prepare for court and undertake parenting courses. She had no money and little professional support from the refuge she was in. At times, Rose felt like she was being punished for the abuser’s behaviour.

Although Rose found aspects of the overall process hostile, she praises social services and continues to get support from them when necessary.

“I think social services get a lot of stigma, a lot of like, ‘they’re bad people’ but they’re not actually not if you work with them, they’re actually very supportive and actually support me now with [my daughter], with her needs, because I’m in a new relationship. So, I suppose it brought back a lot of, you know, ‘is he going to turn out like mum’s ex?’

Rose trusts that social services have her children’s best interests at heart and is willing to engage with them for support going forward.

Case study 3 – Long-term support



Colleen is an Irish Traveller who fled to the UK for safety. In Ireland, she attempted to leave the abusive relationship but she was located by the perpetrator on a number of occasions and was at high risk of experiencing serious violence. Colleen miscarried multiple times as a result of the physical abuse she experienced and received threats to her life at the refuge she fled to. She received limited support from the police and didn't feel it was safe to stay in Ireland due to the risk of being found again by the perpetrator. Her refuge worker reached out to UK based domestic abuse organisations and was able to refer her for domestic abuse casework support from an Irish and Irish Traveller Outreach Worker.

The caseworker supported Colleen remotely before she travelled to the UK and ensured she would have a refuge space ready upon her arrival. This advocacy support was particularly important as many Irish Traveller survivors have reported facing discrimination when trying to access refuge accommodation.

Due to the housing crisis, Colleen stayed in the refuge for over a year before secure housing was found. Her caseworker was able to provide both practical and emotional support throughout this process. Like some Irish Traveller survivors, Colleen struggled with confidence around her literacy. The caseworker was able to sit down with her to discuss what would work for her in order to be best supported. Colleen received face to face support where possible, i.e. to fill in forms and set up her finances and bills at her new address as this is where she felt least confident. The caseworker also helped Colleen to advocate with other professionals to be more understanding of her literacy support needs so she could get extra help where she needed it. For example, Universal Credit were able to set up a 'telephone only' account for Colleen to use as opposed to an online one. Colleen felt empowered by this support which in turn increased her independence.

After her time in the refuge, Colleen was supported to access a secure tenancy with a housing association. Her caseworker advocated alongside her with the council to state how important it was that she had the security of a tenancy of this type given her experience of fleeing abuse and her health and wellbeing needs. The caseworker was able to provide resettlement support to refer Colleen to grant schemes so she was able to furnish her new home.

Colleen spoke of how this domestic abuse caseworker understood her and knew how leaving a situation of domestic abuse can be hard when it involves leaving your family and community behind. Colleen speaks of how nice it feels to be able to wake up when she wants and to wake up without a fear of what the day might bring.

Conclusion

It is clear that most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller victim-survivors of domestic abuse are not receiving the support they need and deserve in the UK.

The majority of GRT survivors are not even aware of the services available because of non-existing or unsuitable engagement strategies. Those victim-survivors who manage to find help are too often faced with prejudiced and/or ignorant workers, inadequate safety plans, and support that is fractioned and unsustainable.

However, as this research has shown, there is a growing will among the domestic abuse service sector to learn more about, and to engage better with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller victim-survivors. In order to turn this good will into practice, the government, commissioners and funders need to commit into providing long-term sustainable funding so that holistic and targeted support can be offered for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors, and for survivors from other marginalised and minoritised communities.

Larger mainstream services need to form meaningful and fair partnerships with specialist services who have the experience and the knowledge to work with marginalised communities. Building trust with communities whom have experienced discrimination for hundreds of years in public and in private services, will take time and flexibility. Services that are designed by default for white and/or middle-class women, are not often suitable for other women, and engagement strategies need to go beyond slogans and visions of 'inclusiveness'.

As one of the interviewed survivors mentions, it can take one-hundred times for a GRT survivor to leave their abuser. Often leaving means also having to leave their family and whole community, and entering a society they don't know much about, and that is often hostile towards them. These women have to re-build their lives brick-by-brick and need understanding, flexible and long-term support in order to do that.





**The Traveller Movement would like to say
THANK YOU to our funders for their support**

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