



National Action Group
for LGBTI+ Traveller
and Roma Rights

Unveiling Inequality - Experiences of LGBTI+ Travellers & Roma

A peer-research project to explore and make visible the
experience of exclusion of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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About the Transformative Research Cooperative (TRC)

I am a member of the Transformative Research Cooperative (TRC): a cooperative of experienced researchers and practitioners with extensive experience in the field of further, adult, community, and development education. The cooperative is committed to the transformative capacity of education for individuals, communities, and the wider social and environmental world. Our research and facilitation work are grounded in participative, reflexive, dialogic philosophies and practices.

About the Researcher – Dr. Sarah Meaney Sartori

I did my PhD with the Adult and Community Education Department in Maynooth University. Funded by the Irish Research Council, the PhD research was a creative exploration of the experience of educational exclusion from the perspective of prisoners and youth. Currently, I am the research manager on College Connect, a programme aimed at widening educational diversity that is focussed on educational inclusion for refugees, people with convictions and Travellers. I have worked as an adult educator for over 15 years, developing and delivering modules and programmes to a wide variety of groups. I work with and am trained in creative research methodologies, that is the creative editing of research data, the purpose being to bring research out in the open for public engagement, discussion and debate. I believe that research should disrupt the status quo and is best carried out with and by the communities for whom it is intended.

NB This report will cover topics from suicide to self-harm, which may be distressing to some readers. Caution is therefore advised.

Foreword by Oein DeBhairdúin

This report is a marker in the history of Ireland, as it is the first time in which the community has been engaged on a national level in regards to what are the needs and experiences of those who live the intersectionality of being LGBTI+ and Traveller and Roma. A great care and focus was placed on ensuring it was the voices of those that have direct lived experience of these coincident factors and shared identities, which were held front and foremost.

This report is not intended to be shelf bound but something that seeks to inspire action, as at its core it remains an act of challenge - a call to action to those who craft policy, organise the allocation of resources, develop plans of service delivery and the much needed considerations and importance of community development in its need to be as inclusive as possible.

While undoubtedly some progress has been made over the last decade, as a community we still struggle deeply. When we talk of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma, we usually speak of young, cis-gendered men and structurally often leave our lesbian sisters and trans kin behind, we usually speak of the very rare few who are out and live lives loud in their identities and ethnicity.

However, the vast majority of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma remain unable to share that freedom and sense of belonging, within society as a whole, and within Traveller, Roma and LGBTI+ spaces.

Historic under resourcing of accommodation, mental health support and the tight grip of racism and homophobia has brought additional pressures to a community that has very been pressed to live on the edges of society and as this sorrowful research reaffirms, so many are pushed over that edge.

My own expectations were greatly transformed through the development and evolution of this peer research process. I at first assumed we would receive fresh new ideas and distinct pathways to progress the struggle to a place of peace - and we did indeed. But

the most resounding call that came from those that had the space, place and courage to be involved was that of wanting safety and to simply remain living. I cannot understate the need for action.

Current reviews and the implantation of national LGBTI+ Strategies and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy need to firmly embed and directly and concretely incorporate the needs of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma and their families into the structures and approaches that seek to support the determinants of positive health.

A part of this process was also the moulding of creative works, that took the submissions and words shared in the gathering of groups, into poetic pieces that may act as additional bridges of understanding and connection between LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma and the wider communities. We intend to tour these heart-spun creations in the new year.

My genuine gratitude and thanks to the work of National Action Group for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma Rights members who over saw this work and the LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma, and at times their family members, who entrusted us with their voices - we remain determined that you will not only be heard but listened to.

Gralti,

Oein DeBhairdúin
Chairperson
National Action Group for
LGBTI+ Traveller
and Roma Rights





Executive Summary

Introduction

There are potentially 4,000 Travellers on the island of Ireland who are LGBTI+¹. Many LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experience social exclusion on a personal, familial and societal level,² and specific LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma supports are few and far between.³

This research, 'Unveiling Inequality – The Experiences of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma' is commissioned by the National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights, who formed with the goal of advancing greater awareness and understanding of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex and other sexual identities (LGBTI+) Traveller and Roma and supporting their inclusion in organisations and in their communities. The study is gratefully supported by LGBT Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). This is a peer-to-peer participatory action research project that aims to unveil the isolation experienced by LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma, with the aim of creating an Ireland which is more LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma inclusive.

The research began in early 2021 and was completed in July 2022, and we understand it to be the largest study of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma in Ireland to date. There were 57 engagements in total - 47 through an online survey tool, and 10 through focus-group discussions. Arts-based methodologies such as Photovoice and transcript poetry were used to help participants and communities more broadly engage with the findings. Some examples of participant Photovoice and poems are included throughout the research report. The full Spoken Word Project will be launched later in 2022/early 2023 both in physical spaces and virtually, to take this research off the page and into the public forum for discussion and debate.

Research Aim

The aim of the study 'Unveiling Inequality - Experiences of LGBTI+ Travellers & Roma', was to explore, evidence and make visible the experiences of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma. This was with the view to enabling relevant services and stakeholders to identify the actions that need to be taken to achieve inclusion.

The research report describes a community that experience racism within the mainstream Irish LGBTI+ community and services, as well as isolation due to a fear of or experience of homophobic, biphobic, transphobic discrimination and attitudes within their own ethnic communities. It also documents the considerable issues faced by LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, such as isolation/lack of understanding from their communities, homelessness, lack of support/no support, being in heterosexual marriage (often with children), and exacerbated mental health issues. However, it also strives to capture the love and acceptance that some participating LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma describe as receiving from their families and loved ones.

Research Approach

The field research was carried out from October 2021 until July 2022 and used participative and experiential approaches that encouraged collaborative leadership and participation at all stages of the research process.

Three peer-researchers carried out four focus groups with 10 participants - 9 LGBTI+ Traveller and 1 LGBTI+ Roma. Photovoice was used as a methodology, and participants were asked to bring a photograph that

represented their experience as LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma, and that they could give consent to sharing as part of the research publication. Participants had the opportunity to discuss the research with the supporting organisations prior to taking part, and again with the researcher as part of the informed consent process.

Research participants were invited to take part through multiple methods including a Webinar, through a poster-call distributed through Traveller organisations, and finally through a survey. The survey was designed to be used as a preliminary recruitment tool, rather than as an instrument to be relied on as a central part of the research. However, it quickly revealed the fear that people had about their LGBTI+ identity being exposed and garnered more responses than the call for focus group participation.

There were 43 + 2* valid survey responses. Two of the responses were completed by family members, and these responses when referred to in the report contain an asterisk. Four responses were excluded. Three were invalid as they contained multiple conflicting answers, and one was excluded due to it being incomplete.

45 (43 + 2*) Traveller and 2 Roma took part, that included the following breakdown in terms of sexual and gender identity.

- 28 Gay male*
- 9 Gay female/lesbian
- 5 Bi-sexual
- 3 Transgender
- 2 Intersex*

It is important to note that the sample above is a non-representative sample, as the objective is to provide an important snapshot of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experiences. Because of this, inferential statistics have not been drawn.

Background and Context

On top of facing prejudice for being Traveller or Roma, LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma can also face homophobia within their community because of their sexual identity,⁴ and experience immense pressure to conform to the stereotypical and one-dimensional portrayals of who Traveller and Roma people are.^{5,6} Mental health issues are more prevalent for Traveller and Roma, who have been identified as high-risk in relation to suicide and poor mental health.⁷ Suicide for Traveller men, for example, is seven times higher than the general population, and most common in young Traveller men aged 15-25.⁸ Similarly, 90% of LGBTI+ youth in Ireland are also struggling with their mental health.⁹ Therefore, Roma and Traveller individuals who identify as LGBTI+ are even more susceptible to exacerbated rates of mental illness and suicide.¹⁰

The wider LGBTI+ community may have access to avenues such as 'moving away from home' or 'going to college' that can be successful mechanisms for coping with sexual identity.¹¹ However, a big aspect of the coming out process for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma is taking into consideration the reaction not only from family members but the reaction from wider family and the Traveller and Roma community more broadly, and fear of exclusion for many can be too big a risk to take. By law, all public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.¹² However, the reality, where high levels of racism can impede on the ability to source employment, access higher education or find accommodation,¹³ alternative options outside the family and community structure may simply not be available to LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma.¹⁴

Similarly, participants in wider LGBTI+ research have cited the LGBTI+ community as a source of strength and support,¹⁵ and LGBTI+ groups as integral in terms of offering a safe space for people to come out, as well as enabling them to form a social network of support.¹⁶ However, for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, there is discrimination within the wider LGBTI+ community



that includes anti-Traveller and anti-gypsy sentiment, with many citing verbal racism and exclusion from social clubs.¹⁷ In a nutshell, the consequences of exclusion from the community are more acute for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, who may literally have nowhere else to go.

Findings – Experience of Coming Out, Mental Health and Exclusion

Some respondents to this research had coming out experiences that ranged from feeling lonely and isolated to being threatened or endangered or made homeless as a result. A significant number of participants (39.1%; n=18) said they had experienced ‘homelessness’ as a consequence of being LGBTI+, while others described being in a state of ‘temporary homelessness’, that seemed to be a direct consequence of their being LGBTI+. On top of this, just over half of the respondents to our survey self-selected that they were married to someone of the opposite sex which helps to explain the reticence respondents expressed to attending a space which might expose them and their LGBTI+ identity.

It is clear from this research that LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experience the same mental health issues as the general LGBTI+ population, only more so. Several gay male Focus Group Participants spoke of spending a considerable amount of time in their late teens or early twenties, isolated from family and friends and locked in their bedroom. Some of the participants in this research spoke about being in mental turmoil, in some instances for years, during this period of their lives.

Participants were asked about their experiences of harassment and violence because they are LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma. By far, the most frequently reported negative experience was being verbally hurt, and a considerable number of participants had experienced threats. Just over 40% of participants had experienced some form of physical attack due to being LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma (41.9%; n=18), attacked sexually (7%; n=3) or attacked with a weapon (20.9%; n=9).

With the exception of ‘attacked sexually’ these figures are considerably higher (in some cases double) than those reported by the main LGBTI+ community.¹⁸

Findings - Experience of Supports and Barriers to Support

The majority of research participants, 71.1% (n=32), found finding LGBTI+ friends to be a support, while only 8.9% (n=4) found support from Traveller/Roma organisations and only 6.7% (n=3) from LGBTI+ organisations, with some participants reporting feeling a lack of acceptance due to their ethnicity. People in focus groups also spoke about the support of their families being the most important source of feeling acceptance of their LGBTI+ identity, and for many, once they had the backing of their immediate families, the views and opinions of others ceased to matter.

In terms of aspects that hindered or blocked people from accessing support, almost 80% (n=35) of respondents selected negative attitudes in society towards LGBTI+, while family and friends as well as the community were seen by 72.7% (n=32) to have a negative impact. Respondents also cited ‘country people’ or ‘settled people’ and ‘anti-Traveller sentiment’ in organisations as having a negative impact on individuals’ acceptance of their LGBTI+ identity. Fear of rejection or discrimination (97.2%; n=35) were the main reasons people cited for hiding their identity and therefore not seeking support, while for others (33.3%; n=12), it was because they were in a heterosexual marriage.

Recommendations

The aim of this research was to advance greater awareness and understanding of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex and other sexual identities among (LGBTI+) Travellers and Roma and support their inclusion in organisations and in their communities. Therefore, a main focus of this research was LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma people's experience of accessing supports, and participants emphasised the following as key to raising awareness and promoting acceptance of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma:

- Increased support from Traveller services for families of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma
- More LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma services
- Increased LGBTI+ education for Traveller and Roma communities
- Increased LGBTI+ education for the wider settled community

This research indicates that more needs to be done by both LGBTI+ organisations and Traveller and Roma organisations to include LGBTI+ people's needs in their services. Steps to improve care for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma could therefore include:

- Employing and retaining LGBTI+ staff
- Using inclusive language
- Implementing specialist staff training particularly with regard to anti-racism
- Initiating conversations on inclusion with boards and executives

This research also suggests the need for broader policy changes, including the need for:

- Greater representation of Traveller and Roma LGBTI+ people in public awareness and education campaigns
- Effective response to the serious mental health issues impacting LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma nationally

1 Abdalla et al. (2010). All Ireland Traveller Health Study

2 LGBT Pavee, Ireland. (2022). Reconciling Community, Culture and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

3 Ibid

4 Warde. (2021). LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue'.

5 LGBT Ireland Submission. 2020/05. A MORE EQUITABLE IRELAND FOR LGBT+ TRAVELLERS.

6 Ibid.

7 Pavee Point. (2021). Urgent action on Traveller Health Plan needed as COVID-19 adds to Traveller mental health crisis.

8 Pavee Point. (2015). Travellers and Suicide: Facts and Figures.

9 BelongTo. (2018). <https://www.belongto.org/90-irish-lgbti-youth-struggle-mental-health/>

10 Baker & Bila. (2019). Gypsy, Roma & Traveller LGBTQI International Conference 2019 Report.

11 Higgins et al. (2016). LGBTIreland Report. p. 69.

12 The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act. (2014). Section 42.

13 Pavee Point. (2022) Roma in Ireland.

14 Barry. (2022). Harris announces €450k funding to assist Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

15 Noone et al. (2018). Far from Home: Life as an LGBT Migrant in Ireland.

16 Higgins et al., (2016). LGBT Ireland Report. p. 155.

17 Gay Project. (2022). <https://gayproject.ie/special-projects/proud-af/>

18 Higgins et al. (2016). LGBTIreland Report.

I'M A BIT FUNNY AS WELL

I'm actually very, very lucky...I have not experienced homophobia within the community... I don't know how it happened...but I was very, very lucky.

This is a photograph of myself. I was carefree. I wasn't out at the time, but everyone sort of gathered... it was an open secret that nobody spoke about.



A year after this photograph was taken... I started to see friends, peers, cousins starting to go out with members of the opposite sex. I started going out with settled girls. But once my friends, cousins, peer group started going out with other Travellers... 'right I may do the same' ...that's when it started to get serious and like 'it might lead to engagement or marriage' ...that frightened the life out of me.

I started to revert into myself... hiding myself away... watching my every move, my hand movements. I got more and more angry with myself, angry at family members. I came out of the room maybe once, twice a week for three years. I don't know how I'm not psychologically destroyed.

I came out to my brothers and sisters, on a drunken night out. I thought that was the end of it. I thought that I was going to be ostracised. I was going to be kicked out. I had my own prejudices against my own community, my own family. But...they came up to me one after the other and says, 'you're still our brother... we love you'.

I met this other gay Traveller. My mother says, 'ah you need to keep away from that fella... he's a bit funny'. But I turned around to my mother and said, 'Ma, I'm a bit funny as well'.

**Photovoice created from Focus Group Participant transcript
Photograph by Derek Speirs*

Introduction

When Ireland was going through the legal process of changing homosexuality from being a crime in the mid-1990s, the human rights issues faced by Irish Travellers were only just beginning to be highlighted. Inevitably, with so many rights to foreground, LGBTI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex plus) people within the Traveller and Roma communities were the last to be considered.¹⁹ So, while the diversity of the community is acknowledged by Traveller organisations in strategic plans and through the National Action Group for LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Rights, there are few, if any, specific LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma supports currently available, other than support from LGBTI+ organisations and Traveller organisations respectively.²⁰

This research, 'Unveiling Inequality – The Experiences of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma' is commissioned by the National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights, who formed with the goal of advancing greater awareness and understanding of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma and their inclusion in their support organisations and communities. Supported by LGBTI+ Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), this peer-to-peer, participatory action research project, aims to unveil the isolation experienced with the aim of creating an Ireland which is more LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma inclusive. The broader objective of this research is therefore to increase awareness and understanding of the intersectional discriminations at play and the cross-cutting experiences of exclusion, to enable relevant services and stakeholders to identify the actions they need to take.

The report you are reading lays out the context in relation to LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, how the research came about, as well as the steps taken, and the methodology used to explore participants experiences as LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma. Key themes that emerged from this research project will run throughout

the report and form important framing concepts. The intersectional and multiple nature of exclusion faced by Travellers and Roma is widely recognised in the literature and will be referred to, for example: accommodation, racism and stigma, exacerbated by mental health issues and poverty. Themes which are particular to the experiences of LGBT+ people including exacerbated mental health issues, day-to-day victimisation and harassment, difficulty accessing services, will also be discussed. Themes which are more particular to the experience of Traveller and Roma LGBTI+ people including isolation/lack of understanding from their community, homelessness, lack of support/no support, being in heterosexual marriage often with children and exacerbated mental health issues will be explored in terms of how the intersectionality impacts on the individuals concerned.

This research is likely the largest study of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma in Ireland to date and is necessary to foreground the considerable issues faced, but it also highlights the beauty and value of oral culture, through the use of poetry and creative methods that capture the melody and cadence of Traveller and Roma voice.

Creative arts are an important aspect of Indigenous cultures and the use of creative arts has a curative effect on the mind, the body, the spirit, and the emotions in themselves.²¹ The voices of participants, as well as the voices of Traveller and Indigenous authors, artists, academics, activists and allies are foregrounded and referenced throughout, in the aim of delivering a report written 'with' LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma rather than one written 'about'.



Overview of Report

Chapter One provides the background to the report and provides the context in relation to LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma. The significant issues faced by the community are described. Information on the organisation The National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights, who are carrying out this research, is detailed, as well as detail on the supporting stakeholder organisation LGBT Ireland.

Chapter Two describes how participants were recruited and the different methodologies used to explore participants' experience. It also lays out the demographics of participants in the study and describes the profile of those who took part, drawing some comparisons with the LGBT Ireland Report, the largest study of LGBTI people in Ireland to date.²²

Chapter Three documents the main findings from the research in terms of experiences of 'coming out', mental health and the exclusion and victimisation highlighted by participants. Responses are discussed and situated amongst the literature.

Chapter Four focuses on supports that helped with participants' identity acceptance, and the barriers that hindered. This chapter therefore focuses on the supports participants did receive and participants' positive experiences. It also lays out participant recommendations about what could be done to support LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma, and 'what would help.'

Chapter Five is the final chapter of the report and is a concluding summary of the research along with researcher observations, substantiated with insights and recommendations from staff working in relevant

sectors to point to 'where next?' Chapter five also discusses the public engagement aspect of this research through the arts and the use of arts-based methodologies as a lens to critically explore complex inequality.

The chapters of this report are divided by pages that feature participants' Photovoice or transcript poems which were created from participants' focus group transcripts and survey responses. Spoken word and participant voice is purposefully given centre stage in recognition of the importance of orality and narrative to Traveller and Roma culture.

'Unveiling Inequality' is a research report about a community that experience racism within the mainstream Irish LGBTI+ community and services, as well as isolation due to a fear of or experience of homophobic, biphobic, transphobic discrimination and attitudes within their own ethnic communities.

However, it also strives to capture the love and acceptance that some LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma describe as receiving from their families and loved ones. The issues faced by Traveller and Roma are well researched, considered and analysed, while much of the splendour of the community remains hidden.

'What most do not see is the beauty that burns and beats in the heart of the community, a bonfire of remembrance and connection that blazes high on the hilltops of our collective spaces.' Oein De Bhairduin

19 Warde. (2021). LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue'.

20 Ibid

21 France. (2020). Creative Arts and the Indigenous Healing Circle Within an Indigenous Context.

22 Higgins at al. (2016). 22 LGBTIreland Report.

EVERYTHING UR HEART WANTS

– Survey Respondent

*Bi means bi
not that the person ur with is less
or not everything ur heart wants
I love my wife
and will spend my life with her God hoping*

*Priest wasn't helpful
he took it as I wanted to cheat
rather than I want to be peaceful in my own head
I'd never cheat
but being married doesn't make me less bi*

*Wish I said nothing
I feel like I've been selfish
Don't know if we'll ever be able to talk
about things like this open
doubt many married Travellers would*

Our lives would be fucked up if people knew

**Transcript poem created from Survey Respondent transcript*



Chapter One: Background and Context



"Growing up I wanted what many young women my age wanted. I wanted adventure. To fall in love. To travel. To have children. To be happy. I wanted all those things. I think people understood that. I just never wanted it with a man"

Mags – Lesbian Traveller Woman, Cork²⁴

1.1 Foreword

This research began in early 2021 and was completed in July 2022. There were 57 engagements with this research. 47 through an online survey tool, and ten through focus-group discussions. Recruitment of participants was challenging, as people were afraid to come forward and share their experience over concerns of 'who would be involved', 'wouldn't know who was there' and 'I'm not sure of an open room'. Therefore, while the survey tool was initially designed to recruit participants, it quickly morphed into providing a 'safe space' for respondents to share their experience, and the research team needed to adapt accordingly.

Responses to the survey were typically very detailed with respondents expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be invited to communicate their experience.

"Thank you for asking these questions an' I look forward to things getting better"

Survey Respondent

Some participants also expressed how they hoped that their contribution to this research might improve things for the next generation.

"Too late for me but I think of my children and other children and think God they could have a life without something like this just happy in being themselves"

– Survey Respondent



WHAT CAN I CHANGE?



So, I chose this picture because somehow it represents me... and for me they're representations of my brothers. And growing up I knew I was different from all me brothers.

Because all my brothers went through boxing and kind of like it was forced upon us that being gay was such a shameful thing. Especially from my father. And taking part in boxing, being actually forced to take part in boxing. And how you were supposed to dress...stuff like that.

I felt like around...no one was going through what I was going through...because I wasn't being accepted in the settled community because I was a Traveller and I wasn't being accepted in the Traveller community because I was gay. I don't know if you've experienced, but once you go to a wedding the men will sit one side the women will sit

on the opposite side, and I was like 'well where will I sit?'

I just felt so isolated from the community then that brought years of torment like 'what can I change?'

'Maybe if I do get involved back in boxing and maybe if I do have conversations with other Traveller men like maybe the gay will go away.'

My mam kicked me out of the house...for two weeks, so I moved in with my friend. Eventually my mam got in touch.

She's getting used to it...so even with Pride she was like 'have you got any Pride flags?'

***Photovoice created from Focus Group
Participant transcript**

1.2 Background and Context

There are potentially 4,000 Travellers on the island of Ireland who are LGBTI+,²⁵ and many LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experience social exclusion on a personal, familial and societal level.²⁶ Apart from facing racism as Traveller or Roma, as in many other social contexts, homophobia and transphobia exist within Irish Traveller groups.²⁷ At the same time, they are also facing discrimination from the wider LGBTI+ population because of their ethnicity.²⁸ While Antigypsyism is a key aspect of the lived experiences of many Roma LGBTI+ people that often eclipses other forms of oppression, it is not the only aspect of Romani LGBTI+ people's experiences.²⁹ Roma people experience intersectional stigmatisation as both Roma and LGBTI+, as they challenge stereotypical and one-dimensional portrayals of who Roma people are and what it means to be Roma.³⁰ Equally, the pressure on LGBTI+ Travellers to conform to the defined mould of what constitutes Traveller culture, something many Travellers have fought long and hard to have recognised, is immense.³¹ Several participants in the research referred to stereotypical Traveller male activities, such as boxing, and experiencing teasing or derision if they did not want to take part.

'(Dad) never really stood well on making me doing boxing or anything. Just thought I wasn't made for things like that... His brothers used to laugh at me but he'd never had it in him to make me. I told him there were a lot of men that hide behind those gloves'

– Survey Respondent

Irish Travellers first received official recognition of their indigenous status from the Irish Government in March 2017.³² Indigenous peoples are defined as the original inhabitants of a place and have traditional cultures and ways of life closely tied to the local land.³³ Traveller was the term put onto Ireland's Indigenous people because of their nomadic identity, an identity that has been penalised and criminalised since anti-nomadic

legalisation was first introduced by the British during the 1500's, and which the Irish state inherited but did nothing to repeal.³⁴ Typically, Travellers identify politically as part of the wider collective of Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers, because of their historic mobility and the ongoing importance of cultural nomadism to their identity. Although the vast majority of Travellers are no longer nomadic, settled majority definitions of nomadism distinguish only between people who are mobile and those who are not, and fail to understand cultural nomadism and what Traveller or Roma ethnicity brings to the lived experience. Cultural nomadic values include, the extended family, rituals surrounding death, economic self-sufficiency and flexibility in employment, and independence.³⁵ Governments, that have failed to understand either the fluidity of movement in nomadic communities, or cultural nomadic identity that does not involve mobility, have led to inappropriate and culturally decimating accommodation policies.³⁶

Some of the traditions for Traveller and Roma, such as emphasis on gender roles, attitudes to family, procreation and conservative religious values, have evolved and been established over time as defensive reactions to racism and prejudice.³⁷ Patriarchy, which is entwined with the systems of colonisation, white supremacy, and capitalism and gives men power and privilege at the expense of women, acts as the framework for the domination and oppression of gay, queer, and transgender people, as well as the stunted development of men.³⁸ It is visible in the high prevalence of domestic violence against women in indigenous communities, and when that violence is extended out to the LGBTI+ community.³⁹ In Indigenous communities, it also erases and twists teachings and worldviews on gender and sexuality, namely the diversity and power of these aspects and experiences.⁴⁰ This can leave LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma with a sense of alienation or disaffection from their social and group context, and potentially lead to an ambivalent or conflicted relationship in terms of identifying as Traveller or Roma.⁴¹

Maintaining mental health can be a challenge for all members of society, but when this is combined with the experience of racism, exclusion, and discrimination that the Traveller and Roma communities have expe-



rienced, the challenge is greater.⁴² Travellers disproportionately experience issues around identity, sexuality, addiction, depression, anxiety, bereavement, PTSD and more; the roots of which stem from decades of racist and discriminatory policies, not least the 1963 Report from the Commission on Itinerancy, a report that problematised the community's culture and way of life and established policy relating to Travellers for the next twenty years.⁴³ Internalised oppression, originating from where people are disallowed or unable (because it is too dangerous or risky) to express anger and frustration, turn these feelings inward to be directed at oneself through depression, low self- (or community) esteem, apathy, substance abuse, or mental illness. Young Travellers, living with the anticipation of hostility and discrimination, use tactics such as 'compliance' and 'hiding in plain sight', something Joyce (2018) compares with the tactics and logic used by young black men in the U.S.A.⁴⁵

According to *Belong To*, half of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with self-harm, while 63% of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with suicide ideation, problems which have worsened as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions.⁴⁶ Almost all LGBTI+ young people are currently struggling with anxiety, stress, or depression.⁴⁷ Furthermore, LGBTI+ people experience high incidences of victimisation, discrimination and harassment, with one in three gay men and one in four transgender people having experienced physical violence in public, and one in four intersex and one in five transgender people having experienced sexual violence.⁴⁸

The experiences of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma are intersectional in that they are linked to their experiences as Traveller and Roma. According to the All-Ireland Traveller Mental Health Study in 2010, suicide accounts for 11% of all deaths within the Traveller community, which is between six and seven times higher than the national average.⁴⁹ This is similar to patterns observed in other Indigenous ethnic minorities globally.⁵⁰ As higher levels of poor mental health are common in both the Traveller and Roma and LGBTI+ communities respectively, consequently, LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma battle layers of discrimination as

they strive to find self-acceptance, community acceptance and societal celebration of all of who they are.

As such, some participants in this research spoke of finding it difficult to determine whether their experience was as a result of their being LGBTI+ or of being Traveller or Roma.

'Not sure how to divide Traveller identity with being gay'

Survey Respondent

While others spoke of receiving more backlash as a result of their ethnicity than as a result of their sexual identity.

'I've experienced more discrimination for being a Traveller than I ever have done for being gay'

Focus Group Participant

Certainly, Traveller or Roma identity and how LGBTI+ identity was accepted or rejected or perceived by the community was a prevailing theme raised by most participants. The fear of rejection from the community prevented many participants from being open about their sexual identity, as this was felt as likely to result in more exclusion and isolation than they were already experiencing as a consequence of their ethnic identity.

'Hard being a Traveller but then you have other Travellers to be a Traveller with. And even if we're the first to drag each other down we at least have each other. But OUT Travellers have a terrible time'

Survey Respondent

'Gossip' in the community, particularly gossip of a malicious nature, was referred to repeatedly as a threat to mental health and well-being.

'It fucks with my mind to admit I'm thankful my parents are not around to hear the gossip'

Survey Respondent

Concealing a sexual minority identity can simultaneously generate the stress of hiding while also protecting against the stress of discrimination.⁵¹ This research will therefore explore the impact of 'coming out' on LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma and the lived experiences of people living in the intersection of these minority identities.

1.2 (L) Lesbian, G (Gay), B (Bi-Sexual), T (Transgender), I (Intersex), + (Plus)

LGBTI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and others. The 'plus' represents other sexual orientations including pansexual (not limited in sexual choice with regard to sex, gender, or gender identity), and Two-Spirit (a person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit and used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity) as well as other gender identities. The first four letters of the acronym have been used since the 1990s, but in recent years there has been an increased awareness of the need to be inclusive of other sexual identities, such as queer (Q) and intersex (I), to offer better representation.

Sometimes the acronym is seen as LGBTQI. Though Q (queer) may be used by people as a specific identity, it is often considered an umbrella term for anyone who is non-cisgender or heterosexual. However, it can also be considered a slur. Based on anecdotal evidence that queer is not typically used by the LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma community in Ireland, for the purpose of this research the term LGBTI+ will be used throughout.

L (Lesbian): A lesbian is a woman/woman-aligned person who is attracted to only people of the same/similar gender.

G (Gay): Gay is usually a term used to refer to men/men-aligned individuals who are only attracted to people of the same/similar gender. However, lesbians can also be referred to as gay. Today, sometimes 'gay' is used to refer to yourself when talking about similar gender attraction.

B (Bisexual): Bisexual indicates an attraction to all genders. The recognition of bisexual individuals is important, since there have been periods when people who identify as bi have been misunderstood as being gay.

T (Transgender): Transgender is a term that indicates that a person's gender identity is different from the gender associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

I (Intersex): A person born with, or who develops naturally in puberty, sex characteristics which are not typically male or female.

+ (Plus): The 'plus' is used to signify all of the gender identities and sexual orientations which exist in the rainbow community.

1.3 The National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights

This research was commissioned by the National Action Group for LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Rights and LGBT Ireland. The National Action Group for LGBTI + Traveller & Roma Rights is a collective that aims to increase the promotion, protection, inclusion and celebration of LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma individuals and their families within their communities and organisations and services. It promotes awareness for the intersectional experiences of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma.

Membership of the Action Group consists of representatives from the LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma communities, national, regional and local Traveller and Roma organisations and services as well as LGBTI+ organisations and services.



The National Action Group for LGBTI + Traveller & Roma Rights provides information, signposting and support to LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma, their families and organisations and services. It produces resources, such as awareness posters and guides which features the voices of prominent Traveller and Roma such as Traveller comedian and writer Martin Beanze Warde (pictured above) and Senator Eileen Flynn.

Every year the National Action Group together with the community and allies march in Dublin Pride and many other Pride events across the country, celebrating LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma and the diversity within the LGBTI+ community.

Contact the National Action Group for LGBTI + Traveller & Roma Rights- www.travandromalgbti.ie

'[It's about] valuing people differently within our community, rather than coming down on anyone for their sexuality and gender. Accepting people for who they are, is the only way to be, as there is really no right way to be a Traveller. Live and let live!'

Senator Eileen Flynn⁵²

1.4 LGBT Ireland

LGBT Ireland is a national organisation underpinned by localised knowledge and responses. Together with network members, LGBT Ireland provide support, training, and advocacy which aims to improve the lives of LGBTI+ people across Ireland. LGBT Ireland have been an active member of the organisation The National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights since 2017.

The service was established in 2010 by seven local LGBTI+ helplines, who shared a vision to create an infrastructure to enable them to offer support and information nationally through their network of trained volunteers. Today LGBT Ireland offers a comprehensive range of services which provide support and information on issues relating to sexuality and gender identity. Non-judgmental, confidential listening and support is provided seven days a week through a telephone helpline and through an online instant messaging service, while the LGBT Ireland website provides a gateway to information and support throughout the country.

The peer support service established in 2014, offers opportunities for people to come together on a monthly basis to provide emotional and practical support to each other around a common experience or situation. LGBT Ireland also delivers LGBTI+ awareness training to other services and community groups, to enhance



the support received by LGBTI+ people accessing these services and groups. The organisation works with partner organisations to expand the support available to LGBTI+ people and their family members, including with Samaritans Ireland through their Direct Dial and Connect programmes, and currently receives funding from the National Office of Suicide Prevention, and from Pobal through the SSNO (Scheme to Support National Organisations) grant scheme.

1.5 Counselling & Supports

This research was also supported by Exchange House Ireland and The Traveller Counselling Service who, along with LGBT Ireland, were available for participants to access if and when needed.

Exchange House Ireland (EHI) has been an active member of the National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights since 2017. EHI focuses on the provision of frontline services to the Traveller Community, across a range of interventions including family support and crisis intervention, Addiction Service, education and training, children and young people's supports, and mental health services. It is a holistic approach to the person, ensuring that no matter the issues that an individual or community are facing EHI are there to provide support so that they can have a better future.

EHI provides a Duty Service phone line Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am to 5pm (4pm on a Friday). A trained team of Social Workers, Family

Support Workers, Addiction Workers, Counsellors, and Peer Support Staff are equipped to provide immediate support or pass the case on for further support if necessary.

Call 01 8721094 or email support@exchangehouse.ie for more information.

The Traveller Counselling Service is an independent culturally appropriate counselling service, which is specifically set up to meet the needs of the Traveller community in Ireland. It provides a free, confidential, non-judgemental counselling service to members of the Traveller community and their families. The service has counsellors based in a number of locations and provides support to local Traveller groups and service providers to put structures in place that address the mental health needs of Travellers in local areas.

In recognition of the sensitive nature of the research and how participation on this project may be emotive for both participants and peer-researchers, LGBT Ireland, Exchange House Ireland and the Traveller Counselling Service provided counselling support for anyone taking part who wanted to avail of this. The peer-researcher team met with Maria Carnicer from Exchange House Ireland, Suzie McCarthy from the Traveller Counselling Service, and Collette O'Regan from LGBT Ireland to discuss the supports that were available and participants were provided with email addresses and phone numbers at the time of the focus groups and at a Webinar sharing the research and calling for participants, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



1.6 'Unveiling Inequality' – Why and how?

Through the work of the partnership (The National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights) there was strong anecdotal evidence of the negative impact racism and discrimination have on an LGBTI+



Traveller or Roma individual's ability to exercise their fundamental human rights and experiencing those rights as being respected, protected and fulfilled in a meaningful way. Therefore, the aim of this peer-research project, 'Unveiling Inequality - Experiences of

LGBTI+ Travellers & Roma', was to explore and make visible in a robust and evidenced report the experience of exclusion and marginalisation of these ethnic minorities. This was with the view to strengthening the organising and advocacy work of rights holders, to steer priorities of the Action Group, and to enable relevant services and stakeholders to identify the actions they need to take to foster desired changes in attitudes and behaviours to achieve real inclusion.

The following chapter describes in detail 'what we did', and the efforts we went to to promote and share the research. Chapter Two also describes in detail 'who took part and how'.

24 National LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Action Group. (2022). LGBT+ Traveller 24 & Roma Calendar.

25 Abdalla et al.. (2010). All Ireland Traveller Health Study - Our Geels: Summary of Findings.

26 LGBT Pavee, Ireland. (2022). Reconciling Community, Culture and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

27 Warde, M. (2021). LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue'.

28 Ibid

29 Fremlova, L. (2017). The Experiences of Romani GBTIQ People: Queer(y)(ing) Roma.

30 Ibid

31 LGBT Ireland Submission. 2020/05. A MORE EQUITABLE IRELAND FOR LGBT+ TRAVELLERS.

32 Joint Committee on Justice and Equality. (2017). Report on the Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity.

33 Gone & Kirmayer. (2020). Advancing Indigenous Mental Health Research: Ethical, conceptual and methodological challenges.

34 Donahue, et al. (2006). 'Misli Crush, Misli: Travellers and Nomadism.'

35 Delaney. (2001). 'Representations of the Travellers in the 1880s and 1900s.'

36 Ibid

37 LGBT Pavee, Ireland. (2022). Reconciling Community, Culture and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

38 Gearon. (2021). Indigenous Feminism Is Our Culture.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 LGBT Pavee, Ireland. (2022). Reconciling Community, Culture and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

42 Meaney-Sartori. (2021). Mincéirs Mental Health Course – Evaluating a Traveller Led Course in Mental Health for the Traveller Community.

43 Irish Traveller Movement. (2017). Review of the Commission on Itinerancy Report.

44 France. (2021). Within Indigenous NA Context: Healing Circle, Counselling and Creative Arts.

45 Joyce. (2018). Mincéirs Siúladh: An ethnographic study of young Travellers experience of racism in an Irish City.

46 BelongTo. (2021). LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown: 1 Year Later Key Findings.

47 Ibid

48 Higgins et al. (2016). LGBTIreland Report. p.244.

49 Abdalla et al. (2010). All Ireland Traveller Health Study - Our Geels: Summary of Findings.

50 Gone & Kirmayer (2020). Advancing Indigenous Mental Health Research: Ethical, conceptual and methodological challenges.

51 Pachankis et al. (2020). Sexual orientation concealment and mental health: A conceptual and meta-analytic review.

52 The National LGBTI+ Travellers & Roma Rights Calendar 2022

ONE EDGE OUT MIGHT BE FOREVER

– Survey Respondent*

*I didn't even know the word intersex
until they were born
And I think my husband doesn't understand
tho the nurse tried
He was just happy...they were healthy
And didn't even mind the name as long as I picked it*

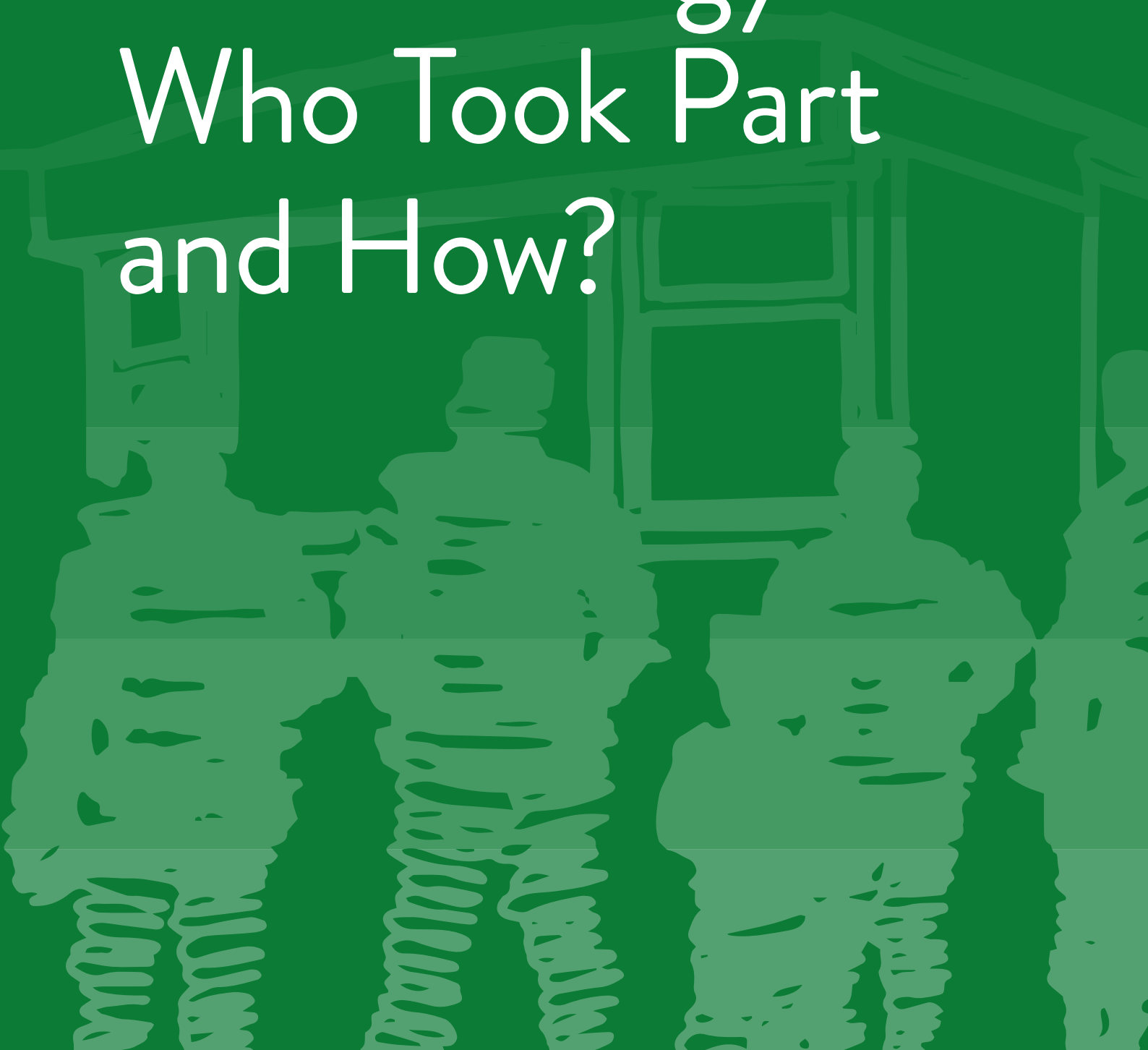
*We didn't go operation
they might be male female or not...
... think we both just want to love
I'm not sure how to support them without harming them
and don't want to box them in either
as Travellers know Travellers and one edge out might be forever*

*I love my child
and they are as they are
Think about the child when they get older
I'm so scared about how to raise them
...nowhere to turn...
and don't know how to help them*

I'm sure tomorrow's tomorrow will be better



Chapter Two: Research Methodology – Who Took Part and How?



HORSES

A lot of the symbols that come up around Travellers and Traveller inclusion is usually horses and wagons. It was also around horses that I first heard the term fxxxxt. Because I was frightened of horses and somebody said oh 'you're just being a sissy', and somebody else says, 'Oh, no, he's a fxxxxt.' I was nine.

So, you have like an immediate crisis about your identity. I started the coming out process when I was about 16, but it did coincide with 'you can't live here anymore', 'think of the younger children it's gonna make their lives difficult.'

I don't know why being who I am is making their lives difficult. In my head...I am the most Traveller of all Travellers...because I've never not been a Traveller do you know...but I struggled around how other people would have connected to their own culture and how that become muddled for myself.

Some elderly Traveller women... decided that I wasn't a Traveller... people who were very clear in their own identity, but who felt comfortable enough to call me out in a space. And they never said it but... it did feel like it was about being gay. It's almost like that being gay, even if you have a history and X over there might be a cousin of yours...you're not a Traveller. So, I think that fear and that negativity and that sense of 'you're not one of us'...I think first came through horses, and then was really solidified then.

***Photovoice created from Focus Group Participant transcript**





I'd hear stories of my family saying about gay people and I knew it was wrong, you know, I mean, it's kind of put in your head like it's not normal. That's why I kept it a secret and I actually did think it was a phase. Maybe I'll grow out of it. I was really secluded. I kept myself to myself. I was keeping myself busy with horses'

Focus group Participant

2.1 Introduction

Participating in research can reinforce feelings of powerlessness within society if participants are not democratically involved in the process, and if they see no direct change or insight as a consequence of the research.⁵³ The research methods and process used in this research strove to do the opposite through the minimisation of power imbalances.⁵⁴ As such, this research followed a structure based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) frameworks,⁵⁵ the principle of which is that stakeholders are invited into participative and democratic relationships in which they are encouraged to engage in genuine collaborative leadership.⁵⁶ Research partners, researchers, and participants are therefore collaboratively involved in leading and developing the project at all stages in an iterative cycle of research, reflection, and action.⁵⁷

Participatory Action Research, I believe is of special importance in research related to Travellers and Roma, as Travellers in particular have long been the subject of scholarly attention, and there has been specific criticism of past-practice in Traveller related research, where 'settled' researchers declare themselves 'experts' on Travellers, and where much of the literature is

written from a 'settled' perspective.⁵⁸ While I am a settled researcher, the co-creation of the research structure with members of the LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma community helped better shape my understanding of Traveller and Roma specific issues. Issues such as, socio-economic exclusion, cultural issues (e.g., nomadism, language, horse-keeping), racism and discrimination, accommodation, educational disadvantage, unemployment (84% of Travellers are unemployed), gender issues (e.g., the impact of living in a strongly patriarchal culture), service provision (Travellers are often not linked to any services), addiction issues, conflict and violence,⁵⁹ and how these may exacerbate circumstances for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma.

For example, in the LGBTIreland Report, some participants experienced moving away from home or to urban cities as liberating as they felt able to be more open.⁶⁰ For others, going to college was significant because there was a greater openness about sexual/gender identity and they had access to LGBTI+ supports, resources and peers.⁶¹ For Traveller and Roma however, this option is usually not available, as one participant in this research explained -

'I wasn't educated enough where I could imagine myself having a job, certainly not one that could pay bills and rent and give you any sort of a life. And we didn't have a life outside of the site'

Focus Group Participant

Many Travellers live in 'Traveller specific' accommodation – namely halting sites or group housing schemes, where large extended families live together based on Traveller's shared identity.⁶² Halting sites are purpose-built residential accommodation for Travellers, provided by a local authority, generally comprising of bays, where an individual bay can host a family unit.⁶³ Some of the participants in this research referred to the 'camp', which may refer to an 'encampment', which is defined by the Office of the Planning Regulator as 'unauthorised occupation of land (local authority and privately owned land) by members of the Travelling community.'⁶⁴

There is also an 'unofficial' version when it comes to Traveller accommodation and participants in the research referred to 'living on the side of the road' or in a 'trailer in mother's yard.' 39% of Travellers are living in severely overcrowded conditions, and approximately 3,000 Travellers live in unofficial sites or on the side of the road without access (in 2021) to running water, electricity and toilets.⁶⁵ In addition, there are a disproportionate number of Travellers experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping rough and accessing emergency accommodation.⁶⁶ Travellers experience of homelessness is also often hidden, through conditions such as living in overcrowded houses, sleeping on the floor or on couches, and in insecure accommodation under threat of eviction.⁶⁷

Roma in Ireland are also discriminated in accessing accommodation and experience severe overcrowding, poor quality accommodation, a lack of security of tenure as well as homelessness or being compelled to live in unsafe and abandoned buildings due to lack of accommodation options.⁶⁸ Anti-Roma sentiment in Ireland is such that in one instance three Roma families

were intimidated in their home by up to 200 people and forced to leave under Garda escort.⁶⁹

Consequently, avenues such as 'moving away from home' or 'going to college' which may be successful coping mechanisms available to members of the wider LGBTI+ community, are more challenging to access for Traveller and Roma, where racism can impede on the ability to source employment or alternative accommodation⁷⁰ or access to higher education, where participation remains at an alarmingly low level.⁷¹

2.2 Peer Researchers

Three peer-researchers were recruited for this research project, who also participated in the research process. The process was developed with a focus on participation and empowerment, and in recognition that peers are experts within their field of experience. The 'insider' knowledge and position of the peer-researchers, and the manner in which they are able to frame research questions and interpret responses, has the potential to facilitate a deeper understanding of the support needs of this group.

The members of the National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights steering this research, recommended people who they believed would be a good fit in terms of having facilitation experience. Potential peer-researchers were reached out to by telephone for an informal interview that discussed the research more in-depth and laid out the commitment that was required to participate. Because of COVID-19 and the impact of the third wave of the virus at the time of recruitment, an inaugural meeting was held online where peer-researchers met with each other as well as with members from the stakeholder organisations steering this research (The National Action Group for LGBT Traveller & Roma Rights, LGBT Ireland and Exchange House Ireland). At the meeting, an overview of the project was given to the peer-researchers and a dialogue ensued about the expectations for the research.

Peer-researcher training was carried out online between October and December 2021 and facilitated over three sessions. The training was designed experientially, with a focus group facilitated by the Principal Investigator, so that peer-researchers could experience both the process of being a participant in a focus group, as well as observing the role of the facilitator. Photovoice was used as a methodology and participants were asked to bring a photograph that represented their experience as LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma.

The first session was on Photovoice, a term that was first used by Caroline Wang⁷² in her research into community health with rural women in China, and as a method has a strong commitment to social critique and to supporting the empowerment of marginalised groups where individuals are viewed as experts in their own lives. The sharing that resulted from using the photographs to elicit conversation was more emotive and descriptive than might have otherwise arisen. Participants were also hugely supportive and encouraging of each other in the focus group discussion. Patricia Leavy upholds the belief that this is because the arts evoke emotional responses, and so the dialogue sparked by arts-based practice is highly engaged.⁷³ Furthermore, by connecting people on emotional and visceral levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy.

The second online session involved reflecting on the process of the focus group and exploring the various stages of the research in more detail including:

- Informed Consent
- Ethics and limits to confidentiality clause
- Researcher skills – listening, honouring all voices, managing participant input
- Research Methods – focus groups, and use of Photovoice to generate discussion
- Communicating the findings from the Needs Analysis – knowledge exchange

The practicalities of the research, such as recruiting participants, how the focus groups would be supported by the Principal Investigator in terms of recording and safe storage of the data, were covered in subsequent sessions.

2.3 Recruitment of Research Participants



Research participants were invited to take part in this research through multiple methods including a Webinar promoting online focus groups, through a poster-call distributed through Traveller organisations, and finally through a survey, where respondents could indicate if they were comfortable being contacted and input their email address or phone number to take part. All of the content for the webinar, poster and survey was designed with the peer-researchers on this project and therefore informed by those who had direct experience of being LGBTI+ Traveller, thus embodying the participatory and democratic ethos of the research methodology.

The survey, which was designed to be used as a preliminary recruitment tool, rather than as an instrument to be relied on as a central part of the research, quickly revealed the fear that people had about their LGBTI+ identity being exposed and helped shine a light on why, despite all our efforts to get people to participate in focus groups, we were struggling to do so. Many respondents to the survey were married. Travellers tend to marry younger than the settled population. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) report that in April 2016 31.9% of Travellers, aged 15 to 29, were married compared with just over 1 in 20 (5.8%) of the general population.⁷⁴ Similarly, and relative to contemporary majority Irish society, some Roma marry and have families at quite a young age,⁷⁵ which has historical links to the slavery of Roma in Romania and as a way of protecting Roma girls from rape from their 'owners'.⁷⁶ In the absence of solid alternatives for future economic security and social status, marriage and family formation continue to act as a means to try to escape poverty and achieve social status.⁷⁷

It is important to note the diversity of views within Traveller and Roma communities in relation to early marriage and to avoid simplistic equations that can impact on access to education and wider human rights.⁷⁸ According to Darren Collins, young gay Travellers will sometimes enter into marriage because they do not want to shame their families.⁷⁹ Others are known to have entered into arranged marriages, at great expense to their mental health, in order to keep up a pretence for the sake of their parents.⁸⁰ Just over half of the respondents to our survey self-selected that they were 'married to someone of the opposite sex' and the comments below highlight the reticence respondents expressed to attending a space or taking part in an event, which might expose them and their LGBTI+ identity.

'Fear of losing children'

Survey Respondent

'I'm not out and don't plan to be as ya can see the back biting about those that are'

Survey Respondent

'...our lives would be fucked up if people new'

Survey Respondent.

Perhaps as a result of peoples' reticence to take part in face-to-face interviews or focus groups, the survey began to be circulated more widely through Traveller organisations and online on social media. While people may have been unwilling to take part in-person, it was clear from the length of answers being submitted via the survey that people were engaged and keen to contribute their experience and were supportive of the research.

'My friend helped me with this as didn't know about it. Using her phone. Blown my mind that people are doing something about this'

– Survey Respondent

Some responses to open-ended questions were over 400 words in length, and people expressed gratitude at having a place to express themselves.

'Thank you for asking these questions an' I look forward to things getting better'

Survey Respondent

The peer-researchers set up a Facebook page, that offered a space to be able to ask questions about the research (via email and phone) as well as providing background information to the research.

Some survey respondents requested directly that the research results be well-promoted amongst the community.



'Found this on Facebook can you please make sure results get a good seeing'

Survey Respondent

Many of the responses were used in the creation of the transcript poems that divide this report and appear in the 'Spoken Word Project' that accompanies this report and that is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

2.4 Profile of Focus Group Participants

Between November 2021 and July 2022, the research team carried out four focus groups/interviews with LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma: two in-person (one on the east of the country in Dublin and the other in the west in Galway) and two online. In total 10 people took part in in-depth research conversations focused on their experience as LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma using Photovoice as a methodology.

The breakdown is as follows:

- 4 Focus groups – 2 online, 2 face-to-face
- 5 Hours 20 mins of material
- 3 Gay female/lesbian – 7 Gay male Participants
- 9 LGBTI+ Traveller, 1 LGBTI+ Roma

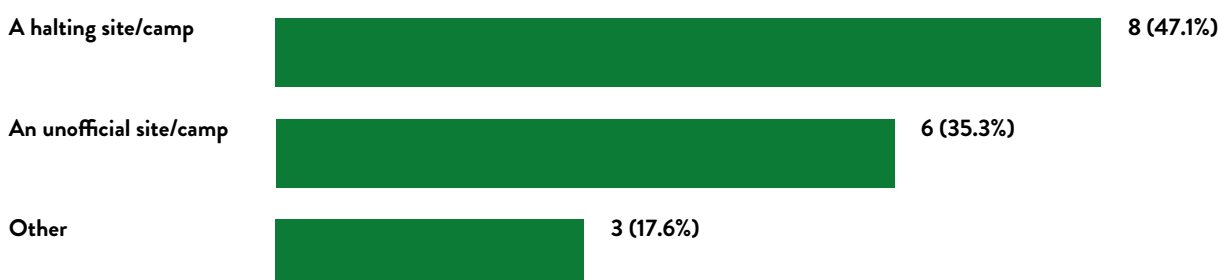
Total 10 Participants

2.5 The Unveiling Inequality Survey

The Unveiling Inequality Research LGBTI+ Travellers & Roma Survey was completed by 51 respondents. Four responses were excluded leaving a total of 47. Three of the responses were invalid and contained multiple answers so were subsequently disregarded. One response was unfortunately abandoned too early in the process to be able to be included. Two of the responses were completed by family members, so the respondent count is 45 + 2. The two responses by family members are asterisked when referred to in the report. The survey launched on the 22nd of February 2022 and closed on the 4th of July, the time frame of which was designed to include Dublin Pride, held on the last Saturday in June. Participants answered 27 questions and the survey took approximately ten minutes to complete, though given the length of some of the responses, the time spent completing the survey may have been considerably longer.

The survey questions were finalised with the peer-research team and also following consultation with Belong To, an LGBTI+ youth organisation in Ireland which caters for young people aged between 14–23 years. Belong To, together with GLEN - Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, commissioned the LGBTIreland Report, which was a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland, and is considered to be the largest study of LGBTI+ people in Ireland to date and the first study with a sample of intersex people.⁸¹ The steering group on this project were keen that the findings from this research, focused on the specific experience of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, could be

FIGURE 1: HALTING SITE/UNOFFICIAL CAMP/OTHER?



drawn on for the next national LGBTI+ study due to be executed later in 2022. This objective was with the view to creating better visibility of the specific and complex support needs for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma in particular.

2.5.1 PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The profile of Survey Respondents provided in this report is more detailed than that of Focus Group Participants and is as follows:

- 45 + 2* Survey Responses
- 45* Traveller 2 Roma
- 28* Gay male
- 9 Gay female/lesbian
- 5 Bi-sexual
- 3 Transgender
- 2* Intersex

As noted, two of the survey submissions were on behalf of others, and when referred to are asterisked. One respondent completed the survey for their brother.

'Im filling this out for my brother who hung himself'

Survey Respondent*

The other response was from the parent of an intersex child.

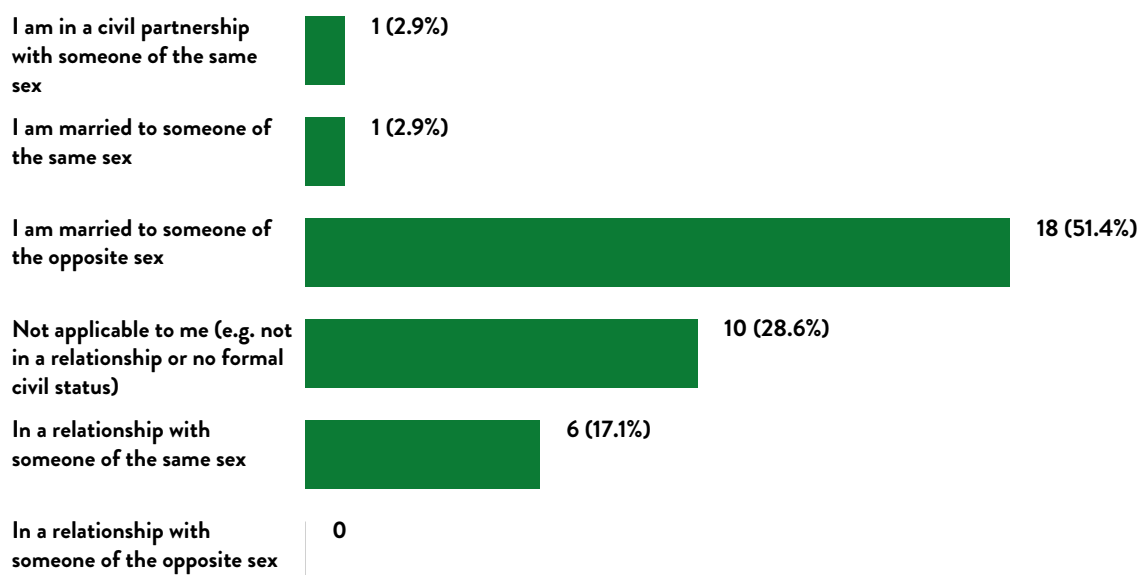
'My child is intersex and I didnt even know the word intersex until they were born. Sorry if this miss the asking but I just want my child to be known too.'

Survey Respondent*

2.5.2 AGE PROFILE

The majority, 21 of the participants who answered the survey were between 18 and 24 years old. Just over 20% (n=11) of participants, were between 25 and 34. 9 were between the ages of 35 and 44. 4 participants were between the ages of 45 and 54, and there were 3 participants aged between 55 and 64. One participant* did not respond to this question. Therefore, we could summarise that the majority of survey respondents; 32 in total, were between the ages of 25 and 34.

FIGURE 2: CIVIL PARTNERSHIP STATUS





2.5.2 LIVING SITUATION

In terms of living situation, over half of participants said they lived in a city or suburb of a city (57.4%). 34% of participants said they lived in a town, while just over 19% said they lived rurally or in a village.

At the time of participating in this survey, 22 participants, were living in a house, while 7 were living in an apartment or flat. 15* were living in a chalet/trailer/mobile home/caravan, while 5 participants were homeless, living in group housing or emergency accommodation. 8 participants lived in a halting site*, six in an unofficial site/camp, while 3 lived in 'mother's yard' or 'Traveller group housing.'

Q8B. If you live in a chalet/trailer/mobile-home/caravan, do you live in...

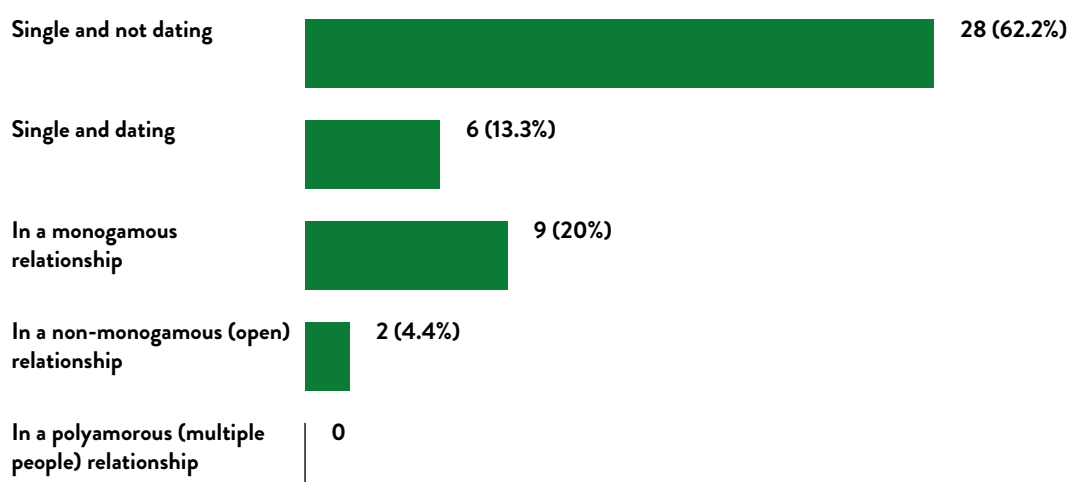
Sixteen participants were living with their parents at the time of taking part in the survey, while 9 were living with family members other than their parents. 6 participants lived with their 'same-sex partner/civil partner/spouse with no children'. 5 participants lived with their 'opposite sex partner/spouse with child(ren)'. 5 lived alone, and the remaining five were homeless as mentioned previously.

2.5.3 RELATIONSHIP STATUS

As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter by Traveller Darren Collins, many of the participants of this survey were married. Over half of survey respondents were married to someone of the opposite sex, with just 1 respondent married to someone of the same sex, and 1 in a civil partnership with someone of the same sex. 10 respondents said that this question was not applicable to them, while 11 respondents elected not to respond to this question, including the two respondents who were filling this survey out on behalf of family members.

Participants were asked about their current relationship status. Just over 60% (62.2%; n=28) were single and not dating, while others (13.3%; n=6) were dating. Another 24.4% (n=11) were in a relationship. This included 20% (n=9) in a monogamous relationship, 4.4% (n=2) in a non-monogamous/open relationship.

FIGURE 3: RELATIONSHIP STATUS



2.5.4 CHILDREN

'I want to have children, but I don't want to have a man. And that is why...I came out sooner ... Because I don't want to have a husband and get married and then have kids and then having to divorce from him and having children.'

– Focus Group Participant

Of the 46 participants to answer on children (the respondent who answered this survey on behalf of

their child did not answer this question) almost 60% (n=28) reported that they had never been a parent. Over 40% (n=19) of respondents were parents, which differs greatly with the LGBTIreland Report findings, where less than 10% reported that they are or had been a parent.⁸² Participants in this survey had between 1 and 9 children, with the majority having either 1 or 2 children.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, takes a look at the experience of 'coming out', mental health and the experience of exclusion for the participants in this research.

FIGURE 4: CHILDREN





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Chapter Three – Coming Out, Mental Health and Exclusion



A REMINDER OF WHO I AM

The table is right behind me... it's...a constant reminder to me of who I am. I have a collection of these little tin pieces from Tom McDonnell. They're handmade, from one of the last remaining Traveller tinsmiths in the country.



I'm very conscious of the fact that a lot of people would say that 'oh, you don't look like a Traveller', 'you don't sound like a Traveller'. I don't fit all the stereotypes when it comes to describing what a Traveller is. This here is a reminder to me of who I am, and that you don't have to be any one particular way at all to be a Traveller.

You're considered that there is something not quite right with you when you're 18 and not talking to girls or not getting married. 'So, I'm gonna hide it now until I can't hide it, and then I'll do something about it. I'm safe now until I'm 18, or maybe 21. And then I'm going to end it all.' Contemplations of suicide have been there for me for a long period in my life.

I couldn't do the kind of work that my brothers do. I left school early and wasn't educated enough where I could imagine myself having a job, certainly not one that could pay bills and rent and give you any sort of a life. Growing up we didn't have a life outside of the site, so I'd have no friends or family if I left. It was difficult to see a future for myself.

I came out when I was about 21, but at the time it wasn't accepted as coming out and wasn't spoken about for years later. 'I don't mind who you are. I don't care who you are. Just don't tell your dad.' I've had so many positive achievements that I celebrated by myself for the most part. No matter how well you do, there is always a reminder that there is something to be ashamed about, you know?

**Photovoice created from Focus Group Participant transcript*



'It's almost like that being gay, even if you have a history and X over there might be a cousin of yours... you're not a Traveller... you're not one of us'

Focus Group Participant

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the experience of 'coming out' and the association between identity and mental health for participants as well as their experience of exclusion, before moving into an exploration of supports and recommendations in the following chapter. When we speak about 'exclusion', this chapter will delve into participants' experience of harassment, violence, sense of safety and homelessness, to put forward a picture of how this exclusion is experienced by LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma. In this portrayal, we will discuss the impact of this for individuals and the intersectionality of the exclusion (harassment, violence, sense of safety and homelessness) experienced as a consequence of being LGBTI+ and compounded by the experience of being Traveller and Roma.

Discrimination and racism against Traveller and Roma in Ireland has been evidenced at all levels of Irish society through government policies and practice such as inadequate accommodation,⁸³ racial profiling by the police, disproportionate representation in prison,⁸⁴ and in the media and public sphere where racism and

hate speech are commonplace.⁸⁵ When 10 people, including five children and a young pregnant mother, died in the fire at a temporary halting site in south Dublin in 2015, settled residents protested against plans to accommodate the grieving survivors, illustrating the depth of racism and the total lack of empathy towards the community.⁸⁶ While the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy⁸⁷ pledged to adopt and implement measures to address racial discrimination and hate speech in the mainstream media and public sphere, the racism remains so pervasive and deep-rooted that it has been normalised in the media and evidenced in quotes from the country's politicians and in public discourse.⁸⁸ Participants in this research sometimes referred to the racism against their culture as 'the last acceptable form of racism in Ireland'.

'It's okay to say something derogatory towards Travellers... it's acceptable to say stuff about Travellers you know? That's what baffles me'

Focus Group Participant

A report from a recent conference in the UK hosted by The Romani Cultural and Arts Company, highlighted the high rates of mental illness and suicide amongst Gypsy and Traveller individuals who identify as LGBTI+, along with a heightened fear of the repercussions of revealing one's sexual identity due to the tightly knit and widely marginalised family and community structure.⁸⁹ In short, the implications of ostracism from the community are more acute for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, who may often quite literally have 'nowhere else to go.'⁹⁰ This chapter aims to explore and delve into this topic in an Irish context through the 'coming out' experience.

3.2 Coming Out – Age and 'Telling'

We asked survey participants when they 'first thought' and 'first knew' they were LGBTI+. Of the 46 participants to answer, answers when people 'first thought' they were LGBTI+ ranged from 11 years old to 19 years old. The most common age for thinking was 12 or 14 years old. The mean (average) age for 'thinking' they were LGBTI+ was 13.79 years.

The most common age for 'knowing' for the total sample was 15 years and the age range was between 12 years and 'late 20's'. The mean (average) age for 'knowing' was 16.63 years. Respondents who were older (late teens or 20's) tended to also be/have been

married to someone of the opposite sex and/or have children.

Over 95% of people who took part said they had told someone that they were LGBTI+. 6.7% (n=3) had not told anyone about their LGBTI+ identity. Of these, most people (89.1%) had told friends, 58.5% (n=27) had told siblings, and 37% (n=17) had told parents. 13 people had told extended family, while 9 people spoke to their 'wife' or told 'strangers online' or people in a 'gay group'.

In terms of experience 'telling', only 8 people had a 'positive experience. Half of the people who responded to this question (n=22) had a negative experience, and 17 had experiences that were mostly of a 'mixed' reaction.

'Mixed. My friend didnt take it well'

Survey Respondent

'Friend upset, counsellor not great with me'

Survey Respondent

'Friends supportive family less so'

Survey Respondent

FIGURE 5: LGBTI+ 'TOLD'





3.2.1 COMING OUT - EXPERIENCE

We asked if people could say more about their experience of coming out, and 34 people provided more detail. Some people provided more information about a positive/mostly positive experience.

'I came out to my family and community within a few weeks. It was a very positive coming out'

Survey Respondent

'It was a very positive experience to which I didn't expect'

Survey Respondent

'Most of my coming out experience was a positive one. The only negative and dramatic experience was with my family'

Survey Respondent

'I found a lot of love and support from my family once they had a chance to get over their own initial shock. Not that I was gay, as it was a known 'secret' but more so that I would share that openly'

Survey Respondent

Similarly, some Focus Group Participants had positive coming out experiences and spoke of the support they received from their families, and the willingness on the part of their loved ones to engage with or to try to understand more about LGBTI+ identity.

'So, the hardest one would have been for me to tell was my mom... 'Okay, I've got her kind of blessing. I don't care what anyone else thinks''

Focus Group Participant

I actually got my nan to tell my granddad. She was like, 'I'll do it for you.' ...but no, he's absolutely fine with it'

Focus Group Participant

'She said to me, 'obviously, you're attracted to men. Does that mean you want to buy women's clothes?' I said, 'no mummy, I self-identify as a man I'm comfortable being a man'. 'So, what do you call them people...trans-vestites?' I said, 'no, you don't say that these days, you say trans'. But she's very open, and to talk to me, to know it like.'

Focus Group Participant

Other survey respondents had more difficult coming out experiences, that ranged from feeling lonely and isolated to being threatened or endangered or made homeless as a result.

'Very lonely. Told there are places to go to but no, not as a Traveller'

Survey Respondent

'My family disowned me and threatened me and my partner but nothing happened to us'

Survey Respondent

'I went to bed in the car that night and he tried to burn me in it'

Survey Respondent

'I'm now homeless'

Survey Respondent

Likewise, some Focus Group Participants had negative or mixed reactions from their families, some of which involved their moving out.

'My dad and my mam kicked me out of the house...for two weeks, so I moved in with my friend. Eventually my mom got in touch'

Focus Group Participant

'It did coincide with 'you can't live here anymore''

Focus Group Participant

Others left home as a result of extreme reactions from family members, or as a protective measure as the ability to live 'a lie' was no longer possible.

'I went back and got hit so I just left. it's not about loving people less, it's also just about loving yourself as well.'

– Focus Group Participant

I had this depressed... depressive episode. I knew that the one way I could overcome any of this was to become independent. I moved into an apartment...I couldn't afford it. But I knew it was better for me to be in a space where I could close the door and lock myself away rather than be in a site'

Focus Group Participant

Some respondents to the survey said that they 'wouldn't do it again' or 'if I could do it again, I'd keep it to myself', highlighting how challenging they found the process. As highlighted throughout this report, a big aspect of the coming out process for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma is taking into consideration the reaction not only from family members, but the reaction from wider family and the Traveller and Roma community more

broadly. Extended family is a key element in Traveller culture with people identifying themselves by their family, clan or family name, with family names or connections considered important.⁹¹ Similarly, both the immediate family and extended family are central to Roma culture, who often travel with their extended family and it is quite usual for three or four generations of the same family to live together.⁹²

For communities that already experience isolation and exclusion to the extent they do, exclusion from the community as a consequence of being LGBTI+, as highlighted in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, or fear of exclusion, can be too big a risk for some LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma to take.

'Hard being a Traveller but then you have other Travellers to be a Traveller with...we at least have each other but OUT Travellers have a terrible time'

Survey Respondent

'Nothing wrong with being gay but the world really doesn't think that way most times. Every single Traveller that has come out that I know has an awful time been made a laugh of'

Survey Respondent

Similarly, managing a minority identity within a minority identity, for many only compounds their already significant feelings of isolation and disconnection,⁹³ and can feel like the ultimate rejection in a lifetime of stereotyping and discrimination.

'Hate to Travellers is hard. Who would want another reason to be hated'

Survey Respondent



3.3 Experience of Violence/ Harassment, Sense of Safety and Homelessness

'I don't feel safe as a Traveller near mind being gay...so no I don't feel safe and I don't even know what feeling safe feels like'

Survey Respondent

Participants were asked about their experiences of harassment and violence because they are LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma. By far, the most frequently reported negative experience was being verbally hurt due to being LGBTI+, with 93% (n=40) of respondents having experienced this at some point. A considerable number of participants had experienced threats due to being LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma: threatened with physical violence (60.5%; n=26), had someone threaten to 'out' them as LGBTI+ (48.8%; n=21), or had hurtful things written about them on social media (32.6%; n=14).

'Whenever a young boy leaves his girlfriend or breaks off an engagement, my name is brought up, you know, 'the reason he broke it off is because he's gay he's going out with that fella'

Focus Group Participant

Just over 40% of participants had experienced some form of physical attack due to being LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma (41.9%; n=18), attacked sexually (7%; n=3), or attacked with a weapon (20.9%; n=9). With the exception of 'attacked sexually' these figures are considerably higher (in some cases double) than those of the LGBTIreland Report.⁹⁴ While some people referred to 'fights' within their families or community, others referred to experiencing 'bullying' or violence from the majority community.

'Queer bashed by non-Travellers 3 times in the gay quarter of X 3 times, one severely'

Survey Respondent

'... gave them the "chance" to bully me about that, to make fun on social media and during school hours or after school hours'

Survey Respondent

We asked survey respondents if they felt 'safe' as an LGBTI+ Traveller or Roma. Only 11.1% (n=5) said that they felt safe, while 84.4% (n=38) said that they felt unsafe. 10 respondents provided 'other' information here with a selection of these below, highlighting how even the concept of 'safety' was alien.

'Travellers are not safe how would a gay Traveller be safe'

Survey Respondent

'I dont know this ? as if anyone feels safe like'

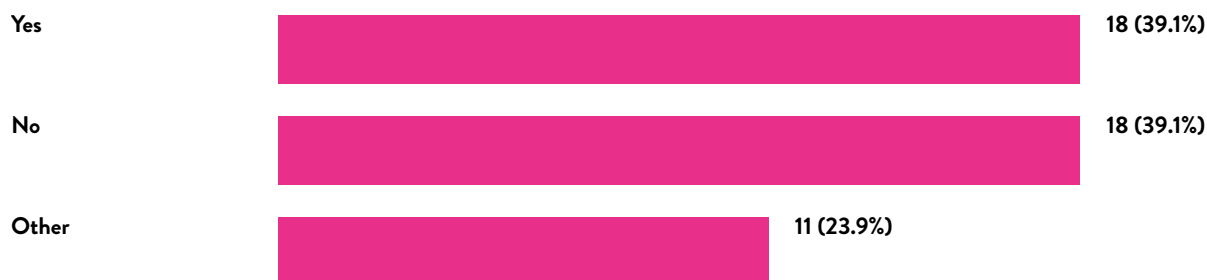
Survey Respondent

'I don't care how confident or how much money a Traveller has in the pocket no one's feelin safe'

Survey Respondent

We also asked people if they had experienced homelessness because of their LGBTI+ identity. 18 (39.1%) said they had experienced homelessness as a consequence of being LGBTI+ and a further 18 (39.1%) had not. 11 respondents (23.9%) selected 'other', and some people reported how they were unable to differentiate between being made homeless as a result of being Traveller or Roma or being made homeless as a result of being LGBTI+.

FIGURE 6: HOMELESSNESS



'Not sure how to divide Traveller identity with being gay ...Not like people tell you exactly why they wont support'

Survey Respondent

'Bit of a mix as didnt have good choices as a traveller and then family didnt cope very well so had less choices so i think it was a bit of both'

Survey Respondent

Others described being in a state of 'temporary homelessness, that seemed to be a direct consequence of their being LGBTI+.

'Yes for a few weekends or time when we argue and I cant go home'

Survey Respondent

'few weeks here and there'

Survey Respondent

'No, but nearly and it is ongoing'

Survey Respondent

3.4 Mental Health

'Used to drink heavy to black my mind out I'd go through a bottle and half a day easy stopped the drink when I realised how much my family and children were suffering'

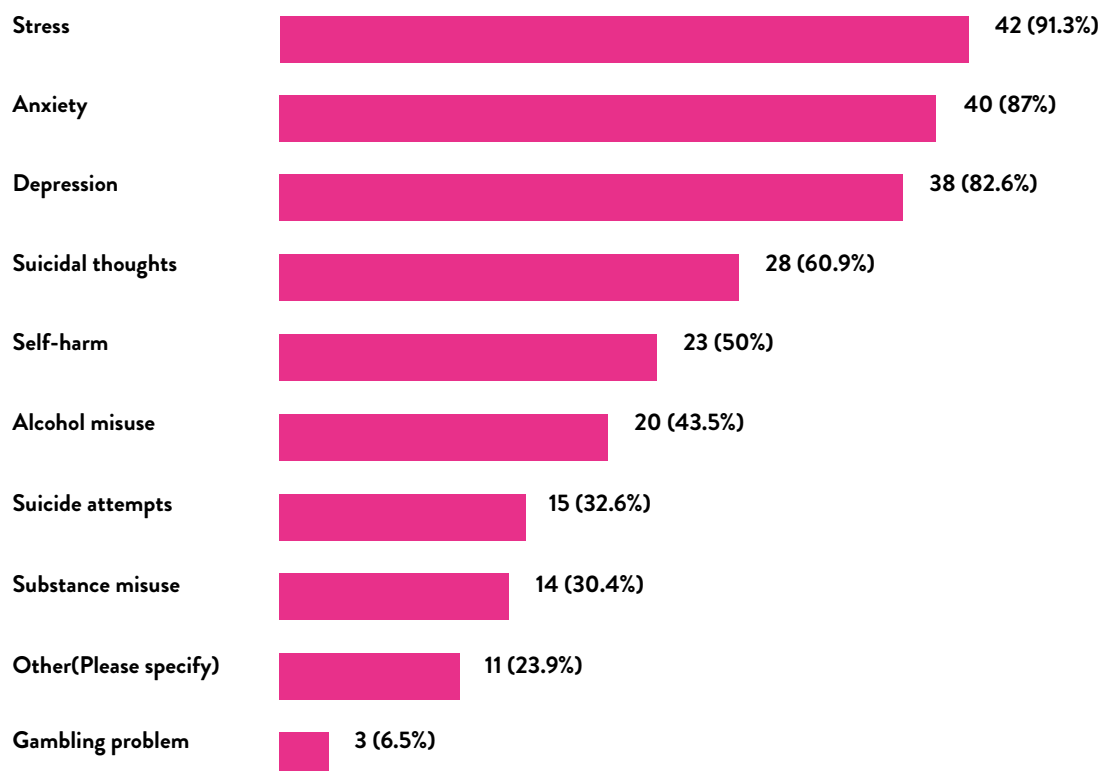
Survey Participant

We asked survey respondents to mark whether they had ever experienced any of the following as a result of their LGBTI+ identity.

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts
- Suicide attempt/s
- Alcohol misuse
- Substance misuse
- Problem gambling
- Other (Please specify)

Over 90% (n=42) recorded 'stress', followed closely by 'anxiety' (87%) and 'depression' (82.6%). Just over 60% (n=28) had experienced suicidal thoughts and 32.6% (n=15) had attempted suicide. 43.5% (n=20) listed 'alcohol misuse', 30.4% (n=14) listed 'substance misuse', and 3 respondents listed 'problem gambling'. 11 respondents selected 'other' and gave more information including 'tablets', 'loneliness', and 'keeping to myself' (n=8).

FIGURE 7: MENTAL HEALTH



'I was very depressed. I was getting very angry all the time; I was kicking doors and it wasn't like me at all. Because I was... I was afraid of coming out'

Focus Group Participant

'I couldn't pretend to be anything else. And I certainly wasn't going to be accepted at home...contemplations of suicide has always been there for me'

Focus Group Participant

'As someone who is from the Irish Travelling and Scottish Gypsy communities and is gay it is my experience and understanding that there is an intersectionality between inner/outer community, socially ingrained homophobia, and also outer community, socially ingrained racism'

Survey Respondent

As with homelessness, one person commented that it was tricky to separate out their experience as LGBTI+ from their experience of being Traveller/Roma.

Several gay male Focus Group Participants spoke of spending a considerable amount of time, in their late teens or early twenties, isolated from family and friends and 'locked' in their bedroom. Suicide for Traveller men is seven times higher than the general population, and most common in young Traveller men aged 15-25.⁹⁵ Some of the participants in this research spoke about being in mental turmoil, in some instances for years, during this period of their lives.

'I had a bedroom to myself so I could actually physically remove myself away from the camp and away from the community, and also away from the family world in a way. From that age, 17 to the age 20, I completely kept away from everyone. Physically shut the door every day.'

Focus Group Participant

'I wouldn't...like go out and meet friends, make plans, you know? In case...mom or close family would start to notice that you know, I haven't had a girlfriend yet ... I was just getting down and down and down more. Like...it really affected my mental health. Really bad to the point where you know, everyone noticed.'

Focus Group Participant

3.5 Concluding Thoughts

The Traveller community is currently experiencing a mental health crisis, that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 lockdowns and is evidenced by the high levels of suicide and self-harm, as well as by the high numbers of Travellers on medication for anxiety and depression.⁹⁶ As stated so eloquently by Martin Beanze Warde; 'mental health issues do not know the difference between who is a Traveller and who is not. They do not discriminate. Only they do.'⁹⁷ The current government,

after years of community campaigning, have made a formal commitment to implement a National Traveller Health Action Plan, that remains outstanding.⁹⁸ Geraldine McDonnell explained in her address to the Oireachtas that Traveller and Roma are invisible in mental health policy and provision because Traveller and Roma are not being counted in official data.⁹⁹

Yet we know, and research has shown, that ethnic minorities disproportionately experience addiction, depression, anxiety, bereavement, PTSD and more stemming from decades of racism and discrimination.¹⁰⁰ Internationally, LGBTI+ people have been consistently identified as a population who experience elevated rates of mental health difficulties comparative to the general population.¹⁰¹ As with racism experienced by Traveller and Roma that can lead to internalised shame about one's identity, a prolific culture of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia towards LGBTI+ can compound mental health issues.¹⁰²

While it may be difficult to separate ethnic identity from LGBTI+ identity in relation to mental health, it is clear from this research that Traveller and Roma LGBTI+ experience the same mental health issues as the general LGBTI+ population, which is compounded by the experience of anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism. It is also apparent from responses in this section that supports or protective mechanisms such as 'moving away from home' or 'increased Gardaí presence', which are cited as supports that would help the majority LGBTI+ community and could protect against violence or harassment¹⁰³ are not applicable for these communities, who experience such discrimination in relation to housing and accommodation, and where ill-treatment and abuse in the form of under-policing and over-policing is routine.¹⁰⁴ Supports and 'what would help' LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.



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Chapter 4 – Supports & Recommendations



A WHY CHILD

Oh yes, I experienced more way discrimination for being a Traveller than I ever have done for being gay. I think personally racism against Travellers, as well as Roma gypsies, is the last accepted form of racism in Ireland. I mean it's okay to say, you knacker. It's okay to say something derogatory towards Travellers, but if you dare say the word faggot, or the other derogatory terms... racist slurs, other ethnic or like different colour people, or religious, you'd get the head ate off ya . But it seems still OK to be nasty and seems acceptable to say stuff about Travellers, you know? That's what baffles me.



I was a why child growing up. Why? Why? Why? And why can't a girl have sex before marriage? Why can't a girl be the bread winner? Why? Why? So many whys and the answers didn't make sense to me. I would then ask, who said you can't? Who's the person that made all these rules up? No one could ever give me a clear direct answer.

Growing up, you would get peer-pressured into things you don't want to do, like toxic masculinity, like boxing, football, and as for women...in the sense that the more women you got with the more of a man you become. Strange really. As I'm gay, I felt the pressure even more so. When it was my turn to get married, I moved out. I thought, maybe I can just live this life away from my family, away from the community, all alone. I lived on my own for three years

In my family my father brought up sons. There wasn't any emotion or feelings in my family. When I told my father...I dropped to the floor and just started crying, I'm so sorry if I could change this I would. These are exactly his words. There's nothing wrong with you. If you go around thinking there's something wrong with you, you're going to be a very unhappy person for the rest of your life.

So, I wiped the tears and we just carried on. I might be different from my other members of my family but I'm still part of it and loved equally.

**Photovoice created from Focus Group Participant transcript*



'That's the weirdest thing, isn't it when you see people from minority backgrounds judging others for who they are?... Then complain about society doing that to Travellers for them as a Traveller. It's the most craziest thing to think of because it's so hypocritical'

Focus Group Participant

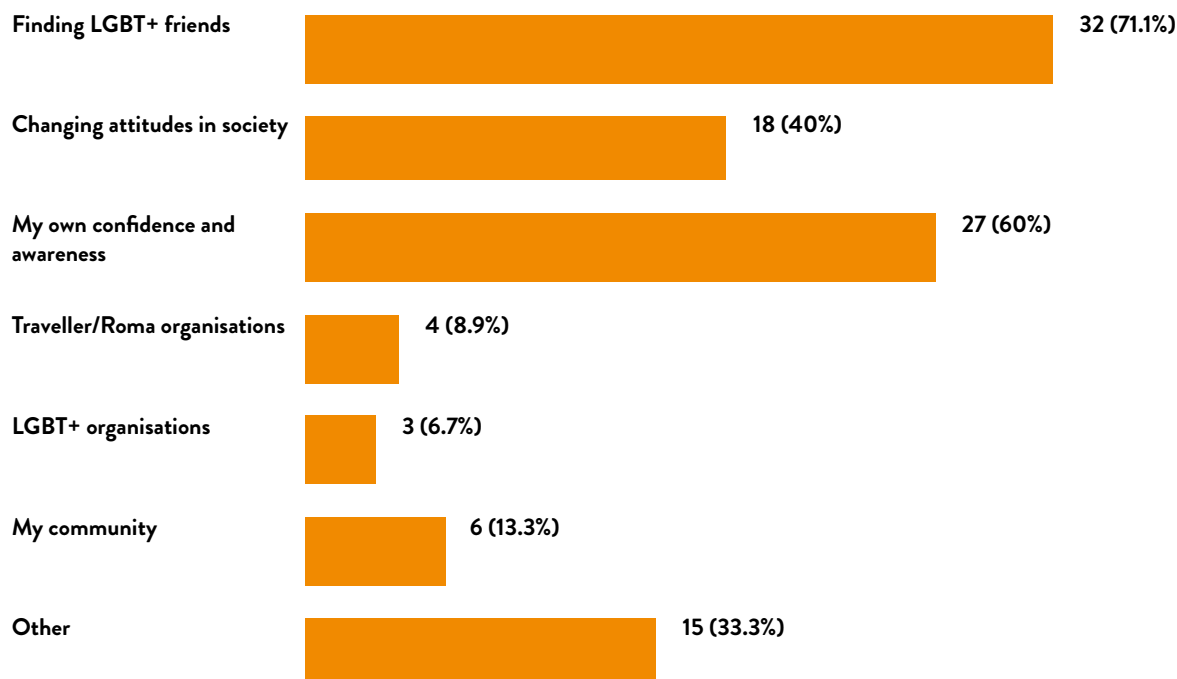
Participants in wider LGBTI+ research have cited the LGBTI+ community as a source of strength and support,¹⁰⁵ and LGBTI+ groups as integral in terms of offering a safe space for people to come out, as well as enabling them to form a social network of support.¹⁰⁶ However, for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, there is discrimination within the wider LGBTQI+ community that includes anti-Traveller sentiment, with many citing verbal racism and exclusion from social clubs.¹⁰⁷ This is compounded by discrimination within their minority communities for being LGBTI+.

In this section we look at what supports were available to participants and what helped people accept themselves and their LGBTI+ identity. In doing so, we also explore what hindered people, as in understanding the barriers and aspects of peoples' experience that had a negative impact on their coming out or identity acceptance, we can better understand the recommendations put forward by people as to what would help and make a difference to their lives.

4.2 Supports and What Helped

A number of aspects helped participants with their self-acceptance and coming out process as LGBTI+. These include 71.1% (n=32) for whom 'finding LGBTI+ friends' was a support, and 40% for whom 'changing attitudes in society' helped them accept themselves more easily. 60% of survey respondents (n=27) said it was their 'own confidence and awareness' that supported their coming out, while 8.9% (n=4) found support from Traveller/Roma organisations and 6.7% (n=3) from LGBTI+ organisations. 13.3% (n=6) received support from their community, and 33.3% selected 'other' but only 2 provided more information, which included 'other gay Travellers' and 'a friend'.

In the LGBTIreland study, 41% of participants cited Inclusion in the LGBTI community and the support received as paramount to their wellbeing.¹⁰⁸ However, for Traveller and Roma LGBTI+, only three participants referred to the support they received from LGBTI+ organisations, with some participants reporting feeling a lack of acceptance due to their ethnicity.

FIGURE 8: COMING OUT SUPPORT & ACCEPTANCE


'Had contacted a org and they were not aware of Traveller in the way they should be, Knocked me back greatly'

Survey Respondent

Similarly, Focus Group participants spoke of other LGBTI+ friends, particularly those that were also LGBTI+ and Traveller or Roma, as being a source of support.

'I met this other gay Traveller, and he knew what I was about. I knew what he was about as Travellers, and so we could ,we support each other in that way'

Focus Group Participant

Other Focus Group participants spoke of how changing attitudes in society made it easier to be self-accepting, though for some this was coupled with a maturity or 'thicker skin' that made them less susceptible to the negative impact of judgement.

'It's been ingrained in everyone's head in the Travelling community that being gay is a taboo thing... you just doesn't exist. Obviously, it's just been passed down from each generation to generation. And now it's getting a bit better because...it's more modern times now. You see it everywhere now. It's on the TV, Pride month every year is getting bigger... so it's kind of more people are educating themselves'

Focus Group Participant

'I think it's easier now with today's generation because it's somewhat cool. Like it's become cool now to be part of the LGBTQI'

Focus Group Participant



'...at that stage in my life, I was kind of busy doing my own thing. No one else's opinions mattered to me'

Focus Group Participant

People in focus groups also spoke about the support of their families being the most important source of feeling acceptance of their LGBTI+ identity, and for many, once they had the backing of their immediate families, the views and opinions of others paled into insignificance.

'I think once I told my immediate family.... I didn't really care what anyone else thought'

Focus Group Participant

'I know they're not okay with it. You can just tell. You get the vibe. Just you know, you can sense it. That's fine. They're not my immediate family. That's fine. You can't please everyone' – Focus Group Participant

'My nephew whispered to her, 'he's married to a dude'. It was so funny. She wasn't bothered. Like children aren't closed minded. It's society that teaches... that brings in hatred.'

Focus Group Participant

4.3 Barriers and What Hindered

In terms of aspects that had a negative impact on peoples' coming out or identity acceptance, almost 80% (n=35) of respondents selected 'negative attitudes in society towards LGBTI+', while family and friends were both seen by 72.7% (n=32) to have a negative impact. 72.7% (n=32) said the community had a negative impact, and 54.5% (n=24) felt it was down to their own confidence and awareness that hindered their self-acceptance. Of the 22.7% (n=10) respondents who selected 'other', 'country people' or

'settled people' were listed, while 'anti-Traveller sentiment' in organisations was cited as another aspect or negative impact on the coming out experience or acceptance of LGBTI+ identity.

We also asked participants 'If you have not told someone you are LGBTI+ what are the reasons for not telling?' The most common reason people identified for not coming out was fear of rejection or discrimination (n=35), or fear of being 'outed' (n=31). Others were concerned that they 'wouldn't be comfortable' (n=19) or because they 'don't know how to bring it up' (n=9). 12 respondents would not tell someone because they were 'in a heterosexual marriage', while another 12 felt it was 'not something that I need to declare'. 8 people said they were 'unsure of sexual orientation' while of the 7 who selected 'other' responses ranged from 'want to keep my teeth' to 'fear of losing children' (n=3).

Family, extended family bonds and networks are very important to Traveller and Roma way of life, as is a distinct identity from the settled or 'country' population, and family anniversaries, births, weddings and funerals are usually marked by extended family or community gatherings.¹⁰⁹ Several participants referred to negative experiences at large family and community gatherings such as funerals and weddings and dreading these occasions or not attending all together due to their LGBTI+ identity.

'It's near a death sentence for me to be asked to go to a wedding'

Focus Group Participant

'We were at a funeral....and someone comes over who quite clearly knew I was gay. And she shuffled over to say, 'So, are you married?'

Focus Group Participant

'Got floored one time at a wedding when one of the men thought I was looking at him. I wasn't. Brought a lot of shame on the family'

Survey Respondent

'I had this number in me... I had it memorised. I knew the support was there but I didn't actually ring the number because I was scared'

Focus Group Participant

'I wouldn't go to weddings or funerals or anything like that. Just because you don't want to put yourself in that environment'

Focus Group Participant

4.4 Looking for Help

We asked people if they had looked for help, if so, who they had sought that help from, and how was their experience of receiving the help. Of the people who responded, 21 (46.7%) said they had looked for help, 12 (26.7%) had not looked, 8 (17.8%) had looked but couldn't find anything and 8 selected 'other'. Of these, some responded 'it was some time ago', or 'I don't think they understood Travellers'.

In terms of 'where' people looked for help. 8 people responded to this question, and of these, 2 sought help from Traveller/Roma organisations, 3 from LGBTI+ organisations, 1 from a private counselling service, and 2 from 'literacy class' and 'community worker'.

5 people responded to the question asking them to rate their experience, and of these, 1 recorded a positive experience, 3 recorded a negative experience, and 1 said it was 'OK'.

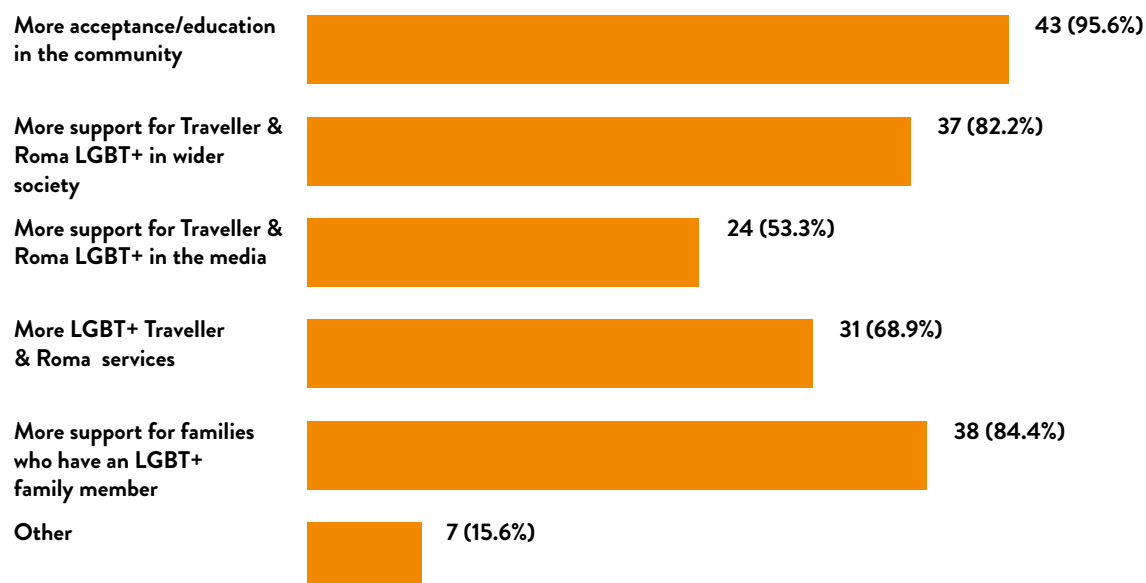
One Focus Group Participant spoke of knowing the phone number of a support organisation, but never having the confidence to actually phone.

4.5 What would Help and Recommendations

The question regarding 'what would help support Traveller/Roma LGBTI+' received a much fuller response rate. 95.6% (n=43) felt more acceptance/education in the community would be key. 84.4% (n=38) felt that more support for families who have an LGBTI+ family member would help, while 82.2% (n=37) felt that more support for LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma in wider society would be of benefit. 68.9% (n=31) advocated for more LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma services, and 53.3% (n=24) believed that more LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma in the media would be supportive. Of the 7 participants who selected 'other', these included:

- 'Actual places to go'
- 'Need actual programmes'
- 'Church issues. Support needs to start early not just for Pride events'
- 'Safe place to stay'
- 'Local Traveller centre is very old-fashioned would not go there for support'

Focus Group Participants also suggested more LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma services, or targeted supports within existing organisations.

**FIGURE 9: SUPPORT FOR LGBTI+ TRAVELLERS & ROMA**

There should be more community key workers...like LGBT Traveller specific roles, I think personally, there should be one in every organisation, locally and nationally'

Focus Group Participant

Pride was mentioned at every focus group and referred to by survey respondents. Pride is a festival and parade that takes place over the month in June and sees LGBTQ+ themed events take place across the country in schools and organisations throughout the summer, with the Dublin festival culminating with the Dublin Pride parade and march on the last Saturday of June. Pride is a global outdoor movement, celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer social and self-acceptance, achievements, legal rights, and pride. Celebrated in June to honour the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York, a series of events between police and LGBTQ+ protesters that stretched over six days, it is considered by many activists as the birth of the gay liberation movement and the birth of gay pride on an international scale.¹¹⁰

As with the general LGBTI+ population for whom being part of a community and finding acceptance within that community is recognised as important,¹¹¹ participants in this research referred to getting the



opportunity to celebrate ones' identity and the awareness that events such as Pride created, as being valuable.

'The only time (Pride) in my life that I've ever seen people excited to see Travellers it's like, 'oh my God the Travellers are here!'

Focus Group Participant

'My three nieces come up to me, out of nowhere. I think it was the start of June but they must have found out in school it was Pride month. So, the three of them walked up to me in the camp... and says, 'happy Pride month!'. And I was like, I was taken aback... so, it is a lot better.'

Focus Group Participant

As with the LGBTIreland Report,¹¹² several participants in this research mentioned the school environment in the context of raising awareness of LGBTI+ identities by displaying posters, running workshops and discussing sexual orientation.

'Let's talk about LGBT all year, like from September onwards until...like not just doing LGBT talks in the schools just on June because it's Pride Month, but talk about it all the time so like children can understand'

Focus Group Participant

'I think they should educate children from first class upwards about the LGBT and make them understand like not everyone's the same everyone's different and it's okay to be different'

Focus Group Participant

'I'd rather learn about it in school, then learn about like, go to, like one online or whatever'

Focus Group Participant

This was a point more typically raised by lesbian participants, for whom bullying in school and exclusion, typically from other girls in school, was an issue that caused distress and in one case resulted in leaving school altogether.

'I left school for being bullied for not having boyfriends'

Focus Group Participant

4.6 Anything to Add?

At various points in the 'Unveiling Inequality' survey, participants were invited to provide more information, and our final question asked if they had 'anything else to add?' 18 people input, with some expressing gratitude that this research was happening and hoping it would help improve the situation for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma. Some messages were hopeful, and others less so. A selection of responses is available here.

'Best of luck with this not sure what can change until there's a lot of change. nothing wrong with being gay but the world really doesn't think that way most times.'

Survey Respondent

'Thank you to X in X who sent this on to me blew my mind that this is even happening'

Survey Respondent

'Hope this research helps people. its fucked up. we all know people who we think might be happier being more themselves'

Survey Respondent

The next chapter, which is the final and concluding chapter of this report, will discuss the arts-based methodologies, in the form of poetry and spoken word, as a communication device to amplify participant voice and experience. The concluding chapter will also reflect on this research to summarise the learnings from it, and draw on insights from both participants and people working in relevant sectors to help signpost 'Where Next?'



IT'S NOT A CURSE AND IT'S NOT FOR CURING

– Survey Respondent

*It's not a curse
and it's not for curing
but I tell ya it's no blessing*

*Travellers aren't stupid
we know the length and breadth of the country has gay Travellers
and I heard of a trans Traveller...*

*I'd never give them back I swear
but sometimes I think, what would my life be like?
if I didn't go looking to be married*

*I love her like a sister now
she's never blamed me
...has a touch of depression over it all*

*As long as I got to see and live with my children
she could get up and go to a man
who'd keep her in the way she wants to be kept*

*I see Travellers out sometimes on Facebook
an I think Jesus I'd like to be as free
but I don't think my mind could cope...*

*Even if we're the first to drag each other down
we at least have each other
but OUT Travellers have a terrible time*

*Too late for me
but I think of my children and other children
and think, God they could have a life without something like this*

**Transcript poem created from Survey Respondent transcript*



- 105 Noone et al. (2018). *Far from Home: Life as an LGBT Migrant in Ireland*.
- 106 Higgins et al. (2016). *LGBTIreland Report*. p. 155
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- 109 The Traveller Movement. (2022). *Gypsy Roma and Traveller History and Culture*.
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- 111 Higgins et al. (2016). *LGBTIreland Report*. p. 64
- 112 Higgins et al. (2016). *LGBTIreland Report*. p. 70

Chapter 5- Reflections, Spoken Word and Where Next?





WHY WOULD YOU CARE IF SHE'S GAY?

*No wonder there's people
killing themselves or, you know, committing
suicide.
If you want to judge people, what do they
expect like
the outcome?*



*That's the weirdest thing, isn't it? When
you see people from minority backgrounds judging others for who they are?*

Like when Travellers is really badly judging each other for your own individuality in who you are, but then complain about society doing that to Travellers. For them as a Traveller! It's the most craziest thing to think of because it's so hypocritical.

I was different than the others because I didn't talk about boys. I left school for being bullied for not having boyfriends. People didn't really have a bond with me much and so I got bullied. And I don't really mind like the smaller your circle. At least you know your true friends at the end.

The worst decision I've made was come out as bisexual because I wasn't. And I was afraid if I said I was lesbian that she wouldn't accept me, but I've made it worse.

I got a girlfriend, but I came out for the fact that one, I wanted to be happy myself, and two, because I wouldn't let a girl come into my life and let her hide as much as I was hiding. So, I came out gay.

My family wouldn't accept me for a whole six months. I went through mental health by myself, alone. But I'd rather that for six months, than a lifetime of hiding.

*Why would you care if she's gay? Like, if she's happy? We're not back in the 18 hundreds, the 19 hundreds. Not being accepted...and to this day like?
That's what should have been funny to me.*

**Photovoice created from Focus Group Participant transcript
Photo 44406150 © Ian Allenden | Dreamstime.com*



'Stories are how we explain the world around us to others and ourselves. Each story passes messages to us, some clear, some oblique, but always speaking to us when we choose to listen.'

Oein DeBhairduin in *Why the moon travels* ¹¹³

5.1 Reflections

This research is seeking to communicate the voices of participants and to honour their thoughts, opinions and experiences by sharing them through this report and through poetry and spoken word, so that we may all have a glimpse of their inner and outer worlds, and experience for a moment what it might be like to walk in their shoes.

Over 95% of survey respondents felt that more education and acceptance in the Traveller and Roma community would make the biggest difference in terms of supporting their self-acceptance and LGBTI+ identity, with 84% (n=38) believing that more support is needed for Traveller and Roma families who have an LGBTI+ family member. As highlighted by Martin Beanze Warde, if we want to seek change in relation to how LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma are viewed by mainstream society, a leap must be taken by the community themselves towards practising some introspection, because being a minority within a minority means LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma face a dual oppression.¹¹⁴ Similarly, through creating avenues to share the experiences of

LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma with the general public, we can create a visibility and awareness of human experience that has been widely ignored, suppressed and denied.¹¹⁵ Accepting the existence of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma is a starting point for a dialogue that can eliminate the amplification of violence felt at the intersection of Antigypsyism and homophobia.¹¹⁶

The personal stories and testimonies put forward from participants in this research, gives us an insight and a better understanding of the social exclusion experienced by LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma on a personal, familial and community level. We get a glimpse of how sexual identity can pull families apart 'no one speaking to me for years' and be a motive for hate and violence 'queer-bashed by non-Travellers 3 times, one severely.' But we are also privy to the love and support that participants received and that were experienced through simple human gestures such as making a cup of tea 'he never made me tea' or a passing comment 'happy Pride month.' Through the communication of these experiences and stories, it is the aim of this research to promote understanding and inclusion for LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, and to support the actions that need to be taken to foster changes in attitudes

and behaviours to achieve real inclusion and make Ireland a better place for everyone.

At the beginning of this report, we highlighted the origins of exclusion for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma in their being overlooked in the campaigns for justice and equality, as the urgent and pressing needs of the communities took precedence.¹¹⁷ LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma are only too aware of the state of emergency for their communities, and can appreciate that within that emergency, there are some needs that seem more 'life or death' than others.

'My sister is living on the side of the road with two children and no husband RIP and I don't think she even cares if someone is gay or a lesbian but I do think she would worry if she thought organisations that could help her would spend more time helping gays. It's not like a ladder about rights and who is higher up on the ladder but I get it that in person physical stuff seems more.'

– Survey Respondent

However, as this research shows, inclusion and acceptance of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma can also mean life or death. We had participation in this research from someone on behalf of their brother 'who hung himself' and we heard from a participant who went to sleep in a car after coming out and whose family member 'tried to burn me in it.' We have heard participants refer to their mental health as 'a weight right over my head' or 'waitin' to snap' and describe the impact of gossip, which when malicious could be considered 'a polite form of murder by character assassination.'¹¹⁸

In this chapter, we will discuss the Spoken Word Project, which emerged from this research as a response to the calls for greater education and awareness in the community, and which foregrounds participant voice in the form of short poems or 'spoken-word' to evoke emotion and promote human connection and

understanding. This chapter will also aim to point to 'where next' in relation to how to progress and respond to some of the issues and learnings discussed and presented here.

5.2 'Unveiling Inequality – LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Spoken Word Project'

One of the findings from this research was in relation to taking action that would lead to 'more acceptance/ education in the community', which 43 (95.6%) of survey respondents felt would be important in supporting LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma going forward. This research employed arts-based methodologies such as Photovoice and transcript poetry to help engage the public and communities with the findings. Thoughtfully carried out, creative research can enliven adult learning, promote empathy for others, and move toward relations of solidarity.¹¹⁹ Turning research interviews into poetry or monologues is a form of research analysis that goes by many names; poetic transcription, research poetry,¹²⁰ transcript poetry. The term public engagement is used to describe the many ways in which the activity and benefits of research can be shared with the public and community and provides an opportunity for interactive discussion and debate with a pressing social issue.

The 'Unveiling Inequality – LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Spoken Word Project' is a collection of 20 Photovoice and transcript poems developed from the interview transcripts and survey responses of the participants of this research project. Specifically, the project aims to do the following:

- Promote increased awareness of inequality and exclusion experienced by LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma.
- Educate the public and communities on issues related to LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma.
- Make visible ('unveil') the experiences and voice of a sub-section of the community who are often 'hidden'



- Take research 'off the page' and into the public forum for discussion and engagement.
- Act as a tool for cultural awareness training to better support LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, their families and their communities.

Some examples from the 'LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Spoken Word Project' are included throughout this report to separate chapters. The full Spoken Word Project will be launched later in 2022 both in physical spaces and virtually, and the intention is to tour national organisations.

5.3 Where Next?

This research 'Unveiling Inequality' reveals the complex experiences of those experiencing dual marginalisation, by virtue of being both Traveller and Roma and having an LGBTI+ identity. It can therefore provide valuable insights and recommendations for the health, education and community sectors in supporting LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma people. A main focus of this research was LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma peoples' experience of accessing supports, and participants emphasised the following as key to raising awareness and promoting acceptance of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma:

- Increased support for families of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma
- More LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma services
- Increased LGBTI+ education for Traveller and Roma communities
- Increased LGBTI+ education for the wider settled community

This indicates more could be done by both LGBTI+ organisations and Traveller and Roma organisations to include LGBTI+ people's needs in their services. Steps to improve care for LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma could therefore include:

- Employing and retaining LGBTI+ staff
- Using inclusive language

- Implementing specialist staff training particularly with regard to anti-racism
- Initiating conversations on inclusion with boards and executives

However, participants also highlighted the need for broader policy changes, including the need for greater representation of Traveller and Roma LGBTI+ people in public awareness and education campaigns as well as the pressing need to respond effectively to the serious mental health issues impacting LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma communities nationally, and which are undoubtedly contributing to the current Traveller mental health crisis and the six-times higher suicide rate.¹²¹ Certainly, as victimisation and minority status are risks for suicidality,¹²² the elevated risk of suicide for LGBTI+ indigenous, and therefore LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma, is obvious.¹²³

The fear of being rejected or bringing shame on the family and community they love can lead many LGBTI+ Travellers into self-destructive behaviour, including taking their own lives.¹²⁴ Fifteen people in this research admitted having attempted suicide, and almost double admitted to contemplating it. The Photovoice at the beginning of this chapter, 'Why would you care if she's gay?' blatantly calls out the impact of sexual identity victimisation on suicide levels. 'No wonder there's people killing themselves,' the participant exclaims, 'if you want to judge people, what do they expect like the outcome?' While the Photovoice at the beginning of Chapter Four, calls out the patent discrimination and use of hate speech toward Travellers and Roma, 'the last acceptable form of racism in Ireland.'

Participants in this research communicated their desire to be loved and accepted, 'I do want someone to love me someday', while recognising that there exists a hierarchy of needs,¹²⁵ 'I get it that in person physical stuff seems more.' There is a sense that until the Traveller and Roma communities' physiological and safety needs are met, peoples' need for belonging and love, particularly if this differs from the accepted 'norm', may be dismissed or derided. There may also be wariness in the struggle for equality, that recognition

of the intersectionality within the communities and the rights of sexual minorities, might dilute the Traveller and Roma cause.¹²⁶ However, experiencing the lack of a friendly environment among the mainstream LGBTI+ movement while at the same time facing rejection from Traveller and Roma communities, is at odds with the activity of both movements proclaiming and publicly fighting against exclusion and oppression.

It is our hope that this research makes visible and creates awareness of experiences, that have widely been ignored or repressed throughout mainstream society, and that the acknowledgement of LGBTI+ Travellers and Roma experiences and this exploration into how these multiple identity positions overlap, can be a starting point towards building a more loving and tolerant society.

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114 Warde. (2021). LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue'.

115 Baker & Bila. (2019). Gypsy, Roma & Traveller LGBTQI International Conference 2019 Report.

116 Ibid

117 Warde. (2021). LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue'.

118 Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (1989). p.67.

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123 Davidson. (2016). No data exists on suicide among gay and trans Indigenous Australians.

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WE DON'T REALLY TALK ABOUT ANYTHING LIKE THAT

- Focus Group Participant

*I knew basically
I was always with the girls
My friends were like the whole-time wanting boyfriends
At the time I had a boyfriend
I was just...
completely different*

*I started to get more attracted to girls
...when I started knowing
I started kind of hiding myself away
I wasn't talking to my family
I'd lost all my friends
... acting out in school*

*One of my close friends
...her brother was gay
and he was a Traveller
So, it gave me more confidence
to open up
...and I wasn't judged*

*My sisters was OK
But when it came to my brothers...
They didn't say a whole lot
Said they don't want to see it
...posted on Facebook
...don't really talk*

We don't really talk about anything like that

**Transcript poem created from Focus Group Participant transcript*

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**An Choimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas**
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission