



RACISM TOWARDS GYPSIES & TRAVELLERS

A snapshot of experiences in Devon
(Is this the last unchallenged form of racism?)



Devon & Cornwall Police
Building safer communities together



Devon and Cornwall Police are continually working hard to address barriers to reporting hate crime by all protected groups including Gypsies and Travellers. This piece of work is one of many measures that the Diverse Communities Teams within Devon and Cornwall Police have endorsed.

A joint project by Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council (PDREC), Devon County Council (DCC), Devon's Gypsy/Roma/Traveller Achievement Service (GRTAS) and Devon & Cornwall Police. The project was coordinated by PDREC.

Introduction

There are estimated to be around 5,000 Gypsies and Travellers in Devon. The main groups are Romany Gypsies, New Travellers, Irish Travellers and Showmen. Although most now lead largely settled lives, the numbers do fluctuate seasonally due to travelling patterns. There are Gypsies and Travellers living in all areas of Devon, in housing, on private sites, Council sites and unauthorised sites.

Professionals working in different capacities with Gypsies and Travellers in Devon are all aware through their contact with these communities that many experience racism, prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives. The consequences are far reaching; some people seem resigned to the fact that racism and prejudice are part of their lives, others feel it is necessary to hide or deny their identity, and for others it can lead to a disengagement with the wider community leading to a lack of opportunities and an unwillingness to access services.

This snapshot focuses on the two Traveller groups which are recognised Ethnic Minorities – Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. It is recognised, however, that other Traveller groups in Devon also experience prejudice and discrimination.

Surveys

The surveys were carried out by a team of six interviewers three of whom are Romany Gypsies. All the interviewers currently work or have worked for one of the partner organisations. They only conducted interviews with Gypsies and Travellers known to them. The interviews were conducted between July and November 2012.

75 questionnaires were completed with Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers across Devon. Those interviewed were living either on Council run sites, in houses, on private family owned sites or unauthorised encampments. The majority of those interviewed were based in Devon and a small number were travelling through.

Interviewees were asked four questions:

- 1. In the last 12 months, have you been the victim of any racist incidents, comments or attitudes in Devon?***
- 2. In the last 12 months has anyone in your immediate family been the victim of any racist incidents, comments or attitudes in Devon?***
- 3. Have you ever hidden your identity as a Gypsy/Traveller because you are worried that it will affect the way you are treated?***
- 4. Have you ever hidden your children's' identity as a Gypsy/Traveller because you are worried that it will affect the way they are treated?***

Results

74 of those interviewed identified themselves as Romany Gypsies and one as an Irish Traveller. There was no marked difference in the answers of those living on different types of sites/accommodation, although those in housing seemed more able to hide their identity if they wished to. What is evident from those surveyed is that many in the Gypsy & Traveller community in Devon feel very vulnerable and powerless to challenge racism directed towards them and their families. They have little confidence in reporting incidents and receiving a positive outcome.

In the last 12 months, have you been the victim of any racist incidents, comments or attitudes in Devon?

81% said yes 19% said no

“You don’t report it, you’ve got to take it.”

“We get followed in the shops and get comments and looks but we don’t take no notice now. It’s never worth the bother to say anything.”

“I hear people use the word ‘pikey’ all the time.” (college student)

In the last 12 months has anyone in your immediate family been the victim of any racist incidents, comments or attitudes in Devon?

68% said yes

28 % said no

4 % said they didn’t know

“My son gets it all the time when he goes to the park.....once a while back some older boys started on him name calling...they chased after him and one boy had a knife and when they caught him held it to his throat. I called the Police and they took him to Exeter to interview him, they said they looked into it but nothing was followed up.”

Have you ever hidden your identity as a Gypsy/Traveller because you are worried that it will affect the way you are treated?

65% said yes

35% said no

“I do sometimes try to hide our identity, just to get services, for example a doctor or a dentist.”

“I hide my identity all the time. Everything I do in life I hide my identity, especially when it comes to earning a living.” (Romany woman working as a carer)

“I don’t tell them in the doctors or clinics or if we have to go to the hospital ever.”

“With my business I would hide (my identity) until I was confident they wouldn’t react badly.”
(cleaner)

“I’m not ashamed, I just know its easier to mix in if people don’t know you’re a Gypsy.”

Have you ever hidden your children’s’ identity as a Gypsy/Traveller because you are worried that it will affect the way they are treated?

40% said yes

39% said no

21% weren’t sure, or it was not applicable

“In pre-school I didn’t want them to be stigmatised. I never wanted it to be common knowledge that they are Gypsies.”

“That’s why we moved into a house. I didn’t want them to have the same stigma that I had.”

“I always hide my children’s identity for their own safety.”

“I have not let it be known at school that they are Gypsies because I fear they will be bullied. Because I am married to a non-Romany it is not obvious from their surname.”

“I just know it’s easier for them if people don’t know...we don’t need the hassle and my son doesn’t need to hear that stuff.”

Interviewees who had been victims of racism, or had family members who had been victims of racism, were asked to give more details. Many told us about several different incidents. Although sometimes incidents had been reported to PDREC, the Police or Traveller Education, most people didn't take any action:

"We are taught from a young age to let it run off you like water off a duck's back and you don't say anything"

Examples of experiences of racism

Verbal abuse.

"In the pubs we hear people refer to us as gyppos or pikeys but we try to keep quiet rather than start trouble."

"I've been called pikey and told to go back to pikey land."

Difficulty accessing goods and services.

"When me and my brother go out bowling, to the cinema or clubs if they think you are a Gypsy they make weak excuses to keep you out like 'you've not got the right shoes on'...we are Gypsies and they don't want us there. Its never worth making a fuss, nothing will get done and you can't change some people."

"When we go out to the films or swimming I try to hide that we are Gypsies or they don't let you in."

The Police.

"I'll tell you what, it's the police that give me the most trouble, I must get stopped in the motor 3 or 4 times a month, asked to show my papers and licence and motor searched. Everything is in order but they are looking for things to get me on."

"I feel I get harassed by the Police."

Local Authorities.

"Councillors made comments which I think were racist during the planning committee meeting for my site. They denied the comments were racist."

"We feel the council shows prejudice, they don't want us to have sites."

The education system.

"In a lesson the teacher made a comment about Gypsy women got their living by conning and stealing. My daughter spoke to the teacher afterwards and the teacher was sorry and a few weeks later did a whole lesson on Gypsies."

"I don't think you stand get a fair chance if you are a Traveller in school."

Racist bullying at school.

"She was picked on at school, name calling and children being nasty in the playground. She was unhappy and started wetting the bed."

"My daughter's life at school was awful until the age of 12 when I took her out."

"My daughter has suffered a lot since she has been in secondary school."

Work and employment.

"If we are out getting work it wouldn't get us any work if we let on we are Gypsies. People talk about not wanting to give jobs to Gypsies."

"I had just finished a job (roof spraying) and the man was pleased with the work. He said I'm glad I didn't get the pikeys to do it. How could I tell him I was a Gypsy?"

"I'd never get any work if I told people I was a Gypsy."

"My daughter has a job and she hides her identity every day, she doesn't want to be picked on. She never talks about her life she just gets on with her work."

Being unfairly stereotyped.

"When Big Fat Gypsy Wedding has been on I often hear negative comments about Gypsies like I heard someone say Gypsy girls are a load of tarts."

"(Big fat Gypsy Wedding) didn't do us any favours. Most of it was untrue or out of context. I didn't report it, I didn't think there was any point."

The planning system.

"The fact that they organised a meeting in the village was racist as they don't do that for other applications." (Romany applying for planning permission in a village)

"When the site was being looked at by the Council I had an unsigned letter put through my door saying our area didn't need Gypsies here. I found this offensive but I didn't do anything about it."

The Health Service.

"After the baby was born the midwife is supposed to come out to visit for a few days but she wouldn't make the visits. We had to take her to the surgery, that wasn't right."

"After my operation they let me come home and the nurses were supposed to come out to me to change the dressing but they wouldn't come. When the Macmillan nurse found out she went mad. She held a meeting at the surgery with the doctors and nurses and told them. Now they are fine, they are nice people when they come, they were just afraid."

CONCLUSION

- ❖ Many Gypsies and Travellers residing in or travelling through Devon have been victims of verbal abuse and racist incidents.
- ❖ The fear of discrimination is high and many go to great lengths to hide, or attempt to hide, their own and their families' identities.
- ❖ Many Gypsies and Travellers lack confidence in the authorities' willingness to deal appropriately with racist incidents.
- ❖ Some Gypsies and Travellers feel ill-equipped to challenge discrimination and racism themselves and are unsure where to go for help.
- ❖ Many feel that the media representation of Gypsies and Travellers has contributed towards the negative stereotyping of the community.
- ❖ Prejudice towards Gypsies and Travellers is evident in public service delivery resulting in them experiencing poor or no access to the service they require.

It was very apparent from the results that many of those questioned had resigned themselves to the fact that racism and discrimination was a part of their everyday life and that they held no hope for a better future.

"We are so used to it. If we had to make complaints we would be making them every day. So we ignore it and get on with it"

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ That **all** agencies, statutory and voluntary use this report to raise awareness within their organisations of the racism experienced by Gypsies and Travellers in Devon.
- ❖ That these agencies proactively assess and address the extent to which they are meeting the needs of their Gypsy and Travellers communities within service delivery. This could be achieved through management and leadership; cultural awareness training and ensuring that appropriate objectives are set as required by the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- ❖ Schools: to encourage reporting through the (BPRI) Bullying and Prejudice Related Incidents forms (www.babcock-education.co.uk – reducing bullying)
- ❖ That Police and Crime Partnerships introduce a single incident reporting system and monitor incidents and outcomes with community stakeholder groups.

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