

## Vulnerable Groups

### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller People

Revised: 13/12/2016

#### Introduction

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller is a collective term describing a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. It can refer to an individual's language, nomadic way of life and self-identification. It does not exclude those who live in houses but instead is a status that people may ascribe to themselves. Gypsies and Traveller communities are diverse and may include Romany Gypsies, Roma, Scottish Travellers, Welsh Travellers, Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Boat Dwellers, Showpeople and Circus People. Although many still live a travelling life, others may have settled on authorised camp sites or within permanent housing.

To be considered as an ethnic group in English law, there must be a shared history, language, customs and practices that go back centuries. Gypsies were first recognised as an ethnic group under law in England in 1989 with Irish Travellers being recognised as a distinct ethnic group in England and Wales in 2000.

#### What do we know?

Gypsies and Travellers experience some of the worst outcomes of any groups for both health outcomes and educational attainment. Gypsy, Roma Travellers are unlikely to remain in school past the age of 14 years and are reported to be among the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England. In 2011, only 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs compared to 58.2% of all pupils.

While there is a lack of research done on this population, evidence has shown that Gypsy Travellers have significantly poorer health status and more self-reported ill health than other residents in the UK, including both other ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged white UK residents. Gypsy Roma Travellers can sometimes struggle to engage with healthcare services and in particular may not access maternity services, GP, sexual health services, smoking cessation, dentistry, mental health or drug and alcohol services. This can impact on their health status, particularly from a prevention and health promotion perspective. In addition, Gypsy and Traveller communities have experienced significant discrimination and abuse for a number of decades and may find themselves segregated from the rest of society.

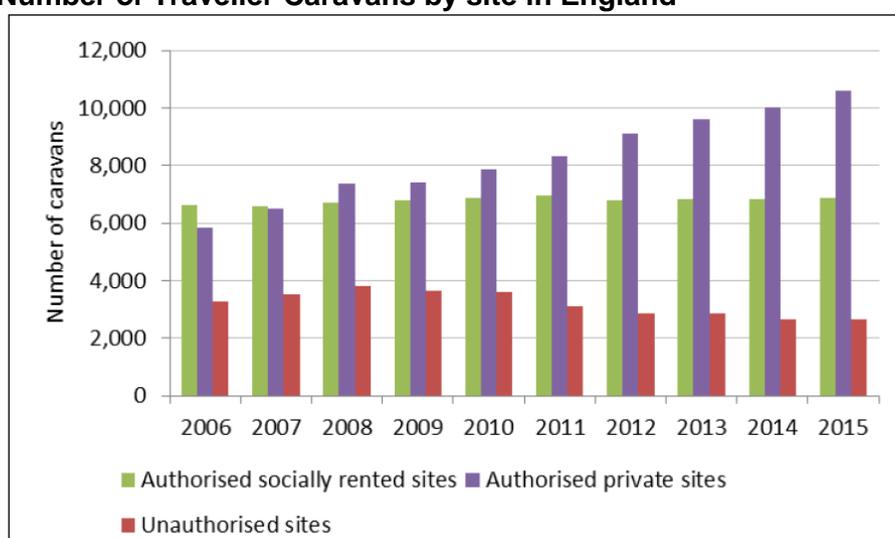
A literature review on the [Health and Wellbeing of Travellers and Gypsies](#) found they experience Infant Mortality Rates up to 5 times that of the national average. They have lower rates of breastfeeding and childhood immunisations meaning that their children are less well protected against illness. Within the Gypsy, Roma Traveller

community, there are high rates of accidents – in part related to poor conditions on traveller sites but also due to the nature of the lifestyle and when work is undertaken with poor Health and Safety standards. There is also a higher prevalence of many other diseases such as respiratory problems, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and depression. Miscarriage and maternal death are also more common among the travelling community compared to the general population.

A report to the Department of Health on [The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England \(Parry et al 2004\)](#) found that over twice as many Gypsy, Roma Travellers have a long term condition when compared to the general population (42% vs 18%). Compared to the general population, smoking rates are significantly higher among the GRT population. The report also found that those travellers who live in bricks and mortar accommodation experience poorer mental health when compared to those who continue a travelling lifestyle. This is felt in part due to isolation from the loss of close community networks on site and racial discrimination from the non-GRT community.

The [Traveller Caravan Count](#) has taken place twice a year since January 1979. In January 2015, there were 20,123 caravans on authorised sites in England. Overall, 87% of traveller caravans in England were on authorised land and 13% were on unauthorised land. While the total number had increased slightly since January 2014, over the past ten years there has been an increase in 26% of the total number of traveller caravans in England.

**Figure 1: Number of Traveller Caravans by site in England**



Source: [Department for Communities and local government: Housing statistical Release June 2015](#)

**Figure 2: Traveller count in West Berkshire - Authorised sites (with planning permission)**

| Year | Month   | Socially rented caravans | Private Caravans              |                               |                      |
|------|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
|      |         |                          | Temporary planning permission | Permanent planning permission | All private caravans |
| 2014 | January | 19                       | 0                             | 54                            | 54                   |
|      | July    | 21                       | 0                             | 52                            | 52                   |
| 2015 | January | 19                       | 0                             | 54                            | 64                   |

Source: [Department for Communities and local government: Housing statistical Release June 2015](#)

**Figure.3: Traveller count in West Berkshire - Unauthorised sites (without planning permission)**

| Year | Month   | No. Of caravans on sites on Travellers own land |                 | No. Of caravans on sites on land not owned by Travellers. |                 |
|------|---------|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|
|      |         | “tolerated”                                     | “not tolerated” | “tolerated”   | “not tolerated” |
| 2014 | January | 0   | 0               | 0   | 3               |
|      | July    | 0   | 0               | 0   | 0               |
| 2015 | January | 0   | 0               | 0   | 3               |

Source: [Department for Communities and local government: Housing statistical Release June 2015](#)

There is one Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Caravan site provided by West Berkshire Council. This is based at Four House Corners in Burghfield and was opened in 1974. It has 18 pitches and a caravan capacity of 36. There is a further official private site which contains both a residential site (Old Stocks Farm) where travellers can pay to stay indefinitely and a transit site (New Stocks Farm) where travellers can stay for up to 3 months at a time. There is also a Circus Winter site based at Enbourne which is run privately.

The 2011 census was the first census to include Gypsy/Traveller as an ethnic group. Gypsy or Irish travellers were the smallest ethnic minority group in England and Wales with just 58,000 individuals, although there is some evidence to say that this is an underestimation with individuals reluctant to disclose this due to fears about discrimination. The most common accommodation for Gypsy or Irish Travellers was a house or bungalow with 24% living in caravans or mobile structures. Gypsy or Irish Travellers reported the worst health out of all ethnic minorities, with only 70% reporting “good” or “very good” health compared to 81% of the overall population.

In West Berkshire, 164 individuals identified themselves as the ethnic group “White: Gypsy or Irish traveller” in the 2011 census. The school census in 2014 identified 62 pupils who ascribed themselves as either Traveller or Irish Heritage or Gypsy Roma. These pupils were attending either state funded primary schools, state funded secondary schools or special schools. Gypsy, Roma, Travellers made up 0.36% of the state primary school population but only 0.14% of the state secondary school population reflecting the earlier age of leaving school for this community.

**Figure. 4: School census 2014: Number of pupils by ethnic group in West Berkshire**

| Type of school                        | Total number of pupils | Traveller of Irish heritage | Gypsy/Roma |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>State funded primary schools</b>   |                        |                             |            |
| England                               | 3, 490, 420            | 3,300                       | 11, 960    |
| West Berkshire                        | 10, 680                | 6                           | 36         |
| <b>State funded secondary schools</b> |                        |                             |            |
| England                               | 3, 173, 975            | 1, 095                      | 6, 510     |
| West Berkshire                        | 11, 660                | x                           | 16         |
| <b>Special schools</b>                |                        |                             |            |
| England                               | 94, 355                | 100                         | 295        |
| West Berkshire                        | 570                    | 0                           | 4          |

Source: [Department for Education, June 2014 \(updated March 2015\)](#)

## What is the data telling us?

Although Gypsy, Roma, Travellers make up a small proportion of the West Berkshire population it is known that this is a group who have worse health outcomes than the rest of society. In particular, this population can experience high infant mortality rates, high maternal death rates, high smoking rates and higher rates of long term conditions when compared to the general population.

There is little routine data available on the specific health status of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller population in West Berkshire, including their access and uptake of health preventative services. This is important as we know that as a group, the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller population are less likely to engage with preventative health services such as screening, immunisations and sexual health services.

Gypsy, Roma Travellers are recognised as having a greater health need than other sectors of society. However, despite this they often have worse access to services and are less likely to utilise healthcare. The reasons for this are multifactorial but can include complex procedures for registering with primary care services, low expectations on the part of health care professionals and fear of hostility or prejudice.

Further barriers to accessing health services include poor health literacy and also cultural beliefs such as believing that poor mental health should be dealt with by household members. A lack of cultural awareness by health professionals of Gypsy, Roma, Travellers' health and social needs presents another significant barrier to access. Traveller men in particular can be reluctant to discuss health issues and access services.

## Recommendations for consideration

- There is a need to ensure that healthcare staff are trained in the specific needs of Gypsy Travellers in order to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Healthcare provision needs to be culturally well informed and sympathetic to Gypsy Travellers needs.
- Consider engaging with the community to identify health needs and barriers to access, for example undertaking a Health needs survey.
- To identify current levels of access to immunisation, screening and sexual health services for the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller population and for service providers to consider ways of engaging with this population.
- For CCGs to consider local barriers for the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller population to engage with primary care services, including mechanisms of how they can register individuals with no fixed abode.

- Information sharing between different agencies is key to improving access to services for the Gypsy, Roma and Travelling community.
- As poor living conditions and environmental factors can impact on the health status of Gypsy, Roma, Travellers it is necessary for partnership working between agencies such as the NHS, Local Authorities, Social Services, Housing, and Environmental Health to be able to address these issues.

### **Other services and partner organisations**

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families with preschool aged children are also supported through children's centres and the Health Visiting Service as part of the universal service.

[Alana House](#) is a community project in Reading with a satellite service in West Berkshire which provides support to vulnerable women with complex needs. There is an outreach worker based at Alana House who works with women from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families who have suffered domestic violence or who are in need.

### **National and local strategies**

There is a recognised need for the needs of Gypsy, Roma Travellers to be effectively included in the JSNA but also in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies for all Local Authorities.

The [National Association of Teachers of Travellers and other Professionals](#) is the nationally recognised voice of Traveller Education Services. It provides a forum to share good practice and resources aimed at raising the educational attainment of Gypsy Traveller children.

In 2013, the [Royal College of General Practitioners](#) published an evidence based commissioning guide for CCGs and Health & Wellbeing boards on improving access to health care for Gypsies and Travellers, homeless people and sex workers.

The [Department for Communities and Local Government](#) published a progress report in 2012 by the working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers. The report contains 28 Government commitments including:

- Identifying ways of raising educational aspirations and attainment
- Identifying ways to improve health outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers
- Encouraging appropriate site provision
- Tackling hate crime against Gypsies and Travellers
- Improving knowledge of how Gypsies and Travellers engage with services that provide a gateway to work opportunities
- Sharing good practice in engagement with Gypsies and Travellers and public service providers.

The Department for Education published [Improving the Outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and traveller pupils](#) in 2010. This report identified a number of social, cultural, economic and systemic barriers to enabling them to make the most of the educational opportunities at school. As a result of the research, a TARGET model

was created including eight outcomes against which progress can be measured: Attainment, Attendance, Transfer and transition, Progression and Retention, Engagement, Enjoyment and Health and Wellbeing.

**Local Strategies:** West Berkshire Council is currently reviewing the overall pitch/plot requirements for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople through a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA). This forms part of the [Local Plan](#).

The [Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service \(EMTAS\)](#) works to help schools support pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including children from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller group. This is done in a number of ways such as providing guidance and advice to the schools themselves. The Pupil Support Officer helps to get the children into school and to keep them in school. They work as an advocate for families, particularly in child protection cases. In addition, the Pupil Support Officer runs a Mum and Toddler bus once a month which provides support to families with children younger than school age. The Pupil Support Officer can only work with those who have self-identified as Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller which may potentially be an issue if an individual was reluctant to do this for fear of stigma or discrimination.

In order to improve communication between different agencies working with Traveller families, the West Berkshire GRT Practitioners Group was set up. This includes representatives from EMTAS, Health Activist, GRT Health Lead, Community Fire safety, Citizens Advice Bureau, Schools and Children's centres.

If you have any questions about this chapter, please contact Public Health and Wellbeing Team on [publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk) or 01635 503437