



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, Phibsborough 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 Phibsborough 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.

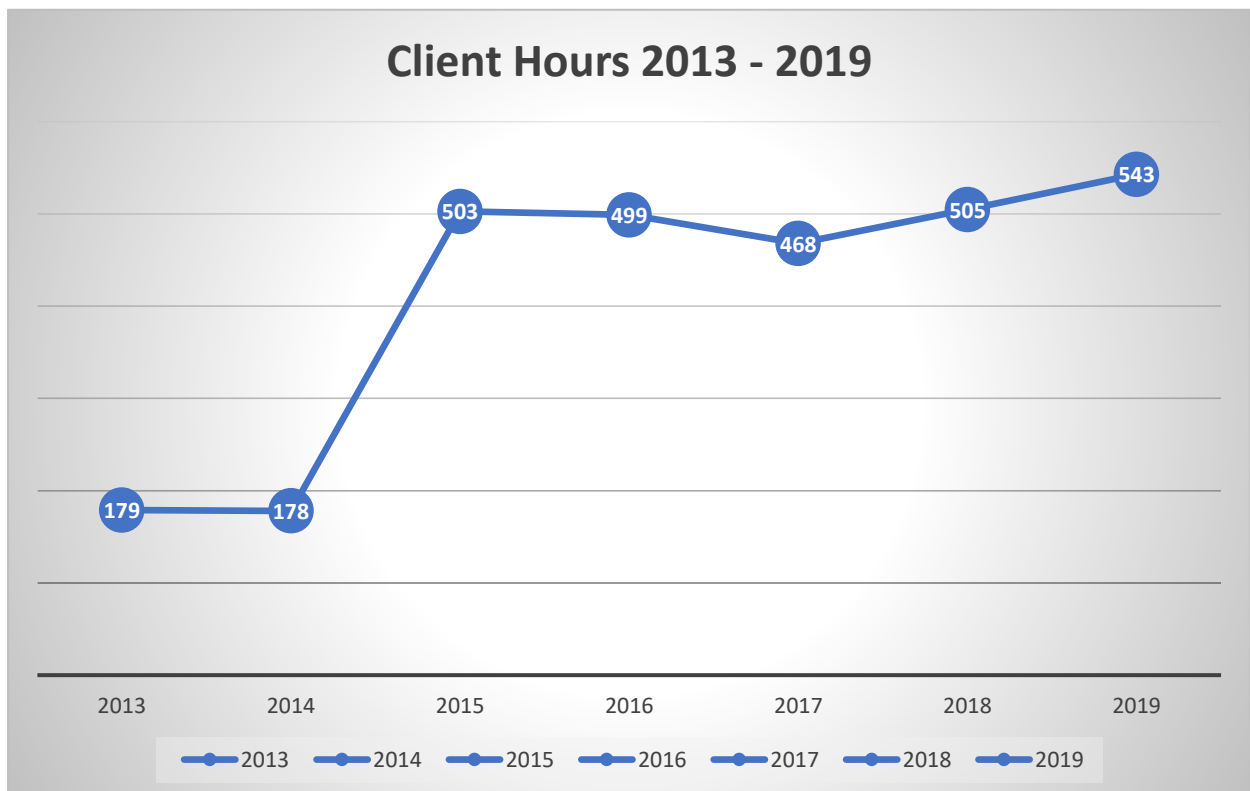
Secondly, the need for the service. The need for the service itself in the community drove the demand up as suicide rates climbed and addiction soared in some families and communities, the latter in a lot of cases drove the former, when the offshoot issues of addiction such as crime, poverty and ability 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 2019

Client/Counselling Hours 2013 –2019

Since our inception in 2008, to end Dec 2019, we have provided a total of 2875 counselling hours to members of the Traveller community. The graph below shows the client hours provided between 2013 and 2019 and records not only the significant increase in the provision of counselling to Travellers since 2015 but correspondingly indicates that 2019 has been our busiest year to date.

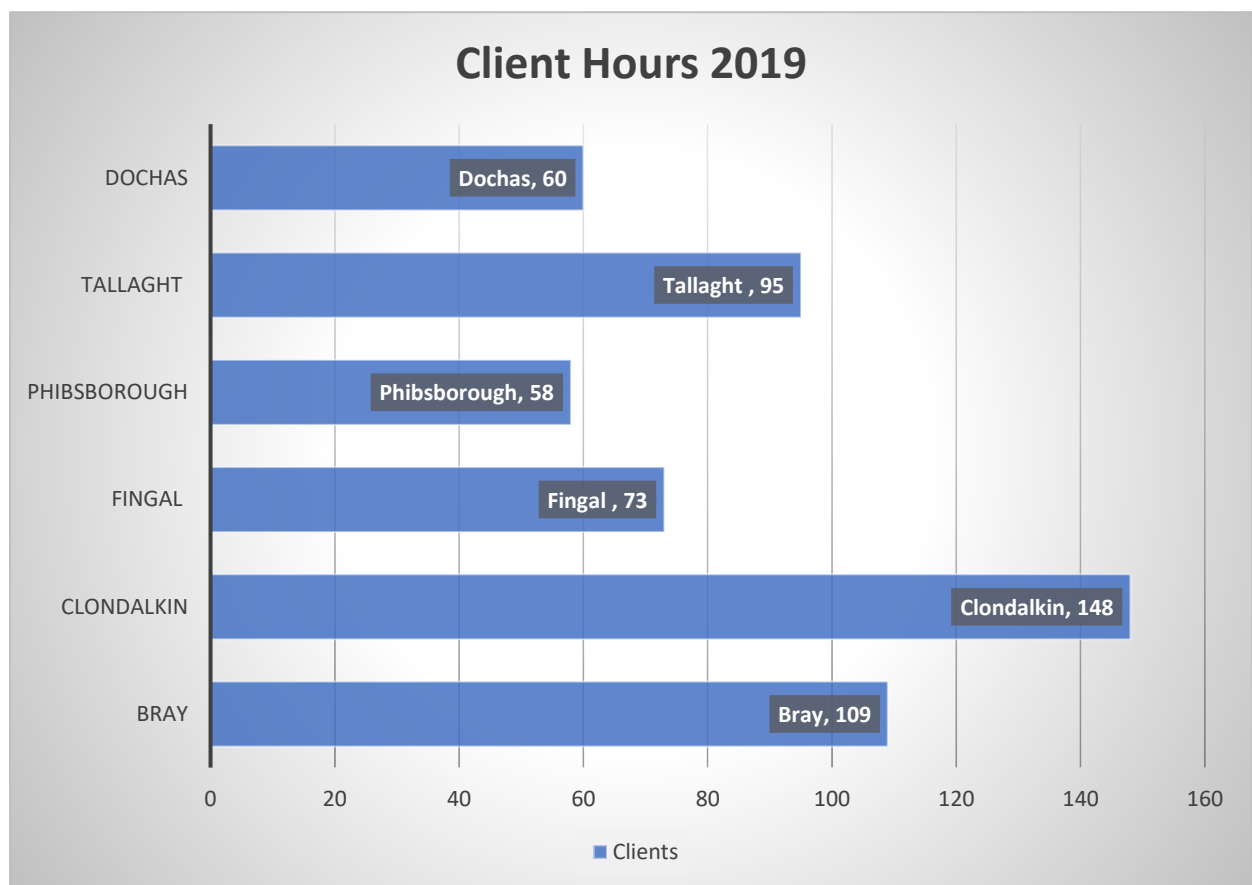


Client Hours 2019

We have provided a total of 543 counselling hours during 2019 which is a high figure when taking into account one therapist is on extended parental leave and another therapist is on sabbatical till 2020.

The counselling that took place during 2019 was provided in 1 Wicklow and 5 Dublin locations.

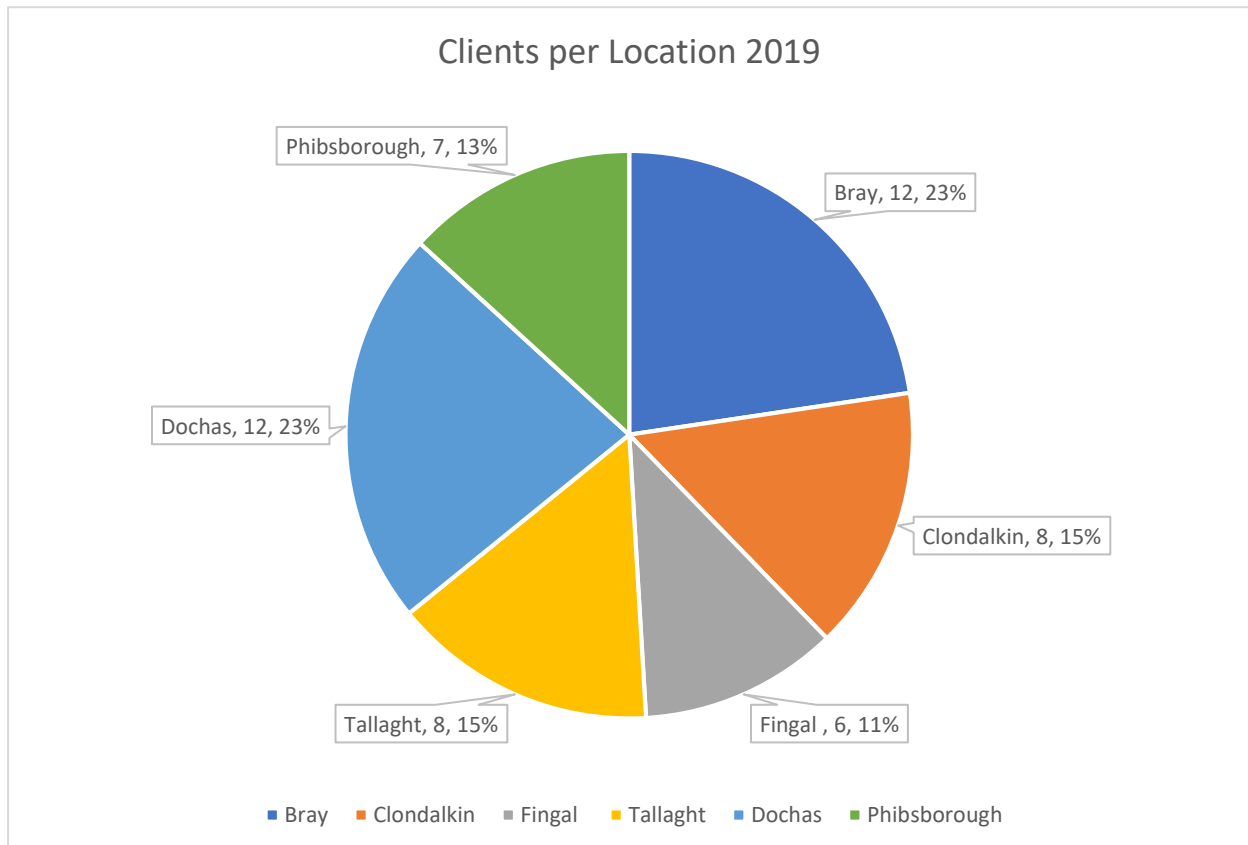
Client Hours by Location 2019



Total Number of Clients for 2019

We have seen 53 individual clients during 2019, in the six locations listed below.

Of the 53 clients, 5 were returning clients, though 2 of these were based in Dochas, indicating that they had returned to prison having been previously released.



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

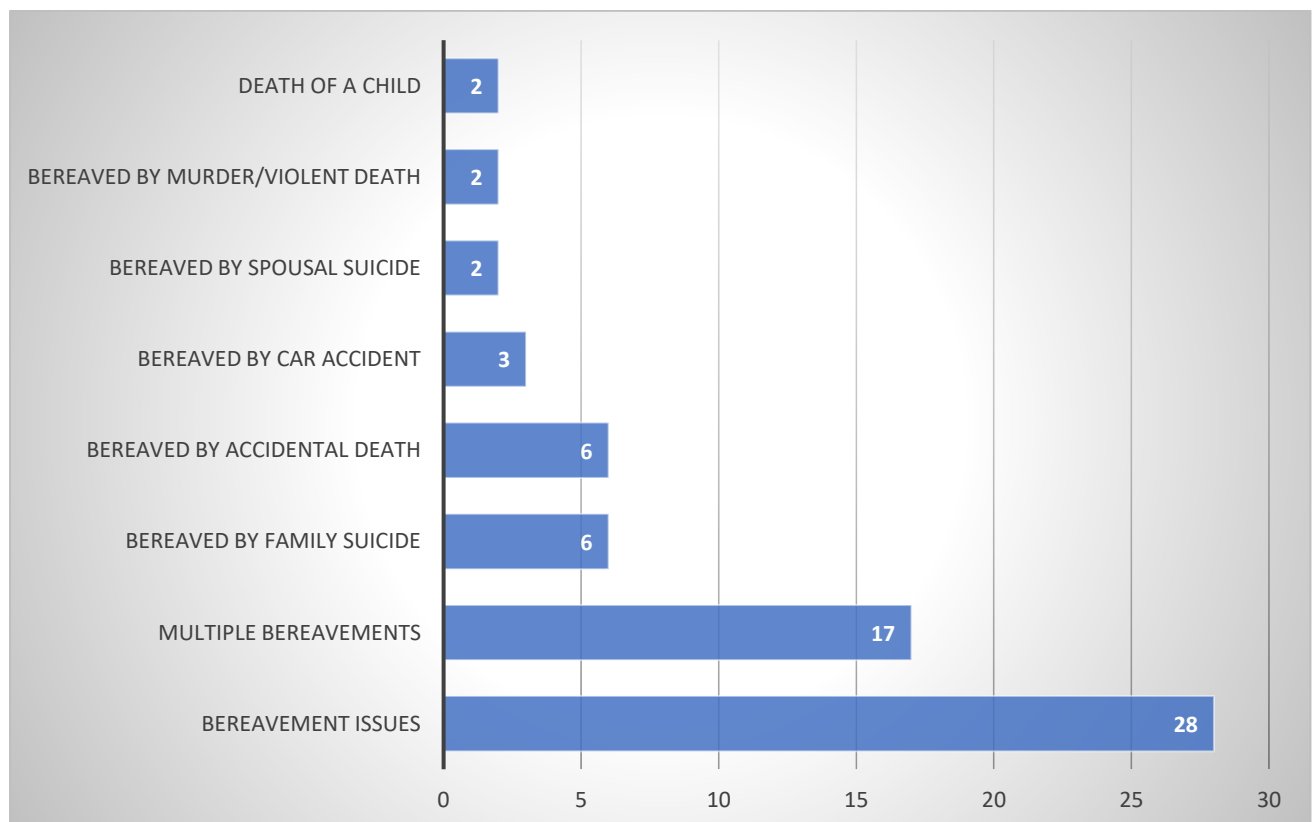
Bereavement 2019

Bereavement continues to be one of the biggest issues our clients deal with. During 2019 the following figures have been recorded

- 53% of all clients present with bereavement issues
- 32% of clients experienced multiple bereavements
- 11% were bereaved as a result of an accident of which 6% were fatal car crashes
- 11% of clients have been bereaved by suicide with 4% of these experiencing multiple suicides within their families and extended families
- 4% of clients lost their spouse to suicide
- 4% of clients were bereaved by murder
- 4% experienced the death of a young child

11% of clients were bereaved by suicide indicating the alarming rates of suicide within the community and the 4% of clients experiencing multiple family suicides correspondingly indicates the ripple effect and the increased risk factor for those bereaved by suicide.

Bereavement 2019



Mental Health & Related Issues 2019

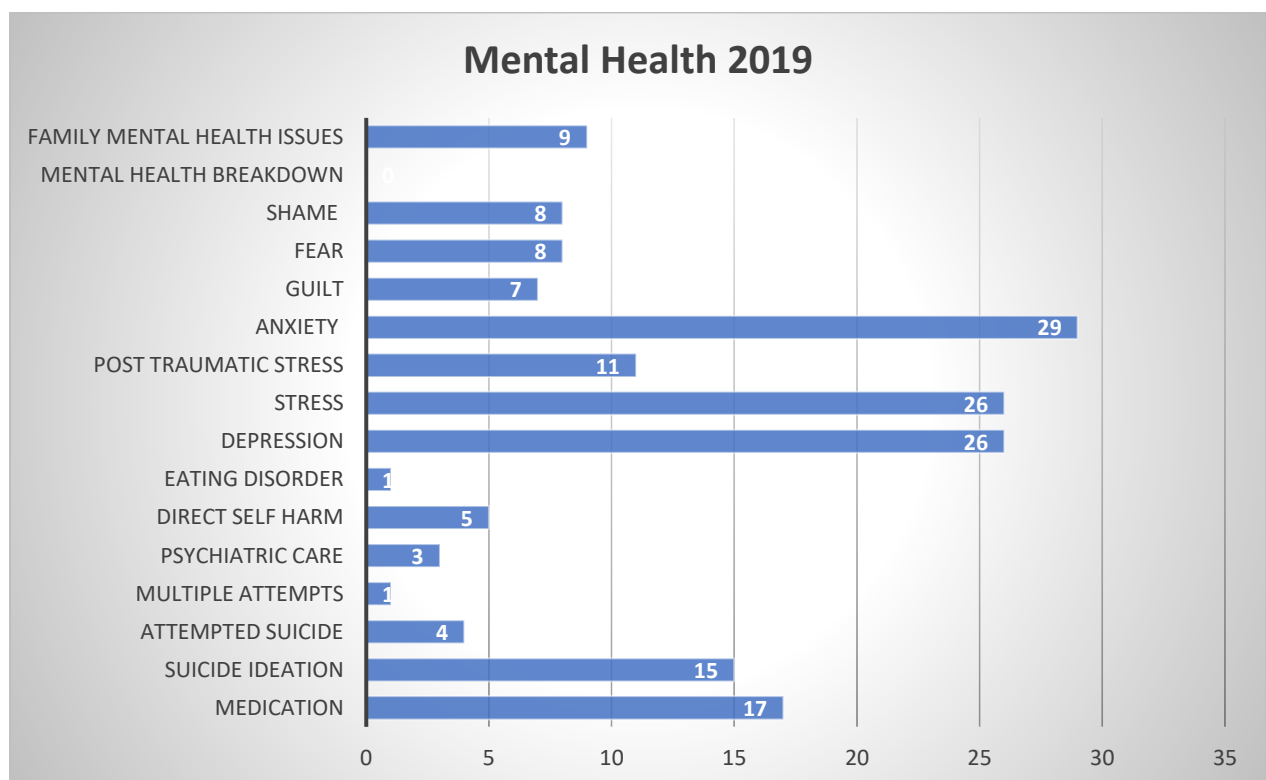
The majority of clients attending our service are facing very real struggles with their mental health.

Some worrying statistics here are the continuing trend that indicates that over half of clients are presenting with anxiety, stress and depression.

A further concern is the continuing trend in the number of clients presenting with suicide ideation and using psychotropic medication which is 1/3rd of all clients.

A further concerning statistic is the number of clients presenting with PTSD which represents over 1/5th of clients attending the service.

- 55% of clients experiencing consistent anxiety
- 49% of clients experiencing consistent stress
- 49% of clients suffering from/diagnosed with depression
- 21% or almost 1/4 of clients are living with post-traumatic stress syndrome
- 28% of clients experiencing suicide ideation
- 32% using psychotropic/anti-depressant/sleeping tablets or similar prescription medication
- 15% of our clients are experiencing fear in their day to day lives
- 15% of clients struggling with feelings of shame
- 13% of clients were troubled with feelings of guilt
- 8% of clients attempted suicide
- 9% of clients are engaged in direct self-harming behaviours



Contributory Factors 2019

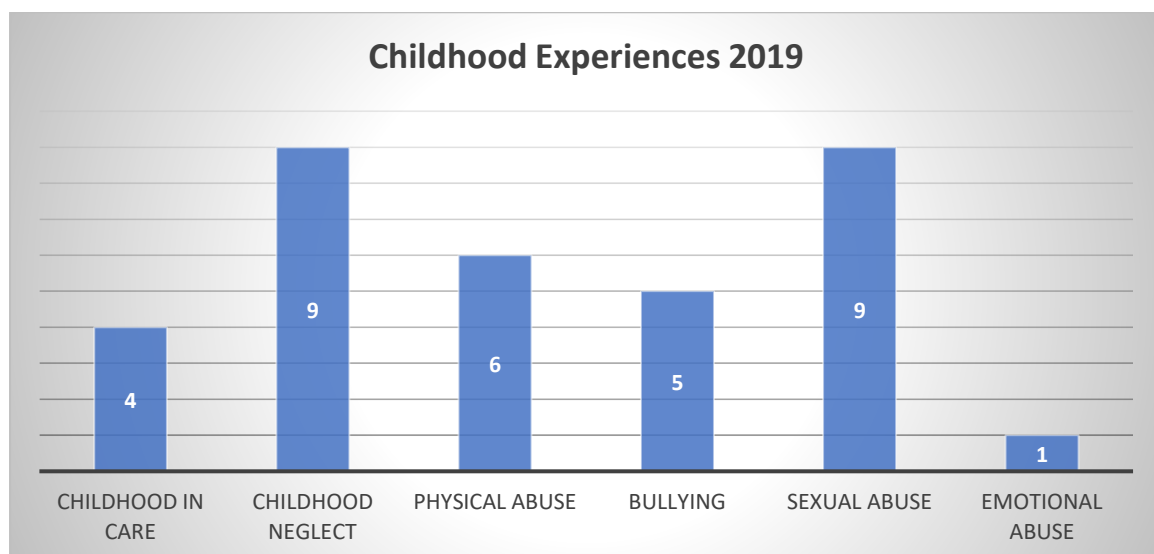
It is important to note before proceeding, that even though issues such as exclusion, discrimination and racism and the many issues they contribute to such as unemployment, social exclusion, low mortality etc. do not feature in the presenting issues of our clients, this is not to suggest that these are 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 2019. We have separated some of the more prevalent factors to be looked at individually.

Childhood Experiences 2019

Unresolved traumas from childhood can implicate client's 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:-

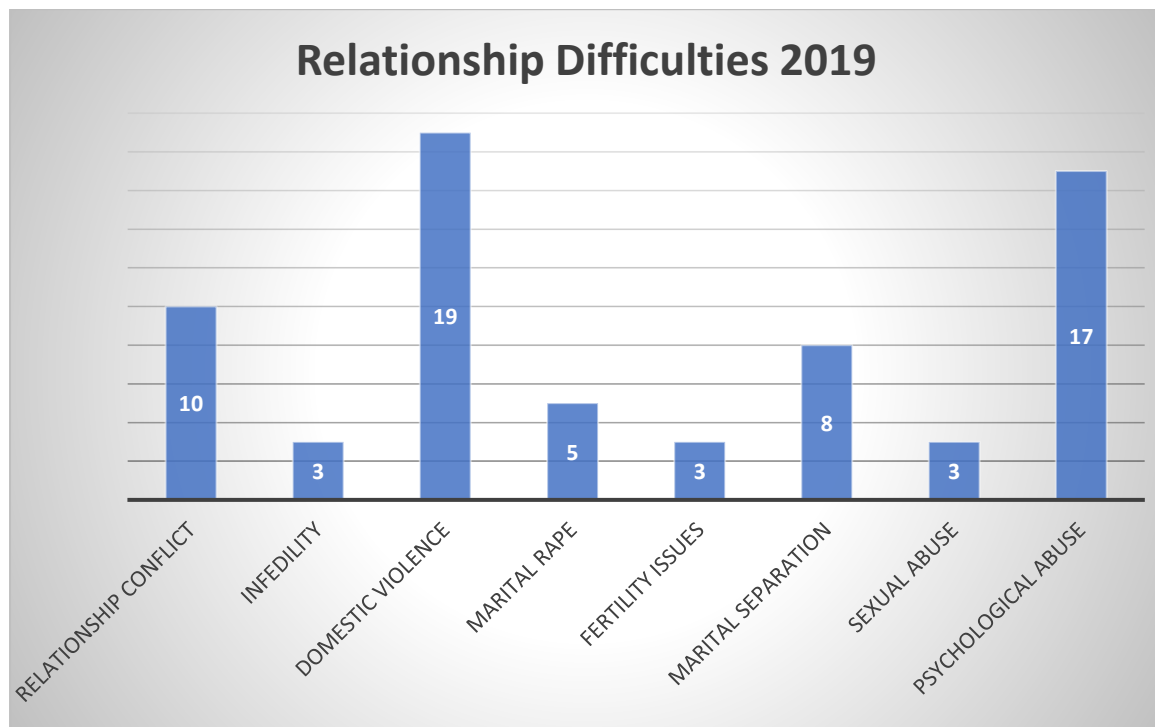
- 8% of clients spent some or all of their childhoods in care
- 19% of clients experienced neglect as a child
- 11% experienced physical abuse in childhood
- 9% of clients were bullied as children
- 2% clients experienced emotional or psychological abuse as children
- 17% of clients were sexually abused as children, representing almost one fifth of our clients. This is a high figure and would appear to be increasing (8% in 2017, 13% in 2018) which indicates the extent to which Traveller children were vulnerable in the past but similarly how adult Travellers are now finding the courage to seek help for these traumas. The inclusion of Traveller women in Dochas, who are a particularly vulnerable group, also elevates these statistics



Primary Relationships 2019

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

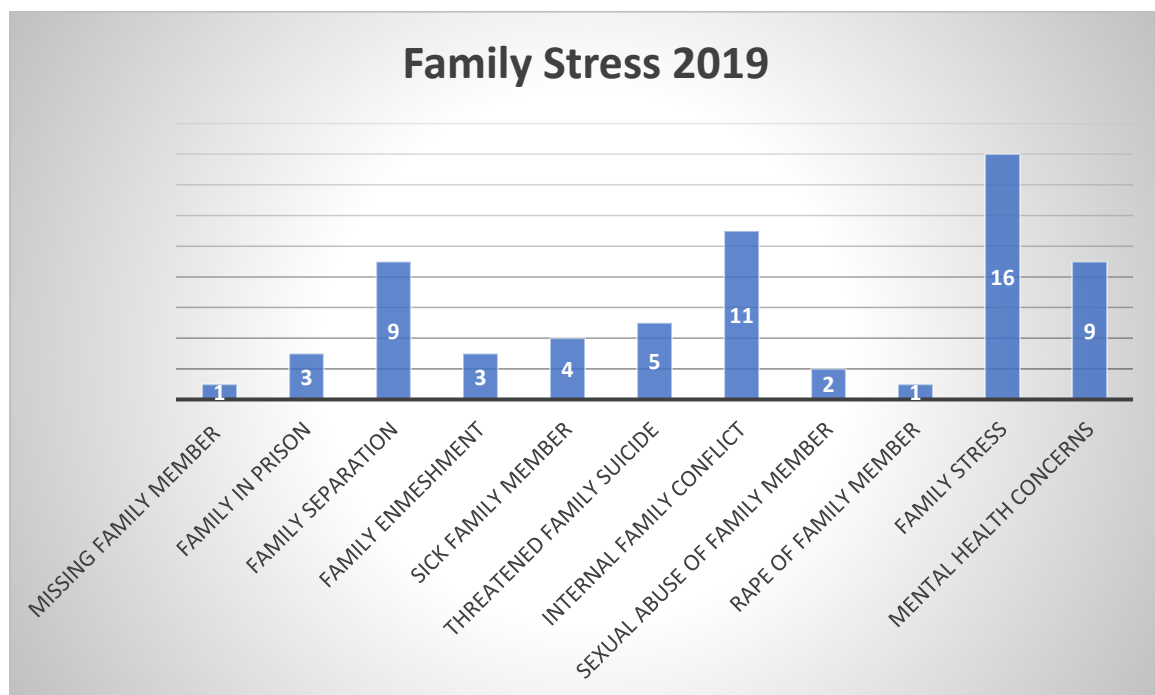
- 19% of clients were or had experienced conflict in their relationships
- 6% experienced infidelity and
- 36% of clients, are currently experiencing or have experienced domestic violence in their primary relationships.
- 9% had experienced marital/relationship rape or sexual abuse
- 6% struggled with fertility issues and
- 15% of clients were separated
- 32% of clients were or had experienced psychological abuse in their relationships



Family Concerns 2019

Concerns and worries about their families or issues that are impacting their families was another major concern for our clients during 2019. Considering the role that family and extended family play in the lives of Travellers, these concerns have significant implications for our clients.

- 2% of clients were dealing with the stress of a missing family member
- 6% of clients had a family member in prison
- 17% were separated from their families
- 6% of clients felt the negative impact of family enmeshment
- 8% were living with a sick family member
- 9% were living with the threat of suicide within their family
- 21% were experiencing internal family conflict
- 4% were dealing with the issue of sexual abuse of a family member
- 2% experienced the rape of a family member
- 30% of clients were experiencing high levels of stress due to family issues
- 17% of clients had on-going mental health concerns within the family

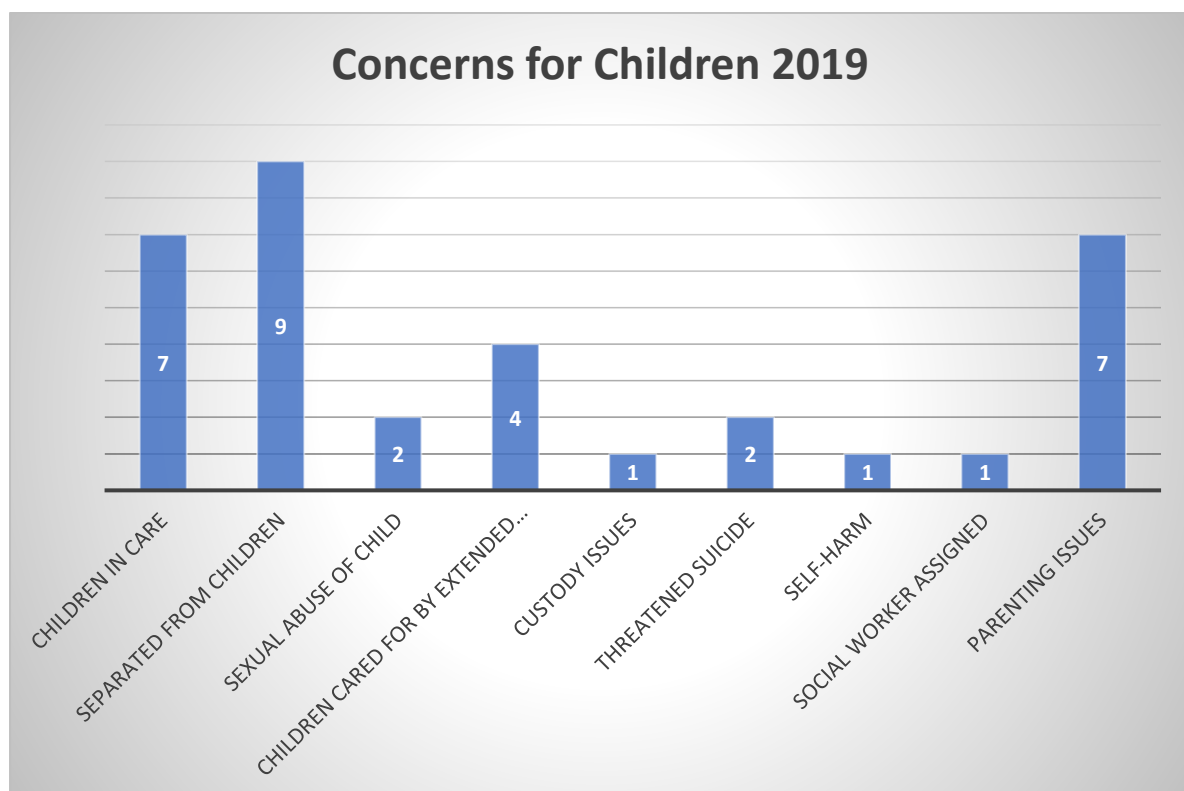


Concerns for Children 2019

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

- 13% of client's children were in care. This figure is elevated due to the high number of clients seen in Dochas, though there were a number of other clients, both men and women, not in Dochas, whose children were in care.
- 17% of clients were separated from their children. Again, the large volume of clients seen in Dochas explains this elevated figure though does not represent all clients separated from their children
- 4% of clients children had experienced sexual abuse
- 8% of client's children were being cared for by a family member
- 2% of clients were struggling with issues regarding custody of their children
- 4% of clients had children experiencing suicide ideation
- 2% of clients' children were engaging in direct self-harm
- 2% of clients' children had social workers assigned to them
- 13% of clients presented with parenting difficulties

Two new themes that have emerged during 2019 are the clients presenting with concerns regarding their children's suicide ideation (4%) and self-harming behaviours (2%).

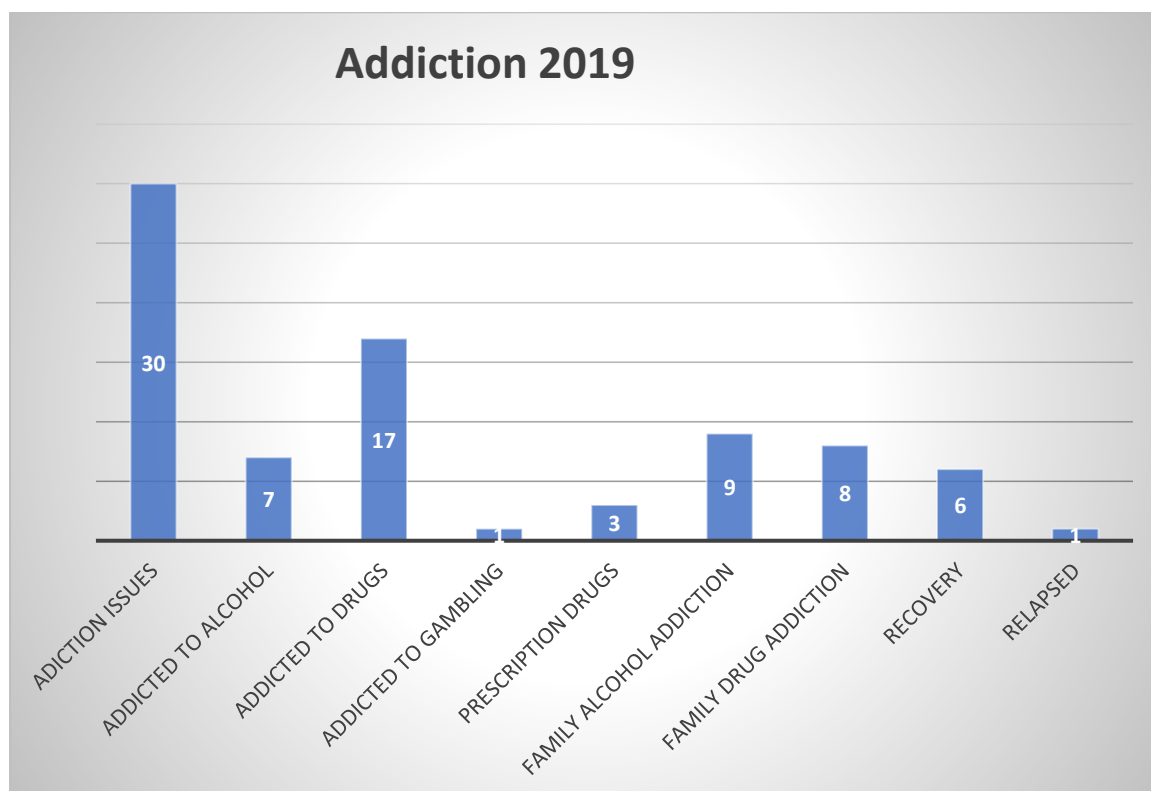


Addiction 2019

In previous years, we have included addiction under the heading of contributory factors, though considering the impact of addiction on our clients, with well over half of all clients during 2019 presenting with addiction issues, we now examine 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 condition affecting all of the family and for many Travellers, the extended family.

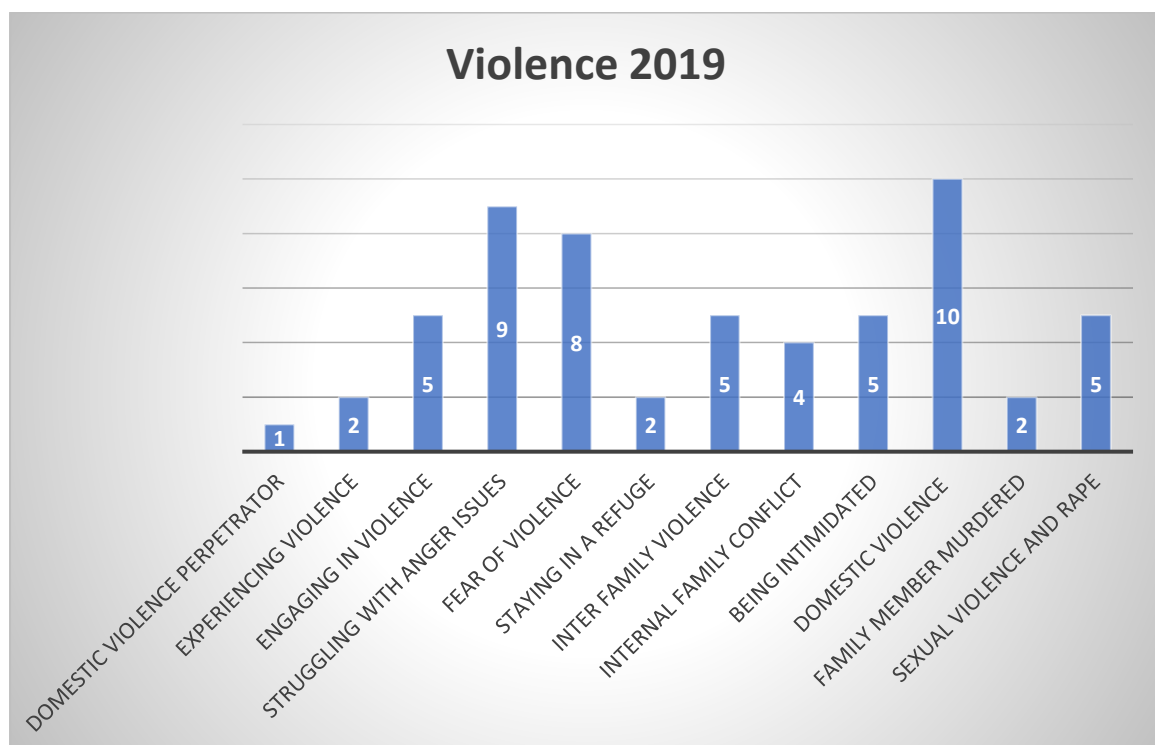
- 57% of clients presented with addiction issues. This referred to all forms of addiction, their own addiction issues as well as addiction in their families
- 13% of clients struggled with addiction to alcohol
- 32% struggled with drug addiction
- 2% were addicted to gambling
- 6% of clients presented with addiction to prescribed/over the counter medication
- 17% had family members addicted to alcohol
- 15% were impacted by drug addiction within their families
- 9% of clients were in recovery
- 2% of clients had relapsed



Violence 2019

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

- 2% of clients are perpetrators of domestic violence
- 4% of clients are currently experiencing violence in their lives
- 9% of clients are engaging in violent behaviour
- 17% of clients are struggling with anger and rage and their violent behaviours
- 15%, of our clients are living in fear of violence. This figure incorporates all forms of violence.
- 4% Staying in Refuge
- 9% 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 and engaged in within the community.
- 9% of clients are dealing with internal violence in their families and extended families
- 9% of clients are being intimidated. This intimidation includes domestic violence and inter-family violence.
- 19% of all clients presenting were or had experienced domestic violence. This figure similarly includes clients that grew up in families where domestic violence was an issue.
- 4% of clients have had a family member murdered
- 9% of clients have experienced sexual violence including rape either themselves or within their families

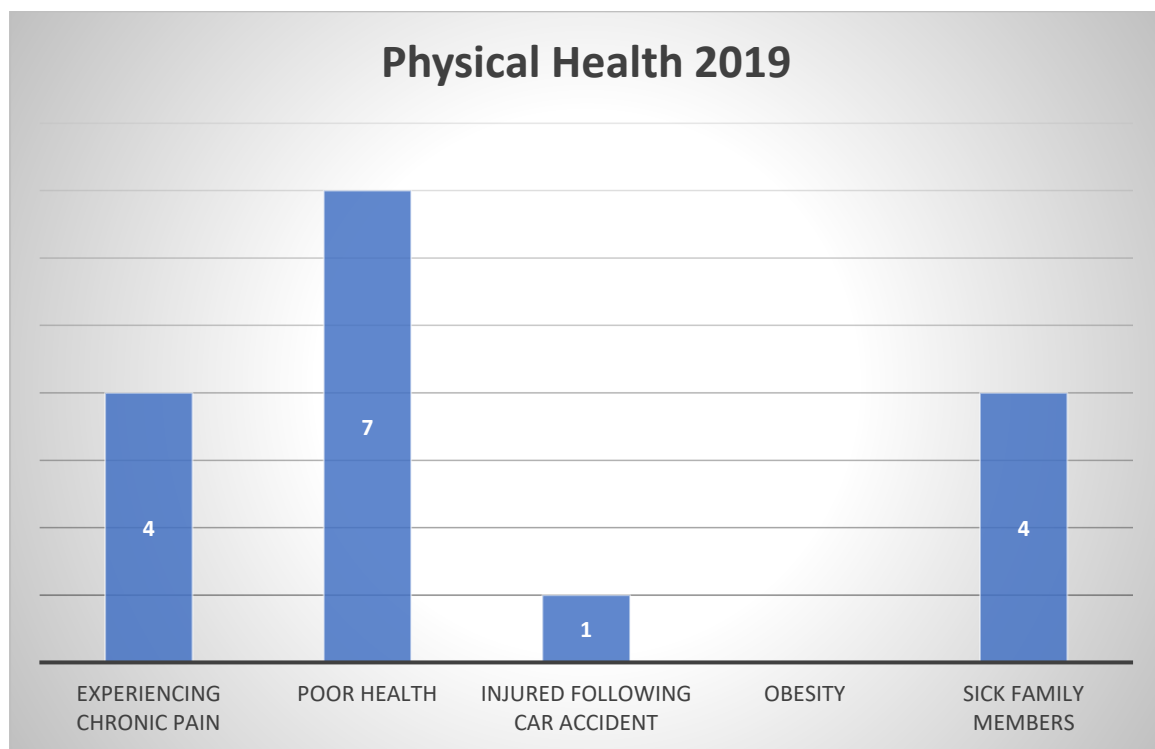


Physical Health 2019

A high percentage of clients presented with health issues. As health issues are a contributory factor in terms of mental health, we have included these separately. Our stats include those living with health conditions themselves and those living with family members with health concerns.

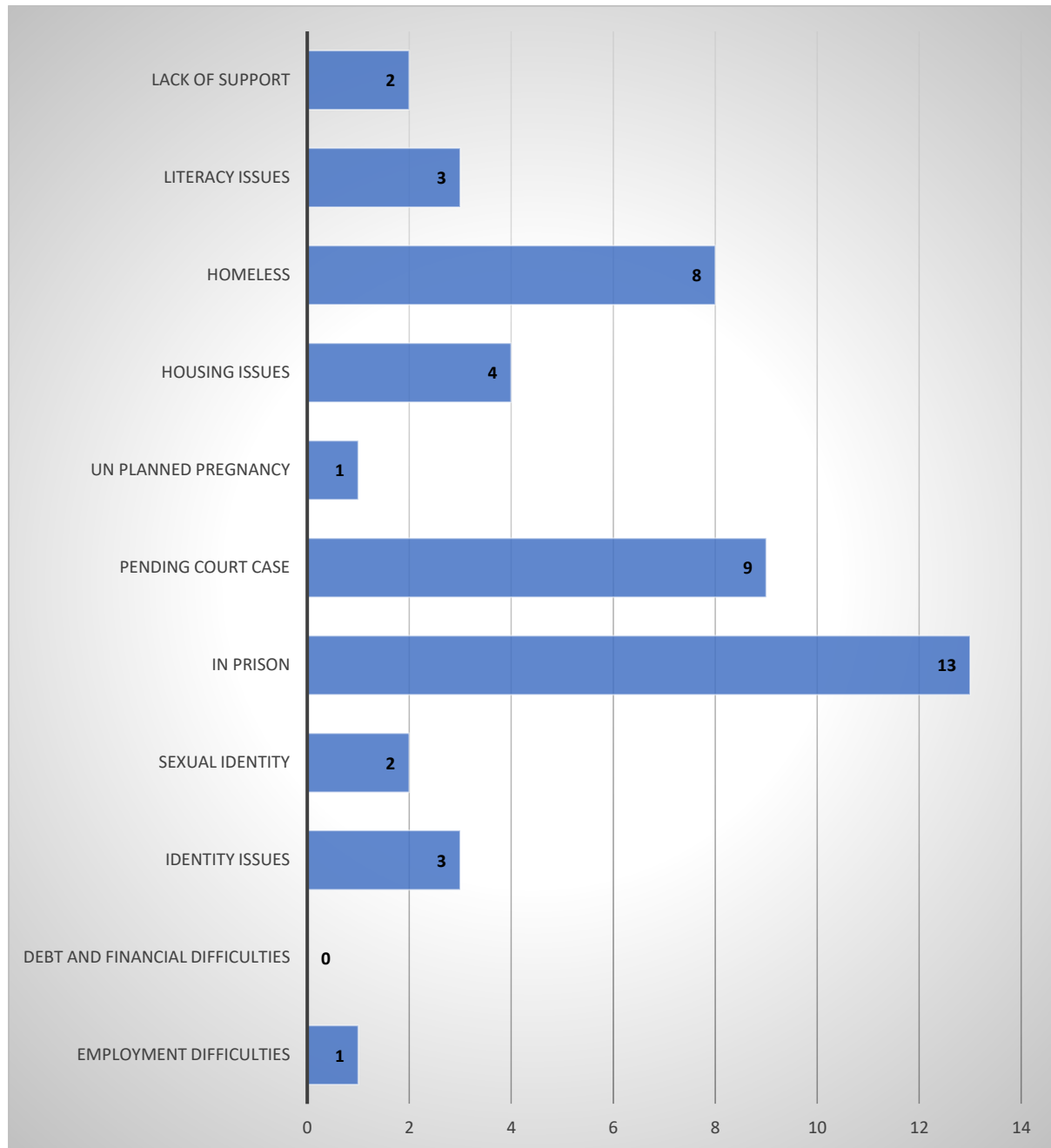
Poor physical health can have an impact on mental health and well-being, and it is for this reason that we have included this issue as a separate topic.

- 8% of clients were experiencing chronic pain
- 13% of all clients presented with physical health concerns during 2018
- 2% of clients were suffering as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident
- 2% of clients were struggling with obesity
- 9% of clients had family members with health problems



Other Contributing Factors 2019

Along with the issues addressed previously, the following are additional contributory factors that were impacting negatively on our clients in 2019.



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).

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 throughout 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 which is continuing to grow in tandem with the homelessness crisis within the wider community. 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.

The stress of court appearances is also an issue for clients but may be linked to the percentage of our clients who are part of the Dochas prison population though this figure is inclusive of clients outside the prison system also.

The issue of sexual identity is increasing in prevalence, which is welcome in terms of Travellers finding the courage to address issues of their own sexual identity or are being confronted by sexual identity issues within their families.

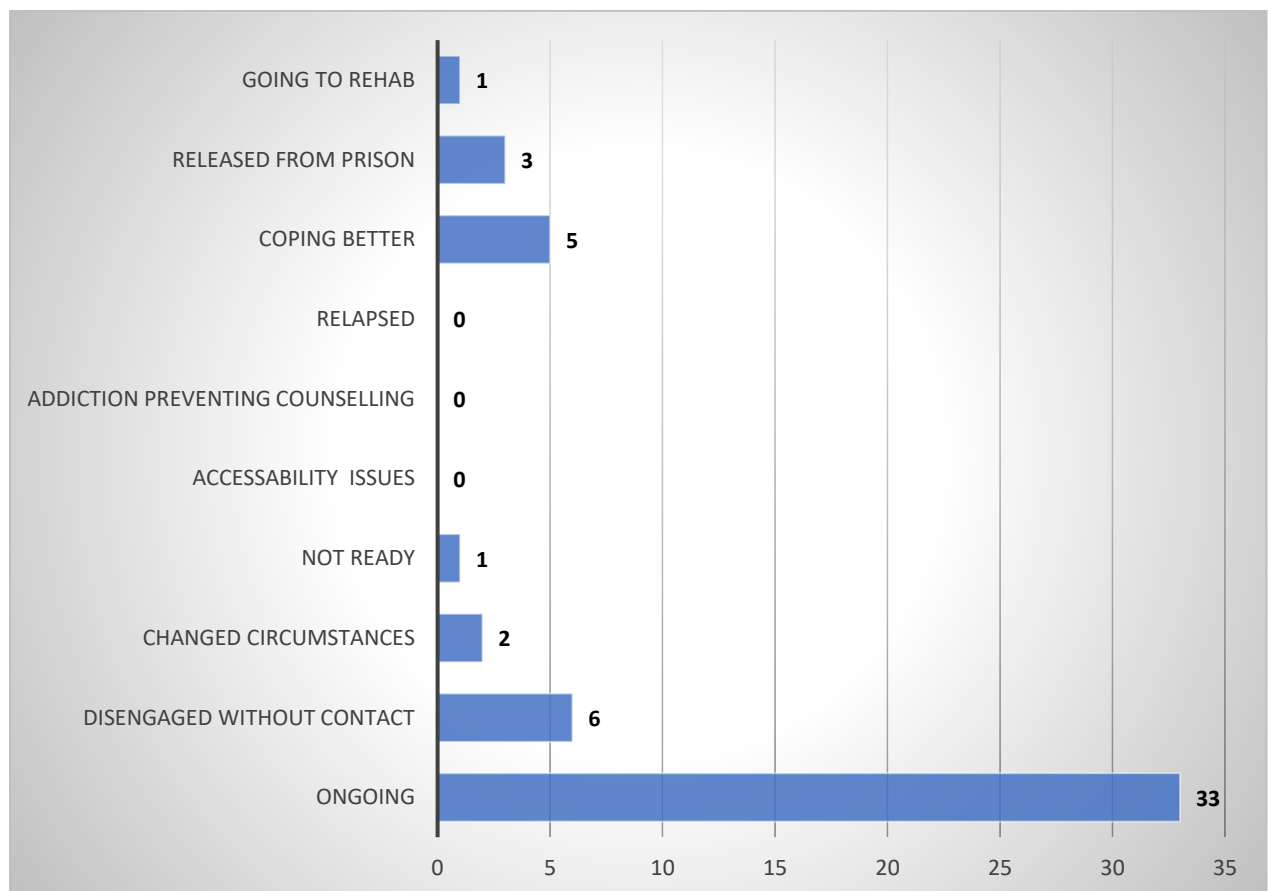
Other factors that were less prevalent though none-the-less very significant include identity issues, literacy issues, unplanned pregnancy and lack of support – which can be understood in terms of the changing demographics of Traveller regarding how they choose to live, with many younger Travellers opting for the private sector, thereby losing out on family and extended family support.

Outcomes for 2019

The following outcomes were recorded for clients for 2019 to date.

- 62% of clients who were attending the service in Jan 2019 are still attending the service
11% disengaged without further contact
- 4% stopped coming as they were no longer able to access the service due to a change in circumstances eg. Leaving prison, moving
- 2% were not ready to engage in the counselling process
- 9% of clients finished up and were feeling better and were coping better with their circumstances (eg left violent partner, addressing addiction in family)
- 2% of clients had gone into rehab
- 2% were caught up in addiction that was preventing therapeutic work
- 6% were released from prison
- 4% were referred to specialised services

Client Outcomes 2019

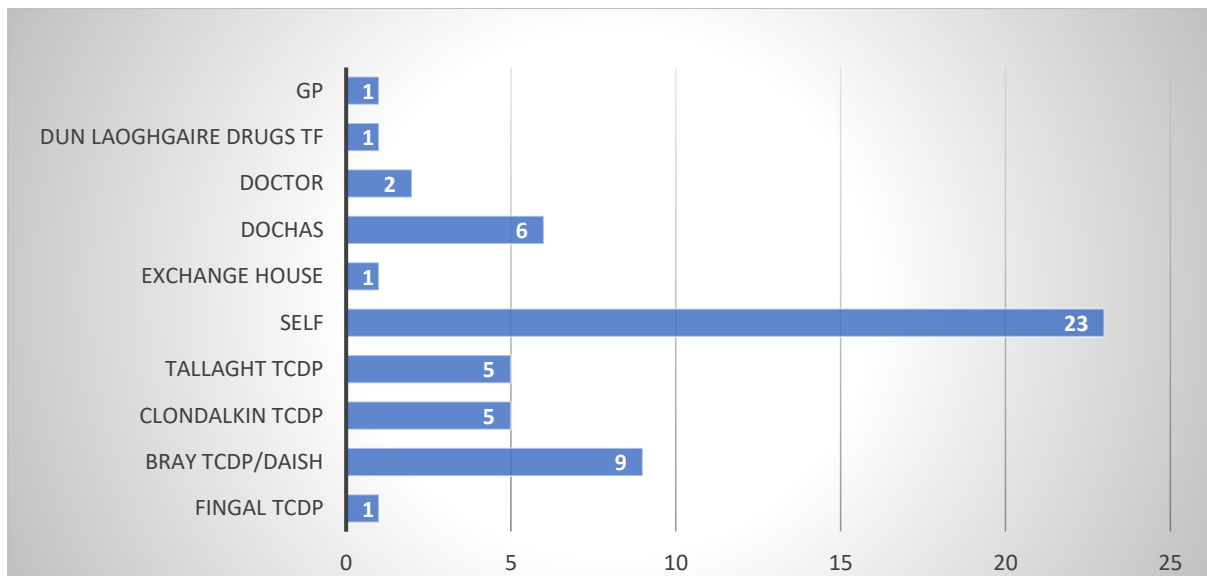


Referrals 2019

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.

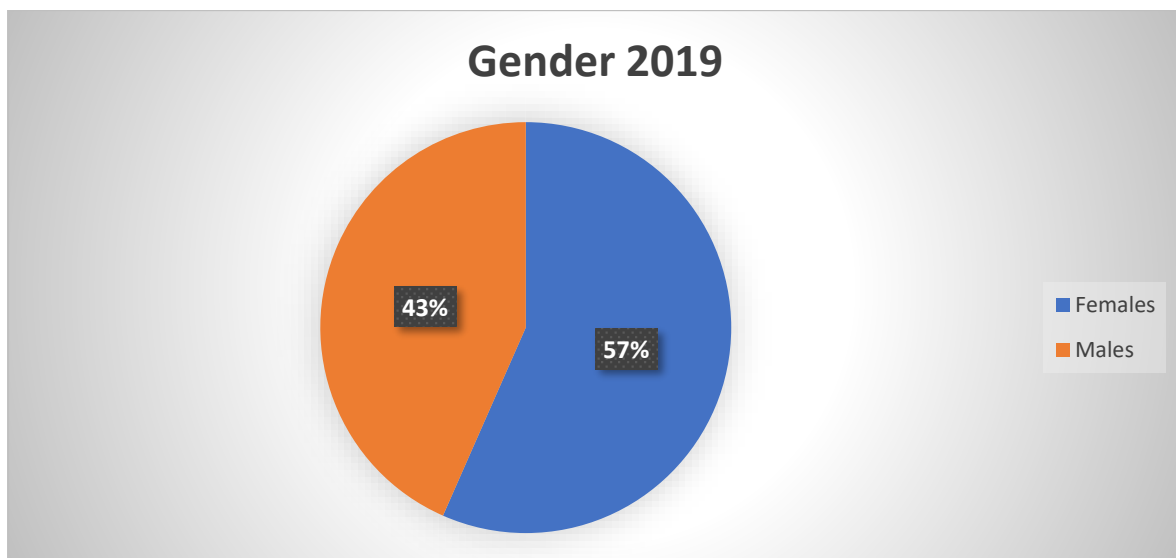
Referral Sources 2019



Client Profiles 2019

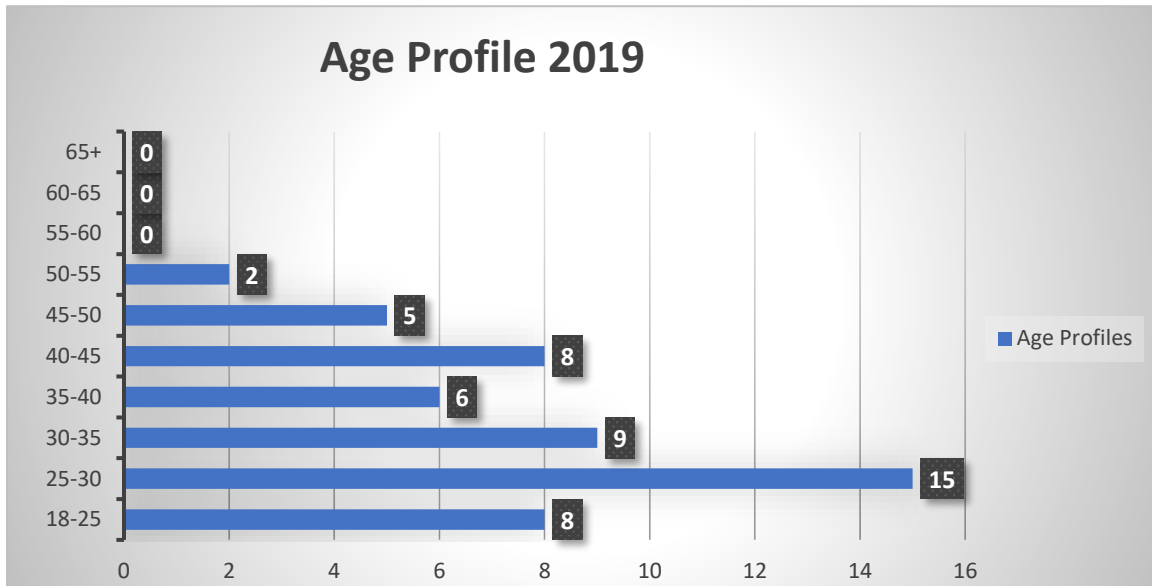
Gender

The gender profile for 2019 is in keeping with gender profiles in previous periods and showing a continued trend with an increase in men attending the service.



Age Profile 2019

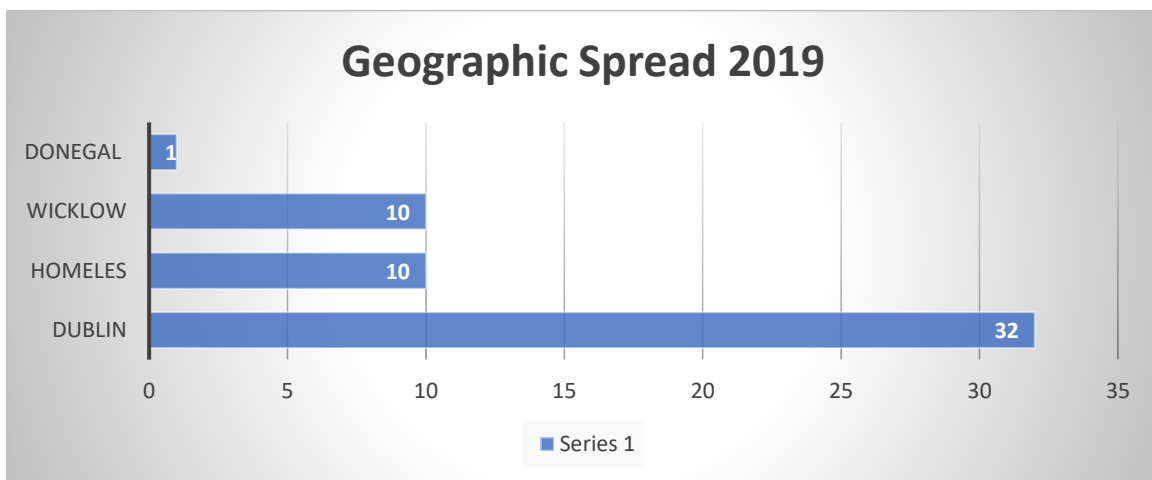
The figures below indicate that individuals aged between 25 – 30 represent our largest client group in terms of age ranges with fewer older Travellers attending for counselling. This statistic is consistent with other periods.



Geographic Spread 2019

The limited availability of our service is reflected in the statistics below. Clients being seen in Dochas prison are listed as hailing from Dublin, unless they refer to themselves as homeless. This is so that the inclusion of their home county won't distort the figures in terms of our geographic spread.

A worrying trend is the increasing figure for clients presenting as homeless which has increased from 14% in 2017, 17% in 2018 to 19% in 2019..



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 2019, though we are hopeful that our work in collaboration with the Traveller Mediation Services in 2019 along with our conference 'The Impact of Conflict on Traveller Mental Health" held in April 2019, will continue to 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 trends and changing patterns or emerging issues within the community, nothing definitive can be taken from these figures until year end.

Correspondingly, while they do represent in some respects the work we are doing, or more accurately 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.