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'Prison Is the Worst Place a Traveller Could Be': The Experiences of Irish Travellers in Prison in England and Wales

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Summary: Irish prisoners are the second most represented foreign national group in the prison system in England and Wales, and while no precise statistics are available, it is estimated that Irish Travellers make up a considerable percentage of the prisoners who identify as Irish. It has been said that Irish Travellers suffer from unequal hardship in prison and this has been linked with racism and discrimination from prison staff and other prisoners. This paper draws on a series of semi-structured interviews undertaken with ex-prisoners from Traveller and non-Traveller backgrounds (*n* = 37) as part of the author's doctoral research. It considers more specifically the experiences of those who identified as being Irish Travellers (*n* = 8), with participants regularly reporting name calling, bullying and racism by both prisoners and prison staff. The paper also reflects on a perceived lack of Traveller engagement with education in the prison system and argues that a lack of literacy has resulted in Irish Travellers being in a prison within a prison.

Keywords: Irish Traveller, prison, racism, bullying, Irish prisoners abroad.

Introduction

Irish Travellers are a community of people 'identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland' (s. 2.1 Equal Status Act, 2000). They have been a part of both Irish and British society for centuries (Power, 2003, 2004; Linehan *et al.*, 2002; Cemlyn, 2008; Van Hout and Stanewicz, 2012; James, 2007) and in the UK they are recognised as being a distinct ethnic group under the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended in 2000), the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. It was not, however, until March 2011 that Irish Travellers were categorised as a distinct ethnic

group in the UK National Census. Prior to this they were considered invisible in official statistics (Tilki *et al.*, 2009) and the 2011 Census showed that there were approximately 56,100 who identified themselves as an Irish Traveller or a Gypsy. This figure is likely to be an underestimate, as many Travellers may not complete a Census form. The Traveller Movement (2013) has estimated a population of around 120,000 Irish Travellers, while the Council of Europe (2012) has estimated a population of between 150,000 and 300,000 in the UK.

At this point it is important to note that Irish Travellers are distinct from members of the Roma community, as well as those who classify themselves as Gypsies. This was highlighted by van Cleemput (2010: 316), who noted that various ethnic minority groups in the UK, including English, Welsh and Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsy Travellers and Roma, all of whom may hail from from different countries, 'have been identified – and identified themselves – as having different languages, beliefs and certain different cultural traditions'. A wide range of studies have considered the differences between these groups (Fraser, 1992; Power, 2004; Simhandal, 2006; Department for Schools, Children and Families, 2010; Cromarty *et al.*, 2018). Despite the fact that Irish Travellers are a distinct, homogeneous group, there is little to suggest that the public, the media or even the political establishment are informed of such differences, and Irish Travellers are invariably grouped under the generic heading of Gypsy, Roma or Traveller.

In England and Wales, the experiences of Irish Travellers in prison, and of Irish prisoners in general, are under-researched (MacGabhann, 2011; Gavin, 2014). There are, however, some notable exceptions to this. MacGabhann (2011, 2013, 2015) has made a substantial contribution to the research on Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales, and other contributions such as those by Power (2003), Cemlyn *et al.* (2011) and Cottrell-Boyce (2014) should not be overlooked. Overall, however, there is a lack of research on Irish Travellers in prison. This is somewhat surprising as Irish Travellers are recognised as being a distinct ethnic group, and research on racial and ethnic minorities in the prison system in England and Wales is not uncommon. Furthermore, Irish prisoners in England and Wales more generally have always been an under-researched group, and have usually been ignored in the context of studies of ethnic minorities and the criminal justice system (Hickman and Walter, 1997; Cheney, 1993). Irish prisoners were once referred to as the 'invisible minority' (Murphy 1994: 2) and Gavin (2018) claims that research into Irish prisoners' experiences remains so underdeveloped that such a description retains its accuracy in the prison system of England and

Wales. This is also surprising, as the Irish are now the second most repre-sented foreign nationality in the prison system after the Polish. On 31 March 2017 the prison population in England and Wales stood at 84,968. Of this figure there were 773 prisoners whose nationality was recorded as Irish.

This paper considers the experiences of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales. Its data derive from a wider study undertaken as part of the author's doctoral research, which examined the lived experiences of Irish prisoners in England and Wales in the context of their mental health (Gavin, 2018). Participants were ex-prisoners who took part in a semi-structured interview. While Irish Traveller participants did not want to discuss aspects of their mental health, they did describe, at length, a series of issues that may have impacted on their mental health. These included bullying, racism and discrimination.

This paper begins by reviewing some of the available literature on Irish Travellers in Britain. It considers a range of problems that this group faces inside and outside of prison, such as literacy and mental health problems, as well as racism and discrimination. It then presents the findings of the research, which focuses on the views of Irish Traveller ex-prisoners in England and Wales.

The Irish Traveller community

Irish Travellers present with a very distinctive way of life, which is often manifested in their values, culture and traditions, including nomadism, the centrality of the extended family, their own language, and the entrepreneurial nature of their economy (Power, 2004). These have endured into the 21st century, 'with many members of Irish Traveller communities continuing to prefer a nomadic, self-employed way of life within a cohesive extended family structure, in spite of the hostility often exhibited towards them in the media and in government' (MacGabhann, 2011: 10). The nomadic rights of Irish Travellers, however, 'been severely curtailed by criminal justice legislation, commodification of marginal land, and settled people's resistance to their nomadic way of life. Conflict has arisen between urban settled denizens, municipal authorities, police forces, and Irish Travellers over modes of living and access to scarce resources' (Power, 2004: 5). Such curtailment, com-modification and conflict may explain to some degree why Irish Traveller life circumstances are associated with many risk factors, including social exclusion, substance abuse, mental ill-health, unemployment, racism and a lack of education (van Hout, 2010; Health Intelligence, 2017; Yin-Har Lau and

Ridge, 2011; Cromarty *et al.*, 2018). All of these factors relate closely to the additional risk of an individual being involved, at some level, with the criminal justice system, and it can be argued they contribute to the over-representation of Travellers in the criminal justice system, both in Ireland and in England and Wales (Costello, 2014; MacGabhann, 2011, 2013; Gavin, 2014).

Irish Travellers have suffered from social exclusion, racism and discrimination based on their ethnicity for centuries (Power, 2003, 2004; Linehan *et al.*, 2002; Cemlyn, 2008; Van Hout and Stanewicz, 2012; James, 2007), and this has come from local communities, the political establishment and the media. A high-profile example of this in England was in the case of *R v Martin* (2001) (EWCA Crim. 2245), where the defendant was convicted of murdering a 16-year-old Irish Traveller who had broken into his home. During the trial the British media created space for the expression of the view that the presence of Travellers was simply incompatible with life in rural England (Vanderbeck, 2003). Martin was portrayed as the true victim who was, in the words of one Member of Parliament, merely defending his home (Vanderbeck, 2003). Van Cleemput (2010) has highlighted other examples of racism towards Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England and Wales, including the burning of an effigy of a Gypsy caravan with pictures of the family occupants in the window, and the murder of a 15-year-old Irish Traveller boy in what the police described as a racist incident. Racist attitudes have also presented in the Metropolitan Police in London, where there has been a recent discovery of an online chat forum used by police officers to post insults aimed at Gypsies (Bowcott, 2017).

Discriminatory attitudes can be harmful to a person's mental health (Gordon, 2016) and research conducted into the mental health of Irish Travellers in Ireland (McGorrian *et al.*, 2013) reported a rate of frequent mental distress of 12.9%. This was more than 2.5 times that reported in a population sample of the general public. The study identified discrimination as a strong predictor of frequent mental distress. The evidence points to a high incidence of depression and anxiety, as well as the existence of great stigma around mental illness, within the Travelling community. Research has also found that Irish Traveller women in particular rely on drug treatments rather than therapies that might address the causes of their illness, and there are particular concerns about suicide within the wider Travelling community (Tilki *et al.*, 2009). In 2010 The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study revealed that the suicide rate among Travellers was six times that of the general population in Ireland and accounted for 11% of all Irish Traveller deaths. Suicide for

Traveller men was found to be seven times the rate of the general population, and was most prevalent in men aged 15–25. The rate of suicide for Irish Traveller women was found to be five times higher than the general population. The study found that 62.7% of Irish Traveller women and 59.4% of Irish Traveller men said that their mental health was not good for at least one day in the previous 30, and while mental health services were available, they were often perceived as inadequate and inappropriate (Quirke, 2012).

Substance abuse is an increasing problem within the Irish Travelling community. Traveller culture traditionally offered resilience and protection from substance abuse through strong family networks and an anti-drug attitude (van Hout, 2010). However, these support systems have been eroded over the years, resulting in increasing levels of drug and alcohol abuse within the Travelling community (Quirke, 2012). Irish Traveller men report higher levels of alcohol and drug use than women; Traveller women, both young and old, present with high levels of prescription medication abuse. In terms of seeking counselling and treatment for substance abuse problems, Travellers are under-represented (van Hout, 2011). The numbers presenting to services for treatment for alcohol abuse are far higher than for drug abuse, and research (van Hout, 2010) has noted that reasons for alcohol abuse being significant in the Traveling community include using it to cope with problems, escaping from alienation, and, wanting to be part of the community they live in. Furthermore, there is an increasing level of tolerance of alcoholism and the problems it brings, so much so that it is now considered a normal part of Irish Traveller culture (van Hout, 2010).

The educational attainment of Irish Travellers is generally low, and traditionally, Travellers have had a poor engagement with education (MacGabhann, 2011, 2015; Cottrell-Boyce, 2014). In the UK, census data from 2014 showed that over 60% of Gypsy and Irish Travellers aged over 16 had no educational qualifications, compared to 23% for the rest of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Cottrell-Boyce (2014) found that 25% of Gypsy and Irish Traveller children in the UK were not enrolled in education, while a local survey in Dorset found that 62% of adult Irish Travellers and Gypsies in the region were illiterate (Friends, Families and Travellers, 2007, as cited in Cottrell-Boyce, 2014). MacGabhann (2011: 33) noted that Irish Travellers come 'from a background where an opportunity to gain literacy skills as children have been restricted'. Despite these restrictions, studies indicate that the attitudes of Irish Traveller parents and pupils to primary education are predominantly positive (Derrington and Kendall, 2007; Wilkin

et al., 2009). Research undertaken in Wales found that Gypsy and Irish Traveller parents expressed a desire for their children to obtain a basic level of numeracy and literacy (Welsh Government, 2008). Research has, however, found a number of factors associated with poor Traveller educational engagement, including negative parental attitudes about education, weak affiliation with mainstream culture, a history of poor school attendance, older siblings with unhappy experiences in secondary school and predetermined intentions to leave school early (Derrington and Kendall, 2003). These factors often result in literacy problems.

Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales

There are no definitive figures for the Irish Traveller prisoner population (MacGabhann, 2011, 2013). There are several reasons for this. First of all, the W3 form, which allows for Travellers to self-identify as Travellers at prison reception, was introduced only in 2011. Irish Travellers serving sentences prior to its introduction may not have had the opportunity to identify themselves as Travellers. Secondly, many Travellers may choose not to identify as Travellers when they enter prison, out of fear of bullying and racism from prison officers and from other prisoners. Information obtained through the Freedom of Information process revealed that on 30 June 2018, a total of 1443 prisoners in all prison establishments (including Immigration Removal Centres operated by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) in England and Wales self-identified as either Gypsy or Irish Traveller (under the code 'W3'). This included those held on remand, those serving a sentence and non-criminal prisoners. There are an additional 489 prisoners whose ethnicity was either not stated or not recorded, some of whom may also identify as being Gypsy or Irish Traveller. Furthermore, examination of the data for 30 June 2018 showed that there are 13 prisoners classified under the old 'W8' form, which is now a superseded code formerly used to record those identifying as Gypsy or Irish Traveller (Freedom of Information Act Request 1810120004[1]).

The problem, however, lies with the single unitary classification of Irish Traveller and Gypsy. To compound this problem, Irish Travellers are some-times codified under the abbreviation GRT – Gypsy, Roma or Traveller – for counting purposes. For example, research by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) found that as many as 5% of prisoners in male Category B prisons, and 7% of prisoners in local female prisons, in England and Wales are

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[1]   https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/525853/response/1251633/attach/5/FOI%20181010 2004% 20reply.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

of a GRT background. As previously stated, Irish Travellers are a distinct, homogeneous group when compared with Roma and Gypsies, and these groups present with wide-ranging differences. Research, therefore, suggests that Irish Travellers are overrepresented and undercounted in the prison system (MacGabhann, 2011, 2013; Gavin, 2014). This should come as no surprise, as there is widespread criminological and statistical evidence that members of racial and ethnic minorities are both over-policed and under-protected by the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Bowling, 1999; Bowling and Phillips, 2002, 2007; Rowe, 2004, 2007).

In 2011 the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain published *Voices Unheard: A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison*, which examined the position of Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales (MacGabhann, 2011). The research was commissioned in response to the needs of the Travelling community, as identified by two of the Chaplaincy's projects: The Travellers' Project and the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas. The Travellers' Project advocates for the rights of Irish Travellers in prison, supports the educational needs of Irish Travellers to improve their situation in prison, campaigns on issues affecting them such as discrimination, planning law and site provisions, and communicates its recommendations to the authorities through research based on reason. The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas was established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1985 in response to concerns regarding the number of Irish men and women in UK prisons. In a research study with 296 participants, MacGabhann (2011) identified a wide range of issues affecting Irish Traveller prisoners including literacy, education, physical and mental health, family contact and resettlement.

MacGabhann (2011: 84) found that Irish Travellers suffer unequal hardship in prison because 'poor levels of literacy, mental illness, limited access to services, discrimination, and prejudicial licence conditions for release, dis-proportionately affect Traveller prisoners'. They are entering prison with a very low level of educational attainment, and over 50% of Irish Travellers in prison had serious literacy problems. However, these are likely to be underrepresentations given the reluctance to report such problems. 25.5% of Travellers were reported as having learning difficulties and 59.3% were in need of some form of basic educational intervention. A basic lack of literacy may result in a wide range of problems for Travellers in the prison system. For example, an inability to read may act as a barrier to information, entitlements and education, and may result in feelings of low self-esteem. It may also result in a lack of availability of treatment options or rehabilitative services, or

as a barrier to entitlements such as applying for temporary release. Further research by MacGabhann (2015), which examined the educational attainment of Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales, found that that 68% of respondents (*n* = 61) either did not attend school or left school at or before the age of 14. Participants in that research spoke positively about the education they received in prison; for many it was the first time that they had access to a stable learning environment. Prison education could therefore offer 'a golden opportunity for many Traveller prisoners, if the Literacy and Numeracy classes are pitched at an appropriate level' (MacGabhann, 2015: 12).

Bullying of Irish Travellers has been widely reported in research examining their experiences in prison both in Ireland (Costello, 2014) and in England and Wales (MacGabhann, 2011). This was highlighted by research undertaken by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2015, 4):

> Bullying is an issue that came up in a number of our investigations into self-inflicted deaths of Travellers. Bullying in prison has been identified as increasing the risk of suicide and self-harm in a number of previous PPO publications. Discrimination towards Travellers is still commonly experienced in the community and this can manifest itself in prison as threatening behaviour, intimidation or bullying.

Research by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) raised concerns over safety, behaviour management and mental health problems. Gypsy, Roma or Travellers were more likely to report having problems on arrival in prison, such as mental health problems, problems contacting family and money worries, than other prisoners. Bullying was also found to be an issue, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) found that when compared with the general prison population, members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups were more likely to report that they felt unsafe at the establishment at some point (36% compared with 17%); more likely to report that they had been bullied or victimised by another young person or group of young people (39% compared with 13%); and less likely to think that staff would take them seriously if they did report being bullied or victimised (56% compared with 82%). Bullying is a behaviour that occurs among all types of prisoners – men, women, juvenile, young and adult offenders – and inter-prisoner bullying is seen as commonplace in the prison environment (Ireland, 2002). It is, however, possible that the prison itself promotes a bullying culture.

Being on the receiving end of such behaviour, from other prisoners and from prison officers, can have a detrimental impact on one's mental health. Victims of bullying can experience 'fear and tension, isolation, depression, injuries, debt, difficulty in settling and making use of facilities, material deprivation and illness. Some victims may request to be segregated from other prisoners for their own protection, they may abscond or escape, and in some instances self-injure or commit suicide' (Ireland, 2002: 130). MacGabhann's 2011 study found that 26.1% of Irish Traveller prisoners were suffering from one or more mental illnesses, and 64.7% of female Traveller prisoners were suffering from a mental illness. Suicide and self-harm among the Irish Traveller prisoner population was highlighted as a cause of great concern and Travellers are significantly overrepresented in prison suicides compared to the general prisoner population.

This study

Ex-prisoners are considered to be a hard-to-reach group for the purposes of research (Hartfree *et al.*, 2008), as are Irish Travellers (Deakin and Spencer, 2011). Thus, trying to get Irish Traveller ex-prisoner participants was doubly difficult. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants with the help of charities and advocacy groups that worked with Irish ex-prisoners in Britain. This involves identifying and selecting participants who have a good knowledge or understanding about an issue or who have experience with the issue being researched (Creswell and Plano-Clarke, 2011). Prior to the commencement of the research, ethical approval was sought and approved by the relevant ethics committees.

The overall research sample (*n* = 37) was made up of 29 Irish non-Travellers and eight Irish Travellers. Of the eight Travellers, 50% classified themselves as first-generation Irish and 50% second-generation Irish. 88% (seven) were male and 12% (one) was female. 38% (three) were born on the island of Ireland and 63% (five) were born in England, Wales or Scotland. 25% (two) were aged 18–23, 50% (four) were 24–29, 13% (one) was 30–34 and 13% (one) was 35–39. 88% (7) stated that their status as an Irish Traveller was not recognised at prison reception.

The format chosen for this research was that of semi-structured interviews with an informant-led interview style. Respondent-led interviews allow the interviewer to remain in control throughout the process, while informant-led interviews are concerned with 'the interviewee's perceptions with a particular

situation or context' (Robson, 1995: 231). Non-directive probing questions were used to encourage and motivate respondents to provide clarifying information without influencing their answers. Such an approach is designed to be neutral in order to avoid increasing the probability that any specific type of answer is encouraged or discouraged from respondents. Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview notes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Caulfield and Hill, 2014).

The research findings in this paper are based primarily on the interviews conducted with eight Irish Travellers, therefore it must be acknowledged that this small sample size is a major limitation of the study. Although a rich narrative was obtained through the interview process, the small sample size raises questions over whether the views expressed in this paper are representative of the views of all Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales. It is, however, worth noting that many of the non-Traveller participants in this research confirmed much of what was alleged by Irish Travellers when discussing racism, bullying and discrimination.

Findings and discussion

Irish Travellers claimed that they suffered from racism, discrimination and bullying from both prison staff and other prisoners. Allegations of racism and discrimination were made against prison officers and other prisoners. Comments included:

> There is a lot of racism and discrimination against us in prison. We get called pikey which is very disrespectful to our culture … Prison is the worst place a Traveller could be. (Second-generation Irish; Irish Traveller; Male; 30–34)

> There were degrading comments inside from officers and other inmates. One time I was listening to some Irish music in my cell. The officers came in and smashed up all my tapes and tore up family pictures I had. This happened when I was in a single cell and when I was sharing they would tell the other fella to get out so there were no witnesses. I was singled out 'cos I was Irish and because I was a Traveller. No doubt about it. (First-generation Irish; Irish Traveller; Male; 35–39)

Experiences of this nature mirror the findings of previous studies of the experiences of Travellers broadly and Irish Travellers specifically. For example,

as far back as 2003, the British Commission for Racial Equality identified failures in the system related to Irish Travellers:

> Prisoners with low literacy skills had difficulty adapting to prison life and accessing prison services. In the case of Irish Travellers, this is compounded by prejudice and discrimination, leading to high levels of self-harm. (2003: 83)

Five years later, very little had changed, as the National Offender Management Service Race Review (2008) raised several concerns over the experiences of Travellers in prison. These included problems associated with accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes; derogatory and racist name calling by prisoners and by prison staff, in two of the prisons visited; a lack of confidence in the complaints system; and a lack of cultural awareness and understanding on the part of staff. Historically in prisons in England and Wales, Black and Asian prisoners were the most likely victims of racism, and the most common incident was verbal abuse. Prison officers were most likely to target Black prisoners, and verbal abuse and bullying were the most common problems. Furthermore, prison officers would often stereotype Black prisoners as being troublesome, being lazy and sharing an antipathy towards white society (Cheliotis and Liebling, 2006). It is interesting, therefore, to note that participants felt that prison officers and prisoners now see Travellers (possibly Gypsies and Roma also) as the remaining target for racist behaviour. This view was supported by another participant when noting a double standard in terms of racism in prison, whereby racism towards Travellers was seen as acceptable but racism towards other minority groups such as Black or Asian prisoners was not:

> There's a lot of racism against the Travellers. We get called pikey and gyppo every day. But nobody sees this as racism. But if they called a black person the N word or Asian a Paki, then somebody would get arrested. (First-generation Irish; Irish Traveller; Male; 30–34)

Racism, discrimination and bullying towards Irish Travellers in prison has always been commonplace, and this has been well recorded in research findings that identified mistreatment by prison staff:

> Staff, either through personal experiences, or more often by process of social osmosis, carry unchallenged prejudices about Travellers and

nomadism. These are now often concealed in the case of Black and Asian prisoners due to various attempts by the Prison Service to tackle colour-based racism and discrimination, but Irish Travellers are still often perceived as a criminogenic group rather than an ethnic minority. (Power, 2004: 98).

MacGabhann (2011) raised concerns with regard to the treatment of Irish Travellers by other prisoners, and how complaints are dealt with by the authorities. Participants in that research claimed that they would never report the bullying, name calling and racism they suffered to the prison authorities. One participant noted that threats and abusive names shouted at and about Travellers were never reported, as nobody wanted to be seen as an informer. Indifference on the part of staff to such complaints was also highlighted as a potential reason for a lack of reporting.

Non-Traveller participants in this research (*n* = 29) also noted significant differences in the ways that Travellers were treated as opposed to other racial and ethnic minority groups. Several referred to incidents of racism and mistreatment towards Travellers through the use of derogatory language by other prisoners and prison staff, with bullying of Irish Travellers also highlighted:

One Traveller guy was really scared … I don't know, maybe suffering racism or bullying. They do get called names like gyppo and pikey. (First-generation Irish; Male; non-Traveller; 35–39)

They would never, ever get away with treating the Muslims or the Blacks like how they treat the Travellers in prison. (First-generation Irish; Male; non-Traveller; 45–49)

Non-Traveller participants highlighted the problems that low levels of literacy created for Irish Travellers:

They [Travellers] were never pushed towards education or to do courses because there was, I think, an assumption that they can't read or write. Some can't but there's a lot who can. (First-generation Irish; Male; Non-Traveller; 30–34)

Such disadvantage was borne out in the data, which suggested that all Irish Travellers who participated in this research had left school by the age of 13,

and 88% (*n* =7) did not undertake any educational courses while in prison. This reaffirms MacGabhann's (2015) findings of a high percentage of Travellers leaving school at an early age. The importance of being able to read and write in prison was highlighted in no uncertain terms by one participant who stated that 'if you can't read or write inside, you're fucked' (second-generation Irish, Male, non-Traveller, aged 50+). The ability to read is a skill that is very important to surviving prison life, as highlighted by the National Offender Management Service (2008), which found that since Irish Travellers often have very low literacy levels, they can find it difficult to fill out complaints forms, visiting orders and forms for temporary release; it is common for Irish Travellers to have applications denied because certain forms are not completed correctly (MacGabhann, 2011). This was also highlighted by Costello (2014), who noted that literacy-related problems for Travellers in Irish prisons were linked with a lack of information, a barrier to entitlements and low self-confidence.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the position of Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales by providing evidence from Traveller and non-Traveller ex-prisoners. Participants in this research highlighted the mistreatment of Irish Travellers through racism, bullying and discrimination, as well as discussing the impact that a lack of literacy may have on this group when in prison. These issues may have the undesired effect of making Irish Travellers feel as though they are in a prison within a prison, one where they are being mistreated and where their management needs are not being met. This paper has shown that the problems faced by Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales are not hidden, and if prisoners are aware of the problems then it is reasonable to assume that the prison authorities are also aware.

It must therefore be asked why such behaviour towards Travellers is deemed acceptable. There are several possible answers. First of all, it may be that Irish Travellers are seen as a sub-group of Irish prisoners, who are still a somewhat invisible minority in the prison system. When a group is invisible to the outside world but highly visible to those in the prison system, it makes them an easy target. Secondly, it might be that while Gypsies, Roma and Travellers make up 5% of the total prison population, there seems to be no understanding that each of these is an ethnic minority with its own history, culture and traditions. The label of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller is not repre-sentative of a homogeneous group. Perhaps a greater understanding of the

differences between these three groups might result in better treatment for all of them. What is most likely, though, is that Doherty's (2015) assertion is correct – that racism towards Travellers in England and Wales is seen as acceptable in society. Lane *et al.* (2014) found that discrimination and racism towards Irish Travellers is ongoing throughout England and Wales, and can often involve verbal abuse, violent physical attacks, abusive media coverage and overtly racist statements from politicians. If such behaviour is rife in society, it is only logical that some prison staff and prisoners will import these attitudes into the prison.

There are, however, several examples of good practice in prisons in England and Wales in dealing with Irish Travellers (Costello, 2014). First of all, there is a legislative basis for non-discrimination – since 2003, the prison service in England and Wales has had structures in place to prevent and address inequitable treatment of prisoners. The Equality Act 2010 placed a legal obligation on the then National Offender Management Service to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. There are equality and diversity representatives for different minority groups, including Irish Travellers, with whom the prison service is obliged to consult. Some prisons in the UK organise cultural and cross-cultural events to celebrate different cultures and traditions, including those of the Travelling community. One example is found in cultural awareness days, which involved preparing posters and facilitating oral histories (Costello, 2014). In 2018 the Ministry of Justice published *Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System.* On the issue of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in prison, it stated that efforts are being made to explore and address specific disparities among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. A Gypsy, Roma and Traveller action plan is to be drawn up to consider how needs or issues of this group can best be addressed. All of this is of course very welcome.

Some further options available to the prison authorities could yield positive results with regard to how Irish Travellers are treated in prison. First of all, the 'Gypsy, Roma, Traveller' classification should be abandoned for an individual classification to allow people to identify as one of Gypsy, Roma or Traveller, not as all three. Secondly, prison officers and prison staff are under a duty of care towards those in their charge. This duty includes taking measures to deal with racism and bullying on the wings as well as not engaging in racist or bullying behaviour towards prisoners. Finally, there is an onus on all concerned to ensure that anti-racist/discriminatory legislation is upheld within prison walls. Ongoing and innovative approaches to training on diversity

awareness and the application of restorative justice interventions would promote understanding and could serve to deescalate institutional tensions that will arise when people feel that they are 'in a prison within a prison'.

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