



Realities Checked: Gypsies and Travellers' Experiences of Crime and Justice Since the 1960s

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The Research

- The [Realities Checked Study \(RCS\)](#) was conducted to provide the first systematic and comprehensive study of the crime and criminal justice experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in England since the 1960s.
- Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups protected by the Equality Act 2010 which means they should not be discriminated against because of their race or ethnic origin.
- Very little is known about Gypsies and Travellers' experiences as victims of crime.
- Little large-scale evidence exists on Gypsies and Travellers' perceptions of the criminal justice system.

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Our Research Approach



The **RCS** captured Gypsies and Travellers' experiences in 2021/23 by conducting:

- A crime survey of **401 participants**
- Oral histories with **52 community members** (some in joint sessions)
- Oral histories with **22 serving prisoners**
- Interviews with **54 professionals** working with Gypsy and Traveller individuals and communities
- **Archival analysis** of the records of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government/Department for Environment and those of the Association of County Councils and the Association of District Councils 1960-1993

Our study took place in:

- **Two rural areas** (Devon and Cornwall, and Norfolk)
- **Two sub/urban areas** (Leeds, and London, Sussex, Surrey and Kent)

Our research team of eight included a Romany Gypsy man and a Showmen Traveller woman. Eight Gypsy and Traveller Community Researchers who collected the data for our crime survey. Multiple creative outputs from the research have been produced by Gypsy and Traveller creatives from our research sites.

The study has been generously supported by **Friends Families Travellers, TravellerSpace** and **LeedsGATE**.

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Victimisation, Hate and Discrimination

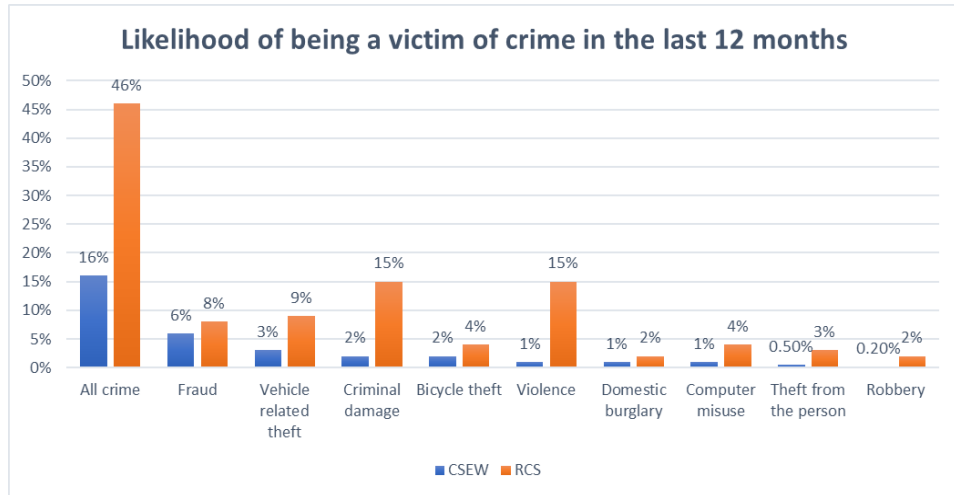
How are Gypsies and Travellers affected by crime as victims?

- In the national Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 19% of people said they had been a victim of crime in the previous 12 months (ONS 2020).
- In the **RCS** crime survey, **46% of Gypsies and Travellers said they had been a victim of crime in the last 12 months**.
- This is more than double the rates of victimisation of other minority ethnic groups:
 - 20% of people who were of Mixed Ethnic or Multiple ethnicities,
 - 15% who were Asian
 - 14% who were Black
 - 13% who were White (ONS 2020).

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Gypsies and Travellers were more victimised by ALL types of crime when compared with the general population



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Hate Crimes

RCS archival analysis and oral histories demonstrate that **the experience of hate crime is not a new phenomenon**. For example, material from the West Midlands (1965-1970) shows that Gypsies and Travellers suffered vigilante attacks from householders, which included caravan burnings, which on occasion resulted in the death of children.

You get the social media, the locals ... 'Let's go down and push their caravans over the cliff and let's drag them off'
(Becky, Housing Officer)

He stuck a cloth into a vodka bottle, lit it, and threw at me. I was 10.
(Dukes, Romany Gypsy)



In the RCS oral histories, most people had stories about either themselves or family members being racially abused or harassed:

- Racist slurs being used at school by children or their parents
- Abuse in social venues like pubs.
- Racist abuse targeted at homes, often by neighbours
- The RCS survey also found 44% of respondents said they were worried about being subject to a physical attack because they are a Gypsy or Traveller

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The negative impact of hate crime on victims can be severe – affecting confidence, self-esteem, and mental health

Percentage of Adults Aged 16 and Over who were victims of racially motivated hate crime

| | Realities Checked (2023) | | CSEW (2019/20) | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------|------|
| | Gypsies and Travellers | Asian | Black | Mixed | White | All |
| All crime | 10% (N=56) | 1% | 0.9% | 0.3% | 0.1% | 0.2% |

I have experienced a lot of poor mental health in my life, experienced a lot of low self-esteem, terrible anxiety where I couldn't leave the house without feeling like people's gonna, you know, feel like 'Oh there he is, one of them [Gypsies]'
(Stefan, English Gypsy Traveller)

In the national CSEW, 0.2% of people surveyed had been subject to a racially motivated hate crime (ONS 2020). In the RCS, 10% of people surveyed said they had been a victim of a racially motivated hate crime in the last 12 months. This is more than 10 times the victimisation rate of Asian and Black people.

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Perceptions of the Criminal Justice System



Gypsies and Travellers confidence in the criminal justice system is very low

In the RCS survey 86% of those surveyed agreed that the criminal justice system as a whole discriminates against particular groups or individuals

A Gypsy can't tell truth ... that's what police think.
(Valentine, Gypsy)

I must have been stabbed... And the police automatically said, 'Well if we hear that you've gone to give revenge...we're gonna come hard on you'.

(Caf, Irish Traveller)

In the RCS Survey:

- 40% said that they did not trust the police very much and a further 39% said that they did not trust them at all
- 29% tended to agree or very strongly agreed that the police in their local area would treat them with respect if they contacted them for any reason. **This is three times fewer than in the general population** where 87% believed that they would be treated with respect
- 39% said they had been unfairly stopped, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the police and for 82% this was due to their ancestry, race or physical appearance.

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- RCS archival data clearly shows the use of aggressive policing tactics and violent evictions paid for by local councils over time
- RCS oral histories evidence:
 - People being terrified when police officers entered their childhood home and used force against family members.
 - Experiences were often transmitted through family memory to younger generations
 - Hostile view towards police due to what some considered to be heavy-handed policing of traditional Gypsy and Traveller livelihood and leisure activities
 - Complaints related to the police not responding appropriately and/or sensitively to their victimisation

my dad would always go out pheasant shooting or rabbit shooting...his car registration must got took... Next morning they was that laying over the bonnet with machine guns...laser dots on him and the police helicopter up... it's just a catapult he was using.

(Gary, Gypsy)

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Recommendations

Policy makers and service providers need to recognise that:



Gypsies and Travellers are more vulnerable to (non-racially motivated) victimisation than other ethnic group

- Concerted efforts by community safety teams should be made to reduce victimisation in these communities
- Victim Support and related services need to be attuned to the specific needs of these communities including in contact and outreach activities.

Most Gypsies and Travellers will have faced racist abuse, harassment, and violence in their lives that will rarely have been reported to statutory agencies

- Third party reporting mechanisms need to be enhanced to instil greater confidence in the reporting of hate crime to the police.
- A public information campaign that reminds potential offenders of the impact of hate crime on Gypsies and Travellers and the penalties of offending might have an important communicative function.
- Restorative justice-inspired principles could build trust between Gypsies and Travellers and settled communities in response to local flashpoints.
- It is incumbent on the police and social housing providers to ensure that they consider carefully circumstances where Gypsies and Travellers allege racist provocation as an explanation for their retaliatory actions.

Gypsies and Travellers' trust in the police service is so worryingly low that the police have little legitimacy among these communities

- The police service needs to engage in urgent reparative work with Gypsies and Travellers to build trust. At the heart of improving legitimacy must be an acknowledgement that first and foremost, Gypsies and Travellers are chronically vulnerable to victimisation and hate crimes. Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers should be in place in all force areas to assist with this reparative work.
- It will also be valuable to consider whether Independent Scrutiny Groups led by Gypsy and Traveller community members could be established to monitor police actions including stop and search and any site operations.

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Thank you for listening

Any questions?

Please find more details for our website at:

<https://www.realities-checked.org/>



With thanks to our partner organisations:

