



# Considerations on Family Care Within the Traveller Community

Kerry Cuskelly

CEO, Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service,  
Registered Social Worker,  
Occasional Lecturer, MU.

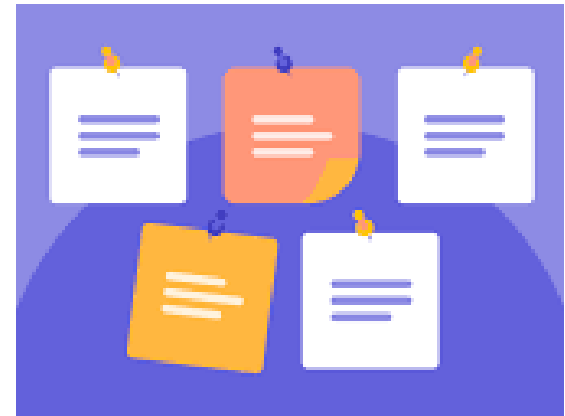


EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Presentation Outline

---

- Population and age profile
- Health considerations
- Structural considerations
- Cultural considerations
- Conditionality
- Prejudice, discrimination and racism
- Policy vs strategy
- Concluding remarks





# Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service

---

## Mission

We are an organisation of Travellers and non- Travellers working together to provide frontline services of excellence to the community. We also strive to work with partner agencies to improve service standards and accessibility for the Traveller community to all services.



**EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND**  
National Travellers Service

# Vision

---

**To live in an Ireland where Travellers are fully valued as a distinct ethnic minority receiving equitable treatment and access to all supports and services without barriers.**



**EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND**  
National Travellers Service

# Exchange House Ireland

## National Travellers Service

---

- Exchange House National Travellers Service was established in 1980 at the petition of the Eastern Health Board
- Originally established to support young Travellers on the streets of Dublin City Centre who were struggling with glue sniffing.
- To provide Family Support to the Traveller community in the greater Dublin area



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Exchange House Ireland

## National Travellers Service

---

- It is now an organisation of Travellers and non-Travellers working together to provide front-line services across Ireland
  - **Education & Training Service**
  - **Children & Young Peoples Service**
  - **Family Support & Crisis Intervention Service**
  - **National Mental Health Service**
  - **Addiction services**
  - **Limerick Travellers Network**



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Population and Age Profile

- There are an estimated 40,000 Travellers in Ireland, representing less than 1% of the population.
- Age Profile compared to general population:



| Age Groups | General Population | Travellers |
|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Over 65    | 11%                | 2%         |
| 15-64      | 65%                | 48%        |
| Under 14   | 24%                | 50%        |



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Health Considerations

---

- Health levels are poor compared to the general population
- The most recent statistics are from *All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010*
- Travellers of all ages have much higher mortality rates than the general population
- Traveller women live on average 7 years less than women in the general population
- Traveller men live on average 15 years less than in the general population

(All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010)



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Health Considerations

---

- Travellers are twice as likely as the general population to have diabetes and related conditions (2009)
- Traveller suicide rates are over six times the national average
- Infant mortality is 14.1% in the Traveller population, and 3.9% in the general population
- Fatal respiratory disease rates are 7.5 times higher in the Traveller population than the general population
- Heart disease and stroke rates are 4 times higher in the Traveller population than in the general population

(All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010)



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND  
National Travellers Service

# Structural Considerations

---

- “Gypsies and Travellers have significantly poorer health than other groups. There is a higher incidence of long term health conditions with low take up of health services. There are correspondingly higher levels of substantial unpaid care where the concept of ‘unpaid carer’ is largely unacknowledged” (MECOPP2012).



# Structural considerations

---

- “Attitudes to illness, pride in self-reliance and tolerance in chronic ill-health alongside a range of difficulties in accessing health services account for some of the late contact with health services (Van Cleemput 2010) and subsequent low carer identification” (MECOPP2012).



# Cultural considerations

---

- *Culture of care*; the ideals and approaches to care associated with different traditions, national cultures and ethnic groups (Fine, 2015).
- Mutual support systems.
- Acceptance of caring as part of normal life.
- Caring as a shared responsibility.



# Cultural considerations

---

- “Traveller families expect to care, and do so willingly, without seeing themselves as “carers” but as family doing what they are supposed to do. Invariably the bulk of caring relies on women and often on one main carer” (Tilki, 2016).



# Conditionality

---

- “Welfare conditionality links eligibility for collectively provided welfare benefits and services to recipients' specified compulsory responsibilities or particular patterns of behaviour. It has been a key element of welfare state reform in many nations since the mid-1990s” (Welfare Conditionality 2019:08)
- “...every individual must prove that he or she is worthy of public money, that they have done everything imaginable to avoid needing benefits and nothing to put themselves in their situation. Every aspect of their life and mindset is rendered fair game for scrutiny” (Jayanetti 2018).



# Prejudice, Discrimination, Racism

---

- “Prejudice is a set of negative personal beliefs about a social group that leads individuals to prejudice people from that group in general regardless of personal differences among members of that group.”
- Discrimination is the acting out of prejudice
- Prejudice + power to act = discrimination
- The Traveller community continues to experience high levels of social exclusion and disadvantage
- The Traveller community continues to experience racial discrimination both at the individual or **interpersonal** level and at the **institutional** level
- Systematic racism spread throughout the different systems in society
- Where Travellers are segregated in the provision of services
- Where legislation and policy making is developed without consideration of their impact
- Institutional Racism - Where procedures and practices of an organisation or institution reflect a lack of acceptance of Travellers’ culture and identity



# Policy vs Strategy

---

Institutional racism within policy and practice e.g. policy of assimilation

- The 1963 Commission on Itinerancy
- The 1983 Report of the Travelling People
- The 1998 Traveller Accommodation Act
- The 2002 Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act
- How to ensure new policies don't replicate previous systems?
- How to ensure anti-racist ethos is embedded throughout all policy development?



# Concluding remarks

---

- Proactive and systemically inclusive policy development.
- Wide-reaching, non-time constrained, culturally-appropriate consultation process with the community.
- Principles of universality in both service provision and financial supports.
- Policy (not strategy) with accompanying resources for implementation.
- Cross-governmental approach (lifespan approach).



# References

---

- Van Cleemput P, 2010, Social Exclusion of Gypsies & Travellers: health impact. Journal of Research in Nursing.
- MECOPP, 2012, Hidden Carers Unheard Voices – Informal caring in the Gypsy/Traveller Community.
- All Ireland Traveller Health Study Team, All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010, UCD
- Tilki, M, 2016, Dementia in Gypsies and Travellers, Leeds Gate and Irish in Britain.
- Fine, Michael (2015) 'Cultures of Care' in J. Twigg and W. Martin (eds) Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology, Routledge: Abingdon UK: 269-276.
- Welfare Conditionality (2019). Final Findings. Retrieved from [http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/40475\\_Welfare-Conditionality\\_Report\\_complete-v3.pdf](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/40475_Welfare-Conditionality_Report_complete-v3.pdf)
- Jayanetti, C. (2018). Punishment beatings by public demand - the truth about welfare reform. Retrieved from <https://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2018/06/07/punishment-beatings-by-public-demand-the-truth-about-welfare-reform/>



# Contact

---

**Exchange House Ireland**  
***National Travellers Service***

**61 Great Strand Street**

**Dublin 1**

**Tel: 01 872 1094**

**Fax: 01 872 1118**



**EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND**  
National Travellers Service