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Maternal and infant health inequalities in Gypsy and Traveller Communities

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8th May 2024

Outline

- Gypsy and Traveller Communities
- Factors underpinning maternal and infant health inequalities
- Barriers to accessing high quality culturally safe maternity care
- Strategies to enhance engagement with Gypsy and Traveller families



Enhancing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller peoples' trust: using maternity and early years' health services and dental health services as exemplars of mainstream service provision

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Dentistry

Research output: Book/Report > Commissioned report

<https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/enhancing-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-peoples-trust-using-maternity->

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller access to and engagement with health services: a systematic review FREE

Alison McFadden ✉, Lindsay Siebelt, Anna Gavine, Karl Atkin, Kerry Bell, Nicola Innes, Helen Jones, Cath Jackson, Haggi Haggi, Steve MacGillivray

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Evaluation of a Gypsy/Traveller Community Health Worker service

FINAL REPORT

APRIL 2024



<https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/evaluation-of-a-gypsytraveller-community-health-worker-service-fi>

Size of the population

Population size unknown

2021 Census	71,440 Gypsy and Irish Traveller in England & Wales 7,000 Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland 103,020 Roma in England & Wales
Council of Europe 2012	150,000 – 300,000 GRT in UK
Brown et al 2013	197,705 migrant Roma in UK 400,000 – 500,000 GRT
Await results of 2021 census	



General health for Gypsy and Traveller Communities

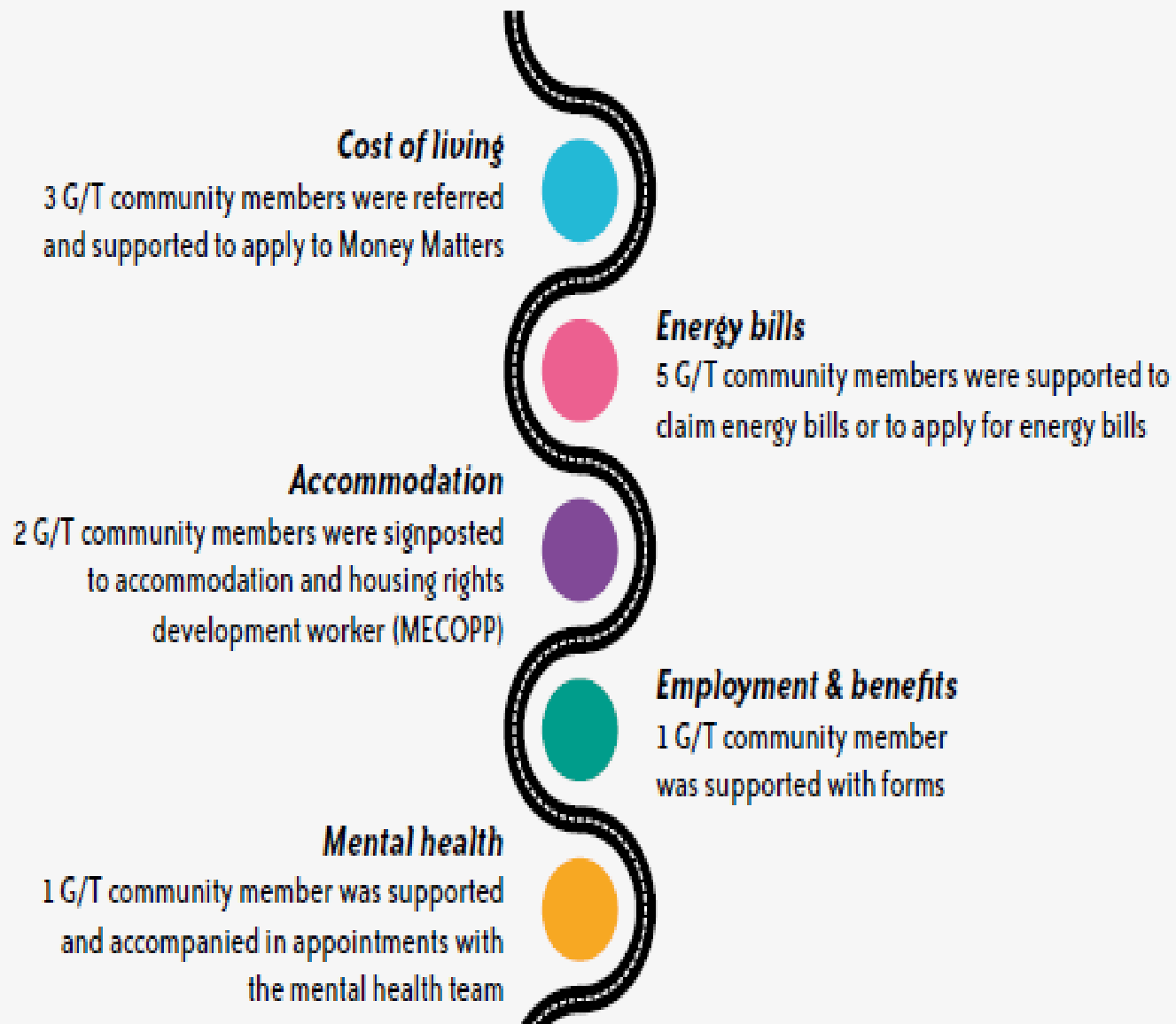
- Worse general health outcomes compared to other ethnic groups
- Lower life expectancy - 10-15 years less than general population
- 2021 Census 14% of Gypsy or Irish Traveller people described their health as bad or very bad
- All Ireland Traveller study - main causes of death
 - External – accidents, suicide
 - Heart disease/stroke
 - Cancer
 - Respiratory illness
- Higher prevalence of chronic conditions



Inequalities in maternal and infant health

- Lack of evidence due to no routine data in England and very recent additions to NHS Data Dictionary in Scotland and Wales
- Perinatal outcomes likely to be similar to or worse than other minority ethnic groups
- Small scale research suggests higher rates of maternal morbidity, stillbirth/neonatal deaths and preterm births
- A systematic review of perinatal outcomes for women from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities across Europe reported more negative outcomes for GRT infants compared non-GRT infants (Ekeze et al 2024)





- **Racial discrimination and stigma**
- **Social determinants of health**
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Poverty
- **Access to services**
- **Intergenerational trauma**

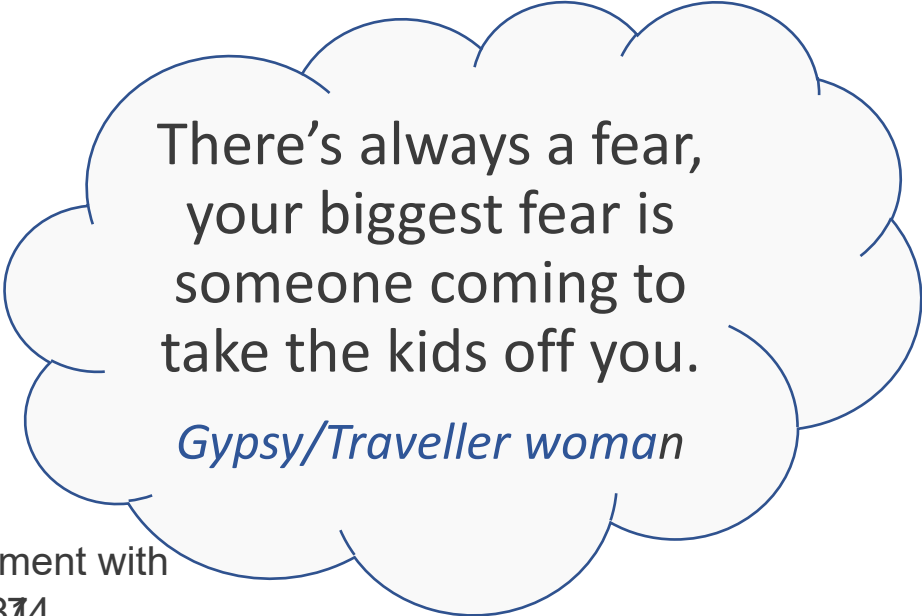
- Some Gypsy/Travellers who live on sites rely on site managers to purchase fuel and energy cards. Because site managers are not always available, some **vulnerable individuals were left without power for three days over Christmas.**
- While visiting various sites, Community Health Workers (CHWs) discovered issues with unsanitary conditions, such as **rat infestations.**
- A Gypsy/Traveller who previously struggled with substance abuse reached out to the CHW **seeking assistance with finding a new home.** They wanted to move away from their current neighbours, who continue to use drugs and alcohol. Additionally, the individual had **mental health challenges such as depression and suicidal thoughts**
- I'm fighting at the minute in a bit of a battle with the mail service to get the post back on the site. **On some sites they do not deliver letters to individual pitches.** I mean, there could be personal letters in there and you know then if the site warden of the area is away, maybe [the Gypsy/Travellers] not get it for a week. People could miss the appointment, you know, all that kind of thing.



Barriers to accessing health services

- Health service issues
- Discrimination and attitudes of health service personnel
- Cultural and language barriers
- Health literacy,
- Lack of trust /fear of health services
- Economic barriers

A Gypsy/Traveller couldn't obtain a prescription because the GP practice had removed them from their register. The GP practice requested proof of identity and address to re-register. *Case report
Community Health Worker*



There's always a fear,
your biggest fear is
someone coming to
take the kids off you.

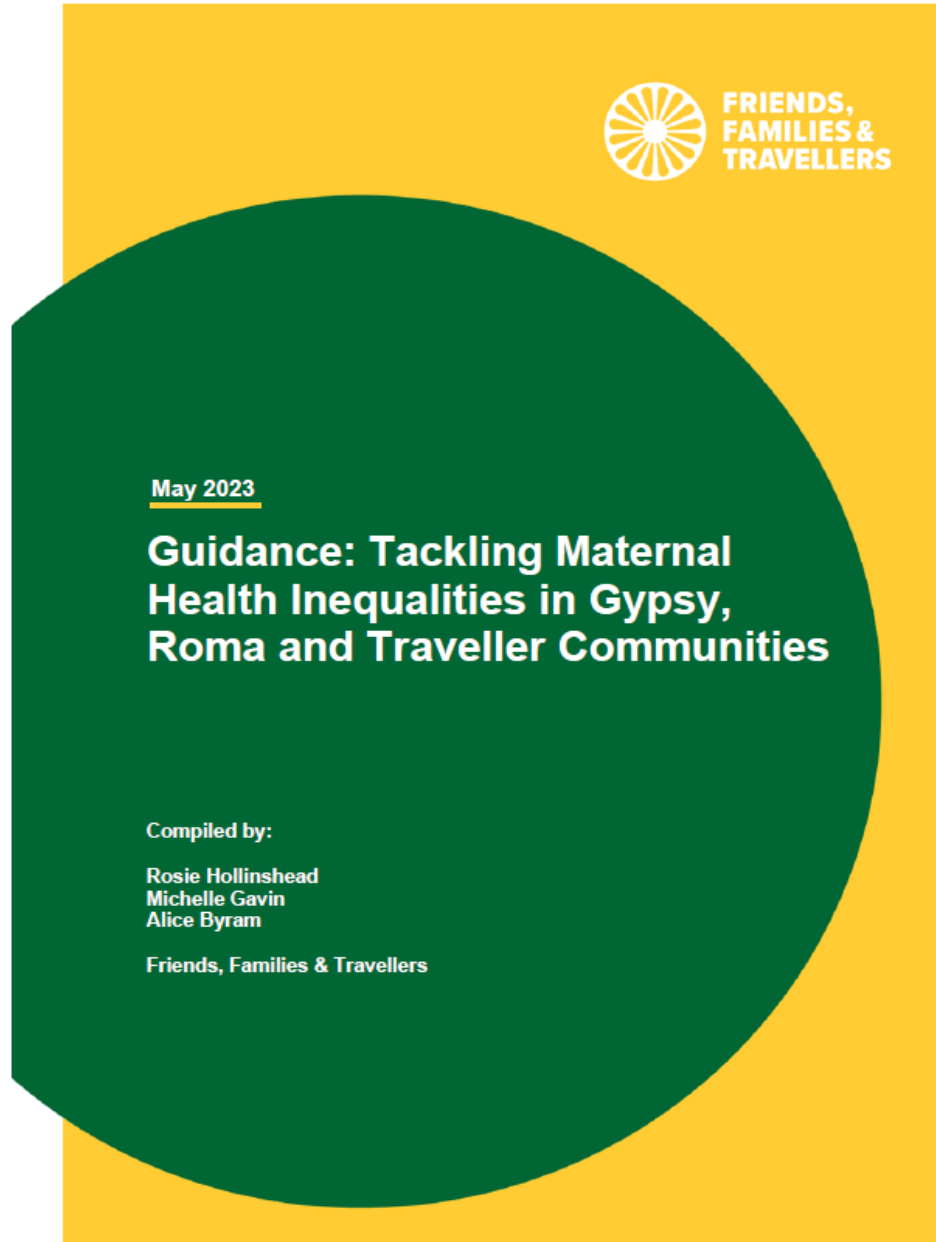
Gypsy/Traveller woman

Example of barriers to accessing preventive health care

Example of Impact: Uptake of cervical screening

During an informative group session, a community health worker discovered that 15 of 30 women had never undergone cervical screening. This was due to barriers such as not receiving invitation letters (caused by lack of fixed address), lack of confidence in accessing healthcare services, and fear of embarrassment from community gatekeepers (e.g. site wardens) receiving their personal letters. To address these issues, the community health worker emphasised the importance of the test, assisted individuals in booking appointments, and accompanied women to their cervical screening appointments.





Impact of structural and institutional barriers on the maternal outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities results in:

- High rates of Caesarean birth reported by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller research participants, as well as consulted health professionals
- High rates of Classical Galactosemia among infants born to Irish Traveller parents
- High rates of miscarriage, pregnancy loss and/or child loss reported by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller research participants

<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/health/new-guidance-tackling-maternal-health-inequalities-in-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/>

Positive experiences of healthcare

Primary care	<i>I mean the doctors there are good. I know the receptionists very well and if it's one of the kids, she'll try and get me an emergency appointment and she'll ring me back</i>
Early year's care	<i>She [health visitor] was a lovely woman. She came out to see me not long ago, six months check-up. She come out to see me because I had bad depression. Because sitting at home all day I cry for nothing. But I told her, and she was there for me</i>
Maternity care	<i>It was the constant care, they made sure you kept up with every appointment and it was the care in the hospital when you were in labour that I liked, I found good I'm happy that she [midwife] come to my house, it's easier</i>

Enhancing trust with Gypsy/Travellers

Themes

- importance of getting to know individual practitioners
- Continuity of carer to allow trust to develop over time
- importance of confidentiality
- influence of previous experience
- importance of not trusting completely -using own judgement in making decisions about health care



Travellers, we're very private. It takes a lot to confide in each other. With health professionals, we should be able to relax and confide in them to the point where they won't take it anywhere else.

If you don't have trust in someone you're not going to be at ease, you won't confide in them, you won't ask them questions

TRUST

Seeing the one person all the time is better, because you don't have to go through your whole life story with them, they know you when they see you.

The doctors and midwives and health visitors, sometimes you've got to go on your own intuition. You can't trust them entirely.

A health bus was used as a reason by local GPs why they didn't need to register people at their surgery, and the reason a lot of our members are registered at a practice which is seven miles from the site.

ENGAGEMENT

The health visitor says how comes I'm in a house? How comes I'm not on a site? I was going to say to her it's none of her business, but I thought I won't. I'm going to be nice to you because you're new to me.

Gypsy/Travellers engage with maternity and child health services, so midwives and health visitors are well-placed to use opportunities to provide wider culturally sensitive health information.

Strategies to enhance trust and engagement



I think sometimes systems we have within the NHS of referral and processes are not flexible enough for people who don't appreciate them or can't navigate them



I do like an idea of health navigator stuff where you have community members that are there within the community, that can help people.

I think training is key for people to understand the culture of Gypsy/ Travellers, but also to understand that the culture doesn't make them so different that you can't deal with them

Third sector organisations - are there for people, whether they just need a little chat or whether they need signposting to somebody else

Some cultural issues

- Going to appointments with family members
- Gender issues – healthcare providers, sensitive topics – especially related to sexual and reproductive health
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Cleanliness – ask where to place your belongings and where to wash your hands

There's been situations I've been involved in where midwives, health visitors, are not received very well.

The reason being Gypsy/Traveller women don't speak about personal women's issues and periods and all stuff like that when a man's present.

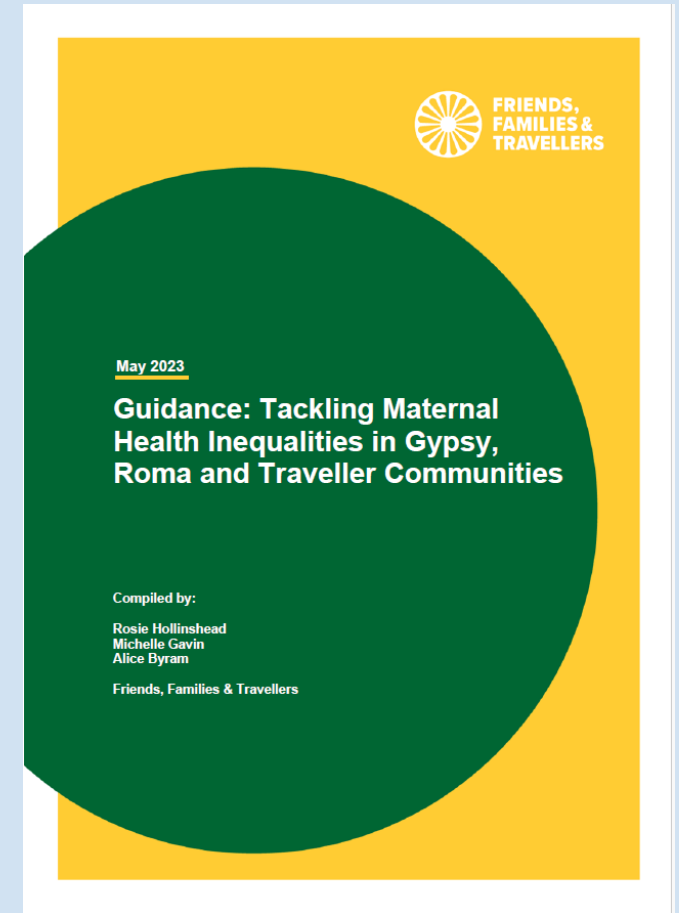
So, if a health visitor arrives and, if the woman's brother or a dad is there, she's trying to get rid of the health visitor. Not because she wants to get rid of the health visitor, but in case she comes out with something that she doesn't want to be spoken about.

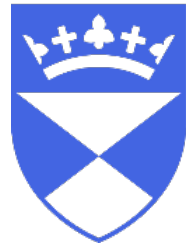
Community health worker



Additional specific maternity care recommendations

- Carefully review Caesarean birth indications and ensure the patient is fully informed about their condition and care.
- Carefully review breastfeeding support and education practices in line with cultural norms found within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- Baby loss and bereavement support services and materials must be made accessible and culturally appropriate for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents





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Thank you. Questions?

