Traveller Counselling Service

**Client Statistics for 2017**

**Client/Counselling Hours 2013 - 2017**

Since our inception in 2013, to year end 2017, we have provided a total of 1827 counselling hours to members of the Traveller community. The graph below shows the client hours provided between 2013 and 2017 and records the significant increase in the provision of counselling to Travellers since 2015. The slight dip in 2017 is due to a member of the counselling team being on extended maternity leave for all of 2017. We are expecting her return in 2018.

**Client Hours 2017**

We have provided a total of 468 counselling hours during 2017 which is consistent with the previous two years, taking into account one therapist on maternity leave.

The counselling that took place during 2017 was provided in 1 Wicklow and 6 Dublin locations, including the commencement of a new counselling service in Mountjoy Prison and a return of the counselling service for MABS.

Client Hours by Location 2017

**Total Number of Clients for 2017**

We have seen 56 individual clients in 2017, in the six locations listed below.

While Dochas represents the highest number of clients per location, this high figure may in many respects be representative of the high turnover of Travellers in Dochas.

**Bereavement 2017**

Bereavement remained one of the biggest issues our clients dealt with during 2017

* 55% of all clients present with bereavement issues
* 25% of clients experienced multiple bereavements
* 20% of clients have been bereaved by suicide
* 11% were bereaved as a result of an accident
* 9% of clients have experienced multiple family suicides
* 7% were bereaved as a result of a car accident
* 5% of clients lost their spouse to suicide
* 5% of clients were bereaved by murder

Suicide continues to be an issue for our clients with one fifth of all clients impacted directly as a result of a family suicide.

**Bereavement/Bereaved through Suicide 2017**

**Mental Health & Related Issues 2017**

The majority of clients attending our service are facing very real struggles with their mental health with almost one third of clients during 2017 experiencing suicide ideation.

An alarming statistic here is that over one third of all clients are using medication to help manage their mental health.

* 84% of clients experiencing consistent anxiety
* 79% of clients experiencing consistent stress
* 52% of clients suffering from/diagnosed with depression
* 50% of clients experiencing loss and separation in its many guises such as bereavement, marital separation, separation from children etc.
* 45% of our clients are experiencing fear in their day to day lives, which is an alarming statistic that will be looked at in greater detail further on
* 36% of clients using psychotropic/anti-depressant/sleeping tablets or similar prescription medication
* 29% of clients experiencing suicide ideation
* 25% or one quarter of clients are living with post-traumatic stress syndrome, another alarming statistic
* 16% of clients feeling isolated
* 13% of clients were troubled with feelings of guilt
* 13% of clients attempted suicide
* 11% of clients experiencing low self esteem
* 5% of clients are engaged in direct self-harming behaviours
* 4% of clients struggling with feelings of shame
* 4% of clients presented with eating disorders

**Contributory Factors 2017**

It is important to note before proceeding, that even though issues such as exclusion, discrimination and racism and the many issues they contribute to such as unemployment, social exclusion, low mortality etc. do not feature in the presenting issues of our clients, this is not to suggest that these are not very real issues for the Travellers attending our services, but rather, it signifies the extent to which these issues are ingrained in the psyche of Travellers that they come to accept these experiences as the norm.

There are a variety of factors that implicate the well-being of clients attending our service during 2017. We have separated some of the more prevalent factors to be looked at individually.

**Childhood Experiences 2017**

Unresolved traumas from childhood can implicate clients mental health and well-being into adulthood. Some of the issues that our clients presented with that impacted their childhoods and continue to reach into their adult lives are as follows:-

* 7% of clients spent some or all of their childhoods in care
* 21% of clients experienced neglect as a child
* 5% experienced physical abuse in childhood
* 9% of clients were sexually abused as children

**Primary Relationships**

Difficulties within their relationships with spouses or partners were a further cause for concern for many of our clients.

* 32% of clients were or had experienced conflict in their relationships
* 32% of clients were or had experienced psychological abuse in their relationships
* 30% or almost one third of all clients had or were experiencing domestic violence
* 25% or one quarter of all clients were separated
* 5% experienced infidelity and 2% had experienced marital rape

**Family Concerns**

Concerns and worries about their families or issues that are impacting their families was another major issues for our clients in 2017. Considering the role that family and extended family play in the lives of Travellers, these concerns have significant implications for our clients.

* 63% of clients were experiencing high levels of stress due to family issues
* 30% were separated from their families
* 25% of clients families were impacted by domestic violence
* 20% of clients felt the negative impact of family enmeshment
* 11% of clients had on-going health concerns with family members
* 7% of clients had a family member in prison
* 7% of clients families are engaged in internal family conflict
* 5% were living with the threat of suicide within their family
* 4% of clients were dealing with the stress of a missing family member
* 2% were dealing with the rape of a family member
* 2% were caring for an incapacitated family member

**Concerns for Children**

Closely linked to the concerns for family, are the concerns that clients presented with in relation to both their adult and dependant children.

* 25% or a quarter of clients presented with parenting difficulties
* 21% of clients were separated from their children. The large volume of clients seen in Dochas explains this elevated figure though does not represent all clients separated from their children
* 21% of clients children were in care. Again this figure is elevated due to the high number of clients seen in 2017 in Dochas, though again, it is not all inclusive of women in prison, there were a number of other clients, both men and women whose children were in care.
* 5% of clients children were being cared for by a family member
* 2% of clients were dealing with the sexual abuse of their child.

**Addiction**

In previous years, we have included addiction under the heading of contributory factors, though considering the impact of addiction on our clients during 2017, with just under half of all clients presenting with addiction issues, we are examining addiction as a separate issue.

For the most part, addiction can be understood as a symptom of other underlying issues. In our service we see addiction as a disease affecting all of the family and for many Travellers, the extended family.

* 48% of clients presented with addiction issues. This referred to addiction to both alcohol, drugs and prescription medication
* 13% of clients were impacted by the addiction of family members
* (% of clients went into or were in recovery
* 2% of clients had relapsed

**Violence**

In the past number of years, we have noticed more and more clients impacted by violence. With this in mind, we have for our 2017 statistics, taken ‘violence’ as a separate issue. Our statistics include those impacted by violence and those engaged in violence and who are working towards positive change.

* 25% or an alarming one quarter of all clients were impacted by domestic violence during 2017. This figure includes clients no longer living in violent relationships but who continue to be impacted by them. This figure similarly includes clients that grew up in families where domestic violence was an issue.
* 23%, again a shockingly high percentage of our clients are living in fear of violence. This figure incorporates all forms of violence.
* 20% or one fifth of clients are impacted by inter family violence. The Traveller Counselling Service is in the process of devising counselling in conjunction with the Traveller Mediation Services, specifically aimed at families engaged in or impacted by inter-family violence. We hope that this intervention will support the work of the mediation services in reducing the levels of violence currently being experienced by the community.
* 18% of clients are currently experiencing violence in their lives
* 14% of clients are being intimidated. This intimidation includes domestic violence, inter- family violence and in one instance a client is being intimidated by her landlord and his son.
* 9% of clients are struggling with anger and rage and their violent behaviours
* 7% of clients are dealing with internal violence in their families and extended families
* 4% of clients are engaging in violent behaviour
* 2% of clients have had a family member murdered
* 2% of clients are perpetrators of domestic violence
* 2% of clients are dealing with the rape of a family member

**Physical Health**

A high percentage of clients presented with health issues during 2017. This included those living with health conditions themselves and those living with family members with health concerns.

Poor physical health can have an impact on mental health and well-being, and it is for this reason that we have included this issue as a separate topic.

* 32% or just under one third of all clients presented with physical health concerns during 2018
* 11% of clients had family members with health problems
* 7% of clients were suffering as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident
* 4% of clients were experiencing chronic pain

**Other Contributing Factors**

Along with the issues addressed previously, the following are additional contributory factors that were impacting negatively on our clients lives during 2017.

There is an array of issues that implicate mental health for the Traveller community, and below are a breakdown of these issues in order of prevalence.

While being in prison is the most common issue in terms of contributory factors, this high figure can be attributed to our work in the prisons (Dochas and Mountjoy). The high figure of anti-social behaviour can also be accounted for by the work we were doing in the prison system during 2017

Housing and accommodation issues, are a constant issue for members of the Traveller community. This issue is comprised of two elements, firstly the lack of suitable accommodation for Traveller families, and secondly the standard of current accommodation. While these two issues have a significant impact on Travellers mental health, resulting tragedies from unacceptable standards of accommodation, such as Carrickmines, have a lasting and deep impact on mental health not only for those directly affected, but through the entire community.

While housing and accommodation issues are a common theme for the Traveller community, an emerging concern that our statistics indicates is the issue of homelessness. In the past Travellers rarely if ever experienced homelessness but with increasing numbers of Travellers moving into the private rented sector as a result of nowhere to pull in their trailers and criminalisation of nomadism through the anti-trespass legislation, we are seeing homelessness grow as an issue for Travellers.

Lack of support is an emerging and worrying concern, as it is indicative of the changed living circumstances within the community, with young families often opting for rented accommodation in the private sector thereby missing out on the family support that has traditionally been available to young Traveller families through living with the extended family.

Other factors that were less prevalent though none-the-less very significant are listed below:-

* + - identity issues
    - pending court case
    - unplanned pregnancy
    - sexual identity
    - debt issues
    - employment difficulties

**Outcomes for 2017**

The following outcomes were recorded for clients for 2016 1st Quarter.

* 30% of clients who were attending the service in Jan 2017 still attending the service
* 21% disengaged without further contact
* 20% of clients finished up and were feeling better and were coping better with their circumstances (eg left violent partner, addressing addiction in family)
* 9% of clients had gone into rehab
* 5% of clients were unable to attend due to addiction issues
* 4% of clients were referred on to specialised services
* 4% stopped coming as they were no longer able to access the circumstances due to a change of location
* 2% were no longer able to attend due to a change in their circumstancesOf interest to note here, is that all clients referred to specialised services went into recovery programmes for either drug or alcohol addiction

**Client Outcomes 2017**

**Referrals 2017**

In 2016 we started to note where and how our clients were being referred to our service and the results for 2017 are outlined below.

We can see from the figures below that the local Traveller Community Development Projects are amongst our biggest source of referrals, highlighting the way in which the Local Traveller Mental Health Partnerships work.

Correspondingly, we can see that the highest number of clients self-referred, indicating that our service is known and trusted within the community. Within this figure we have seen for the first time in 2017, 5 clients returning to the service.

Referrals from ancillary services similarly indicates that awareness of our service has increased.

**Referral Sources 2016**

**Client Profiles 2017**

**Gender**

In counselling and psychotherapy services across the board in Ireland there tends to be a higher percentage of female clients to male, though in the Traveller Counselling Service we have noted an increase in male attendance since January 2016, with female clients representing just over two thirds of clients and male representing one third.

Gender Profile

**Age Profile 2017**

The figures below indicate that individuals aged between 25 – 40 represent our largest client group in terms of age ranges with fewer older Travellers attending for counselling. This statistic is replicated in mainstream counselling services also.

**Geographic Spread 2017**

The limited availability of our service is reflected in the statistics below. While our geographic spread has increased with the inclusion of three new counties where clients hail from, this can be explained in part to the inclusion of Dochas and Mountjoy as locations where we conduct counselling. Though a concerning figure now is the homeless figure of 8 clients which represents 14% of clients attending the service.

**Conclusion**

While the statistics indicate some positive trends, such as clients returning to the service, the number of clients self-referring, other trends are quite worrying, such as the increase in clients experiencing or facing homelessness.

Addiction and violence continue to be prevalent issues for our clients during 2017, though we have seen an increase in clients going into rehab and we are hopeful that our work in collaboration with the Traveller Mediation Services in 2018 will address some of the issues that currently implicate our clients in terms of engagement in inter-family violence.

Overall, we feel that the statistics, while on the one hand give an indication of the work we are doing, or more the work the clients are doing with our support, they are quantitative, and therefore do not capture the long-term positive impact that the counselling offers to our clients.