



Inter-family Violence and its Impact on Traveller Mental Health

16TH APRIL 2019 DUBLIN CASTLE

INTRODUCTION

On 16th April 2019, over 150 Travellers and Traveller activists, service providers and state department representatives, assembled in Dublin Castle for a conference entitled “Inter-family Violence and its Impact on Traveller Mental Health”.

The turn out on the day was high with attendees travelling from all over Ireland and from as far afield as London. Aside from the geographic spread, organisations, both statutory and non-statutory were well represented on the day.

“Conflict and violence destroy communities and have a devastating impact on those involved. One of the most significant, yet often hidden consequences of armed conflicts and other situations of violence is their impact on the mental health of the people affected”.

Chris McDonagh, Traveller Mediation Service

BACKGROUND

The conference, which was organised collaboratively by The Traveller Counselling Service, Exchange House Ireland and the Traveller Mediation Services, aimed firstly, to highlight the root causes such as exclusion, poverty and discrimination and secondly, the conference looked to examine the impact of conflict on Travellers in terms of trauma and mental health and thirdly and most importantly, the conference aimed to explore solutions and ways of supporting the community to address these issues.

“A healing centred approach to addressing trauma requires a different question that moves beyond “what happened to you” to “what’s right with you” and views those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well-being rather than victims of traumatic events.”

Jane Mulcahy, PHD Candidate in Law at University College Cork

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Inter-family violence is a pervasive problem with far reaching negative consequences for individual Travellers, their families and their extended families that has reverberations for the entire Traveller community. This complex issue is exacerbated by the poverty, exclusion, poor accommodation and many other factors including legislative change that curtails the expression of Traveller culture.

There are many adverse consequences for Travellers and their families who engage in inter-family violence including mental health difficulties, imprisonment, injury and in some instances, death.

“...our people are dying, and that’s a simple fact, whether they’re dying of illness, or mental health or whether we’re killing each other, we’re dying”.

Bridget Quilligan

The conference partners aimed to present an understanding of the complexity of the issue of inter-family violence and based on the presentations, round table discussions and the plenary, proposed a set of ten recommendations.

The active engagement of the Traveller community in the design, delivery and implementation of these recommendations is key to their success: -

“This is a complex and multi-faceted issue and there are no quick fixes or easy solutions. It will take time and we need the community fully on board”.

Thomas McCann, Traveller Counselling Service

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. National Response:** A Traveller-led, state supported, national response to the problem of inter-family violence to include the re-convening and re-activating of the NTRIS Action 138 Sub-Committee.
- 2. Accommodation:** The State needs to be pressed on (a) the lack of transient sites for Travellers, (b) lack of accountability for county councils who fail to spend their Traveller accommodation budgets.
- 3. Legislation & Policy:** Legislation which is perceived as anti-Traveller (anti-trespass, market trading, keeping of horses etc.) to be re-examined in light of its impact on inter-family violence. In addition an examination of current judicial practice to address the perception that Traveller sentences are more lenient when involving Traveller on Traveller violence.
- 4. Awareness Raising:** An awareness raising campaign, for both Travellers and the wider community addressing (a) the history of the Traveller experience in Ireland (b) the issue of internalised oppression and (c) challenging the stereotypes around Travellers. This should sit alongside a national anti-racism strategy to address the ongoing issue of racism that Travellers experience in Irish society.
- 5. Education:** Training and educational initiatives to address (a) Traveller youth to include a focus on Traveller culture, internalised oppression, Traveller rights, activism, conflict resolution etc. (b) the inordinately high levels of unemployment amongst Travellers (c) the impact of violence on children specifically aimed at Traveller parents (d) the current lack of focus on Traveller culture in present primary and secondary curriculums.
- 6. Services:** There is a need for increased resourcing of current services as well as resourcing for the initiatives recommended in this report. Ongoing cultural awareness training for mainstream service providers engaging with Travellers (teachers, social workers, Gardaí etc) and the recommendation of a specific initiative to address and build trust between Travellers and An Garda Síochána.
- 7. Support:** Create additional specific supports for Traveller women and children impacted by inter-family violence and increase resourcing of current support services such as mediation, counselling, training, education and youth and children's supports. Ensure there is a supportive space for Traveller activists to come together to discuss the challenges they face as a collective working on behalf of the community.
- 8. Research:** There is a need for an in-depth piece of research, preferably carried out by Travellers, or certainly Traveller led, that would provide an analysis of the root causes of inter-family violence, the implications of inter-family violence and would correspondingly provide recommendations to address the issue.
- 9. Representation:** Increased Traveller representation in government, the Seanad, county councils and state agencies such as An Garda Síochána as a way of ensuring that the Traveller community is represented fairly and that the Traveller voice is heard in these state bodies.
- 10. State Apology:** The final recommendation as a goal for this collective was to initiate the process towards an official Apology from the State to members of the Travelling community for the denial of Traveller culture and ethnicity and the impact of the State Assimilation Policy since the 1960s. This step is of major significance and would enable the restorative process towards forgiveness and healing to really begin.



“I suppose what I’m really trying to get across is a word of warning. If we want to tackle conflict, the big challenge for us all is to get away from the idea that we can tackle it in isolation. We must first understand that it’s a feature of continuous oppression and of the alienation of Travellers from mainstream society “.

Mags Casey

We thank Beatrice Hughes (beatricehughes@hotmail.com) for compiling the full report on behalf of:

- The Traveller Mediation Services (tms.aileen@gmail.com)
- Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service (info@exchangehouse.ie)
- The Traveller Counselling Service (info@travellercounselling.ie).

Photographs were courtesy of The Voice Magazine and the Parish of the Travelling People.