



Inter-family Violence and its Impact on Traveller Mental Health

16th April 2019

Dublin Castle



Traveller Counselling Service



Traveller Mediation Service

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1. Introduction

1.1 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.

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: -

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.
- 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 and (b) the issue of internalised oppression and (c) challenging the stereotypes around Travellers.
- 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 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 Background to the Conference

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.

The decision to work collaboratively in organising this conference was borne out of the belief that by working together with other organisations we ensure that gaps in service provision are covered and that there is no duplication of services. Also, this approach models collaboration, which is what we aim to achieve in order to address the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community.

The idea for the conference came about through discussions between these three organisations of the increasing numbers of clients attending their services, Exchange House Ireland, Traveller Mediation Services and the Traveller Counselling Service, that were impacted by inter-family conflict.

Their work with the Travellers in Prison Project also highlighted how imprisonment and its long-term implications was often a consequence of inter-family violence.



Though most importantly, the contact with individual Travellers and their families who have experienced the grief, loss, hurt, pain, fear, isolation and intimidation that are part and parcel of inter-family violence and a desire to address this, was the driving force behind this conference.

1.4 Conference Organising Committee

Planning for the conference began in early 2018 and an organising committee comprising Aileen O'Brien (TMS), Chris McDonagh (TMS), Frank Kavanagh (TMS), Allyson Coogan (EHINTS), Kevin Burn (EHINTS), Maria Carnicer (EHINTS), Suzie McCarthy (TCS) and Thomas McCann (TCS), was set up.

1.5 Background to the Organisations

Traveller Mediation Service

The Traveller Mediation Service (TMS), is a national service, based in Athlone, Co Westmeath. TMS is a partnership initiative, supported by Restorative Justice in the Community (RJC) and funded by the Department of Justice and Equality. They work to assist their clients and stakeholders to find ways to prevent, manage, and transform conflicts peacefully and effectively.

TMS accepts mediation case referrals from Travellers, communities, and agencies. TMS also promotes and delivers a number of training programmes in the area of conflict prevention and intervention.

Traveller Counselling Service

The Traveller Counselling Service was launched in February 2008, initially as a one-year pilot project which has since developed into a community-based counselling service, that provides counselling to Travellers in a number of local areas. The service works from a culturally inclusive framework that respects Traveller culture, identity, values and norms and works from a perspective of culturally centred counselling and psychotherapy.

Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service

Exchange House Ireland (EHINTS) has over 40 years' experience providing Traveller specific professional, front-line family support, counselling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, education, training and services for children and young people in Ireland. Exchange House is one of the largest Traveller specific service providers in the country and is comprised of Travellers and non-Travellers who endeavour to have our working environment reflect the wider society we would like to see. EHINTS team of trained therapists and social workers are skilled in trauma work. Travellers accessing the services are offered a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to their concerns.

1.6 Funders

In addition to the organising committee, a special tribute needs to be paid to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform who, aside from funding the organisations involved in this collaboration, have correspondingly funded this conference and have been fully supportive of the process since its inception. We are very grateful for their continued support.

1.7 Conference Report

The contract for writing this report was put out to tender. Three submissions were put forward and following assessment by the Conference Organising Committee, the contract was awarded to Beatrice Hughes. While Beatrice is a member of staff with the Traveller Counselling Service, this contract was with her as an individual and all work connected with this contract was carried out outside of her working hours with the Traveller Counselling Service.

2. Addresses and Presentations

2.1 Introduction

The conference was co-hosted by Suzie McCarthy, Community Development Worker with the Traveller Counselling Service and Chris McDonagh, Mediator with the Traveller Mediation Service and Chairperson of the Traveller Counselling Service.

Chris McDonagh (TMS) opened the event with a brief welcome address, acknowledging the long distances travelled by some participants and also noting the degree of positive change within the Traveller community with regard to a new found openness to discuss issues such as mental health and conflict, which, not so long ago, were taboo subjects.

2.2 Presenter Biographies

Minister for State, David Stanton

David Stanton TD was appointed Minister of State for Justice at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration on Thursday, 19th of May 2016. David was first elected to Dáil Éireann representing Cork East in 1997 and has been returned at each subsequent election. Prior to becoming a full time public representative David was a second level school-teacher of educational woodwork and construction studies. He also worked as a career guidance counsellor which included home school community liaison.

Margaret (Mags) Casey

Mags, a Traveller herself and activist for the last 25 years, has a degree in Community Development from Maynooth University and also a Diploma in Business from University Limerick. Mags is the manager of the Tipperary Traveller Rural Development Project for the last 12 years, is Chairperson of the National Traveller Mental Health Network and is a member of the National Traveller Women's Forum. Having experienced suicide in her own family, Mags is passionate about Traveller mental health and addressing its root causes.

[Chris McDongah](#)

Chris, who is a member of the Traveller community, has a Diploma in Mediation and is currently studying for a Master's Degree in Mediation & Conflict Intervention with Maynooth University. He has worked as a Mediator/Trainer with Traveller Mediation Service since January 2015 and previously worked with Laois Traveller Action Group as a Men's Health Worker where he completed a Diploma in Addiction Studies in UCD and gained a QQI Level 6 'Train the Trainer' accreditation.

[Frank Kavanagh](#)

Frank, a Traveller himself, is an MII accredited Mediator, with a Certificate in Restorative Practices from Maynooth University. Frank also holds a QQI level 6 'Train the Trainer' qualification and is a Mediator/Trainer with the Traveller Mediation Service since January 2019.

From 2017 Frank has worked alongside TMS as a member of the TMS panel of mediators. Frank also worked as a men's health worker for the Offaly Traveller Movement until December 2018.

[Jane Mulcahy](#)

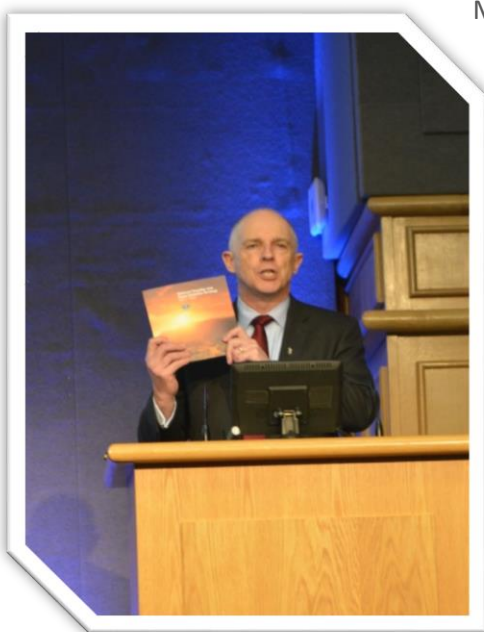
Jane is a PhD candidate in Law at University College Cork in Ireland, working on the topic of "Connected Corrections and Corrected Connections: Post-release Supervision of Long Sentence Male Prisoners". Jane is an Irish Research Council scholar under the employment-based PhD scheme, co-funded by the Probation Service. Her employment partner is the Cork Alliance Centre, a desistance project in Cork City. Jane has worked as a researcher in the area of criminal justice, penal policy and social justice since 2005. She hosts a podcast called "Law and Justice" since September 2017. Many recent features have addressed the subject of harmful lifelong impact of interpersonal trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences on individuals and society.

[Thomas McCann](#)

Drawn towards Traveller activism in his late teens, Thomas, a Traveller himself, has been involved in the Traveller struggle for almost 40 years, with the initial 25 years focused on community development. Thomas continued with his studies, from his initial Diploma in Community Development in the late 1980's, to train and qualify as a psychotherapist in 2004 and in 2008 set up the Traveller Counselling Service. Thomas went on to attain a Master's in Clinical Supervision in 2010 and is currently working towards the completion of a PhD which focuses on the Traveller struggle for human rights and equality in Ireland.

2.3 Minister for State, David Stanton's Welcoming Address

Following Chris McDonagh's welcome address, Suzie McCarthy introduced Minister for State, Minister David Stanton, with responsibility for equality, immigration and integration.



Minister Stanton opened his address by emphasising the importance of the conference and by expressing his hope that it would contribute to putting an end to inter-family violence within the Traveller community so that Travellers can find a sense of peace and wellbeing within their communities, free of fear and anger.

Minister Stanton commended Exchange House Ireland, the Traveller Mediation Service and the Traveller Counselling Service for the collaborative nature of the conference, which is in keeping with the collaborative and inclusive approach to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021.

“Action 138 of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy commits my Department to put in place and fund an effective and sustained programme, in partnership with the Traveller community and all relevant Departments and agencies, to bring feuding to an end definitively.”

Minister Stanton spoke of mental health and the high rates of suicide within the Traveller community and of his hopes for the National Traveller Mental Health Network, referring to the recent launch of their strategic plan,

“The Strategic Plan was launched last month and it is another excellent example of organisations working together to achieve a common aim. The plan highlights the particular issues that are factors to Travellers’ Mental Health and it names conflict and violence as one of those”.

The Minister went on to speak about inter-family violence as a contributory factor that impacts mental health in the community along with issues such as discrimination, unemployment and low levels of educational attainment.

He also spoke of initiatives to address the impacts of inter-family violence, such as the Traveller Mediation Service and the excellent work they do. He also referred to the provision of counselling to the community,

“The availability of culturally appropriate counselling services is a key element to addressing and reversing those statistics that I highlighted earlier. I sincerely hope that any perceived stigma attached to seeking emotional and mental health support is dissolved and that we realise that it is the brave person who seeks help”.

Minister Stanton concluded his speech by thanking all those involved for the work put into organising the conference and offered his apologies for his inability to remain for the full conference.

2.2 Margaret Casey, Director of Tipperary Rural Traveller Project, Vice Chair, National Traveller Mental Health Network

Before beginning her presentation, Mags, as she is more commonly known, noted the three important themes that were to be addressed during the day, conflict, mental health and Traveller culture.

Mags began her presentation by referencing the story of the Ryans and the Dywers, two well known, up-standing and respected business families from Tipperary, who, during the early 1800's, were involved in a long-standing bloody and violent family feud. Though in 1815, these families joined forces with the 'white boys', to rally against the landlords who were increasing rents and carrying out evictions. Their united

stand against their common oppressor, saw an improvement in their living conditions and brought an end to their inter-family conflict. According to Mags, this story highlights three things. Firstly, it demonstrates how conflict existed in Irish society outside the Traveller community. Secondly, how oppression that violated the human rights of Irish people led to violence amongst these communities, as they took their anger out on each other and came to be known as 'the fighting Irish', and thirdly, it shows how this inter-family feuding ceased when they opposed the English landlords and challenged the root cause of their anger.



“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 went on to explain the need for educating the Traveller community in terms of their experience of oppression and spoke of the dangers of linking conflict to Traveller culture, in the same way that some have tried to link high rates of suicide to Traveller culture,

“But we know that mental health issues and suicide rates are linked to discrimination and denial of culture and identity and to the lack of hope and future. I am asking you here today to not fall into the trap of believing that it is normal for Travellers to take their own lives, or that we fight with each other because it’s somehow a part of our culture and our identity”.

Mags reiterated that if the problems were cultural, they would be far easier to fix, with mediation for conflict and counselling for mental health struggles.

When Mags finished her official presentation, she put down her paper and addressed the audience.

“Any Traveller in this room likes to hear straight talking. In terms of conflict that has happened amongst Travellers over the years, where we started to resolve things, was when we started straight talking. Going forward in this conference, we need to be very honest with the civil servants and with the Irish government around the root causes of our high suicide rates, and our conflict”.

Mags acknowledged how in times gone by, mediators were a part of every family, but they didn’t attend college. It was a natural wisdom that came from experience, knowing the damage that conflict could cause in a tight-knit close community. Mediation was a natural aspect of Traveller culture.

Mags referred back to the root causes of conflict such as discrimination and the erosion of Traveller culture, with specific reference to the anti-trespass legislation (2002), noting the need to learn from mistakes of the past. She also spoke of the challenges that face Traveller activists in terms of the slow pace of change,

“A lot of us here as Travellers have the experience of burying our children, our brothers, our sisters, our sisters-in-law, our brothers-in-law, our mothers, our fathers. How can we constantly stand at these gravesides, as family and as activists, and not say that these root causes are affecting our people every day. We deserve equal opportunities, we deserve a good education, we deserve good accommodation”.

Referring to accommodation, Mags spoke of how Travellers don’t want to live on halting sites or in group housing schemes, which she likened at times to concentration camps, isolated on the outskirts of towns, isolated from mainstream society.

This ghettoization of people who don't have employment, or equal opportunities to education is a recipe for disaster. It breeds conflict and high suicide rates. Mags concluded by commending the Traveller Counselling Service and the Traveller Mediation Service and Exchange House Ireland for the work they do with individuals, but reiterated once again,

"But they are constantly trying to save somebody, some family when we could save a community if we were to address the root causes that are causing all of the problems in the first place".

2.3 Chris McDonagh, Mediator, Traveller Mediation Service, Chairperson, Traveller Counselling Service



Chris's presentation opened with an explanation of the work of the Traveller Mediation Service and how the service works with an array of agencies, accepting referrals from many sources with an increasing number of self referrals from Travellers themselves who are seeking to resolve disputes without violence. Chris also explained how the service works to mediate conflicts between Travellers and other Travellers and between Travellers and members of the wider Community. He then went on to explain the reality of conflict,

"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".

The Traveller Mediation Service provides a number of Conflict Training programmes, he explained, including a Traveller mediation training programme with The Kennedy Institute in Maynooth University and the ETBs, designed to train Traveller men and women to become certified mediators. TMS also deliver peer mediation training to prisoners in a number of prisons. Chris told the audience how as part of the programme, the participants also learn to develop skills in conflict coaching, so that they can work on a one-to-one basis with fellow prisoners to de-escalate conflict. While working with the Travellers in prison, Chris explained how some were willing to share their experiences of conflict. He noted that one common theme of conflict, is the capacity for a small incident to escalate quickly into full blown conflict, with pressure from family being a major contributory factor,

“But when conflict breaks out and some of these men have been reluctant to take part, they have been met with pressure from other family members. Communication breaks down as each family member struggles in their own way to come to terms with what has happened”.

Chris spoke of the capacity for minor disputes to escalate within the wider community with devastating effects for all members of the families directly involved but also for other Traveller families that know both sides. Chris also acknowledged how such conflicts can often result in imprisonment,

“Because of the importance of contact with family and friends, separation from family can take a hugely negative toll on Travellers in prisons, so much so, that they may be very troubled by an incident which has occurred outside prison such as the death or illness of a relative”.

Aside from worry about family on the outside, prisoners often worried about conflict continuing with their family while they served their sentence and were powerless in terms of protecting them.

There was also the fear of conflict continuing in prison, with fear of retaliation from the feuding family’s relatives who were also serving prison sentences.

The psychological impact of conflict, yet another consequence of inter-family conflict, Chris explained, can last long after the physical wounds have healed.

“In fact, the psychological damage can be even more devastating than the physical. The lack of sleep, nightmares, anxiety, stress, grief, anger and fear. These are some of the impacts of both direct and threatened of violence”.

Guilt was another psychological consequence that some of the prisoners that Chris worked with experienced. Guilt regarding their violent reaction and the damage they caused, and for one man, the fear that he had killed a man and how he still hears the screams of that man’s wife, four years later. Others spoke about the psychological impact of conflict in terms of feelings of helplessness, depression, despair and difficulties concentrating and finding it difficult just being with people.

Chris concluded his presentation on a positive note, sharing the positive impact of the work being carried out by the Traveller Mediation Service and how a significant reduction in violent outbursts was recorded in one of the prisons where the TMS are carrying out their peer mediation training.

“The work of the TMS shows that Traveller families are looking at ways to resolve conflict without violence. We all need to take responsibility, both the community and the agencies, to work together collectively to bring an end to violent conflict within the Traveller community”.

2.4 Frank Kavanagh, Mediator, Traveller Mediation Service

Frank's presentation was a powerful personal testimonial on his experience of inter-family violence within the Traveller community. His presentation commenced with acknowledging that only a small minority of Travellers are involved in violent conflict or feuding, though this is often amplified by the media or other outside groups, who may have little understanding of how conflict starts or the effect it has on the whole community.

Frank began by explaining how he himself, became involved in conflict,

"A lot of the time people can be pressured into getting involved. This is what happened to me. I didn't want to get involved but I was seen as letting my family name down if I didn't Family name means a lot within our community. It gives us our identity, it says who we are as Travellers so we feel great pride in our family name".

Even though Frank never wanted to get involved, he felt under immense pressure from his family and eventually gave into the pressure to take up for his family name as he felt he was letting them down by not engaging. Only later did Frank realise, that it was himself, his wife and his own children that he was letting down, as they ended up being affected, as much, if not more than Frank was himself.

Frank went on to explain how once he became involved, he felt the immediate impact in all areas of his life, but on reflection, he sees that his mental health was most affected,

"... I remember one of the first things that started happening, was that I noticed friends stopped calling by in case they were dragged into it by being seen with me. So, I began to feel isolated. The lack of sleep for one, staying awake all night and if you hear a car door opening or a dog barking you jump out of bed to see what was happening. I couldn't eat either, as I was going around with a lump in my stomach not knowing what would happen as the days went on. To tell you the truth, it was mental torture."



Frank spoke of the speed at which the conflict escalated, with more and more people getting involved and the situation becoming increasingly violent, explaining that this is a common pattern, that the longer conflict continues, the more people become involved,

“It’s like a ripple effect - it starts with one family and it gathers pace because other families get pulled into it for a number of reasons”.

Frank spoke poignantly of the impact that the violent conflict had on his parents, how stressed they were with the fear that someone would end up in jail, get hurt or killed, or kill someone else. At this point, Frank knew it had to end, so he contacted the other family to try to find a solution. Though Frank **reckons now**, that it would have been so much easier if the mediation service had been in operation to help his family back then.

“TMS offers Travellers a way to settle their differences in a peaceful and safe way and allows both sides to save face. Saving face is very important within our community, as people earn respect by saving face. We are a proud people, so this is really important to us”.

Frank spoke of how the same patterns of events are replicated across the country, over and again, with people turning to alcohol and drugs to deal with the stress, worry and the impact of inter-family violence, with constant fear of running into opposing family members, at schools, at the shops, at the post office or any number of situations that we find ourselves in on a daily basis.

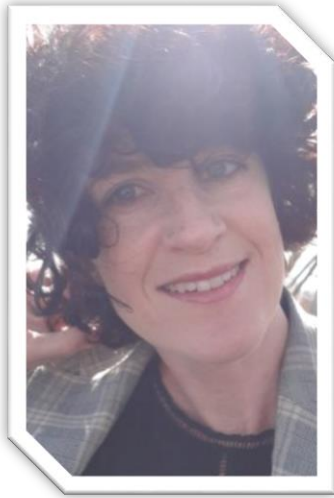
Having Travellers working in the TMS supports the increasing numbers of self-referrals coming from Travellers because, as Frank explained, Travellers have a better understanding of the history or sometimes the underlying problems that non-Travellers might not consider relevant.

Frank closed his presentation, reiterating that inter-family violence affects the entire community, with women and children often impacted by fear, worry and concern and families torn apart, unable to attend family gatherings, because of inter-family conflict.

Frank also spoke about the real experiences of Travellers he worked with, citing one man whose small children were afraid to go to bed at night having witnessed the house being attacked by a group of men. These children are now afraid of the dark and afraid to go to sleep because of their nightmares. Frank concluded his presentation with a powerful quote, from a woman he had worked with,

“You would be better off dead than living like this, this is no life for anyone” (Anon).

2.5 Jane Mulcahy, PhD Candidate in Law with UCC



The fifth presentation, Jane Mulcahy of UCC, was presenting on behalf of Exchange House Ireland. Jane is currently researching her PhD with a particular focus on the adverse effects of trauma, and for this presentation, she specifically focused on the adverse impact of inter-family violence on Traveller children, which she describes as Adverse Childhood Experiences.

"Feuding is neither a sport nor a form of entertainment. People get hurt. Families are damaged. The fabric of the community gets torn."
Rosaleen McDonagh

Jane opened her presentation by referencing the famous Shakespearean tragedy, Romeo and Juliet, based on two feuding families, comparing it to the feuding that impacts the Traveller community. Both sharing a common feature – no happy endings.

Highlighting the role that social media plays, Jane spoke of the 1,587,945 views on a particular 'call-out' You Tube video, showing Travellers goading each other. According to Jane, these videos are not only inciting violence, they are correspondingly reinforcing negative stereotypes of Travellers.

Then moving onto Jane's particular area of expertise, she focused on the impact of trauma on the development of a child's brain, explaining that exposure to trauma and violence in childhood, predisposes children to violence or offending behaviour in adulthood.

Jane explained how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), fall into three categories,

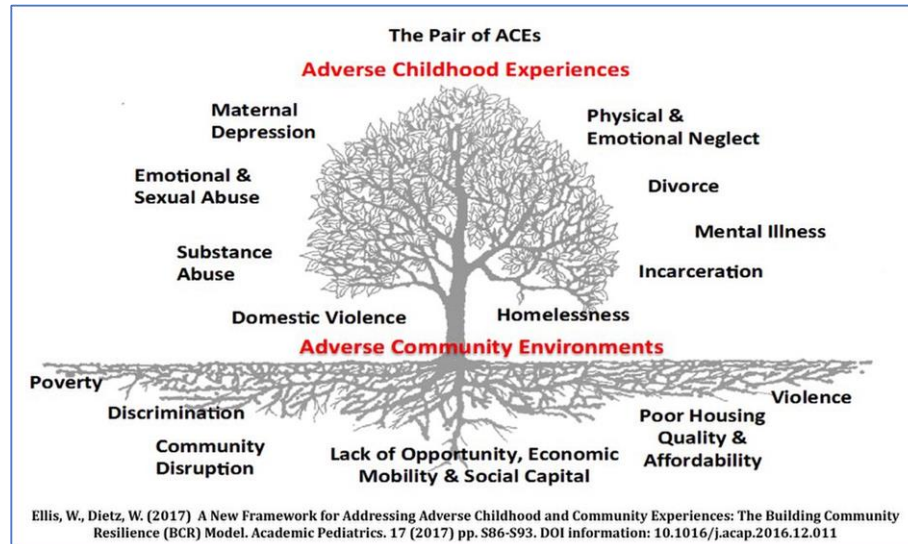
- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| - ABUSE | <i>Physical, Emotional and Psychological</i> |
| - NEGLECT | <i>Physical and Emotional</i> |
| - HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION | <i>Mental Illness, Domestic Violence, Divorce, Incarcerated Relative and Substance Abuse</i> |

According to the ACE scoring system, the continuous or long-term experience of any of the above listed experiences, earns 1 point on the scoring system. Continuing on, Jane explained how ACE's not only effect brain development, but also physical health, explaining that a score of 4 nearly doubles the risk of heart disease and cancer. It increases the likelihood of becoming an alcoholic by 700% and shockingly, it increases the risk of attempted suicide by 1200%.

Jane went on to highlight how statistics such as 11% of all Traveller deaths being due to suicide, could be linked to Adverse Childhood Experiences and continued with an examination of Adverse

Community Environments and showed, using the image of a tree, how both forms of adversity (childhood and community) can combine to create a challenging and difficult life experience,

The intersection between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments



To highlight the importance of feeling safe, Jane explained that in order for children to reach their full potential in adulthood, following on from their most basic needs such as sleep, food, water and air to breath, the sense of safety was the next most important requirement for a child to thrive.

Jane explained how the more Adverse Childhood Experiences, the more likely a person is to experience disrupted brain development; social, emotional and cognitive impairment; the increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours; the development of disease, disability and social problems; and ultimately, early or untimely death.

With regard to the child's brain, Jane highlighted how, in the first two years, the baby's brain grows from 25% to 80% of adult size, which is a time when critical restructuring continues through childhood for empathy, trust and community.

Focusing on the impact of exposure to violence on the development of the brain, Jane explained how exposure to violence in childhood causes the brain to over-develop its 'life-preserving' elements, which can result in neutral cues, or non-threatening situations, being experienced as threatening. The example she gave was of a child who has been exposed to violence finding the experience of starting school threatening, which causes them to feel anxious, leaving them less able to learn, more likely to disengage resulting in poor learning outcomes.

The Fight, Fight or Freeze Response

The fight, flight or freeze response was also explained by Jane with regard to adverse childhood experiences. ACEs cause the production of toxic stress in children, which activates the “fight/flight/freezing” stress response system.

Over time, the traumatized person’s “window of tolerance” shrinks, causing them to either

- Remain constantly on high alert for danger, responding with anger, violence, impulsivity or defensiveness (hyper-arousal) or,
- Respond by shutting down/disconnecting (hypo-arousal) when emotionally overwhelmed or triggered.

Our goal, as Jane stated, must be to reduce the dosage of adversity, even by one point or one adverse experience in childhood, such as exposure to interfamilial violence, and increase the likelihood of a happier adult life for Traveller children.

Safety and Racism

Jane went on to discuss the role of safety in terms of racism, explaining how not feeling safe in wider society because of racism, has yet another adverse effect on the brain’s development. She went on to explain the four forms of racism that Travellers experience in Irish society,

- Personally mediated racism (the blatantly wrong person to person racism)
Cultural racism (which group characteristics are valued? Who do we see as valuable or not valuable in the wider society?)
- Internalized racism (when we believe the things, mostly negative, that have been said about our own group)
- Institutionalized racism (formal and informal policies and practices that perpetuate inequity, such as discriminatory practices and policies and structures).

Healing Centred Engagement

Jane concluded her presentation with a discussion of ways to heal from adverse childhood experiences or, advocating a “healing centred engagement” approach to dealing with young people with extensive trauma.

This approach focuses on recognising and cultivating strengths and a restoration of identity. It is an approach that promotes a collective view of healing and views culture and culturally grounded rituals as being central to well-being.

“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 concluded her presentation with a reference to hope, by citing a Cherokee legend, *The Two Wolves*, suggesting that if we feed the white wolf, the wolf of hope, the wolf of hope will return, but if we feed the black wolf, the wolf of despair, it will return. Stop feeding either one of them and they will stop returning. So feed the one you want to return, the wolf of hope.

Attached is a link to Jane’s full presentation, containing links the research cited in her presentation, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332496344_Inter_familial_Conflict_and_Adverse_Childhood_Experiences_the_impact_of_conflict_trauma_on_Travellers

2.6 Thomas McCann, Director Traveller Counselling Service

Environmental Factors

Thomas opened his presentation by acknowledging that the complexity of inter-family conflict.

“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’s presentation had seven categories, commencing with environmental factors. To this he spoke of conflicting families being forced to live together and particularly families who don’t get on. He also spoke of the overcrowding leading to tension, lack of facilities, lack of play areas for children and lack of amenities for young people.



Thomas continued with a discussion of the inability of families to move from conflictual situations due to anti-trespass legislation, which in the past was key to avoiding conflict for Travellers as families were able to ‘move on’.

The relationship between Travellers and the Gardaí also featured, whereby Traveller often feel that they are not protected by the State and feel they have to defend themselves.

He spoke of the racism and discrimination, citing a recent survey whereby 40% of Travellers felt they were discriminated against by An Garda Síochána. And finally, in relation to environmental factors, Thomas spoke of the poverty with 90% of the community unemployed.

Internalised Oppression

Thomas's presentation continued with a focus on internalised oppression, and how the projected negative stereotypes about Travellers from the media, public figures and the State have been and continue to be a feature of the Traveller experience. Thomas explained how, having experienced such negative messaging from a very young age, Travellers come to internalise these messages, which can lead to feelings of shame related to their identity. Feelings of shame, Thomas explained, can lead to a wish, either conscious or unconscious, for revenge over the person or source of humiliation. Such 'retaliatory rage' is a common response to trauma (Neborsky, 2003). According to Thomas, in assessing those who have anger problems, shame is often a trigger for their violence and according to Paulo Freire, internalised oppression leads to horizontal violence (2000).

Normalisation of Violence

Thomas spoke also of the normalisation of violence in terms of it being seen as an effective and acceptable way of dealing with conflict situations. The options at times seem limited to 'beat' or 'be beaten', where violence is seen as necessary to protect oneself, one's family or one's status in a hostile and violent situation. But as Thomas explained, this comes with a price,

"There are no winners in inter-family conflict, even when they might think they have won they haven't because they are all left carrying the psychological trauma and the scars, both physical and emotional".

And finally, violence can be seen as the only alternative to protect oneself in a situation where others are ready to exploit, victimize and resort to violence themselves.

Learned Behaviour

In terms of learned behaviour, Thomas went on to say that some social learning theorists tell us that observing violence in family settings as a youth or child increases the likelihood that we will engage

in future acts of violence ourselves. Aggressive behaviour and violent behaviour are learned or acquired by individuals. And as Thomas stated, Jane's earlier presentation highlighted the research that has been conducted to look at the effects of violence on children who witness it, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, learning difficulties, and social dysfunction.

Responses by Services

With regard to services responding to inter-family violence, Thomas noted that the services fail to see beyond the violent individual or individuals to the environmental context or the cultural contexts that precede the violence. Thomas explained how violence doesn't occur in a vacuum and that individuals engaging in violence have been shaped by their environment and their cultural context.

Need for a Culturally Sensitive Response

Thomas went on to discuss how a culturally sensitive response is crucial to conflict situations with Travellers, stating that if services are not culturally sensitive, they can reinforce the discrimination that Travellers already experience in wider society and therefore make the situation worse.

Services need to understand the various factors contributing to cultural differences and they need to be sensitive to and appreciate Traveller's experience of violent conflict. They need to have respect for the norms, values and traditions of Traveller culture. The need remains, Thomas stated, to develop more services that are inclusive and meet the needs of Travellers involved in conflict.

Conclusion

To conclude, Thomas reiterated that there are a number of broad areas that need to be addressed such as the wider context and the root causes that are impacting negatively on the Traveller community, including accommodation issues, unemployment and discrimination. He correspondingly spoke of the need to raise awareness within the Traveller community of the impact that violent conflict has on individuals, both adults and children and the need to find alternative ways of addressing inter-family conflict. In terms of addressing the needs of the Traveller community who get caught up in violent conflict, Thomas stressed the need to work collectively, in partnerships between the Traveller community, service providers and the State and to provide culturally sensitive services for Traveller families looking for ways to move away from inter-family violence.

3. Round Table Discussions

3.1 Kevin Burn, CEO, Exchange House Ireland

Following the morning's presentations, Kevin Burn from Exchange House Ireland welcomed the participants back for the afternoon session, by acknowledging how proud all at Exchange House Ireland were to be part of the conference and to work with both the Traveller Counselling Service and the Traveller Mediation Service on an issue that they know to be extremely important.

“What we are doing here today is starting the conversation on the impact of conflict on Traveller mental health, and these are two things, both conflict and mental health, that come up within our services at Exchange House Ireland all the time”.

Kevin went on to explain that a children and young people's service, an education and training service, a family support and intervention service and the National Traveller Mental Health Service are run in Exchange House Ireland. Kevin spoke of the many, particularly younger Travellers, whose mental health has been adversely affected by inter-family violence. With his background in social work, youth justice and child protection, Kevin explained how he sees through his work with children across the board, that they need to feel safety within their family home, in order to flourish, in order to learn and in order to reach their full potential as adults.

Kevin also spoke of the importance of a collaborative approach to addressing the issue of inter-family violence, explaining that no service can bring about the required change alone and also acknowledged the contribution of his co-worker, Allyson Coogan, National Traveller Mental Health Team Leader with Exchange House Ireland, who was a big part of organising the conference though was unfortunately unable to attend.

Kevin concluded his address with an acknowledgement of the morning's presentations, in terms of their positive impact and the power of the personal testimonies, acknowledging that no one has all the answers, but the important thing is to start the conversation in order to find some ways of moving forward to improve the situation.

Round Table Discussion Feedback

The afternoon session commenced with three questions posed to each table for discussion. Responses to these questions were captured both in script and audio form and excerpts from these answers are highlighted below.

3.2 Responses to Question One:-



Introduction

As can be seen from the previous diagram, the broadness of the opening question allowed for many and varied responses and allowed participants to express a wide range of views on the many issues that had been discussed during the earlier presentations, with some specific themes emerging repeatedly. The following section offers a brief outline of these responses, commencing with a discussion of participants' general impressions of the conference, followed by an examination of the nature of conflict and the impacts of violent conflict. A discussion of responsibility for addressing these issues follows which leads into a discussion of the role of the media, in terms of both mainstream and social media. This section finishes with an examination of the role of service providers and a discussion of the power of Traveller testimonies and ends with a discussion of an overarching theme, the desire for change. This section concludes with a summary of the above.

Overall Impressions

While certain themes emerged repeatedly, the general impression of the conference was overwhelmingly positive and hopeful. This feeling of hope became more evident as the conference proceeded into the afternoon, possibly borne out of the belief that collective action to address inter-family violence within the Traveller community might result from the day's proceedings.

"Some people were saying that they came feeling a bit like, I don't really have a lot of hope for today, but have come back this afternoon feeling a lot more hope knowing that there is a collective that wants to change things, that wants things to be different," (Table 1)

While hope featured in the responses, the feeling of despondency and of being over-whelmed also emerged. For some, this was coupled with the belief that discrimination has worsened for Travellers rather than improved. For others, despondency was expressed as a lack of progress, unfairness and disappointment around the lack of improvements for Travellers following the State's granting of Traveller ethnicity.

Many participants noted how well Travellers were represented on the podium in terms of the number and quality of the Traveller presentations and also the number of Traveller attendees though an absence was noted in relation to state representation. And while the Minister's presence and speech was welcomed, his absence for the remainder of the conference was felt.

For some attendees, a further important aspect of the conference was naming and reflecting the reality of conflict within the Traveller community. For others, it was the sharing of information regarding the many services that are available to Travellers caught up in inter-family violence.

Conflict: Its Role and its Impact

The morning presentations were found to be very informative in terms of the nature of inter-family conflict and the many and varied impacts of engaging in violent behaviour. Several attendees noted how interesting and valuable they found this element of the presentations, not only for Travellers, but for the wider community, service providers and the state agencies, in terms of developing and enhancing their understanding of the challenges and complexities involved in the issue of inter-family violence for Travellers.

For some, their understanding of Traveller feuding was in terms of a reaction to the situation Travellers find themselves in; as in Travellers fight with other Travellers, as a reaction to how badly they are treated by wider society,

“We need to understand people’s emotional states and their lack of emotional regulation and why there are difficulties instead of focusing only on the end result of this which is inter-family violence” (Table 5).

The cyclical nature of conflict also emerged and how difficult it is for Travellers to break free of this cycle, particularly with contributory factors such as poverty, exclusion and unemployment making the situation even more challenging and in terms of understanding conflict, many participants spoke of conflict as a learned behaviour.

The various impacts of conflict, such as the isolation and how this can impact on mental health, was also noted. The involvement of innocent family members, getting dragged into conflict without any choice in the matter was also raised as was the impact of imprisonment and how this can impact on both the individual and on their family’s name and good reputation within the community.

The fact that many Travellers that are experiencing conflict or the threat of conflict are operating constantly in survival mode that sees them react defensively rather than respond calmly in situations, was seen as both a symptom and a cause of inter-family violence. Some participants felt that a particular focus on Traveller women’s perspective would have been helpful, in terms of how they experience fear for their children, their husbands and how this fear is ‘held’ by Traveller women and the toll that this ‘holding’ takes on them.

The impact on children was highlighted by many participants as a huge learning that came out of the conference, with much concern being felt in terms of the responsibility for protecting children from exposure to violence in terms of adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s).

“It’s overwhelming, the realisation in terms of the impact on children. It leads back to feeling despondent in terms of the odds being stacked against Travellers” (Table 10).

A further issue that arose in terms of children was the manner in which they are exposed to discussions about violence, which would not have been the case in years past (Table 8).

Responsibility

The issue of responsibility also emerged as a theme with participants reflecting how and who they felt should take responsibility for addressing the issue of inter-family violence,

“What are the root causes? What is the fault of the settled community versus what is internally generated” (Table 11)?

Some participants expressed the view that wider society lacks an understanding of the complexities of inter-family violence, while others felt that feuding is a tool that is used by wider society to blame and shame the community and a way for wider society to deflect avoid taking responsibility for their role in the unacceptable treatment of Travellers that can lead to inter-family violence.

The belief that it is up to each individual Traveller to reflect on their own behaviour and to make the necessary changes within themselves also emerged, as did the belief that Travellers need to be modelling good behaviour for younger Travellers, particularly with regard to inter-family violence.

In terms of responsibility, many participants referred to the State and their role in terms of the issue of conflict and finally, when it comes to responsibility and response, most participants indicated the need for a joint effort. While there were varying opinions in terms of who should take responsibility, there was unanimity in terms of the root causes of conflict which are addressed in question two.

Mainstream and Social Media

The media also emerged as a theme, with the absence of mainstream media, despite several invitations from the conference organisers, noted by some participants as indicative of how some elements within the Irish media are only interested in sensationalist reporting regarding Travellers.

While this is not a reflection of all of Irish media, as it must be noted that RTE Radio 1 covered the conference in their Drive Time programme on the evening of the conference, (16th April 2019) with excerpts from interviews with Mags Casey, Frank Kavanagh and Thomas McCann, this positive coverage of Traveller related issues was felt by most to be the exception, rather than the norm.

The impact of social media arose in terms of it being a huge problem that generates and keeps conflict going with some participants feeling that social media perpetuates the negative stereotypes of Travellers and were found by others to be an embarrassing reflection on the community.

Some participants felt that the 'call-outs' on social media was an issue that was particular to the younger generation of Travellers, and highlighted the need to have young Travellers as part of the debate around conflict,

"... we're not really hearing from any young people here today so maybe that's something that could be looked at in the future" (Table 7).

Service Provision

Service provision also emerged as a theme in response to question one, both in relation to mainstream service provision and Traveller specific services. In relation to services, the need for early intervention in terms of conflict resolution was noted, though it was noted that help was often not available when Travellers needed it, and when it does come, it is often too slow or too late,

"Services become relevant when things have escalated...but when things get even worse, the more social workers/services pull back" (Table 4).

Indicating how failure to intervene early can quickly see a situation get out of hand.

Another theme that emerged regarding mainstream service providers, was a lack of trust borne out of Travellers negative experiences with service providers in the past and out of the service providers beliefs that they know what's best for Travellers.

A lack of trust in mainstream services and institutions can be a key factor in Travellers reluctance to engage with these services at the early stages of conflict. Fear based on previous experiences can see Travellers only seeking help and support when a situation has already reached crisis point.

The issue of Traveller specific services featured also, with some attendees highlighting the need for a collective response to the issue of inter-family violence, (Table 4). Though for many, under-resourcing of Traveller specific services was a serious concern.

A further learning that emerged from question one, was the positive impact of mediation, with many participants noting how powerful a tool mediation is and expressing their gratitude for the Traveller Mediation Service, and correspondingly, requesting that it be sufficiently resourced to meet the demands for its service.

Traveller Voices

While not a theme as such, the personal testimonies warrant inclusion as this was the most commented on aspect of the morning's proceedings in response to question one. The personal testimonies were found to be a powerful element that enhanced an understanding of how individuals become involved in conflict, the ripple effect it has on the entire family and wider community and the implications when they do,

"We were very impacted by the personal Traveller stories...Travellers telling their stories of how conflict and how violence impacts on us here today as Travellers. When a Traveller tells their story it really hits home" (Table 5).

Indicating the capacity of personal testimonies to provide insight, understanding and engender feelings of empathy rather than feelings of blame,

"Those in power need to hear these personal stories, because they help others understand better what it's like to have conflict" (Table 5).

The final theme that emerged during the round table discussions in relation to question one, was the desire for change. It became evident during the morning's proceedings that there was an overarching desire for change with regard to inter-family violence in the Traveller community in all attending the conference and this feeling was expressed most strongly by the Travellers themselves who were present.

Conclusion

Feedback on the morning's proceedings in relation to question one, indicates that the conference was overwhelmingly positive, generating a sense of hope for the future. The presentations were found to provide a deeper understanding of the issues such as the nature and the impact of inter-family violence and responsibility for addressing these issues was also discussed. Absences were noted, the Ministers, the media and young Travellers also. Social media emerged as a theme regarding its capacity to incite violence and the role that service provisions plays was correspondingly examined.

Though the strongest themes to emerge from the morning sessions were through the personal testimonies, indicating the importance of both naming issues, of reflecting the harsh realities of Travellers lived experience and of hearing Traveller voices and Travellers solutions in terms of their lived experience, the root causes of the problem of inter-family violence, and most importantly going forward, their solutions, which will be addressed in more detail in questions two and three.

3.3 Responses to Question Two



Introduction

As with question one, there were many and varied responses to this question and while many of the



themes have already been mentioned in response to the previous question, some new themes also emerge. Amongst these emerging themes that will be discussed in response to question two, are root causes, which were noted by all 12 round tables as a

causative factor of inter-family violence. This is followed by an examination of legislative changes that have impacted the community, with a particular focus on anti-trespass legislation.

A discussion of contributory factors then follows, with a focus on addiction, family pressure and chronic stress. This is followed by an examination of initiatives to counter inter-family violence which leads into a discussion of education. Responses to question two finish with a discussion of Traveller culture, the need for a Traveller led response and a brief summary of all of the above.

Root Causes

A theme that emerged in response to question two, that attendees felt very strongly about, was root causes that have led to the current situation that Travellers find themselves in,

“...it’s important to see conflict holistically and look at the root causes, so there’s a need to understand and contextualise where it comes from” (Table 3).

For some participants, it was important to acknowledge the specific root causes such as poverty, exclusion, high mortality, poor health and educational outcomes for Travellers and high levels of unemployment. Of all the root causes discussed, accommodation featured as the most prevalent and primary root cause in terms of inter-family violence. Some participants acknowledged the chronic stress that Travellers experience due to accommodation and how this can lead to conflict (Table 6), while others noted the impact of overcrowded accommodation (Table 12). Questions were also raised in terms of Traveller accommodation budgets not being spent,

“...and the Traveller budget not being drawn down 25 years later, who’s responsible for overseeing that?” (Table 7),

And questioning what were the repercussions for councils who failed to spend their accommodation budget, if any?

Anti-Traveller Legislation

Many participants felt that legislative changes in recent decades that are responsible for the erosion of Traveller culture also contribute significantly to inter-family violence,

“Another interesting thing ... was the disempowerment within the community. All of the legislation around market trading, the keeping of horses, anti-trespass law and statistics like 90% unemployment within the Traveller community, it all adds up” (Table 8).

While many attendees felt that violent conflict served no purpose, others looked beyond the notion of conflict in terms of defending a family’s name, suggesting that conflict gave purpose to otherwise disengaged Travellers, noting the vacuum created by legislative change and how Travellers, particularly Traveller men’s purpose, has been systematically stripped through legislative changes,

“... conflict actually gives them some power, it gives them some credibility ... it gives them an identity and it gives them a purpose. ...All of the things that have been taken away need to be replaced with something that’s positive as opposed to just allowing conflict replace what’s been lost to them” (Table 8).

The emasculation of Traveller men through legislative change also emerged, with the removal or restrictions on their ability to generate work and support their families and the high levels of unemployment. Traveller men also featured in terms of the conditioning and expectations on Traveller men to retaliate and protect their families and the need to challenge these norms.

One particular piece of legislation that emerged repeatedly in response to question two was the Anti-Trespass Law (2002) and its implication for Travellers in terms of nomadism, a corner-stone of their culture, but most importantly in terms of this conference, a law that restricts the previously free movement of Travellers, a freedom that supported the avoidance of inter-family violence.

A most important point that was brought up in response to this question, was in relation to the stress response of ‘fight or flight’ and how anti-trespass legislation has removed the option of ‘flight’ from Travellers,

“...Traveller families who are forced to live together and don’t have the opportunity for ‘flight’ .. are left with only one alternative - to ‘fight’ ...” (Table 9).

This highlights the complexity of the issue of conflict within the Traveller community, but correspondingly indicates the need to address the root causes, such as accommodation and restrictions on travel, in order to address the issue of conflict.

Some participants found the anti-trespass legislation responsible for the stark reality of Travellers experience in terms of the ghettoization of the community and of Travellers being corralled into small spaces with families they are in conflict with, making matters worse. Many participants called for a review of current legislation, particularly anti-trespass legislation, with some calling for the long promised transitory halting sites.

Though, aside from suggestions to review the current legislation that impacts negatively on Travellers, for some participants, stricter legislation was the answer with regard to social media, with many participants arguing for the regulation of social media, suggesting that ‘call-outs’ be banned. For others, legislation in terms of jail sentencing was the solution, with the belief that Travellers get off lightly, particularly in cases of “Traveller on Traveller” violence.

While the issue of racism emerged in response to question one, it correspondingly arose in response to question two, but with a greater focus on legislation, and taking action against those in powerful positions such as An Garda Síochána, politicians and judges who speak out against Travellers using derogatory or racist language that incites hatred.

Causative and Contributory Factors

In terms of contributory factors, addiction and drug related violence emerged as a causative factor that both escalates conflict through intoxication and causes conflict with ‘drug wars’ (Tables 6 & 9).

Family also featured in terms of some family members keeping conflict going when it might otherwise die down (Table 2). The family name and defending it, also came in for some criticism, in term of how this can lead to conflict,

“When one member of the family does something, the whole family takes responsibility; that has to stop, it’s pulling whole families into conflict” (Table 4).

The impact of chronic stress, which is a factor in many Travellers’ lives, also featured in terms of so many Travellers operating in survival mode due to their raised stress levels. Many participants spoke of the continuous stress that pushes Travellers into survival mode which sees them more likely to perceive situations that are non-threatening as threatening and thereby leaving them more likely to over-react,

“...the fact that so many Travellers are in survival mode a lot of the time just trying to cope with these difficult situations” (Table 8),

Social media and negative stereotyping of Travellers also emerged as a contributory factor in response to question two.

Initiatives to Counteract Inter-Family Violence

In direct response to the question, several attendees discussed possible initiatives that would go some way to counter inter-family violence within the Traveller community. For some these were new initiatives; for others, they were about improving current services, and for others still it was about adequate resourcing for both of the above,

“...there needs to be more money available to be put into the likes of the mediation and counselling services. We need regionalised models” (Table 9).

With regard to mainstream services, there were many suggestions, focused on different types of need, such as employment and education, with suggestions of exploring the social welfare rules to address the 90% unemployment.

For many attendees, the role of the mediation was found to be key in terms of addressing the issue of violent conflict, with many expressing the need to ensure its adequate resourcing and expansion while for others it was about the mediation that happens on a daily basis, and training those that are natural mediators, who have a gift for diffusing situations, to become qualified mediators.

Education

Of the many themes that emerged in response to question two, education was the most prevalent with regard to what is needed to bring an end to violent conflict within the Traveller community,

“...what we are seeing are the results of legacy issues, ... and to counteract that we need to be applying positive discrimination towards Travellers regarding education and employment and also towards training” (Table 4).

Almost every Table mentioned education as a way of addressing the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community. The forms of education were many, including education for the wider community in terms of Traveller culture, educating service providers in terms of Traveller values and norms, education for children regarding resilience, education for youth and education for adults regarding employment prospects.

Some Tables spoke about the barriers to education that Travellers have faced in the past, including the experience of discrimination, shame and feeling different to everyone else (Table 9). Training for educators was suggested to counter the experience of discrimination as was further resourcing within education for Travellers, with one group highlighting the outcomes that result from the education system at present, with .04% of Travellers accessing 3rd level education (Table 9).

Traveller Culture

Developing an understanding of Traveller culture for both younger Travellers and the wider community was a further suggestion, as well as educating the wider community so that they also have an understanding of the oppression that Travellers have experienced in the Irish context.

An important point was also raised here with regard to educating the wider community with regard to legacy issues, the erosion of Traveller culture etc. Should it be the responsibility of the already marginalised Traveller community or is this the responsibility of the wider community and the State?

Some participants were critical of current cultural training models, suggesting that they focus predominantly on crisis situations therefore reinforcing this negative perception of Traveller culture (Table 9). Many also spoke of the need for Travellers to be the educators when delivering training on Traveller culture, as opposed to members of the wider community.

Education with a particular focus on young Travellers also featured as did education in terms of Traveller children and parenting. Following on from the morning presentations and the impact of violent conflict on childhood development, it is not surprising that some participants focused on younger children and specifically parenting programmes, that would educate parents as to how best support their children's development.

Another valid point that was raised here in terms of initiatives was with regard to the wealth of experience and expertise within the wider community, a resource that should be utilised. This thinking is correspondingly reflected in the need to work collaboratively with the wider community to resolve the issues. Though the most relevant collaboration was felt to be between the Traveller community and the State,

“... wider societies mindset needs to change, but this involves policy change at government and state level” (Table 12).

The role that government and the State can play in resolving and moving forward on the issue of inter-family violent conflict was felt by some participants to be key,

“The State needs to take responsibility and the State needs to make changes” (Table 1).

Traveller Led Response

One area where several respondents agreed was in terms of the type of response that is required to bring an end to violent conflict within the Traveller community. For many, while still being a collective response, this needs to be a Traveller led initiative,

“The stakeholder always knows how best to address a need within their own community”

Table 3).

With regard to mediation, some also felt that it was important that initiatives such as mediation be Traveller led and Traveller representation also featured, with participants noting the need for Travellers to be represented on councils, on the drugs task force, in An Garda Síochána, and most importantly, in state agencies and in government.

Conclusion

Question two provided an array of responses, and unlike question one, many of which focused on solutions and initiatives to address inter-family violence amongst Travellers. A collaborative approach seemed to be favoured, with a shared responsibility for addressing the current situation in terms of inter-family violence. Though as with question one, one theme that emerged very strongly, was the need to address the root causes of conflict and in response to question two, this was seen predominantly as a challenge to current legislation and policy regarding the Traveller community.

Another initiative that featured strongly was the need for education, be that training for adults, educating the wider community in terms of Traveller history and culture, educating young Travellers on their heritage and alternatives to conflict or educating parents on the impact of violence on their children’s development. Every table spoke to the theme of education, highlighting the important role it plays in terms of change.

What is evident from responses to the second question, is that root causes are a highly significant contributory factor in terms of inter-family violence and that legislative and policy change that support Traveller culture combined with educational initiatives, may go some way to address this issue. What is correspondingly evident, is that Travellers favour a new, Traveller led approach to addressing inter-family violence, and that the time for that change is now.

3.4 Responses to Question Three



Introduction

In response to question three, once again, the responses were varied, with specific themes emerging across the board. While many of these themes had already appeared in response to the two earlier questions, some new themes also emerged. One interesting response from table 3, which makes a good opening to this section, is a question that they pose,

“Why is it not possible to solve these problems as it’s such a small community” (Table 3)?

Responses to question three commence with an examination of the first steps that participants felt needed to happen in order to move forward with this issue. This is followed by a discussion of the possibility of engaging with Europe in terms of both funding and support. Service provision is examined in terms of the lack of cultural awareness and the need for further resourcing of Traveller specific services which leads into an examination of how to address the root causes of inter-family violence. A challenge to current legislation follows with a particular focus on the role of County Councils and this section completes with a discussion of possible educational initiatives and concludes with a discussion around the need for state support and engagement. A summary of the above completes the responses to question three.

First Steps

Some participants felt that the first step to solving the problem in inter-family violence needs to be an apology from the State, to acknowledge all the negative impacts on the Traveller community and Traveller culture, that resulted from state led initiatives and state led decisions regarding legislation and policy over the last number of decades,

“An apology from the State might go some way to validate Traveller’s experience of exclusion and a way to start the process of reconciliation” (Table 8).

For most participants, a national response was felt to be the solution, that would include Traveller representatives who would hold responsibility for decision making. Some participants suggested a community charter and also researching the responses of minority ethnic communities in Europe to firstly, see how they responded and what initiatives they used to address issues of conflict and secondly, to develop an alliance with other ethnic minorities and thereby have a stronger voice in Europe.

Europe

Recognition that as citizens of Europe as well as being citizens of Ireland, that Travellers have a connection to Europe and consequently, Europe has a vested interest in the lot of Travellers in Ireland also featured,

“If the State doesn’t respond in terms of funding initiatives, let’s bring it to Europe” (Table 6).

Europe also featured in terms of funding research, with Table 8 suggesting the need for an extensive piece of research, that would provide an analysis of the root causes, the contributory factors, the impacts and recommendations with regard to addressing the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community.. It was also suggested that involvement from Europe in such funding, not only supports the research process, but also ensures Europe’s investment in the findings and most importantly, the recommendations.

Service Provision

For many participants, mediation was an obvious answer to dealing with violent conflict in the community and in terms of next steps, the continued and increased resourcing of mediation, but particularly mediation by Travellers for Travellers was felt to be most important. Two other aspects of mediation featured here and they were early intervention and prevention and also increased resourcing to ensure nationwide availability.

The provision of counselling was also seen as a service that could help reduce the levels of conflict and help heal from the traumas of inter-family violence,

“Counselling can help break the cycle, so it’s not passed on from one generation to the next” (Table 3).

Addressing the Root Causes

Many Tables went back again to the root causes of conflict, reiterating that if the root causes aren’t addressed, the symptoms will persist with further suggestions of the culturally appropriate manner in which these issues need to be handled, to prevent further harm to Travellers,

“Travellers can be left feeling full of shame, there needs to be respect when dealing with legacy issues” Table 3).

One of the root causes that emerged again, was that of racism, and the challenge of the everyday racism that Travellers encounter and the need to continually challenge this form of inter-personal racism, hard as it may be.

Challenging Legislation

Challenging legislation also featured significantly in terms of root causes, with particular focus again on anti-trespass legislation with regard to its negative impact on inter-family violence. In terms of next steps, this legislation was examined with regard to the lack of transient sites and also with regard to its impact on nomadism, a feature of Traveller culture, with suggestions of legal challenges on both of these grounds,

“Nomadic lifestyles need to be accommodated; it’s such a cornerstone of the culture” (Table 9).

The Equal Status and the Incitement to Hatred Acts also emerged as legislation that warrants challenging in terms of the huge gaps in the Equal Status Act that includes certain exemptions such as public houses which is particularly evident in relation to Traveller events such as weddings and funerals. Having to provide proof in terms of the Incitement to Hatred Act was also criticised, with suggestions that this Act also be challenged.

A further area in terms of next steps that was recommended, was a challenge to current sentencing for Travellers who have engaged in inter-family violence, with a view to highlighting how Traveller on Traveller violence results in shorter sentences than those given to the wider population, with some suggesting that longer sentencing might be a better deterrent. This also raises an interesting question regarding the differential treatment of Travellers within the Irish judicial system. A challenge to legislation around social media and call-outs also featured in terms of moving forward and next steps.

County Councils

Not surprisingly, accommodation also featured in next steps, with a particular focus on county councils who came in for extensive criticism,

“Who is held responsible when county councils don’t spend their budgets and meet their targets or objectives regarding Travellers. Is anyone held accountable? (Table 8)?

Suggestions were put forward to rectify the situation by way of auditing county councils in terms of their Traveller accommodation budgetary spend and of setting up independent bodies to govern Traveller accommodation, outside of both county councils and government. Others suggested repercussions for councils that don’t spend their Traveller accommodation budgets and others still, suggested the need for designated Traveller representatives on councils regarding accommodation.

Educational Initiatives

Education featured again in 'Next Steps', with many citing the need for education in its many forms.



and in terms of promoting an understanding of Traveller culture. Suggestions were put forward of positive initiatives, such as inclusion of Traveller history and culture on the National Curriculum

in a meaningful way, (Table 7) along with specific one-off initiatives, such as a Traveller history day in schools across Ireland, that would examine the role and treatment of Travellers since the formation of the State.

The need for media campaigns, or radio or TV documentaries, or a heritage centre that would support an understanding of Traveller culture and history in the Irish context also emerged,

“Knowledge/impact of legislative changes on the Traveller community should be available to the wider public, many of them have no idea of what has gone on (Table 11).

And possibly based on the impact of the personal testimonies from the earlier part of the day, whatever form this wider public awareness raising campaign takes, it was suggested that personal testimonies were the way to reach the wider community.

State Engagement

Keeping the State and government officials engaged was another issue that arose, with concern tangible in terms of the conference generating much interest and energy, but with a lack of state support, the challenge to bring about change eventually overwhelming the community.

And state agencies also emerged as an issue in terms of next steps, with a particular focus on the need to develop cultural awareness and alliances with An Garda Síochána, teachers and educators, service providers and the county councils as previously discussed.

Many participants also spoke favourably of the current engagement through the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NITRIS) and the need to continue with this strategy.

Conclusion

Responses to question three, asking what the next steps should be, saw a broadening of perspective in terms of response. A national collective, Traveller-led and state supported response was felt to be the way forward in tackling inter-family violence amongst Travellers. One aspect of the State response that was suggested, was a State apology, for the annihilation of so many key aspects of Traveller culture. Looking to Europe for both support and funding emerged as an issue as did the need for extensive and in-depth research into the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community.

Challenges to current legislation and policy correspondingly emerged, as did challenges to current county council arrangements in terms of Traveller budgets, accommodation and transitory sites. Challenging legislation correspondingly featured with regard to social media and current prison sentencing for Travellers.

Education, with a particular focus on Traveller history and Traveller culture featured as did the need for a shared responsibility going forward, in terms of addressing the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community. That change is necessary was evident in response to every question, and a most important concept if change is ever to happen,

“Hope – people need hope, the feeling they can change their lot” (Table 2).

While it was noted that the conference was a great start, the final comment from Table 11, sums up what many felt in terms of the conference as a starting point to addressing inter-family violence within the Traveller community, while it represents the beginning of something hopeful,

“... its only scratching the surface” (Table 11).

4. Plenary Session

A plenary session followed, chaired by Dr Brigid Quilligan, Chairperson, Kerry Travellers Community Development Table. Remaining on the panel, were the presenters from the morning sessions.

4.1 Questions from the Floor

***Question 1 :** “We’ve listened to so much information today including people coming from their own personal experiences of conflict but if there was one action that could be taken from a national level that would address this, what is it”?*

Mags Casey responded to this question, highlighting the need for a national response from within the community. She noted also that this response, while being Traveller led, needed to involve the wider community and the State and suggested that such a response needs to be thought through.

Mags went on to explain, how as a Traveller in a leadership role and as an activist, there is a need to protect yourself as it’s easy for you or your family to become targets if you challenge the status quo. Or, if you’re challenging the root causes, you can at times end up challenging those in power, such as civil servants, local councillors, TD’s, and how as a Traveller activist, you can be seen as a threat. Mags explained that while she is not in favour of discussing her own personal experience, she herself has suffered the consequences of being a community activist.

“So, if there was something very positive coming out of today, I would like to see us having a national response and I would like to see us not tolerating violence, because, as I said in the beginning, it’s not a part of our culture”.

Jane Mulcahy also responded to this question, echoing what Mags had said, and suggesting that violence be treated as a public health issue. She reiterated the need to challenge the fact that there is nothing about violence that is intrinsic to Travellers – suggesting that sometimes Travellers might believe that that’s the case and certainly the wider community, our legal system, our criminal justice system, might believe that but it is not the case. Jane went on to explain how trauma breeds further trauma and how hurt people hurt other people. Jane’s recommendation in response to this question, was to elevate the safety of women and children, thereby creating safer and healthier communities.

“I think we need overall, a public health approach to violence, and part of that then needs to be a Traveller specific strand, with Travellers as leaders within their own communities”.

Thomas McCann also responded, echoing what Mags said regarding the national response that would reflect the multi-layered nature and complexities of inter-family violence. Thomas discussed elements that needed to be part of this national response, including counselling and mediation but emphasised once again, the futility of providing these services if the root causes are not also tackled. Thomas spoke about ‘how’ a national response is developed and managed, emphasising the importance of the process, referencing projects in other countries that have been adapted to tackle violence. Thomas also emphasised the need for a collective, culturally inclusive and Traveller led response,

“We need to talk about this at a national level and that needs to filter down into the community. So, I think this is the start of this journey”.

Question 2 : *“What age does a young boy or girl need to be to become a mediator, to train as one? And do you go to schools to talk about mediation”?*

Frank Kavanagh responded to this question, explaining that the issue of going into schools and also workplaces is on the agenda for the Traveller Mediation Services this year, explaining that the TMS are trying to target areas where Travellers are to try and change the mind-set. Frank went on to explain the fact that a course will be running again in 2019, and all local Traveller organisations will be informed.

Aileen O’Brien (Coordinator TMS) also responded, saying that while the tailored workshops are quite open, the accredited mediation course has a requirement of 18 years of age.

Thomas also responded, recommending a focus on young people, young Travellers and Traveller youth, with a suggestion for younger Travellers to start engaging in initiatives such as the TMS Youth Reach, explaining that young Travellers would be a key element of a national programme to tackle inter-family violence.

Question 3 : *“I have a very strong sense that what’s being talked about today is how to have a different kind of conversation, like maybe for Irish society generally and for Travellers specifically is to identify common experiences between the Travelling community and the settled community?”*

Thomas McCann responded, agreeing with this suggestion regarding common experience, and suggesting that disadvantage in its many forms is a class issue, stating that the statistics are there to show how Travellers and those from disadvantaged communities often suffer the same types of inequalities and disadvantages and how both represent 95% of the prison population. Though Thomas suggested that the challenge to a response like this lies in how we use the information to pull together and to illustrate the commonality of shared experiences of disadvantage.

The speaker responded, explaining how bonds between Travellers and settled people often develop in prison with an understanding of their common experience a key factor in this process.

Brigid Quilligan also commented, stating that the wider community has to want to understand Traveller culture in order to understand why we share a common experience of disadvantage.

“We’re not killing each other, we’re not hurting each other because we hate each other, we’re not addressing at all why we’re doing that, we don’t rightly understand why we’re doing that”.

Brigid Quilligan suggested, based on her personal experience, that the community would benefit from understanding the experience of internalised oppression with regard to why it is that Travellers engage in inter-family violent conflict.

Thomas McCann also noted that while both communities share much in terms of the experience of exclusion, the experience of racism towards Travellers that sometimes emanates from working class communities, must be addressed before a collective can be formed.

Jane Mulcahy came in also referencing the need for a base line to be set, that would ensure that Traveller children and Travellers have safe, comfortable environments where their basic needs are met like other children, before thinking about going to school and learning, and becoming productive members of society.

“If we have our needs met, if we are safe, if we are given opportunities, we can be anything we want to be. Resilient children are made, not born”.

Brigid Quilligan continued remarking that it’s very difficult to celebrate diversity and culture if you feel like you’re under attack, noting that conflict within the community creates unease, people don’t feel safe, the positive work slows down and there’s sense of fear and unease just under the surface. Brigid referred also to the need for personal responsibility,

“There’s no point in being involved in Traveller organisations if you’re not willing to stand up and say I’m a neutral person, or I don’t want to get involved in conflict, I want to solve this”.

Though Brigid tempered this comment with a call for understanding of how difficult it is for Traveller activists and workers whose families are caught up in conflict, suggesting that their non-Traveller colleagues show some understanding and support for them in these situations.

Brigid went on to acknowledge the great work that the State is doing and the Department of Justice in terms of funding, though noted that this is not enough.

Mags Casey echoed these thoughts, adding that the State, or society in general, hold misconceptions regarding Travellers,

“...they’ve got to stop thinking that they’ve got to fix us. We can fix ourselves but they’ve got to stop, and they have to start undoing the damage they’ve done to us”.

Mags also spoke about sport as a leveller and how Travellers are treated as equals in the sporting arena, where they are treated with respect and where they have hope and belief in their ability to achieve. She also spoke about Travellers capacities, as excellent business people, as sportsmen and women, and how this involvement gives Travellers hope and how important hope is in terms of the will for change and the belief that Travellers can actually change their lot.

Question 4 : *“Firstly, how do we get the decision makers from the agencies at a political level into a room to hear those talks, and secondly, would it be possible to produce a report that would highlight the economic benefits of dealing with the problems, rather than spending all the time and energy dealing with the symptoms and the consequences of what’s going on”?*

Thomas McCann responded saying that Traveller leaders and activists have been struggling for over 30 years to get the decision makers into the room and also spoke of the need to hold both national and local government accountable for their actions or inactions that implicate negatively on the Traveller community. Thomas referred to the vote as one strategy and also looking to Europe for support, as was the case with Traveller ethnicity, which he explained came partly as a result of pressure from Europe, rather than from the goodness of government leader’s hearts,

“...what’s needed is a collective push to change things and we need the support of the settled people, a lot of settled people actually”.

Brigid Quilligan also came in responding to the second part of this question, suggesting that an exercise on the economic benefits of prevention would highlight how cost-effective dealing with the root causes would actually be but also questioning the current levels of response to the root causes,

“Why is it that the decision makers, the people that are holding the power are not listening to the communities and why does it suit them not to fix these issues”?

Jane also responded to this question, stating her support for the economic argument and suggesting also working with the Human Rights Organisations on this issue, to which Thomas McCann added the need to act locally but think globally, emphasising the need to empower local communities to act in tandem with focusing on politicians and strategies to get policies implemented.

4.2 Comments from the Floor

A series of comments from the floor then followed, commencing with a commendation of the conference and noting how inspiring it was to witness the creation of hope. The speaker told of the work that is taking place locally but noted the need for greater support for local groups engaging in this work. She also spoke of the need to understand internalised oppression, by both Travellers and the wider community and finished by reiterating the importance of creating hope for the future for the community.

A Traveller woman spoke of the role and responsibility of parents, in terms of ensuring children have a decent education, that will prepare them for adult life, so that they can challenge the discrimination and racism they will most likely face. This speaker closed by referencing again the need to have young Travellers involved in the process of addressing the issue of inter-family violence.

A third woman spoke of the power of the vote, stating that Travellers need to firstly get registered, secondly get out and vote and thirdly, encourage other Travellers to vote. She explained how a vote, which takes a small amount of time, can be key in terms of change regarding policy and legislation.

This speaker also noted the violence that Travellers have experienced at the hands of the State or the wider community, with Travellers being burned out of their homes and Traveller children being taken from their parents, noting their role in terms of violence as a learned behaviour.

4.3 Summary by Dr Brigid Quilligan

Dr Brigid Quilligan completed the plenary session with a round-up of the discussions that had taken place, opening with a commendation of the panellists, adding the conference had succeeded in enhancing an understanding of inter-family violence and its implications and the causative factors along with giving hope for the future.

Brigid went on to explain how difficult it is for Traveller activists and how, because of their involvement they are thought to be somehow different to the Travellers reflected in the statistics,

“...but we’re no exceptions when the door closes within our own community, we’re faced with suicide, we’re faced with bad health, we’re faced with depression, anxiety, unemployment, poor attainment in education, poor accommodation, all of these issues that the rest of our people are faced with we are surrounded with it also”.

Brigid also spoke of the challenges as community leaders and activists, knowing that the root causes must be addressed if the situation is to change, knowing that this is the solution, yet finding the inaction and resistance of government to this solution frustrating,

“This is only going to be solved collectively, we all need to come together because this is something that’s really affecting our community. It’s killing us. One way or another, it is killing us”.

Brigid spoke also of the need to involve young Travellers and expressed her fear that they are losing hope about the possibility of change and improvements in the future and she spoke of the difficulties that face this generation of young Travellers in particular.

Brigid continued with a focus on the impact of inter-family violence on mental health and how the situation has reached crisis point,

“...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”.

Brigid spoke also about the value of the economic argument in terms of addressing the root causes rather than the symptoms of them and also about the failure of the State to invest in marginalised communities and community development projects, and the impact of this in terms of community activists and community leaders being burnt out, de-mobilised and deflated trying to keep community spirits up. Brigid also spoke of the responsibility on Traveller leaders and activists, to become role models in terms of non-violence,

“...it’s getting critical and we really need to be who we say we are. We need to be non-violent. We need to have non-violent thoughts and non-violent reactions in everything we do”.

Brigid then moved on to acknowledge the violence that Travellers have experienced at the hands of the State over the last 100 years and called for a State apology and resolution to rebuild relationships. To this she added, that if the State needs to listen to the experts who are the community and hear what it is that they need,

“We don’t want to be just surviving and in fact some of us aren’t even surviving, let’s face that fact. Every day is a struggle. We want to thrive and we want to be happy. We want our mental health to improve, but we need the root causes of that dealt with first”.

Brigid concluded by thanking the three organisations, the Traveller Counselling Service, Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service and the Traveller Mediation Service for organising the conference, and thanked everyone involved on behalf of the Traveller community for providing such an educational, informative, inspiring day that gave the community a sense of hope for the future.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

While many suggestions were proposed, it must be acknowledged that firstly, many of the recommendations listed below are currently being addressed as part of the remit of Traveller organisations with a specific focus on these issues and secondly, that all of the recommendations require significant resourcing.

With regard to next steps, the most prevalent recommendation is with regard to the national response, which may underpin all of the following recommendations and represents an achievable first step towards addressing the issue of inter-family violence within the Traveller community, in terms of starting with an initial coming together of all invested parties to discuss the way forward.

5.2 Recommendations

The following ten recommendations are proposed, based on the presentations, the round table discussions and the plenary session. The active engagement of the Traveller community in the design, delivery and the implementation of these recommendations is key to their success: -

1. National Response/Engagement of the Traveller community

The first recommendation, and first step, is for a national response to the crisis in terms of inter-family violence and mental health. It was collectively agreed that this is the way forward, with inter-agency, local groups and all invested parties engaged in a collective response to the issue.

While the initiative needs to be Traveller led, it also needs to be in collaboration with government and state agencies, bringing together all invested parties to decide collectively on the way forward.

At National level

- The NTRIS Action 138 Sub-Committee, *‘to bring feuding to an end’*, to be reactivated and expanded to include Travellers and other key stakeholders which would give direction and be the main driver for proposals and actions and also to secure resources to ensure plans are implemented and appropriate policy is put in place.

At Regional level

- Regional planning seminars, workshops and meetings where the community would be invited to participate in the development of actions and plans to address issues.

At Local level

- Training provided to local Traveller groups to support them to run discussion groups on inter-family violence with the community.
- Local seminars where service providers and Travellers could come together to identify what supports are needed for families and individuals caught up in violent conflict.
- Training and awareness programmes for Traveller parents regarding the effects on children of witnessing violence and what supports are available for families.

2. Accommodation

There is a pressing need to challenge the State with regard to Traveller accommodation in terms of a lack of transient sites proving to be a significant contributory factor with regard to of inter-family violence. The accommodation issue can also be challenged in terms of the lack of accountability regarding county council budgetary spend on Traveller accommodation. The issue of incompatibility with Traveller families being forced to live together who don't get on is a further issue that warrants attention as does the issue of over-crowding, inadequate halting sites and poor facilities

3. Legislation & Policy

There is a need to examine current legislation (anti-trespass, market trading, keeping of horses) with a view to challenging this in terms of being anti-Traveller and in terms of increasing the likelihood of inter-family violence and a strengthening of equality and incitement to hatred legislation.

A challenge to current social media legislation is also recommended as is an examination of current judicial practice to see if Traveller sentences are more lenient when involving Traveller on Traveller violence. The support of human rights alliances is recommended in terms of these legislative challenges, including support from Europe.

4. Awareness Raising

In terms of initiatives, the recommendation of an awareness raising campaign, for both Travellers and the wider community addressing (a) the history of the Traveller experience in Ireland and (b) addressing the issue of internalised oppression and (c) challenging the stereotypes around Travellers was proposed.

This campaign would also seek to raise awareness within the Traveller community regarding the power of the vote and would encourage a cultural revival and celebration to induce pride in Travellers and increase recognition of the contribution of Traveller culture to Irish society. A national anti-racism strategy was similarly proposed to address the ongoing issue of racism that Travellers continue to experience in Irish society.

5. Education

Educational initiatives are correspondingly recommended, with specific proposals for the development of an educational strategy that challenges the current lack of focus on Traveller culture on the present primary and secondary curriculums. The need for a specific educational programme for Traveller parents regarding the impact of violence was similarly proposed. Traveller youth also featured in terms of educational initiatives with recommendations for specific targeted programmes for young Travellers that would address issues such as Traveller culture, internalised oppression, Traveller rights, activism, mediation etc. Targeted educational and training initiatives were also recommended to address the inordinately high levels of unemployment amongst Travellers.

6. Services

With regard to services, there were recommendations for increased resourcing of current services as well as resourcing for the recommended initiatives. The need for culturally inclusive psychological and counselling services for Travellers impacted by inter-family violence was also noted. There is a corresponding need for 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

In terms of support, recommendations of specific supports for Traveller women and children impacted by inter-family violence were proposed as is the continued and increased resourcing of current support services such as mediation, counselling, training, education, youth and children supports. In terms of support, a further recommendation with regard to Traveller activists was proposed, in terms of a collective 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.

European funding is recommended for this project as this will ensure that Europe is equally invested in the findings and recommendations. Research into the economic benefits of addressing root causes is also recommended and could form the basis of a funding proposal.

[9. Representation](#)

A recommendation in terms of increasing Traveller representation in government, the Seanad, county councils and state agencies such as An Garda Síochána was also recommended 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 the 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.

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