

Traveller Counselling Service

Counselling

The provision of counselling is a very significant aspect of the work that the Traveller Counselling Service carries out. It was our central aim when we first began as a service in 2008 and while this aim has since broadened to include advocacy, work in the prisons etc, the provision of one to one counselling to members of the Traveller community, remains central.

As the nature of this work is so private and confidential, we can easily lose sight of the great work that is being done on the ground. To this end, for our 2018 Annual Report, the Board of Management asked that our counsellors provide us with a brief report of how their work has been developing during 2018. These reports are included below. The counsellors were also asked to provide, where possible, a testimonial from a client they are working with. These testimonials are interspersed throughout the Annual Report.

Cairenn Bryson

My work includes Balbriggan, Phisborough and Dochas Women's Prison.

With regard to Balbriggan, the connection with and support of the local centre no longer exists which means that all referrals are by word of mouth and the situation is far from ideal. In saying this, all sessions are full and work with the local community and services is ongoing. There is a need for ownership by local groups and services. A link person on the ground would be a great asset.

The work in Phisborough is running smoothly with referrals coming through the management. The relationship with the Parish is healthy, supportive and positive.

Regarding Dochas Womens Prison, the work here is progressing well. The connections with other services for Travellers in prison are developing well. The only obstacles lie within the prison system as a whole

Margaret Doyle

When I initially joined the Traveller Counselling Service in March 2015, I was working in Tallaght. It was a slow but steady start and has gradually progressed. I am very glad to say that men are engaging with the service as well as women and to me this is indicative of the trust that people have in the service.

Many issues are spoken about in our sessions. Depression, accommodation and poverty affect the majority of my clients. Lack of employment opportunities impact greatly on the men, challenging their role as provider and affecting their self-esteem.

Many clients have been affected by suicide, some experiencing suicide ideation and a number having made one or more attempts to take their own lives.

A number of clients have returned to counselling after some time away. I see this as a very positive message that proves how valuable and necessary the service is.

Aside from the issues previously mentioned, many other issues are discussed and where necessary further actions e.g. referrals are made to relevant services. Since August this year I have started working in the Clondalkin community and I am glad to say that clients are engaging well there too. I look forward to my continued journey with the Traveller Counselling Service and the much appreciated support from everyone involved in the provision of this service.

Jacky Grainger, Therapist

I have worked in Bray for 10 years and over that time the service has gone through some changes. When we first started out, there was on average of two clients per week perhaps three, and these would have been predominantly but not exclusively female. Now we have four to five clients per week which is almost predominantly male, and have a constant waiting list of at least four or five people. The factors that led to this turnaround are I think as follows:-

Firstly, outreach in the community. We held meetings with Traveller organisations and invited anyone and everyone, PHN's brought the news of the service out to the sites, outreach workers informed their clients and groups that they worked in, and community leaders spread the word to various groups and committees.

Secondly, the need for the service. The need for the service itself in the community drove the demand up as suicide rates climbed and addiction soared in some families and communities, the latter in a lot of cases drove the former, when the offshoot issues of addiction such as crime, poverty and ability to care for children became endemic in some communities. People turned to a service they had perhaps heard about a long time ago with a view to finding someone they could talk to who was not involved with the family/community that they could talk to freely and find some relief and hopefully work out some answers for themselves/find information on appropriate referrals maybe.

Lastly, and most importantly, word of mouth. The vast majority of clients in the last 2-3 years especially have all come because someone who had already been had told them about it. Particularly among the men, which is what drove the uptake in men taking up the service. Traveller men talk to each other more now and there was a wind of change over the last five years in which I'd say it's now almost common for men to talk to each other, or at the very least mention to each other, the importance of good mental health, or 'talking about your problems'. What I hear men say a lot now is, 'So and so told me he talked to the woman here (or the woman in Tallaght or wherever they may have gone) and that it gave him some peace, so I'm here'. That for me is one of the greatest achievements for the service and the community as when we first began, a lot of men would call up, but very few would actually show up. Now I would go so far as to say, it's almost becoming as commonplace as needing to go to a doctor or PHN in a lot of communities

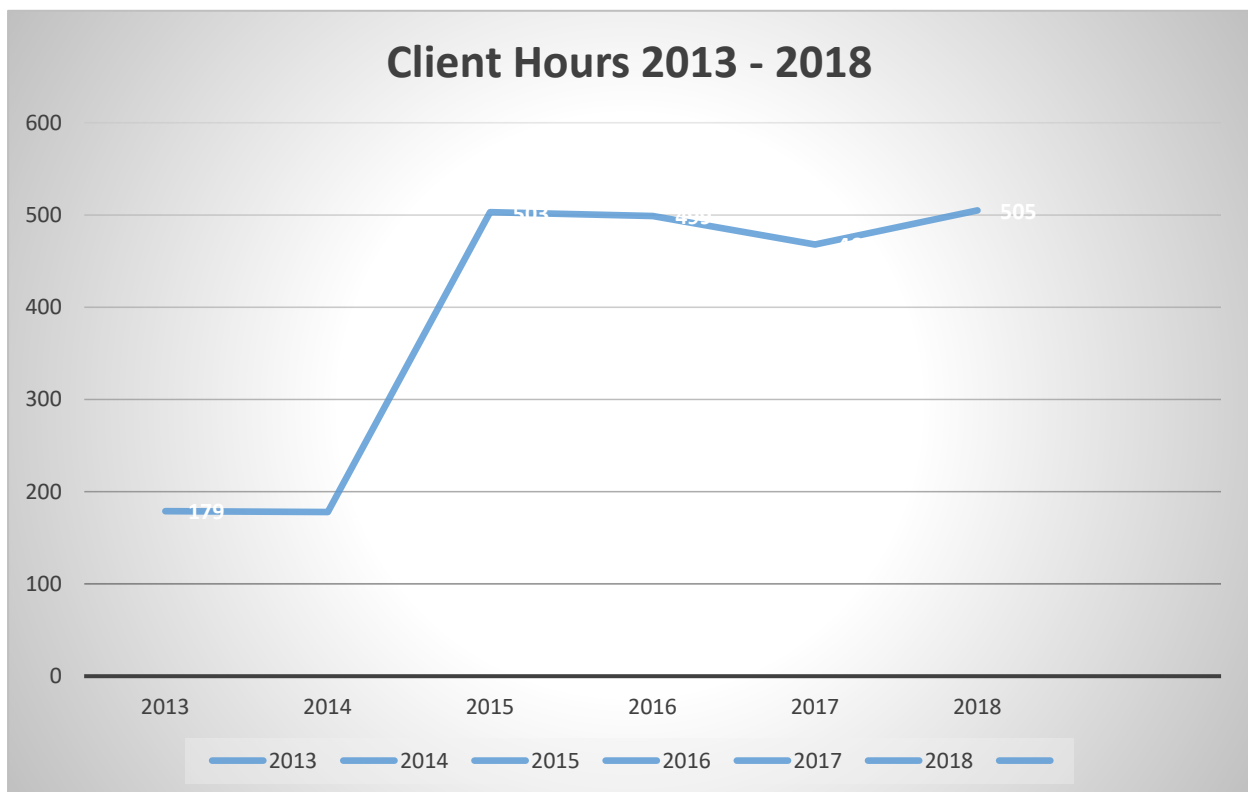
Client Statistics for 2018

"Counselling has helped me greatly. It has helped me understand when I'm being taken advantage of and has helped me draw clearer boundaries"

(Dublin, Woman, 40's)

Client/Counselling Hours 2013 - 2018

Since our inception in 2013, to year end 2018, we have provided a total of 1831 counselling hours to members of the Traveller community. The graph below shows the client hours provided between 2013 and 2018 and records the significant increase in the provision of counselling to Travellers since 2015. The slight dip in 2017 is a reflection of a member of the counselling team taking parental leave after her maternity leave. We are expecting her to return in 2018.

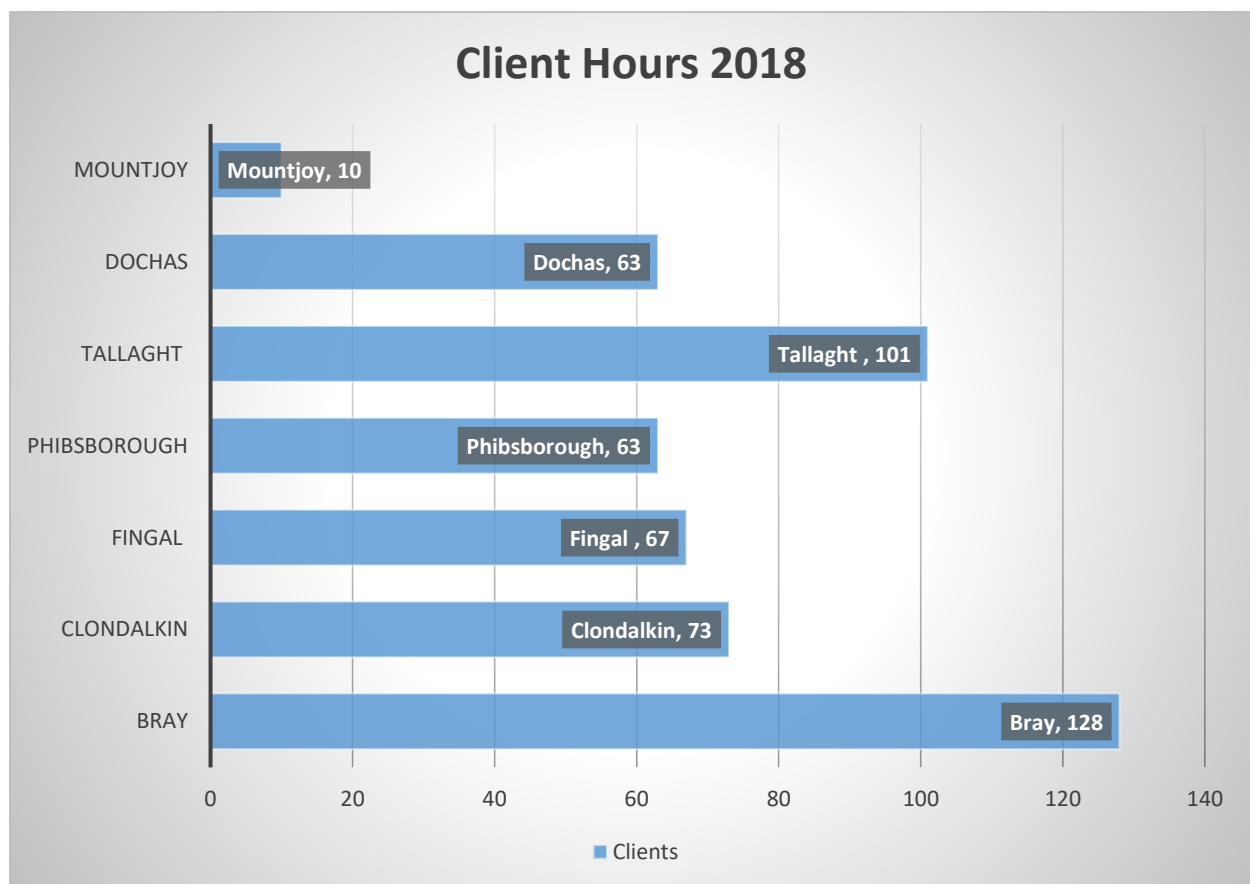


Client Hours 2018

We have provided a total of 505 counselling hours during 2018 which is consistent with the previous two years, taking into account one therapist on maternity leave.

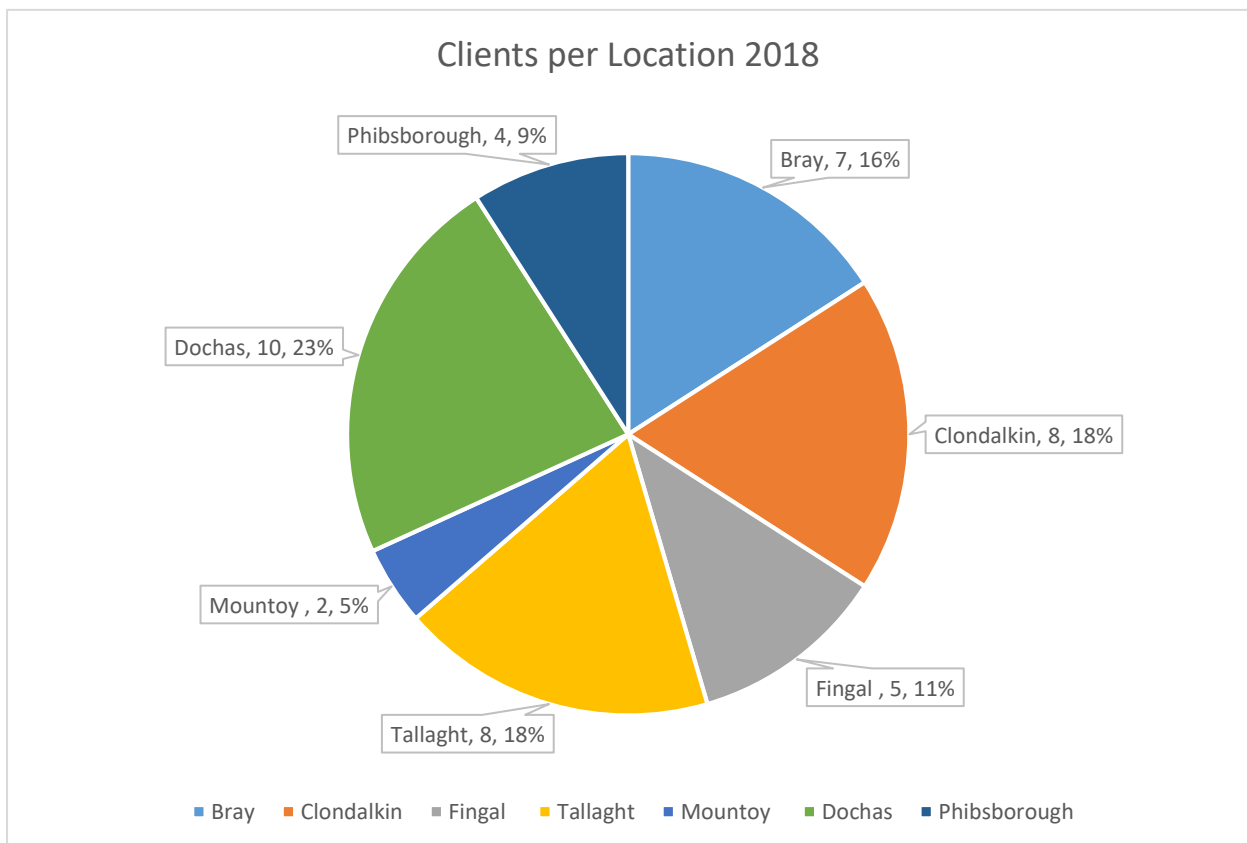
The counselling that took place during 2018 was provided in 1 Wicklow and 6 Dublin locations, including the commencement of a pilot counselling service in Mountjoy Prison.

Client Hours by Location 2018



Total Number of Clients for 2018

We have seen 44 individual clients in 2018, in the six locations listed below. While this number is down on last year, as the hours are increased since 2017, it indicates that clients are engaging for longer with the service which is a positive development.



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.

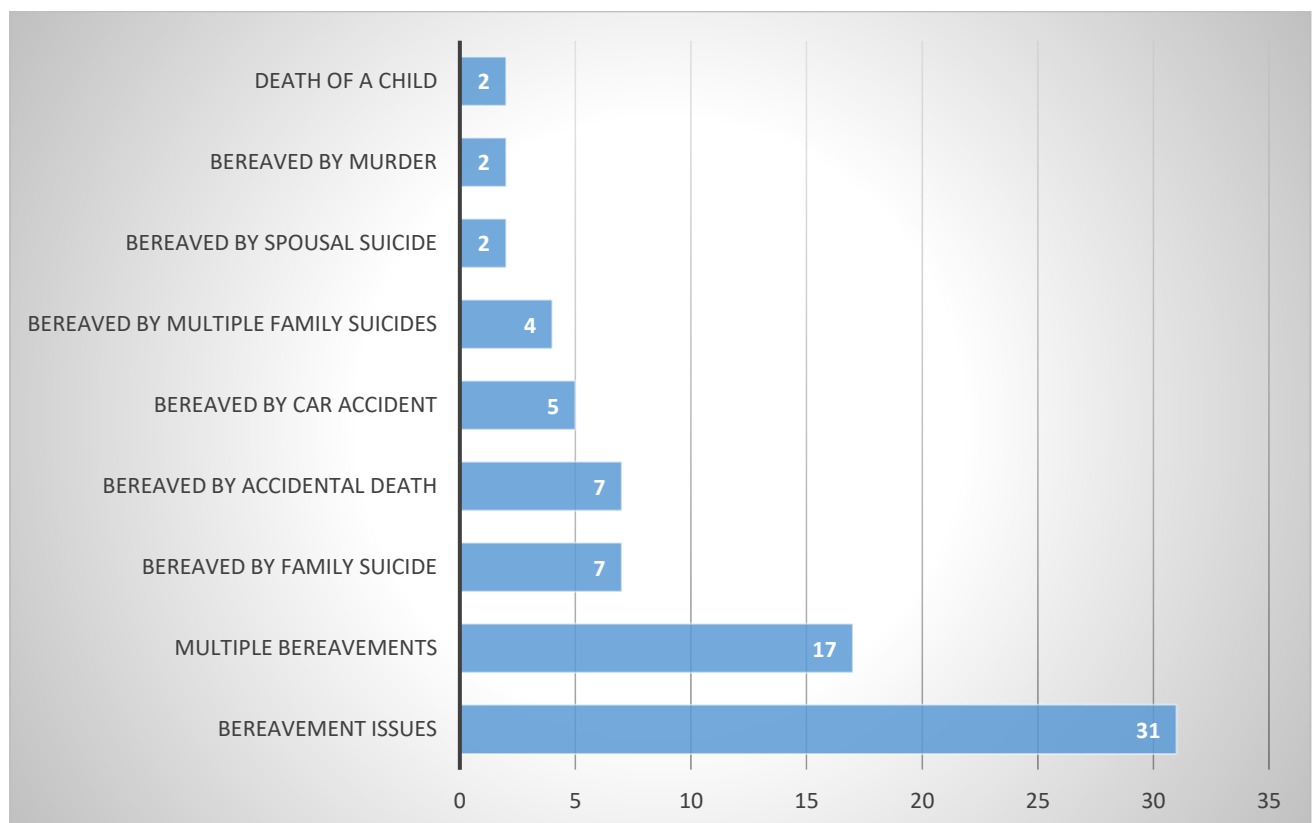
Bereavement 2018

Bereavement remained one of the biggest issues our clients dealt with during 2018

- 70% of all clients present with bereavement issues
- 39% of clients experienced multiple bereavements
- 16% of clients have been bereaved by suicide
- 16% were bereaved as a result of an accident
- 9% of clients have experienced multiple family suicides
- 11% were bereaved as a result of a car accident
- 5% of clients lost their spouse to suicide
- 5% of clients were bereaved by murder

While those bereaved by suicide remains at 16% indicating no change since 2017, a worrying increase is those who were bereaved through accidental death which increased to 16% (7) in 2018 of which 11% (5) were car accidents though may also be indicative of the precarious living conditions that Travellers contend with. Included in this 16% (7), is a tragic accident resulting in the death of a young child.

Bereavement 2018

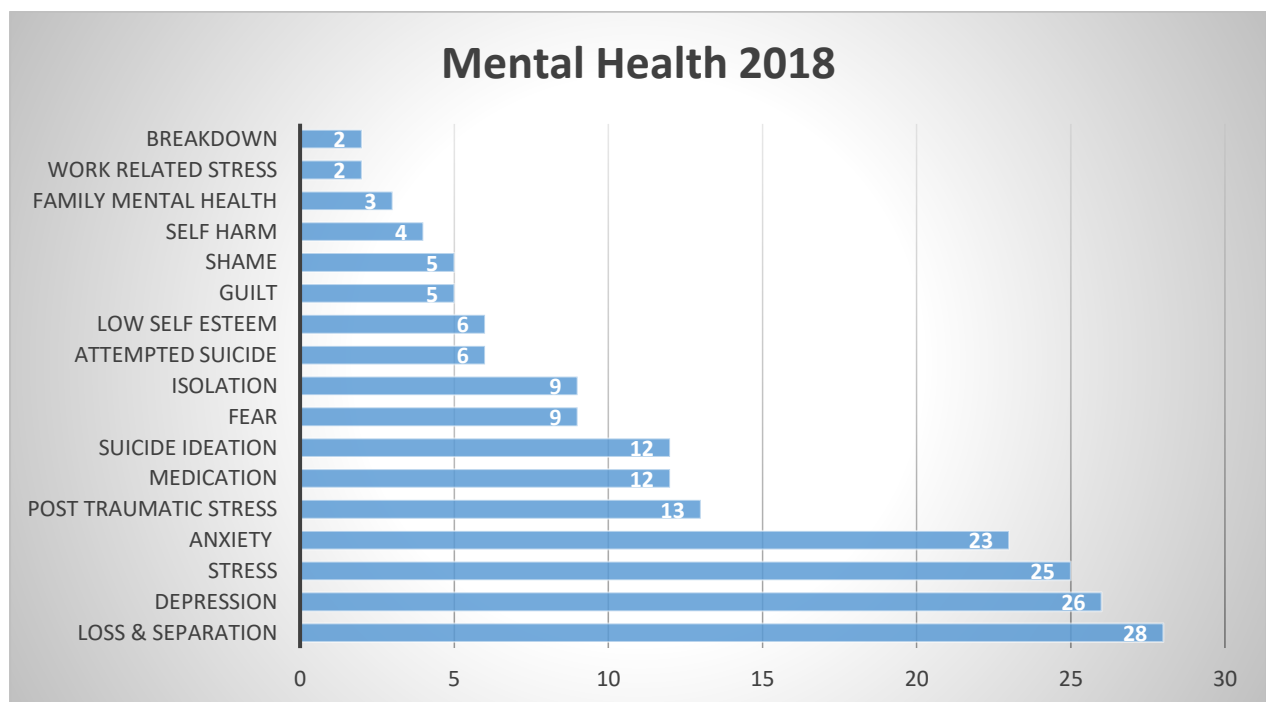


Mental Health & Related Issues 2018

The majority of clients attending our service are facing very real struggles with their mental health though we have seen a decrease in clients presenting with persistent anxiety and stress since 2017, which is hopefully an indication of the positive impact of their engagement with the counselling process. Where improvements were noted, it remains a very real concern that almost one third of clients seen during 2018 were experiencing or had experienced suicide ideation.

Another statistic here that gives cause for concern is the elevated use of medication to help manage their mental health.

- 59% of clients suffering from/diagnosed with depression
- 57% of clients experiencing consistent stress
- 52% of clients experiencing consistent anxiety
- 34% of clients experiencing loss and separation in its many guises such as marital separation, separation from children, imprisonment etc.
- 29% or one quarter of clients are living with post-traumatic stress syndrome, another alarming statistic
- 27% of clients using psychotropic/anti-depressant/sleeping tablets or similar prescription medication
- 27% of clients experiencing suicide ideation
- 16% 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
- 14% of clients attempted suicide
- 11% of clients were troubled with feelings of guilt
- 11% of clients struggling with feelings of shame
- 9% of clients are engaged in direct self-harming behaviours



Contributory Factors 2018

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.

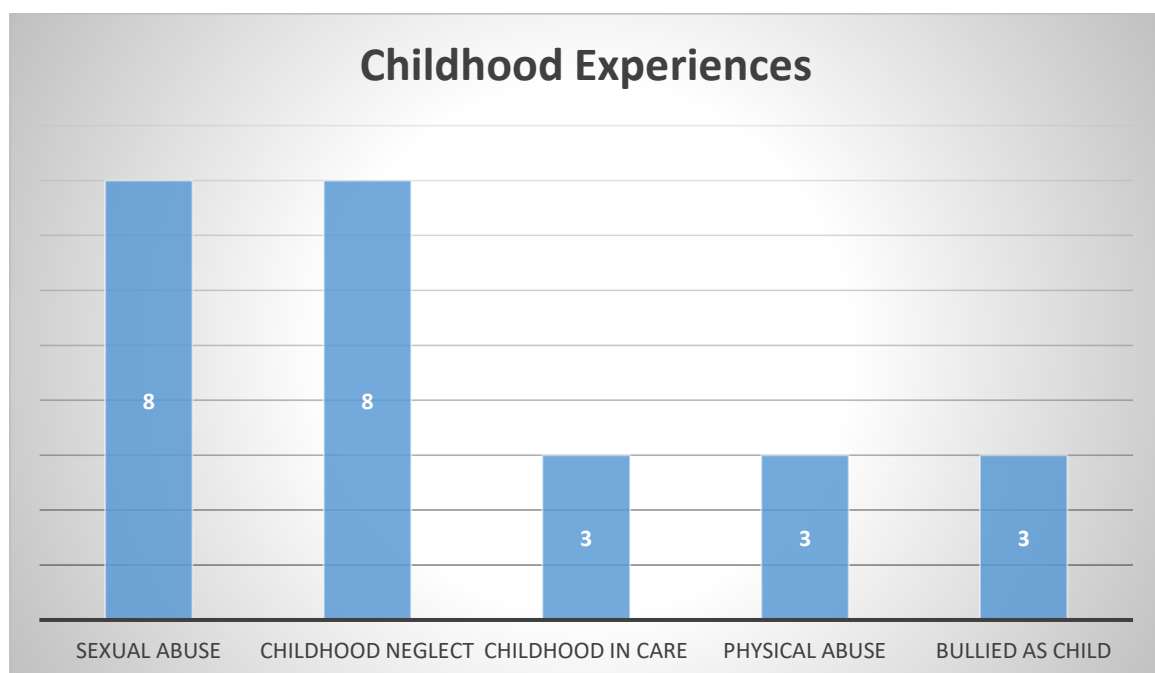
There are a variety of factors that implicate the well-being of clients attending our service during 2017. We have separated some of the more prevalent factors to be looked at individually.

Childhood Experiences 2018

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:-

- 18% of clients were sexually abused as children
- 18% of clients experienced neglect as a child
- 7% experienced physical abuse in childhood
- 7% were bullied as children
- 7% of clients spent some or all of their childhoods in care

While the rate of sexual abuse reporting has doubled since 2017, this is in relation to retrospective abuse which suggests that clients are more confident in how this disclosure will be managed. During 2018, we submitted one report to Tusla under the Child Protection Act.



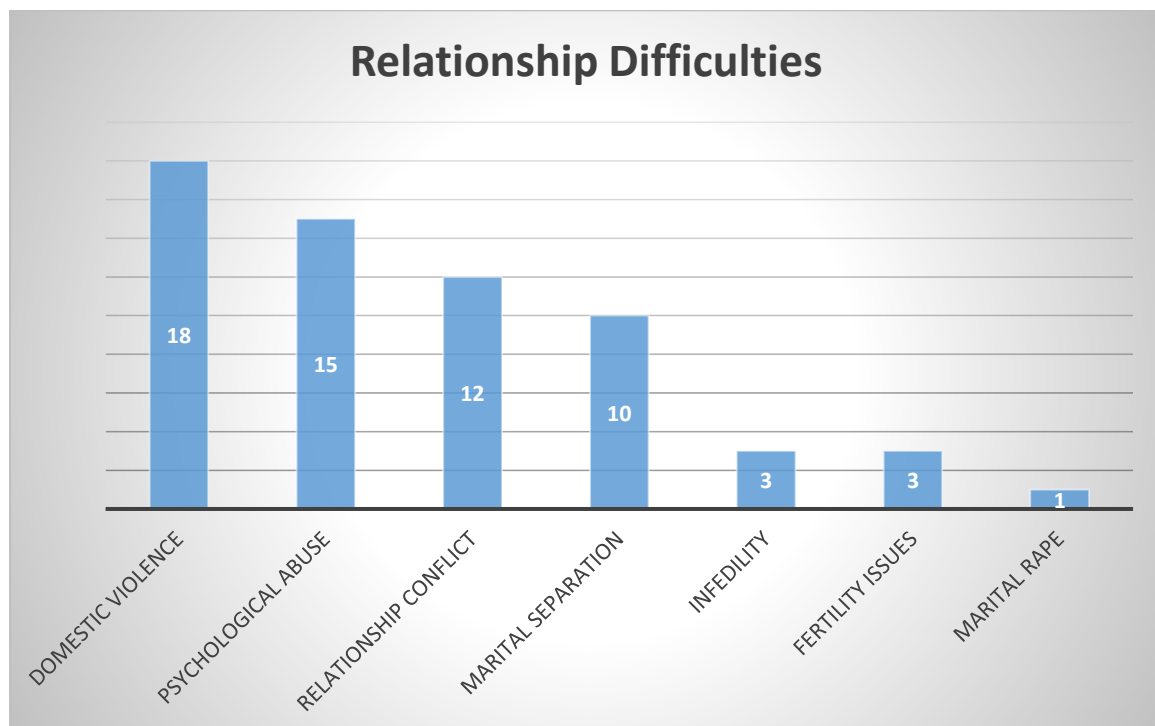
Primary Relationships 2018

*“Counselling makes a big difference in getting through life's difficult times,
I'd be lost without it.”*

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

- 41% were victims of domestic violence
- 34% of clients were or had experienced psychological abuse in their relationships
- 27% of clients were or had experienced conflict in their relationships
- 23% were separated
- 7% experienced infidelity
- 7% Fertility Issues including miscarriage
- 2% had experienced marital rape

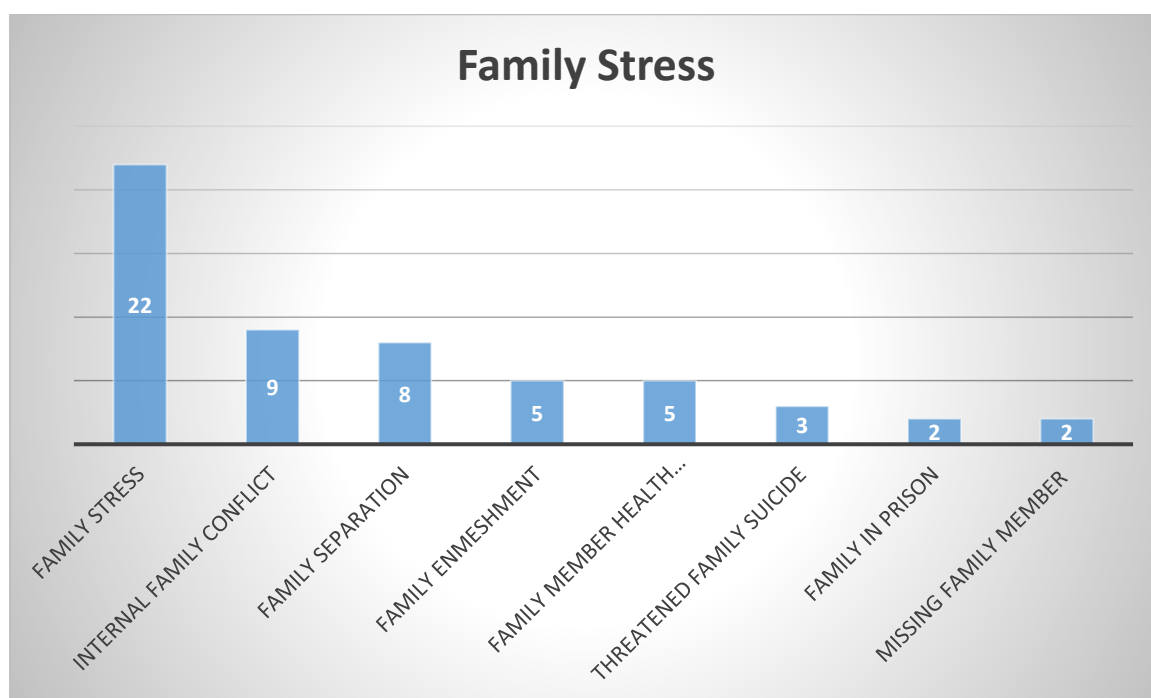
Out of a total of 30 women seen by the service last year, 18, representing 60% were or had experienced domestic violence. The prevalence of domestic violence is a worrying concern.



Family Concerns 2018

Concerns and worries about their families or issues that are impacting their families was another major issues for our clients in 2018. Considering the role that family and extended family play in the lives of Travellers, these concerns have significant implications for our clients. In 2018 we found an increase in the levels of internal family conflict being reported by our clients

- 50% of clients were experiencing high levels of stress due to family issues
- 20% of client's families were engaged in internal family conflict
- 18% were separated from their families
- 11% of clients felt the negative impact of family enmeshment
- 11% of clients had on-going health concerns with family members
- 7% were living with the threat of suicide within their family
- 5% of clients had a family member in prison
- 5% of clients were dealing with the stress of a missing family member

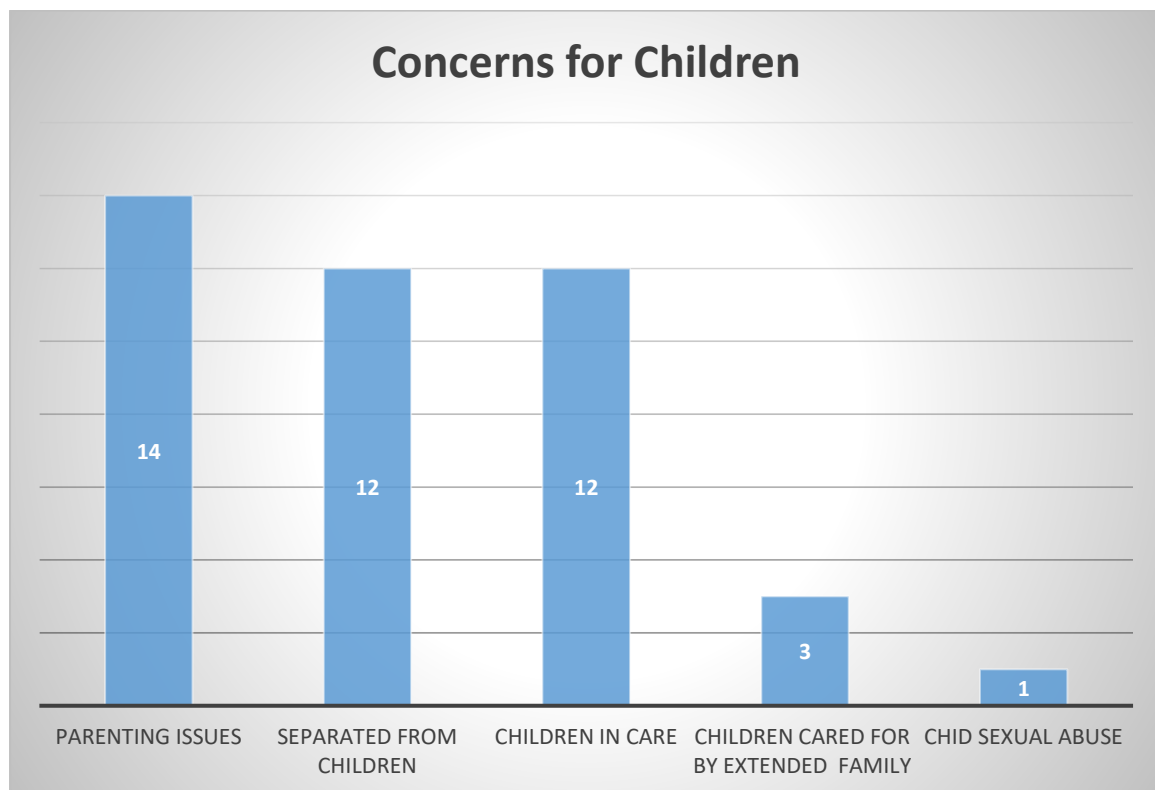


Concerns for Children - 2018

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

- 23% or just under a quarter of clients presented with parenting difficulties
- 16% 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
- 18% of client's children were in care. Again, this figure is elevated due to the high number of clients seen in Dochas during 2018, 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.
- 7% of clients children were being cared for by a family member

There were no reports of abuse of children during 2018.



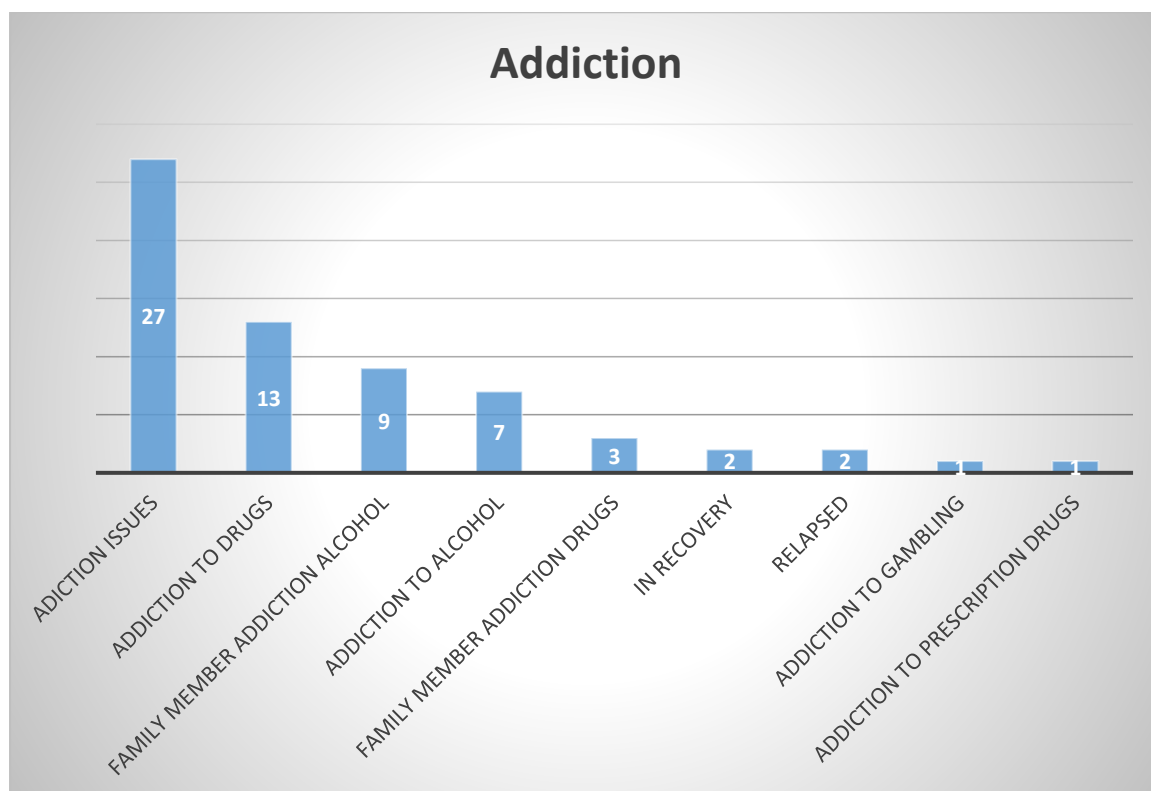
Addiction - 2018

In previous years, we have included addiction under the heading of contributory factors, though considering the impact of addiction on our clients during 2018, with almost two thirds 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 disorder affecting the entire family and for many Travellers, the extended family.

- 61% of clients presented with addiction issues. This referred to addiction to both alcohol, drugs, gambling and prescription medication and similarly referred to their own addiction problems and those within their families and in some cases both.
- 46% of clients presented with their own addiction issues, of which 16% related to alcohol and 30% related to drug addiction, 2% gambling and 2% prescription drugs.
- 27% of clients were impacted by the addiction of family members, with 20% reporting alcohol as the primary addiction and 7% of family members addicted to drugs.
- 5% of clients went into or were in recovery
- 5% of clients had relapsed

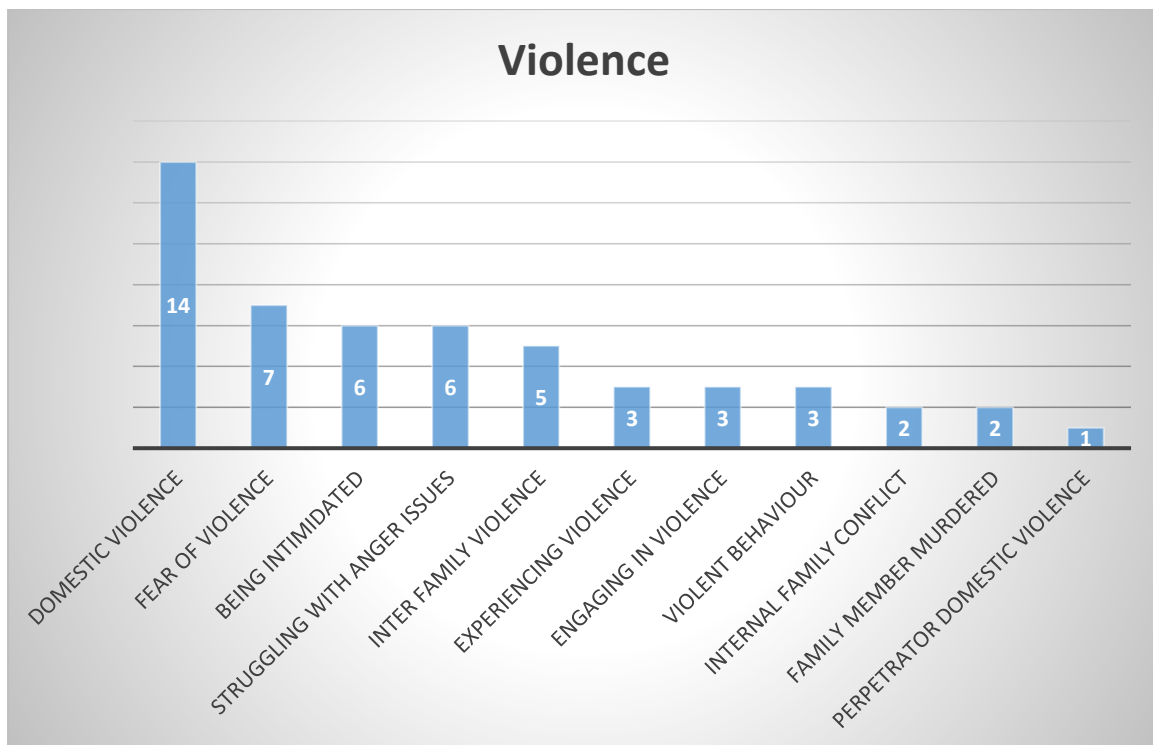
An increase in drug addiction is perceptible in these figures, with 30% of clients presenting with drug addiction issues. This is somewhat inflated with the inclusion figures for Dochas, as addiction levels can be found to be high amongst prison populations in general.



Violence - 2018

In the past number of years, we have noticed more and more clients impacted by violence. With this in mind, we have for our 2018 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.

- 41% of all clients (60% of female clients) were impacted by domestic violence during 2018. 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.
- 16%, again a worryingly high percentage of our clients are living in fear of violence.
- 11%, representing a significant reduction of 9% of clients reported being impacted by inter family violence during 2018. Part of the Traveller Counselling Service strategic plan for 2019 is to devise 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 within the community and trust that the reduction between 2017 and 2018 is evidence of the work of the Traveller Mediation Services.
- 7% of clients are currently experiencing violence in their lives
- 14% of clients are being intimidated. This intimidation includes domestic violence, inter-family violence.
- 14% of clients are struggling with anger and rage and their violent behaviours
- 5% of clients are dealing with internal violence in their families and extended families
- 7% of clients are engaging in violent behaviour
- 5% of clients have had a family member murdered
- 2% of clients are perpetrators of domestic violence

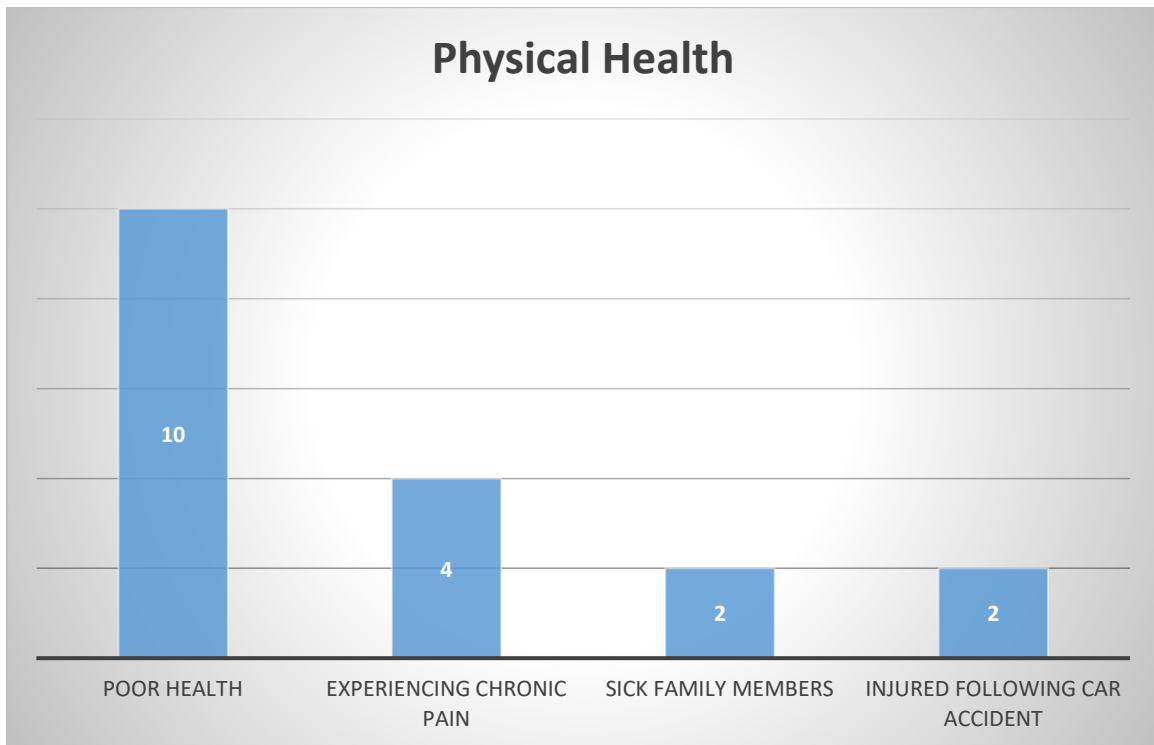


Physical Health - 2018

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.

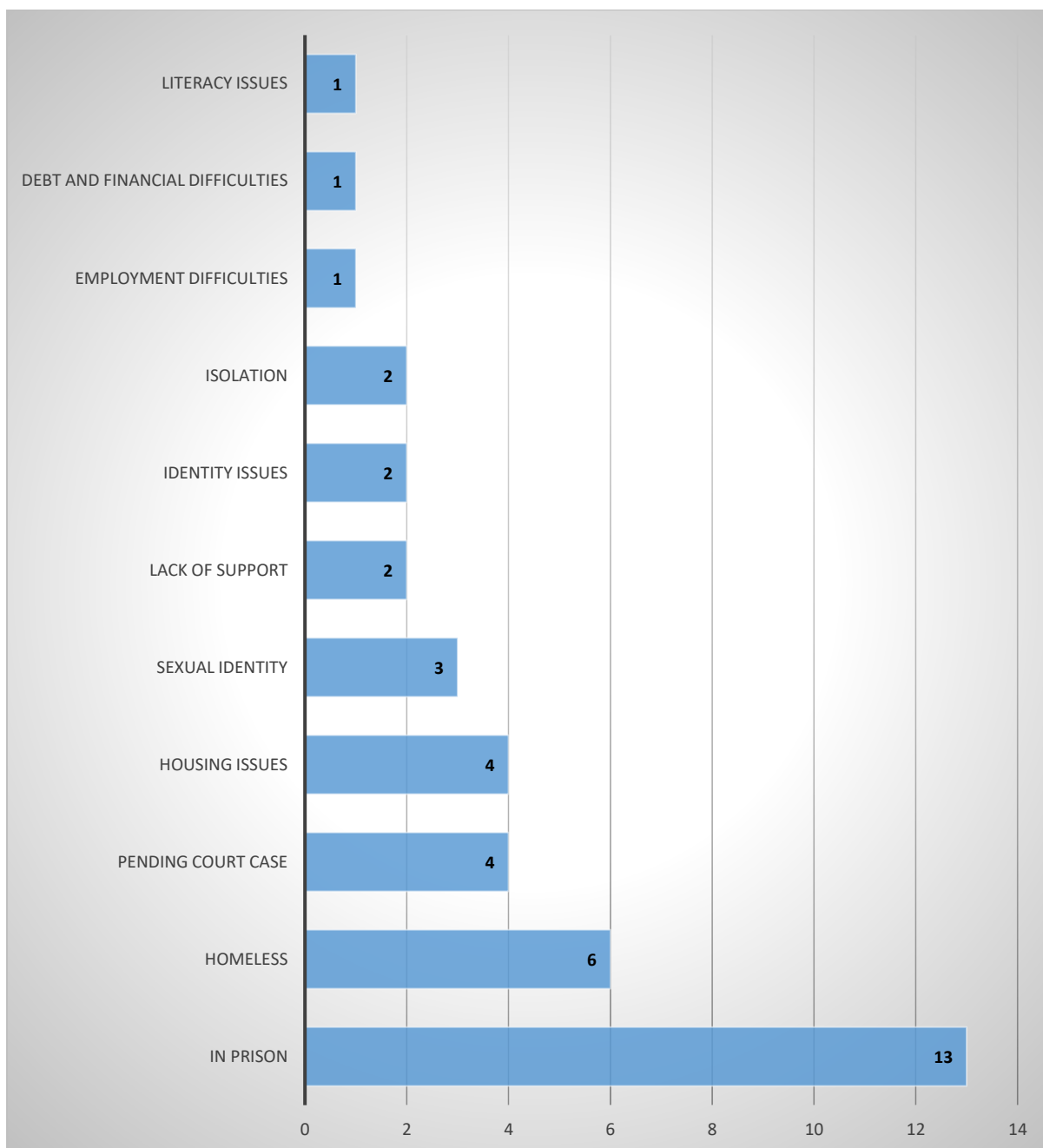
Poor physical health can have an impact on mental health and well-being, and it is for this reason that we have included this issue as a separate topic.

- 23% all clients presented with physical health concerns during 2018
- 9% of clients were experiencing chronic pain
- 5% of clients had family members with health problems
- 5% of clients were suffering as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident



Other Contributing Factors - 2018

Along with the issues addressed previously, the following are additional contributory factors that were impacting negatively on our clients lives during 2018.



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) during 2018.

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 the issue of homelessness grow within the Traveller community.

Pending court cases may be understood in terms of the number of clients currently in prison, pending further court appearances though this figure includes non-prisoners also.

We welcome the increase in clients presenting with sexual identity issues as in the past, sexual identity was such a taboo subject, that an increase in this figure indicates that the community is becoming more accepting and more Travellers are finding the confidence to explore their sexual identity.

Lack of support and isolation are emerging and worrying concerns, as they are 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:-

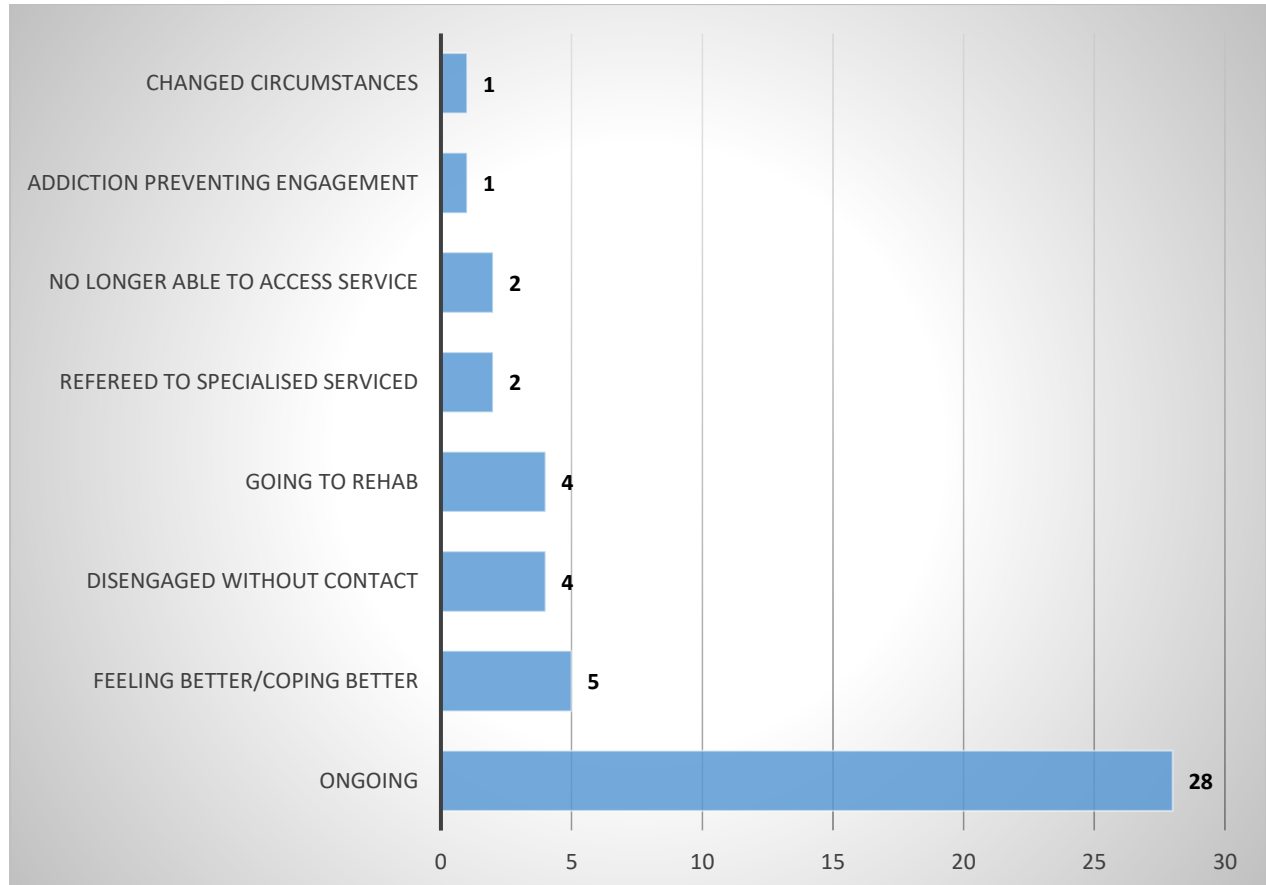
- identity issues
- pending court case
- employment difficulties

Outcomes for 2018

The following outcomes were recorded for clients for 2018. All the clients included in these statistics finished with the service during 2018..

- 64% of clients who were attending the service in 2018 are still attending the service. This is a high level of clients continuing from one year to the next and reflects a positive trend for the service.
- 36% of clients finished counselling during 2016. Of these,
- 11% of clients finished up and were feeling better and were coping better with their circumstances (eg left violent partner, addressing addiction in family)
- 9% disengaged without further contact
- 9% of clients had gone into rehab
- 5% of clients were referred on to specialised services
- 5% were no longer able to attend due to a change in their circumstances. 2% of clients were unable to attend due to addiction issues
- 2% stopped coming as they were no longer able to access the service due to a change in their circumstances

Client Outcomes 2018



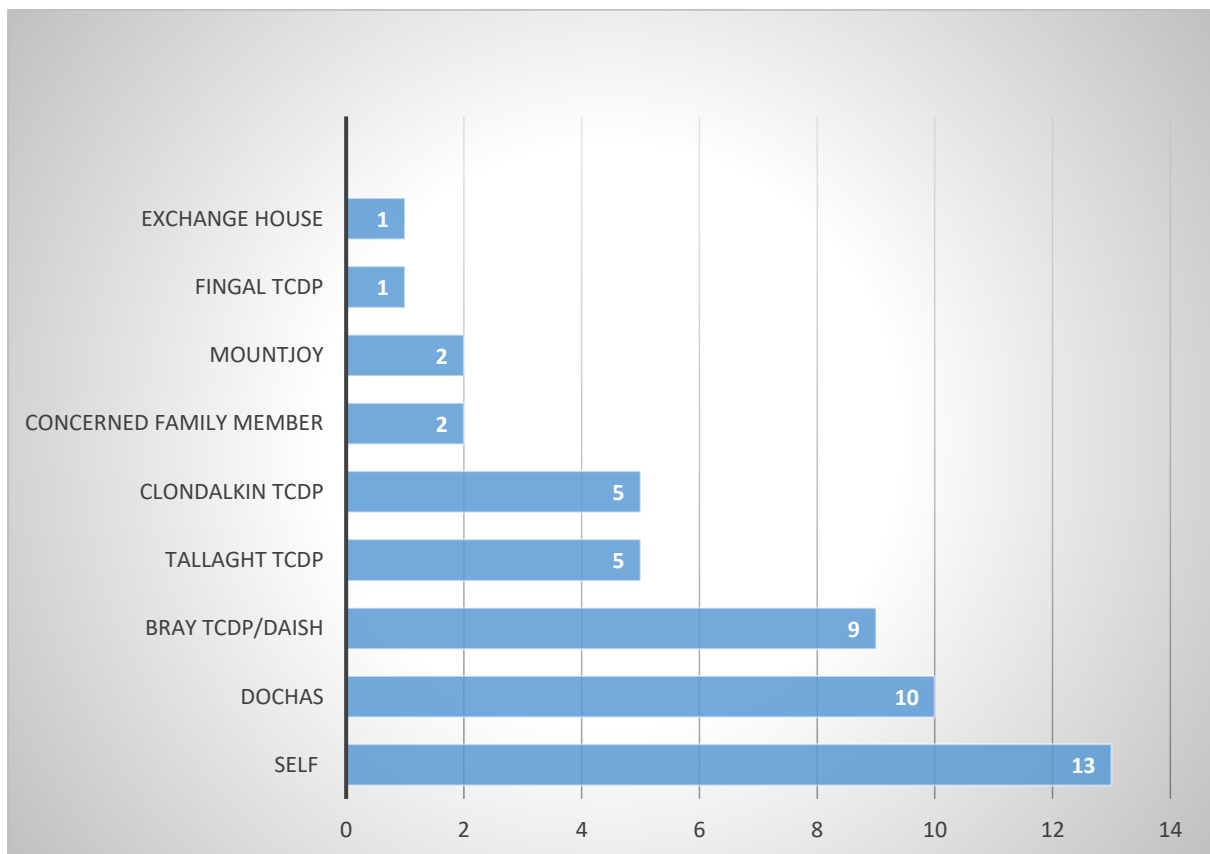
Referrals 2018

We can see from the figures below the highest number of referrals to the service were self-referred, indicating that our service is known and trusted within the community.

We have noticed an increase in clients returning to the service during 2018.

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

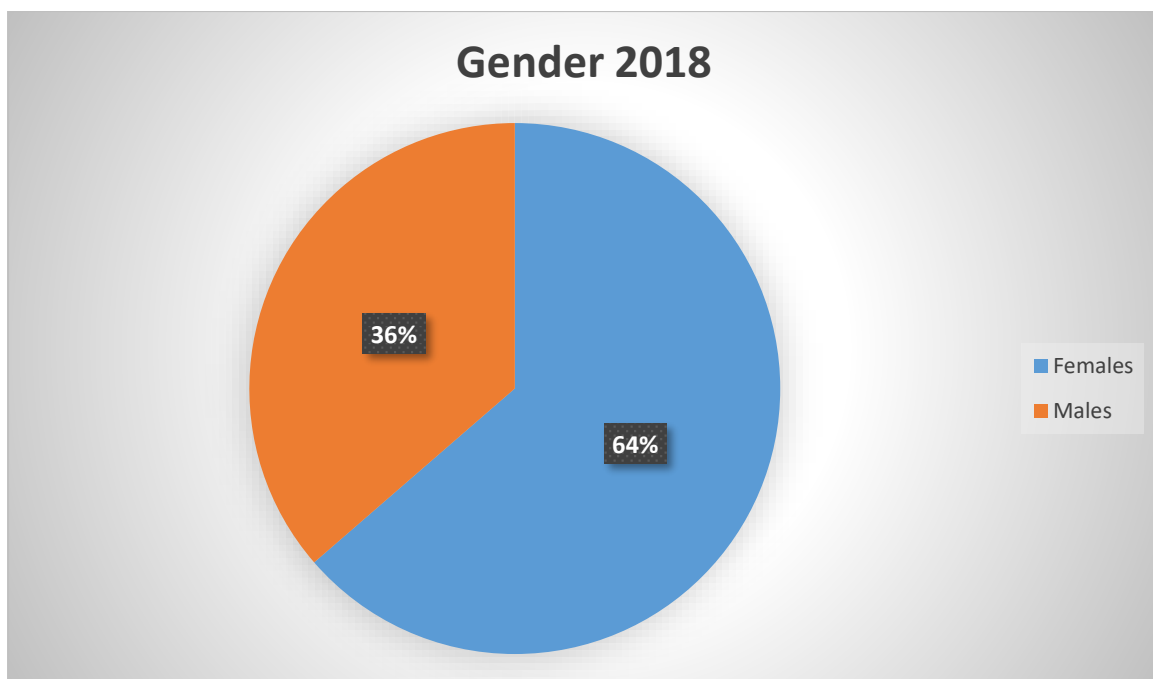
Referrals



Client Profiles 2018

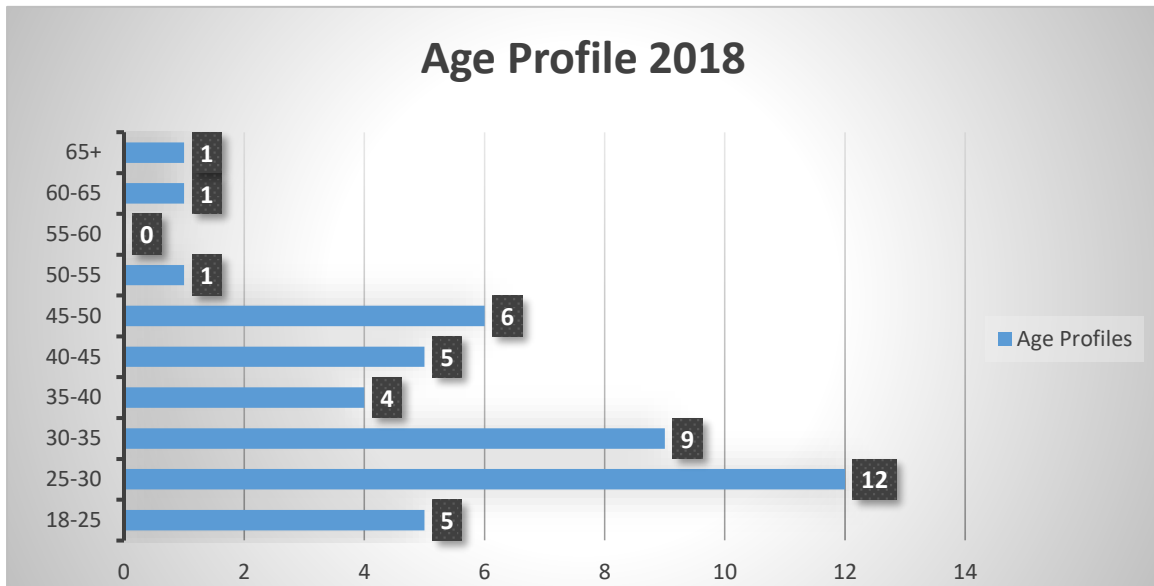
Gender

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 under thirds of clients and male representing just over one third, indicating a further increase since 2017.



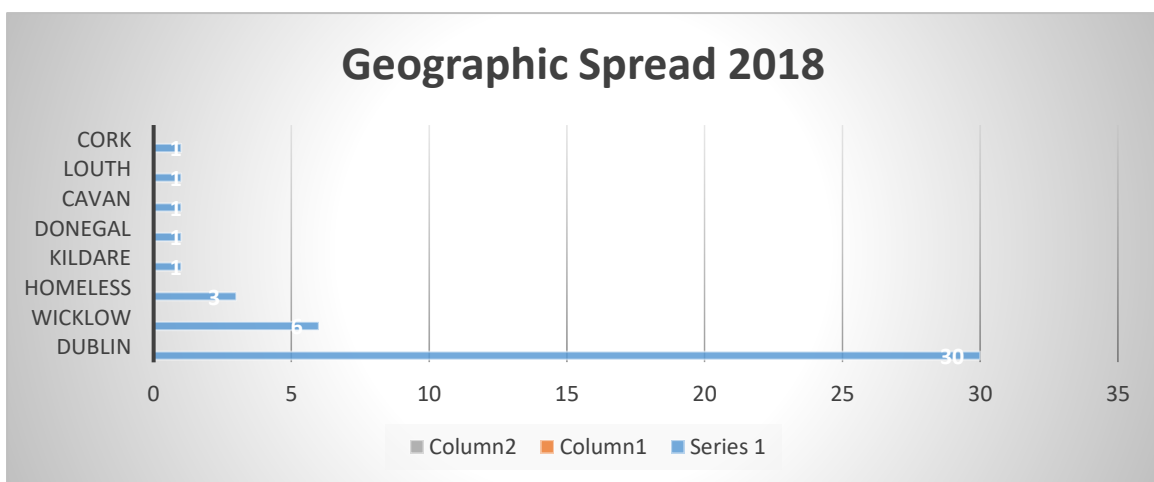
Age Profile 2018

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 though we are pleased to note small increases with older clients attending the service.



Geographic Spread 2018

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.



Conclusion

While the statistics indicate some positive trends, such as clients returning to the service, the number of clients self-referring and the number of clients reporting and seeking support with regard to retrospective sexual abuse, other trends are quite worrying, such as the increase in drug use and in clients experiencing or facing homelessness.

Violence continued to be a prevalent issue for our clients during 2018 though we are hopeful that our work in collaboration with the Traveller Mediation Services in 2019, and particularly our conference in April 2019, will highlight and 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.