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Gypsies and Travellers and Crime and Justice: Professionals Perspectives

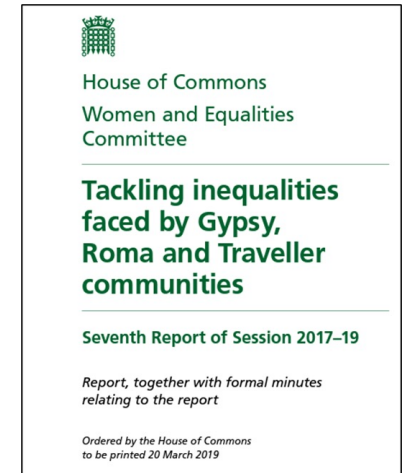
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Background

- Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) largest ethnic minority in Europe (McFadden et al., 2018).
- GRT have faced marginalisation, racism and discrimination historically and contemporarily in the UK (James, 2007; Vincze, 2014)
- While Roma are recognised in the UK, this project is with Gypsies and Travellers (GT) only
- UK media and political narratives problematise semi-nomadic lifestyles (Richardson, 2006; Kabachnik 2010, Clark and Taylor, 2014)
- UK Legislation circumscribes and criminalises these lifestyles (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act, 2022)



- 12% of prisoners
0.1% of population

- 91% experienced discrimination
- 77% hate crime or hate speech

Media and Political Discourses of GT

- GT racialised as inferior compared to settled populations (Richardson, 2017):
 - Stereotyped as idle, deviant, anti-social and anarchic
 - Involved in multiple property and violent crimes (Spencer, 2005)
- Motifs/language of 'floods', outsiders/space invaders

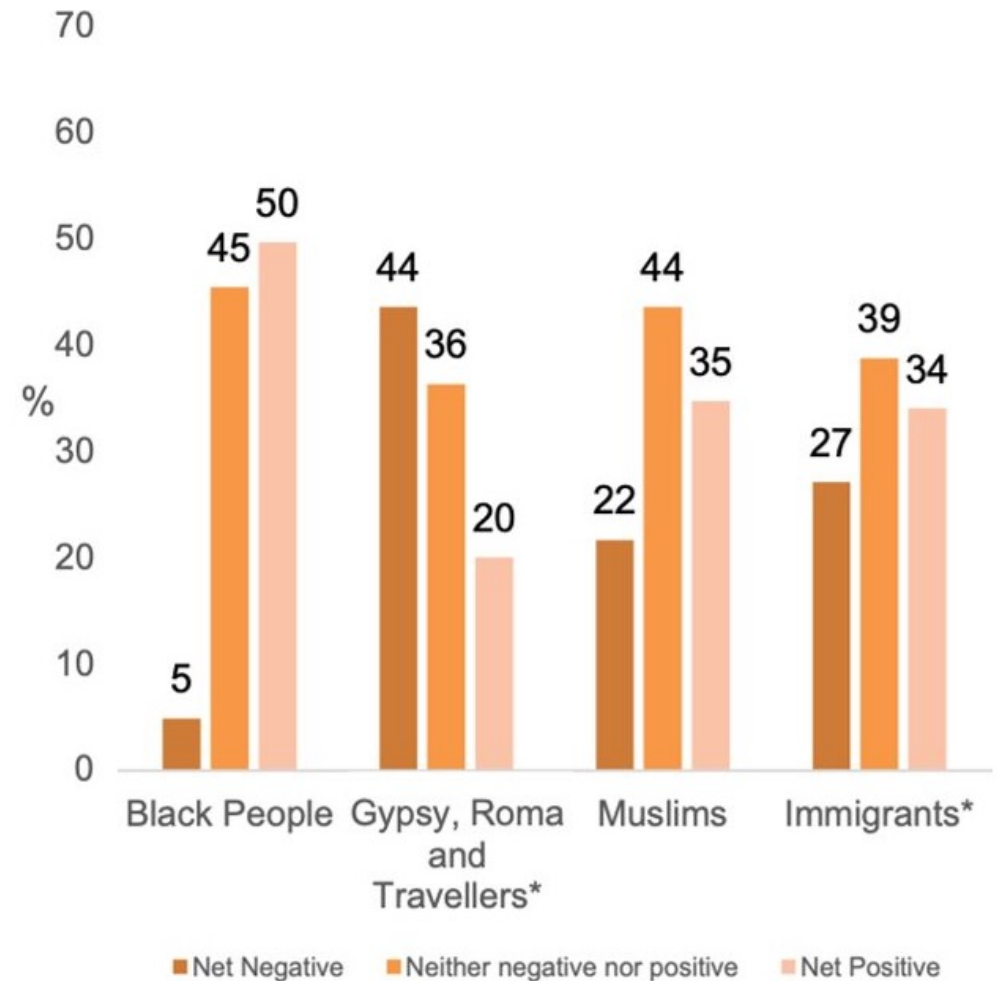
"There's nothing worse than seeing unauthorised encampments, caravans, vehicles, setting up on open park space and then really **ruining the local amenity** through their conduct, through the rubbish they leave behind and through their behaviour, which has **repercussions for the local community.**" (Priti Patel, 2019)



Public Views of GRT

- National Barometer of Prejudice and Discrimination in Britain (2018)
- 44% of people expressed negative feelings towards GRT
- GRT were the only group to have net negative view overall (Abrams, Swift & Houston, 2018)

Figure 4.2 Feelings towards people with each protected characteristic, excluding those who belong to the target protected characteristic



Base – all GB adults, excluding those belonging to the target group. Unweighted n: **black people** 2,129; **Gypsy, Roma and Travellers** 2,169; **Muslims** 2,123; **immigrants** 2,171

Research Objectives and Methods

To critically examine professionals' reflections on, and responses to, dominant discourses surrounding GT communities (<https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FS015280%2F1>)

Methods - 29 semi-structured interviews in three regions in England:

- Police, probation and youth justice services
- Local state (Planning; Social and Children's Services; Health; Education)
- GRT community-based organisations

Thematic analysis of interview data in NVIVO

Two key themes from the analysis:

- 1) Community Safety
- 2) GT Victim Denial

1) 'Community Safety'

- GT perceived as a threat to community safety
- Police manage 'contested perceptions of risk' (Barton and James, 2003)
- 'Othering' of GRT justifies need for public protection (Rowe and Goodman, 2014)
- Community safety rhetoric has an exclusionary effect for marginalised groups (Gilling, 2001)
- Data showed a range of opinions from professionals including resistance to, support for and ambivalence towards dominant discourses

"We get numerous people ring us up, reporting various issues coming from the encampment, crime, et cetera, but ultimately trying to see [...] what is going on versus what is that wider community concern and why we may get issues inflated or exaggerated to us."

Police Chief Inspector

"They said 'I'm Gypsy so that's why they don't want me in the shop'. It's a case of no they don't want you in the shop because you've not got control of your children and they're feral, you know, it's not because they're Gypsy. It's just because there's lack of boundaries."

Police Community Support Officer

Discourse and Ideology

Overall strategy in **racist discourse** is to focus on the negative characteristics of the 'others' and to represent 'us' as the victims of those 'others' (Van Dijk, 2000). This quote evidences:

- Gypsies and Travellers defined as a problem
- Positive ideological self-image of 'in-group'
- Negative image of 'them' and their perceived way of life
- No mention of the problems experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller communities
- Personal interactions have been positive, yet racist ideologies and discourse still bias their views

"I suppose that can be quite disturbing for some people because then they leave a mess and they might be quite noisy, and they'll often have-- the children might not go to school, perhaps... I don't know how I'd feel about that and then it's the unknown, isn't it? If you don't know what they're capable of or what they're going to do, and you've got this set view in your head, it can sometimes make people automatically think, oh, I know that they don't necessarily commit those types of crimes. They don't really break into people's houses and stuff like that. They are quite respectful, actually. The people that I've worked with, they are all respectful especially. I don't know if it's from probation but even in the village actually, there is a good morning. They are nice."

Probation, Equalities Manager

2) 'GT Victim Denial'

- Enforcement targeting, over-policing & racism (James, 2007)
- Qualitative data clearly evidences that GRT are hate victimised (James, 2021)
- GRT "lower priority in terms of seriousness of discrimination" (Abrams et al., 2018)
- Insufficient victimisation data
- Identified as offenders by ethnicity, not by offending behaviour

"Interviewer: do they ever report anything to you, like being victims of hate crime or anything?"

Interviewee: **They do but** it's evidence though isn't it. So, they'll say to the police like three men come on site and they did this and did that, but **there's no evidence and they've got no way of identifying these people and if it happened.** It's really difficult because if you've got a high-profile problematic group that are big and are committing crimes left, right and centre, you know, eating in restaurants and running out, that **community tension is going to get higher, and we do get one of those groups every year.** So, I don't know if you saw the media this year, but we had a group in town that ... like police got drafted down from the county and they seized all their vehicles and arrested them all."

Housing specialist services manager

Summary

- Exaggerated response from public despite lack of evidence
- Perceived threat of GT unauthorised encampments feeds into need for 'community safety'
- GT are seen as perpetrators of crime, not victims. Identified as offenders by ethnicity, not by offending behaviour
- Some professionals defer to negative fixed ideological schema, some appreciate cultural differences and the socio-economic-political drivers behind the inequalities faced by GT communities

Next Steps

- Identifying reasons for professional's resistance to, support for and ambivalence towards dominant discourses
- Further research needed to look at GT experiences of crime as victims
 - Gypsy and Traveller Experiences of Crime and Justice Since the 1960s: A Mixed Methods Study
<https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FS015280%2F1>
 - <https://www.realities-checked.org/>

