

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Tackling Inequalities Faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities](#), HC 360

Wednesday 5 December 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 5 December 2018.

[Watch the meeting - Panel I](#)

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Angela Crawley; Eddie Hughes; Jess Phillips.

Questions 617–665

Witnesses

I: Win Lawlor, Deputy Director, Irish Community Care; Kim White OBE, former Police Constable, Kent Police; Janie Codona MBE, Manager, One Voice 4 Travellers.

II: [Woman 1], [Woman 2], [Woman 3], [Woman 4] and [Woman 5] – **in private**.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Irish Community Care](#)

Examination of witnesses in public

Witnesses: Win Lawlor, Kim White OBE and Janie Codona MBE.

Q617 **Chair:** Can I say good morning to all of you? Thank you for joining us today. Do grab your seats. Welcome to the witnesses and also to people watching online or in the public gallery. This session is the sixth public session of the inquiry into tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Today, we are looking at sensitive issues surrounding violence against women and girls. These are really difficult topics that are very often hidden from view, so we are extremely grateful to all of you for coming today to talk to us and to help cast some light on them.

Before we start with our questions, could I ask the witnesses to say their name and the organisation that they come from?

Kim White: I am Kim White, a retired police officer. I retired on 5 November this year, after 30 years' service as the Gypsy Traveller liaison officer for Kent Police, a role I held for 18 years. I am, however, continuing to do training around Gypsy Traveller culture and, in particular, domestic abuse within those communities, with Kent Police service, multi-agencies and other forces, if required.

Win Lawlor: I am Win Lawlor. I work for Irish Community Care, which is an organisation working across the north-west of the UK. We work with Irish Traveller and Gypsy communities across a footprint that includes west Lancashire, the whole of Merseyside and Cheshire as well, working also into Wales when we have community members approach. We do a whole range of advice, advocacy and support.

Janie Codona: I am Janie Codona. I am a manager for One Voice 4 Travellers. I have been working with One Voice since 2005 regarding supporting women and girls from the Gypsy, Traveller and, more recently, Roma communities suffering from or affected by abuse. We work across the eastern region predominantly with our domestic abuse work. We do have an occasional national project that we do, but most of our work is eastern-region-based.

Q618 **Jess Phillips:** Thanks for coming in today. To start to set a scene, how common is domestic abuse in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

Janie Codona: It is common. Outside of the communities, it is probably considered not very common because not many of the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community report abuse. Within the community, there is a high percentage of abuse and it is something that we have tried to encourage women and girls to report. If we do not get more of them reporting abuse, we cannot recognise the numbers that are being affected or help to plan support to help them.



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Q619 **Jess Phillips:** When you say “high”, is it higher than in the normal population?

Janie Codona: I would have said so. I would have said there is something like 75% of abuse, possibly.

Jess Phillips: So 75% of women in the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller—

Janie Codona: At some point.

Jess Phillips: Normally, we say it is one in three, but it is 75%.

Janie Codona: Yes, I would have said so.

Kim White: The last statistic from the Irish Government that I worked with was 81%.

Jess Phillips: That is high.

Kim White: Having said that, when I do presentations to whoever and we look at domestic abuse—because we must not look at domestic violence; it is domestic abuse—I tell them that a lot of women from outside these communities would look at a Traveller woman’s life as being an abusive relationship anyway. What is expected from women from Gypsy Traveller communities is sometimes not what would be expected—I am not saying in 100% of cases—in the gorger, non-Gypsy community. Therefore, you have coercive behaviour, controlling behaviour, that sort of thing that amounts to domestic abuse in relationships between sons and mothers and things like that. The statistic is very high.

Q620 **Jess Phillips:** Win, do you have anything else you want to add?

Win Lawlor: We have some communities where it is not really that common. It tends to be family groups. It is around patriarchy.

Q621 **Jess Phillips:** Is it not always?

Win Lawlor: Yes—there is a surprise. As a sociologist, I always look at patriarchy in relationship with matriarchy, so you have the two spheres. If you have a Venn diagram with some positive overlap, where there is partnership working and each has their own group of activities, and the power is equal across those two separate groups, that works really well. The problem with patriarchy is that it is often not in balance with matriarchy, so the power that women have is less. It is granted on the say-so of the males only. It is not real power in that case. There are major issues with ownership of that power when the women wish to own it. I have seen some incredibly powerful women in the community.

Jess Phillips: I have met some matriarchs in this inquiry.

Win Lawlor: Often that is a granted power, not an owned power, so that can be the issue. Where there is violence, it tends to be historical and inherent in families, and it is really systemic when it is in that kind of situation.



Q622 **Jess Phillips:** You have already touched on this a little bit, saying that there is an unacceptable level of coercion and control by men to women in the community, and you have touched on the interfamilial, so sons on mothers. Other than the forms of domestic abuse that we all know about, what would you say is the form that is most involved in this community?

Janie Codona: Within this community, as Win mentioned, this coercion and control is an aspect that reaches far and wide. Particularly within the Gypsy Traveller community, where they split from a partner, it is more likely that, if they have an older son, he could and does take on the mantle: "I am the head of the household and what I say goes". There is this child-parent abuse.

Q623 **Jess Phillips:** Is splitting acceptable? Would a woman be ostracised by the community for splitting up or is that acceptable?

Janie Codona: Most Gypsies and Travellers go into a relationship—"We are going to marry for life"—and duly expect to be in that relationship for life. There are some now who are brave enough to walk away from a relationship, and many of those have to move outside the community. They have to go and live in bricks-and-mortar accommodation, because of the fear that, if they stay within the community, they are still able to be under the ruling of this perpetrator—if not directly by him, by his extended family.

Q624 **Jess Phillips:** What about sexual violence? Is it a given that, if you are married, you have to have sex when your husband wants you to? Is the idea that your husband could rape you an issue?

Kim White: Some women I have worked with—and I will call them victims because they are women I have worked with in these situations as a police officer—believe that it is their husband's right to have sex with them whenever they want, and that, when a Traveller man sleeps with a woman, he owns her. She becomes the property of his, so it is up to him what he does. That comes across from them quite often. I say to them, "The fact that this is your husband makes no difference; it could be a stranger in an alleyway but, in this instance, it is your husband". They are like, "Yes, but that cannot be rape, then, can it, because it is my husband?" "Yes, it can be rape and it is rape". It does happen.

A lot of these women are brought up to believe that it is their husband's right to have sex with them whenever they want. If they have grown up in a home like that, it automatically reflects on them. Where things are changing, though, is that we are getting more Travellers in schools now. More Travellers are being educated than we have ever had before. The Traveller girls especially are seeing the life of gorger girls and perhaps thinking, "Do you know what? That is totally different to how I have been brought up" or whatever. That is where they are now seeing that there is a life outside of their community. Whether they think that is a better life or not is entirely up to them, but I do think that they see both sides now.

Q625 **Jess Phillips:** That leads to the next question: what can we do specific



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to this community that would affect this?

Win Lawlor: One of the things I have seen over the 18 years that I have worked with Gypsy and Traveller communities is that there has been a change. Eighteen years ago, I knew one divorced woman, and her family supported her because the abuse was so horrific. She was in intensive care for such a long time that her family welcomed her back and protected her, and became nomadic so that they could keep her safe from him. She had two disabled children and was disabled herself, so there was a lot of support for her in the community and she was very much protected.

I have seen a change occurring in some of the younger couples who are getting together now. It is almost like, "We do this thing where you do something that I do not like. The family is telling me I have to chastise you and bring you into line". It is almost like he will give her a slap, and she will say, "I am not having it" and leave at that point. It is almost after that that they then start to negotiate their own relationship. I have seen that there is one domestic abuse situation and one domestic violence situation very early on in the relationship, and there are no others. But it can be a pattern. It is about the trust relationships and knowing in those couples whether it is hidden or whether it is not happening. That is the thing.

There is still an expectation of what happens if a girl gets out of line. Even that phrase "gets out of line" is an issue: in other words, she does something that is inappropriate to the culture and the expectation that the community has of her behaviour.

Q626 **Jess Phillips:** So it is changing. What can we do to make it better?

Janie Codona: One of the things that we have to remember is that many of these Gypsy and Traveller women do not really relate all the aspects of abuse as being abuse. They see the physical: "He has punched me" or "He has beaten me". That is abuse. A lot of times, as Kim was saying, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and certainly coercion and control, do not come into it. They do not seem to put the same importance on the fact that they are in an unhealthy relationship as they do when they are receiving physical abuse. That is a key area in which these projects can help them.

Q627 **Jess Phillips:** Is there anything that could be done to educate the men in these communities? It is always the women I end up to talking to about this, when the people I want to talk to are the men.

Kim White: You are right, because I have found it much harder in the past to get through to young boys than I have to young girls.

Jess Phillips: I have to say I have found that too.

Kim White: I am finding that the girls are getting more in control of their lives. They have found a voice. As Win said, once her husband has laid a



hand on her, she is saying, "Right, that is it. I am off. Enough is enough". With the boys, it is a lot harder to get to speak to them. I do not say that as a female. I have worked with male officers who also find that quite difficult. The boys have a lot of this instilled in them from a very young age. You can talk to three and four-year-old boys who will come back at you saying it is their right to do this or to do that.

Q628 Eddie Hughes: Who has the most success in communicating with the men? What is the profile of the type of person to whom they would respond?

Kim White: I am not going to say that they would only respond to men, but I think they would more so than to any of us three sitting on this panel. We would find it very, very hard to get through to the men in the community.

Win Lawlor: That is because of the barriers to us as females. One really positive project that has done an amazing lot of work was something Leeds GATE did called Conversations. They literally just had group work with conversations on different sites around domestic abuse and a whole range of subjects that have been taboo. I am sure they have a report on it. It was being led by a young Traveller girl who was half-Gypsy, half-Irish Traveller, who had grown up in Cottingley Springs in Leeds and was working for Leeds GATE. Sadly, she passed away. In the work she was doing as a community member, she was brave enough to go and have those conversations.

A story that always stood out in my mind was where she had had a chat with some of the older men, who were just coming up to do project work, a bit like Men in Sheds or something like that. She was having these conversations alongside that work. There was a girl walking through the site and two of the boys started calling her. An old man who had had this conversation around his own domestic abuse turned round and said, "Lads, she is one of ours. What are you doing calling her?" I can remember Kathy saying it was one of her proudest moments. There had been a change around. There had been a volte face. There had been a huge understanding of what was going on, and it was an older male challenging those younger males. That really worked. That was quite a small project that did not have a lot of funding and it was not over a massive amount of time, but it is about who does it and who says it. They have to be trusted people.

Q629 Jess Phillips: Do you think that, if girls were compelled by the Government or by law enforcement to stay in school until they were 18, it would make a difference?

Kim White: No, they are still taken out of school.

Q630 Jess Phillips: You have said that the school thing is an issue, where girls are seeing other girls and going, "Hang on a minute; she is not getting battered".



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Kim White: I know lots of girls who want to stay in school. I know girls who love school. They love education. They love the social side of it, and they love being away from the site or their home because, at home, they are just going to be abused.

Janie Codona: They feel empowered to do things.

Kim White: They love education but they get to that age of about 13 or 14 and, when the father says, "You are out", they are out of school.

Q631 **Jess Phillips:** That is domestic abuse.

Kim White: Exactly.

Janie Codona: Going back to the previous piece, one of the things that we have noticed is working with young people. We have done projects where we have got young people together to have a conversation, with a group of girls and boys from early teens to about 19, and asked them things like, "Do you think it is acceptable to hit somebody? Why would you think that it is acceptable?" That is to get them thinking about relationships: "If he cheated on you, what would you do?" A lot of the time, as Kim was saying, they are brought up under the control of their father and they then become controlled by the husband, so there is no point that a woman goes, "I am me. I am in control. I am going to do this". It is only with time, confidence or accessing some support project that they ever get any kind of confidence to say, "I do not want to do that".

They perform this cultural tradition, and each girl performs it in turn. Between 16 and 18, or 20 at the latest, they will be getting married. Within 12 months, they produce a child, and possibly another two or three. They do not have the time when they are just themselves. A lot of them are not allowed to go to work, so they are literally dragged out of school. It is cleaning, cooking, ironing older brothers' shirts, babysitting the younger ones, this preparation for marriage.

Q632 **Jess Phillips:** Would you say this is still incredibly common?

Janie Codona: Yes.

Kim White: That happens from around the age of eight years old.

Janie Codona: It is preparation for marriage and preparation for a relationship that they are going to enter into. The father is saying, "You can go out. You need to be back at this time"—fair enough—but then he says, "No, you are not going out here. You are not wearing that".

Kim White: They are chaperoned.

Janie Codona: Yes—"You have to go with your brother". They cannot go away on holidays on their own or do things like that, even if they are over the age of 18. It would be seen as unacceptable. It is like a



sheltered lifestyle where they are just preparing themselves to become a wife and a parent, but not a woman or a person.

Kim White: The way that I have always got into women from these communities is normally within schools or at the school gates. The mums are the one who take the kids to and from school. We have pastoral care in the schools and I have worked very closely with the schools that have that. It has enabled me to talk to women from the travelling community and pass on to them things about domestic abuse, where there is a helpline for them—that sort of thing. But you never really see the men at the school gates—I am not saying “never”, but it is very unlikely—so where do you get to these men to start this conversation? What Janie is talking about—this thing that they have going with the teenagers—is absolutely brilliant, but we need to be getting to these little boys at around the age of five and six, when they are starting school.

I look back at *Gypsy Kids: Our Secret World*. It is something that comes out of my domestic abuse input. It is at preschool and it is a rug on the floor. It is the teacher telling all the kids, “Come and sit on this rug because we are going to have a story”. You have the little Irish Traveller boy and he is walking round the edge of the rug. He will not sit down and the teacher is shouting at him, “Sit down. You are disruptive. Why will you not do as you are told? Sit on the rug like all the other kids”. She could not see what was happening. I could see straightaway what was happening: he was trying to find a place on that rug that did not have a girl, because he has been brought up that he is not to sit with girls. He is not to play with girls. He is not to skip around the yard with girls. He was trying to find somewhere on this rug. “I cannot sit there because there is a girl there”. That is at the age of three and a half years old.

Q633 **Jess Phillips:** Is anybody gay in the Gypsy and Traveller community?

Kim White: Yes, we have a couple of gay males. In fact, there is a very good book, if you want to read it, *Gypsy Boy on the Run* by Mikey Walsh, a real eye-opener. I was reading it on holiday and a man came over to me and said he wanted to borrow the book. I never did get it back but it is a really good book.

Janie Codona: We work with women and girls because we would not be able to function as a group within the community if we were to work with the perpetrator, although we occasionally do family interventions.

Jess Phillips: That is fair enough.

Janie Codona: But we do work with some same-sex couples. We were working with a young man who came to us and he was in an abusive relationship, but the way he had got there was the fact that he was gay, so he decided to tell his parents. He had been getting support and, quite rightly, said, “This is me”. The father reacted by beating 10 bells out of the mother and said, “I will do this every night until you stop being gay”, so he left the home for his mother, moved into a caravan with his



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partner, and they went on to a holiday park. The people on the holiday park accepted him because he was gay but, as soon as they found out he was from the Gypsy community, they asked that the owner evict them.

Q634 Tonia Antoniazzi: What are the biggest barriers that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals face when trying to escape abusive situations? It is difficult to get out of that environment.

Kim White: Where to go? A lot of them have been brought up on sites and have always lived in either a trailer or mobile-home situation. I know that all the refuges that I use are bricks and mortar. You are asking them to come away from their families and their communities, sometimes having to decide that they are never going to be part of that community again, and to live in bricks and mortar, with the children perhaps having to go upstairs to bed, which they have never done before, and living with people other than people from their community. They are living with gorgers for the first time as well. That is one of the hardest things. I quite often remove women to refuge and I know that, as soon as I take them in there, they are not going to be in there long, because they cannot accept that sort of lifestyle.

Win Lawlor: Geography is also important. We had a young girl who came to us asking for refuge, and the closest place to Merseyside that we could find her was in Barmouth, which is two-thirds of the way down the Welsh coast. This was a girl who was 21 years old and had been married about 10 months. She had not crossed Liverpool on her own.

Kim White: Not on public transport or anything.

Win Lawlor: She would go out with her aunts, her sisters or her cousins. She was never on her own. She had no children at this point, so we were looking at supporting her to do something that was completely outside her comfort zone. That in itself was massive.

We find that, if somebody from the Gypsy Traveller community is in a refuge, no other Gypsy or Traveller is accepted in that refuge. I get on my high horse and I am like, "This is racist. Why can you not let somebody in?" They said, "Our travelling community have asked us". This was way back, when I started. It was the travelling community that had asked for this to happen, and then you realise why. I was explained why that situation was, and it was simply because a sister, cousin or family member of the male abuser would be asked to go into the refuge to check that she was in there, which meant that every single Traveller woman in there was unsafe, because that information would get back out. If you only have one refuge in a local authority area, that condemns every single woman to go even further away, which means they are less likely to go and they are less likely to stay. It is really complicated: where are the cuts? There are two in Liverpool, Amadudu and one local authority refuge.



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IDVAs are useful, but IDVAs are not used to go into sites. If you have a housed family, that is okay. IDVA is the outreach domestic abuse service that usually is attached to local authorities. They are useful but they are not usually culturally trained at all. They are useful to support women if there is another agency that can go in and give some background or advice and support, but they often fail because they have no cultural knowledge.

Janie Codona: Regarding refuges, a lot of women would not use a refuge. If they went into a refuge and another woman came in, there is that shame: "Externally, the community know that I have left him. This is what is happening". If they do break up, they do not tend to tell the external community that they have broken up or left him. There is the fact that, if they had someone else come in, that person is going to tell, so they are going to say, "I am not going to go into a refuge. I am not going to leave him because there is going to be somebody else in there". That prevents people then seeking support when they are at the most dire in their life.

Regarding refuges, we have established two safe caravans in East Anglia through funding from the Big Lottery Fund. It is not a refuge but a short-term respite place. One of the things we used it for was a couple: a mother and a sister. The mother had an older daughter who had four children, so we put them up while the refuge could move them, because they wanted to go down to Cornwall from Norfolk. We were able to put them up for four to five days while they could make that space ready for them to go. That gives them that breathing point. They are in a caravan, in a safe space that we manage and risk assess, and it is more likely that they come away from the relationship.

Kim White: I was approached by the Gypsy Co-op. They were looking at opening up a site for women who were victims of domestic abuse to be able to go and live, with X amount of trailers on there, and even a preschool set up for the children. We had a long meeting with them about it and, on paper, it looked really good. The problem I had was when I went back to some of my victims, spoke to them about it and asked, "What do you think and would you use somewhere like this?" They said no, and I asked, "Why not?" They said, "It would be the shame of living somewhere like that and everybody else there knowing my shame", even though they are all suffering the same thing. They also said, "For 24-hour security to be placed on there to keep us safe, that would be men, and we would not trust them". That sort of thing was blown out of the water.

Win Lawlor: One of the other barriers is the fact that there is still an expectation among some officers that domestic abuse is prevalent in the Gypsy Traveller community, so it is only domestic and they do not support women to leave. That is another point that needs making around the difficulties for women escaping. It is the judgment value from the settled community about what goes on in Gypsy Traveller communities and the thresholds and expectations there are.



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Q635 **Eddie Hughes:** With the difficulty of escaping abuse, does it make a difference whether the woman is from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background? Is it easier in any of those situations?

Kim White: No, it is definitely not easier. It is harder.

Q636 **Eddie Hughes:** Sorry, compartmentalise within that, please.

Kim White: If you are somebody not from one of those communities—if you are gorgor community, which means you are none of those three that you have just mentioned—you can come away and perhaps find support with likeminded people. You are in a refuge run by people from your background. When you are from the travelling community, you are not only saying—

Eddie Hughes: Sorry, distinguish between those three different versions of the Traveller community.

Jess Phillips: Is any one more liberal than the others: Gypsy, Roma, Traveller?

Kim White: I find Roma extremely tight. I have yet to have a Roma lady leave. I have dealt with a few Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies. You have to look at the fact that they are not only leaving their family home and taking their children; sometimes, they have to leave their whole community. They are prepared to turn their backs on everything they have ever known and grown up with, the complete family, and just leave the whole lot. I do not think I have ever placed a Roma lady. Have you?

Win Lawlor: No.

Janie Codona: No.

Win Lawlor: It is not just a cultural thing either, because there is also a faith issue that comes into this. As an Irish Catholic but brought up as an Irish Catholic, not an Irish Traveller Catholic, I have to say there is a differentiation between English Catholicism and Irish Catholicism that does impact on Irish Traveller culture, given the pressures upon you. For example, if a man starts drinking and there is domestic abuse, the first place the family send him is to the priest, not to a domestic abuse service. He will be expected to make a pledge not to drink for a period. We have this multifaceted, layered situation and, if you are looking at some of the Gypsy Traveller community, particularly within the born again community, there is also an expectation around faith and that you remain with your father. You are a wife for life.

You have that overlaying the culture. Some families, as with all of us, are more adherent to faith than others, and how you express that faith is different. Even though everyone might tick an Irish Catholic box, a Catholic box or a Christian box, it is how it is demonstrated in the family. We have seen people saying, "I cannot do this because Father will know". "Father" is not "my father": "Father, the priest, will know that I have left my husband". You have that, as well as the family.



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Q637 **Eddie Hughes:** What is the difference if the women are living on a site or in a bricks and mortar home, or if they are travelling or static?

Kim White: I find that, if they are in bricks and mortar, they are not there by choice. A lot of young couples I have who are living in bricks and mortar are there only because there is no site provision for them. The majority of the Gypsy Travellers in Kent would definitely choose to live and remain on a site, because they have been brought up on a site, but they are forced into bricks and mortar.

Q638 **Eddie Hughes:** For the women trying to escape abuse, is it easier if they are living in bricks and mortar?

Kim White: No, it is no different. Regardless of where you are living and how you are living, the community around you, your beliefs and your culture will still be exactly the same.

Win Lawlor: It is harder if you are nomadic because you are less likely to have a third party—for example, a trusted organisation—that could facilitate or support, and you are less likely to know because you are usually on that ground all day. You are expected to be there or you go off in groups. You are never on your own. If there is domestic abuse in a nomadic situation, there is an added vulnerability. Sometimes, where those sites are means that you cannot just go next door, knock on the neighbour's door and say, "Help me", because the neighbour is three miles down the road, and she knows that you are a Gypsy and she ain't going to open the door anyway. You have all those things that go on with the nomadic communities.

Janie Codona: They do not know the area. The ones who are highly nomadic probably have fewer educational abilities, so they cannot pick a phone up and look online for someone to chat to. They are living with the fact that they are probably being evicted. There is a police presence and a local authority presence, so they are hesitant to start saying, "By the way, I am also a victim of abuse", because they are with their family and hoping to get to stay somewhere. They think, "If I add on another trouble, this means that we are not likely to get to stay anywhere", so they just keep it in even more. They do not share with families. They do not share with anybody. Then that can lead to mental-health breakdown because this woman is not only isolated but she is not receiving support; she is probably not receiving adequate healthcare. She is dealing with a relationship that she has gone into thinking, "This is for life" and now it has all fallen down around her. It is not her fault but she feels like it is her fault if she is not quiet and does not put up with it.

Win Lawlor: She is also usually with his family.

Janie Codona: Yes, they go and live with the husband's family.

Q639 **Angela Crawley:** Specifically, what do you think needs doing by local authorities, the police—Kim, perhaps you will have more expertise—charities and communities to help women to flee violence?



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Kim White: Education is a really big must. The fact that we are getting more and more Gypsy Traveller children into schools nowadays is a massive plus, because they are seeing how other cultures live and that perhaps what is happening in their household is not acceptable. Although I have just served 30 years, I did, in fact, join Kent Police in 1976, so I have seen a massive change over the years. Many years ago, when I used to go on to some of the sites, literacy was a massive issue but it is not so much nowadays. More Traveller men and women can read and write.

Having done a session once with some women and held up five posters that related to domestic abuse, I said to them, "Which of these posters is a poster for domestic abuse?" They only picked out one of the five. That was where this fist was coming in from the side, hitting the woman's face. That proved to me that, regardless of all the information that was written on there, it was the graphics that stood out to them. It is important that, when we are working with these communities, we still take into consideration literacy and being able to pass that on. That is why I say education is a big thing, because I did my role as Gypsy liaison officer for 18 years and I have seen a massive change in that time. These girls have access perhaps to a mobile phone or a laptop, which they would not have had 10 years ago, so they are seeing that there is more help out there for them.

I would always say education, education, education, at a very young age. You have to get to these girls and boys when they are at preschool age. I had a little boy once who came to school and reported the fact that his mummy could not walk that day. He was seven years old: "Mummy could not bring me to school today. She could not walk". When asked why, he was not prepared to say, but when he went outside he told the headmistress that daddy had hit her with an iron bar. Years ago, I do not think a little Traveller boy would have opened up like that at school, but he was suddenly in a situation where he felt safe and was able to talk to this teacher about it. Luckily enough, the officers went there and she was taken into hospital, but it was nice to think that that little boy felt he could say that. You would not have had that years ago.

Win Lawlor: Coming from the third sector—you are going to say, "She would say this" now—I have been working with the Traveller community for 18 years. That is where our trust relationship comes from. The fewest number of years that any of our staff have been working with the community is 12 to 14, so we have a trust relationship. One of the things that community members say to us is that the biggest issue is the high turnover in the statutory agencies, so that, when you go for support or when you go to tell your story, you are telling it to a huge number of people. You never see the same people twice. If you do need support, you do not have a relationship there, so you are not going even to open up in the first place.



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You think about the people who are around you all the time: the GPs, the frontline services. It is not just about having domestic abuse refuges or one PCSO; it is about having a network of safe people who you can disclose to. If you are in an area where Gypsies are not welcome, you do not have that anyway. If you are in an area where there is a high turnover of staff because the policy is that you want people to gain skills, develop and grow in the organisation, and move through or fast-track, you are not going to get disclosures. That includes most of the NHS, which is hugely important here. How many people still fall down stairs or walk into doors and walls when they go to disclose to accident and emergency services?

We are linking into services for children and young people, for example. Thresholds have increased, so, when we go to ask for support, where that support is available, the thresholds have become so high that there are a lot of women with ongoing issues who no longer meet those thresholds. Then it goes to a TAF, a team around the family, rather than a child at risk. While they are emotive words in the community, they are ways of supporting women and making sure they are safe, if that is done in a purposeful multiagency way. We always find that statutory agencies such as youth offending, health or mental health step back and leave us with that person. Because our funding is so small, we manage to keep people out of a critical situation but not necessarily as safe as they could be, which is a big concern for us an organisation: how do we utilise funds? It is about understanding the third sector's role and the community's role in supporting community members, and how you can bring the funding out of statutory agencies, and look at organisations that have long-term engagement and are the people who support and manage.

We safeguard all the time and we tell our service-users we are going to safeguard, and they still work with us, because they know that we will do nothing without them and that we have their best interests at heart. It is always explained in a way that says, "We are not coming in". We have never lost somebody who we have safeguarded, so it can be done and it is important that it is done with the community, not to them. The biggest issue is trust.

Janie Codona: It is certainly crisis management but also taking things into the community. A lot of the time, the women have to come out and have to seek support outside, so they are going to somebody from the non-Gypsy Traveller community. They feel like not only do they have to tell them what their issue is but there is a whole plethora of reasons around why they are in this situation that, culturally, they need to get across but they find it daunting to do that. Where you go in the community, barriers are already being lowered and they are more likely to listen. It is a range. It has to include young mums, families, education and even older people. It is working in partnership. We get a lot of referrals. They are referred on to us and that is it: "We have referred this person on to you" and, there you are, left with the person, but you do not



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get the support that you need with that person. Your funds are limited. You have two or three-year funding, or funding for one county but not the other, so you are forever thinking, "What can we do with this person under this present funding stream?"

Kim White: The other barrier is that Gypsy Traveller women are not to talk about their sex lives in front of men. If you go to a GP and it is a male, you are not going to open up to them. If you go to a police officer and it is a male, you are not going to open to them. We had a big rape case down in Kent, where I was going to be giving evidence as an expert witness to put across the Gypsy Traveller girl's sexual experiences that she had had with her husband. At the end of the day, the CPS forgot to call me. Needless to say, he was found not guilty because she had not provided any evidence of the sexual abuse and the rapes that her husband had done, and that is purely because it is wrong for them to talk about anything sexual in the presence of men. It is a big barrier.

Q640 **Angela Crawley:** As a last question, how well do public bodies deal with instances—and Win, you touched on this as well—for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities? Are there any particularly good or bad examples of practice that you can refer to?

Kim White: Getting access to a GP. We can all sit here and have a nightmare about how we get access to a GP. You ring up and get an appointment in three weeks' time or something, so prepare yourself for being ill in three weeks. Definitely with the surgery that I am at, if you go along you do not always see the same GP two or three times running. Like Janie just said, it is familiar faces. If you have a young girl who perhaps has gone for help somewhere and she has spoken to a woman and opened up this woman, or a female GP, the next time she wants to make an appointment to go back and see them she ends up with a male. That is a massive problem for them. Within the police service, when I first joined in the 1970s, it was women who dealt with women and children, which is not the case now. A lot of our domestic abuse officers are males, and I often have to say to them, "If you are going to see a woman from the travelling community, you must have a female officer with you, because she is not necessarily going to open up to male officers". It is difficult because we cannot always put females in those situations.

Q641 **Angela Crawley:** Would a young woman know to ask? Would a young woman feel confident, if she was phoning a GP's office, to say, "I want to speak to a female GP" or "I want to speak to a female police officer"? Would they feel confident?

Kim White: No, I do not think so, not always.

Win Lawlor: Certainly not in a domestic abuse situation or a crisis situation.

Kim White: They will just walk away.



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Janie Codona: Within the Gypsy Traveller community, someone maybe living in Birmingham will have a good relationship with a GP. They may move away—it could be they are nomadic or you have some now who move from site to site, so they are still travelling but in a different format and not travelling unauthorised—so they will say, “No, I am not going to see anybody. I am going to wait. We are going to move back to Birmingham in three months. I will be going back there for Christmas. I am going to wait to go back to that person there because I feel like I can talk to that person”. They seem to make a relationship with a GP practice and they will never visit another one, because, for some reason, they have confidence in explaining what their personal life is like, particularly if there are things around sexual violence. It is not an easy subject for anybody to sit and talk about, and to openly admit, “My relationship with my husband has deteriorated to the point that I now feel like I do not want to have sex with him any more”. It is a difficult subject to broach, and we find that, even working with young people, we have to be careful how we put it because, when we are working with Gypsies and Travellers, we still have to work within the community. We use a lot of posters and get a discussion going around posters, and around GPs. “Would you use a family planning clinic? Would you use a walk-in centre?” Most say, “No, we would look for the nearest hospital sign and use that”. That is very much an in-and-out job.

Q642 **Chair:** Can I just ask you a closing question on the attitudes of the police towards these sorts of issues of violence against women and girls when it comes to Travellers and the Gypsy and Roma community? Do you think it is taken as seriously?

Kim White: Yes. As I said, I retired on 5 November. However, I have been retained by Kent Police to continue to make sure that the domestic abuse training programme around Gypsy Travellers is given to every beat officer within Kent.

Q643 **Chair:** Is that throughout the country?

Kim White: No. I do go to other forces. I have been around other forces. I have been to Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Humberside, Essex, Sussex and Surrey. If those forces want me to go and provide domestic abuse training to their offices, I will, but it is the same with any organisation: people are coming in and people are going out, and I would be on a treadmill doing it.

Q644 **Chair:** Culturally, Janie, how do you find that? Is that something you are concerned about?

Janie Codona: With anybody who works in Gypsy and Traveller domestic abuse, if they are not culturally trained, how can they offer appropriate support? Helping to understand the culture around Gypsies and Traveller helps to understand why this woman is in this situation and how best you can help get her out of it. That is the key issue. There is no funding.



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There is a changeover of staff and new police officers. GPs are changing all the while. I have not seen my own GP in two or three years.

Kim White: Every single sexual abuse case or rape case that comes into the police is dealt with the same; that is it. There is a system that you go through for every rape that is reported and every sexual assault that is reported. That is a pro forma. You go through the whole lot. You have to remember that, when you are dealing with communities and cultural issues, one size does not fit all. That is the problem. You must get a female to examine that girl, because she will not be examined by a male, whereas, if it is somebody from another community, they might be quite happy to have a male that comes in and does the examination of them.

Q645 **Jess Phillips:** I do not think they would, to be perfectly honest.

Kim White: A lot of the girls from the travelling community will insist on having a female to come and do that examination.

Win Lawlor: For me, one of the biggest issues is the cuts in police services across the country. That means that there are fewer culturally trained staff who are out there engaging with those communities. I was talking about this when I was at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Gypsy, Traveller and Roma group yesterday. We were talking about exactly the same thing around hate crime. There is no SIGMA team in Merseyside Police any more; it goes directly to whatever officer is going to take the call. If you are looking at that, you are looking at a variety of responses, from really great to absolutely flaming awful. That is the reality for people on the ground. The biggest difficulty is how you get consistency of service. I have to say it does impact. Eddie, you were asking whether it mattered if you are nomadic. If you are nomadic and your experience of the police has been negative your whole life, you are not going to disclose any kind of situation, if you know that they are the people who are moving you on. It is an "us and them" situation. You are not going to disclose.

Chair: I fear we are going to have to end our discussions there. We are running well over time and I apologise for that. We started late. Can I thank you on behalf of the whole Committee for your time and for coming here today? We know it takes a lot of time out of your calendar, so thank you very much for your very forthright answers as well. That is really helpful. Thank you.



Examination of witnesses in private

Witnesses: [Woman 1], [Woman 2], [Woman 3], [Woman 4] and [Woman 5].

Q646 **Chair:** Thank you so much for joining us. I am sorry to keep you waiting. We have been really disorganised this morning and I apologise.

[Woman 5]: It is okay. The tubes were a nightmare.

Chair: Were they? I am sorry.

This looks terribly formal; it is the only way Parliament knows how to do anything. When we reform this place, we will be much better at it, but apologies for that. We wanted to talk to you about a number of things. You know we are doing an inquiry on the Traveller community and we are looking at violence against women and girls as part of it. We know that you were interested in sharing your views.

The two ladies sitting behind you tapping away are just taking a transcript and it will be anonymised, and you will see that before it goes anywhere, so it is all totally under control.

I will quickly introduce Angela Crawley, who is a member of the SNP; Eddie Hughes, who is a Conservative MP in the Black Country—I cannot remember your constituency name, sorry.

Eddie Hughes: Walsall North.

Chair: Tonia is from Wales, from Gower. I am Maria and I am come from Basingstoke in Hampshire. I am going to kick off but everybody is going to pile in, and it is up to whoever wants to answer. We want to start by asking: what is like to be a Gypsy or Traveller woman living in England? Do you see that as being very different to being a settled woman?

[Woman 3]: I grew up in settled housing, in bricks and mortar, in flats and houses. I have friends from the settled community, and I have family and friends in the travelling community. It is difficult in all areas. It is difficult in schools. It is difficult in work. For some Travellers in particular, it can be more difficult if you are living on a site. For me, I have hidden my identity through a lot of my life, so it is hard on both ends.

Chair: [Woman 1], you were going to come in.

[Woman 1]: It all depends on what type of person you are. There are barriers. A lot of it is hate. It is not just grudges; it is hate. When I was little and growing up, that did not exist in schools with the children I played with. I have seen more of it as I have got older. When we went from place to place, people would have notices in the window saying "No Gypsies allowed", in the corner shop, in the pubs. Women did not go into pubs on their own but, if we were dropping our husbands off or picking them up, that would be there.



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For my daughter's children, it is very hard, especially at school. There is racism and there are hateful babies. Babies do not grow up hating; it is what they are taught by their parents. I was never taught to be ashamed of what I am or what I do. My children went through a whole education, as I did. My grandparents could not read or write, so I went to school, I went to high school and I had a good job. Then I met him when I was 16 and married when I was 18, and that just all stopped.

I had my first attack at 19, being punched and kicked. It was not monthly or yearly; that was daily. I lived with that man for 32 years, to the point where he shot me and stabbed me. As the later years got on, it was always wonderful. If his food was not put on the plate the right way, the food would get thrown off, but I still loved this man, and I loved him and I loved him. I put my children through hell for 32 years because I should have been strong. People say to me now, "God, you are strong. After 32 years, you left". No, I was not strong. I was weak because I not only did damage to myself but I damaged my kids because I was not strong enough to pick them up. It was not people from my own community who helped me eight years ago; it was a bunch of strange women—gorger women, as we call them, or country women—from a refuge, who put me back piece by piece by piece. That took a year.

The police did not want to know. For the first time in 32 years, I phoned the police and I said, "Help me. I need to get away". They came. It was a woman, and she turned round and she said, "This is a domestic". He had bitten me [in body part]. This was eight years ago; I am not talking about 30 years. I only left my husband eight years ago. I had a bite mark where he took a chunk out. My mouth and nose were busted and I had two big hand marks. I was sitting there shaking. They would not put me in their motor. It was a mile from the ground where we were, with no other people there, because they had all shifted off. It was smothered in snow. They said, "This is a domestic".

While they were there, I knew he was not going to do any more damage, so I was safe, so I walked a mile. They drove their Range Rover from the site, and then I walked another two miles to the nearest village to get a bus, and they still would not help me. They helped me to say that they had phoned the nearest mental hospital to get me a bed, to put me in a mental hospital, but to take me to a woman's refuge or a place of safety, they were not doing that. The bus driver did that. He hid me on the back of his bus and he took me from a place in Yorkshire to another place, the nearest train station, and that man got off that bus and put me on a train and paid my train fare. I had to come back to get to my daughter, so my daughter could help me. My son never helped me.

- Q647 **Chair:** Does that experience that [Woman 1] shared with us reflect the experience of other people in terms of where the help lies? [Woman 1] was saying it is not necessarily within the community and not necessarily from the police, but from refuge and strangers.



[Woman 3]: I had a social worker; it was a male social worker. You will find that most Traveller women will tell you that they do not like being in the company of a man and speaking with a man about this, but I had complete trust in the social worker. For me, he was a lifesaver. As a Traveller woman, you do not have the support of family. You lose your community and you lose who you are because you are leaving everything you have ever known and everyone behind.

Q648 **Chair:** How did you find your social worker?

[Woman 3]: He was brilliant.

Q649 **Chair:** No, sorry, how did he find you?

[Woman 3]: Through the police. The police were called to my house. There is a certain questionnaire where they ring you up to ask you questions. I lied to most of the questions, as any woman will. You are not going to admit to certain things, like, "Has a man ever put a hand around your neck?" I would say no, to try to keep my marks down, so that social workers would not be involved, because of the big fear and stigma around it: "They are going to take my children if they know there is violence". It was only a couple of weeks later that another incident happened, and this time, when I left, I left for good. The social worker came back and spoke to me again, and it turned out to be the only support that I had to start off in fleeing the threats.

[Woman 5]: Most find it really hard. What has made travelling more isolated now is the fact that they have cut Travellers' education. There is no such thing as Travellers' education, Travellers' health visitors or community midwives any more. They used to come on the sites but they have stopped all that. That used to give women a bit more support, make women feel a bit safer, and make the men more fearful because they knew that, the next week or the week after, there would be a visit on the site from the health visitor or someone. Since they stopped all that, women are more isolated and it has gone back to how it was years ago. We are in modern days now and it feels like we are back where we were 20 or 30 years ago.

I only escaped because my ex went to prison, not for what he did to me but for something else. When he was in prison, I realised that he had me programmed, where I thought I could not cope without him, I could not be on my own, I was not allowed to be on my own. I am a Traveller; I have to be with my husband. By going to [community organisation] and bumping into [Woman], I realised that there is a future for me and there is hope. I have [number] children. When I decided to leave my husband, I had to leave maybe 5,000 family members behind as well because, when I applied for a divorce, that was it: "You have made your bed; you lie in it. You are bringing shame on the family. Your daughters are now going to be punished for what is going on. You are now a dirty woman".



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I had to stop and think before I leapt. Now it is my friends and my job I go to as a family. I got away from a violent partner and took my children away from that environment, and I ended up more isolated, even though I am safer. I say I am safer but one part of me is saying that I am not, really. I feel now that, when I was with him and in contact with him, I felt safer because I knew where he was and what he was up to.

Now, I wonder where he is or what he is up to. He could be outside this building waiting for me now. He was released from prison. His probation promised me that, when he was released, he would not be put in [area]. Fair enough, he was not put in my [area] but the woman across the road from me comes under [area], whereas I am [area]. They put him in a bail hostel 15 minutes from my house. When I say "my house", I am [age] years old and I have only lived in a house for the last two years.

That was another thing I had to leave: my environment and my home, the site that I lived on in [area] for 16 years. I am only a plastic paddy; I was born and raised in [area]. That was very hard for me. Here I am in a house. I was in the house for about three months before I could sleep. As soon as the children went to school in the morning, I would go and make myself busy. I do volunteering work. I would not go back to the house until I had the children with me. I did not feel safe because I am not used to a house. I am scared.

Then I complained when I heard that my ex was released around the corner for me. They told me, "He is not put in the [area]" but I explained that he is only 15 minutes away. Luckily enough, not through the help of the police or the domestic violence unit, but from his own accord, he asked to be transferred back to [place], where he was from originally, so they transferred his probation from here back there, or his parole—whatever you call it. That was a bit of good news that I had, that he is back [place] now, but for months I was having the same nightmare every night. I was waking up in the middle of the night and I could see him standing over me with a pillow, and it was coming down on my head. I had the same dream every night for weeks and months. It is only lately now I am starting to get a bit more courage.

I used to have the children beside me ready. I would not tell the children what I was scared of but I used to pretend it was a game. I would open the front door: "Now see who can run to the car the quickest", because I was fully convinced this man was waiting outside the door. My garden is very sheltered and I was scared in case he was behind a bush. I said, "Run to the car quickly, all of you"—bang, close the doors—and then the same story coming back. I would get a good look and make sure there were no cars parked where he was watching me or any unusual things. "Now, children, we are going to have this race again and we are going to run back to the house. Grab the shopping. You grab a bag and you grab a bag". I would have the key to the house like this. That is the way I was living for months when he got out of prison.



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The domestic violence unit did not help me. I was reassured before I went into the house that I had security measures and I had this, that and the other. When they had got me the house and I had moved in, they came out and gave me a little thing about the size of that cup to stick on the window. If anyone touched the window, the alarm went off. In the summer, when the glue on the back got hot, it used to keep falling off the window. That was my reassurance: a little alarm like that. I was run down. I volunteered for the police as well for years as a Traveller liaison officer. I felt like they just turned their back on me. There was only one time I asked them for help. I was not refused; I was ignored.

Q650 **Chair:** It is very helpful to hear those experiences. Thank you for sharing them.

[Woman 5]: It was said earlier but the only person who we find does help us—and they are always there, and most communities and Travellers do not appreciate them—is the Catholic priest. I would never, ever have got a divorce until a Catholic priest helped me. “Forget about the Catholic rules and religion”, he said. “We would not expect you to have to stay in a life-or-death relationship. We think, for your own safety, you should get out, and I will grant you a divorce anytime”. Not only did I get a divorce but, I had an annulment as well.

Q651 **Eddie Hughes:** I have not heard that expression “plastic paddy” for a while. My folks are from Mayo and my dad said I spent my whole life trying to pretend I was more Irish than he was. I go back over there two or three times a year; it is just lovely. Interestingly, with regard to the priest, I got divorced and spent a lot of time with my priest discussing whether that was an acceptable thing these days. The church is changing a bit.

[Woman 5]: It is good.

Eddie Hughes: The Pope is catching up a little bit. [Woman 1], you spoke about going to the pub, or waiting to drop the men and collect the men from the pub, because the women do not go into the pub on their own. Give us a bit of a feel for the difference between the way men and women are treated, the jobs that they would have or the roles that they would play in the community.

[Woman 1]: It is not as old-fashioned as it used to be. You just need that one bad person. Not all travelling men are like that. Most men carry their wives. We were just the unlucky ones. We ended up with an animal; well, mine was anyway. What your community is does not matter, whether you are gorgor or Muslim, if you marry that one bad person and he is evil. My husband—and you will have a shock now, ladies—used to take me to strange men’s houses and let them rape me. If I did not do it, he would beat me; when I did it, he would beat me. It has taken me [number] years to stand here. I am frightened of him today. I look over my shoulder. That fear will never go. But he was a good dad. He never



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touched my children. You look shocked. But that is not because he is a travelling man. That is because he is evil.

[Woman 5]: Excuse me; he is not a good dad either. To do that to a children's mother, he is not a good dad either.

[Woman 1]: But he never beat my children—he never let my children go without much or without the best of the best. It was me. I went to the police for the first time in [number] years. I was that battered. I would go to take the children to school and I would make myself nice and so on. The doctor knew, people in the community and my own people knew but they were too scared. Fear is a funny thing. Women like us will always live in fear but we get that little bit stronger. It has taken me [number] years. I am at work. I am near my children now. I am still scared of him. If he comes to me, I am not scared of him hitting me; it is when I do not know where he is at. I need to know where he is at because he could turn up at my door to shoot me. He has shot me before. He has stabbed me.

Q652 **Eddie Hughes:** You say that there could be examples of men like that in all communities, but with regard to men generally in the travelling community—

[Woman 1]: No, that is wrong as well. Why it is so hard for us is because we do not have that help. We do not have the trust. We cannot trust people like you, because we do not know where you are going with it. You are doing it for your job and you really care for us. You know want to know our past. The police did not want to help me. They told me it was a domestic. I walked three and a half miles, and a simple man on a bus helped me. The women in the refuge asked nothing of me. They helped me, yet my own would not because they were scared. You will never educate the men. If they do domestic violence, that is nothing to do with whether they are travelling or whether they are gorgers. You will not educate them, because they cannot be educated.

What you can do is educate our girls and our young women that they need to be respected. You need to make them, safe. One person on their own cannot do that. I cannot watch you 24/7 or you 24/7. It cannot be done. You need to put people in, and it will have to be women because, for me, it makes no difference. I have lived my life. I am nearly [number] years of age.

My [relative] did not marry a Traveller but married a gorger boy, who beat her. She did the right thing and rang the police, and this was [number] years ago. They did not send social services out to check her [age] [child]. They waited until she gave birth. Her babies were rushed to intensive care. Social services turned up to take her babies. Answer me why. Was it because we were Travellers? I say yes, because there were two other families in there. Their babies were downstairs. My [relative] had to be injected every single day. They made her feel inadequate as a mother. There was one family taking in cans of beer and drinking them on the maternity ward, and the other one was smoking in intensive care,



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where our babies were. The staff were sitting and watching this, but she was a bad mother because she was a Gypsy.

[Woman 5]: I think social services are one of the biggest barriers in why Traveller women are not asking for help or not trying to break free. You have to stay at home, be a punch bag and cover up your bruises in order to keep your children. That is how Traveller women feel. As soon as you go to a policeman, he has to file a Merlin report and, straightaway, social services are going to come out to investigate. The woman is being triply punished: punished because she is asking for help to get away from a lunatic who is going to kill her. She does not want to have her children in this position. Maybe he is not a lunatic; maybe he hit her and she wants to try to get him help and see if there is anything like counselling that would work for him. But, when she tries to do that, she will be given an ultimatum where she has to get away from him or the children are going to go into care. To get away from him, she probably has to leave her environment, her home and her site where she has lived all her life.

[Woman 3]: It has given men a little bit of power because they know.

[Woman 5]: It has given them a licence to kill. Since this new Merlin report and child protection Act came out, they have given men a licence to kill.

Q653 **Eddie Hughes:** It would be good to know what advice you would give to people in social services.

[Woman 5]: I would educate social services before anybody else.

Eddie Hughes: It would also be good to hear from [Woman 4] and [Woman 2] at some point.

[Woman 4]: For me, it was physical violence but emotional and mental violence as well. I do not want to say mental abuse. My family were very supportive. If they had not have been, I would not have left. I would have been married [number] years in [month]. I am sorry.

Q654 **Eddie Hughes:** Take your time. [Woman 2], have you any thoughts?

[Woman 2]: I suffered domestic violence when I was first married to my first husband—I only had one husband, but when I was married first time. Then I got divorced after [number] years of separation. I got divorced and reared my son on my own. Then, [number] years later, I had a daughter and I gave up my place where I was living to go and live in [place] with the father. He asked me because he said it would be better, and I suffered domestic violence from him during my pregnancy, being punched in the side here. I went to the priest at the church up the road and I told him, and he came to the house. He said to me, "If I were you, I would get you and your child out of here as soon as possible". I got him to bless the room that I was in with my daughter.



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I suffered domestic violence from a child upwards. Growing up, I lived in caravans because I had no choice. I was only a child living with my mother and my families. When I got divorced, there was still domestic abuse going on with my mother and my father. I decided to get out of this situation and this life. It was not for me any more. When I was a child, I used to want to get away but I did not have the knowledge or the sense to do it, or where to go or what to do, but I thought about doing it.

With the generation even today, as well as from the old days, for a lot of the travelling people who are suffering domestic violence, it is not just in men but within the women too. For their health's sake and for the sake of keeping their families together, they should be put on a sort of therapeutic—

[Woman 3]: Like couples' therapy.

[Woman 2]: Yes. I am not covering up for these horrible men who do it. There are good men about in all generations, but most Irish travelling men are very violent to their wives. They have a very bad temper and they are very bad-minded, in the way their minds think. A lot of it is a sad thing as they do not realise what they are doing, because they have mental health issues from a young age. The younger generation today are learning now not to talk in front of their kids. If they have to question something, they will do it when the kids are at school or not in the surroundings. When I was a child growing up and in my teens, I was looking at my mother getting beaten up and getting hit with anything, unexpectedly, out of the blue. It would frighten you, and then, if I screamed and cried for my mother, I would get beaten as well. There are a lot of mental health issues around with men and women. There are women who do domestic violence on men as well. That is another theory. It is down to mental health and it could be down to alcohol and drugs. Years and years ago, when I was a child growing up, Travellers drank and, at the same time, there was domestic abuse going on then with most Travellers but not all. A lot of travelling men would stand up to other men and say, "Stop. Why would you do that to your wife? I would not blame her if she left you. I would tell her to go". There are others, like the perpetrator who beat you.

[Woman 5]: Even when girls and boys are young, the girl is always at home. The girl has a very strict upbringing. You are not allowed off anywhere. Your brother is your boss. Your father is your boss. You are raised to babysit, clean and cook. This is what you are raised to do. You know where you are going. You know you are going to get married one day. Boys have that freedom and they have had always that power where they look after their sisters. They have a reputation to carry. You can have a scandal. If your sister has a scandal, it is a majorly bad thing. You would not even marry a girl if she had a scandal on her name. This is where it starts from a young age, where boys have that overall power, which triggers jealousy and everything else.



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[Woman 5]: Travelling boys turn more to substance abuse since the law changed, where they can no longer scrap. They cannot have horses any more. They cannot knock on doors looking for work any more. They have more time to abuse themselves and abuse others, because all their culture has been taken.

Q655 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** May I just say thank you? Listening to you all speak just brings it home to me. I have not been in this place long; I have only been here just over a year. I was a teacher before that, so I have had a lot of contact with the Traveller community, girls and boys, and seen the differences. It is really striking that what you have all touched on is about education. [Woman 1], you spoke really well about the need to educate the girls. [Woman 3], you brought it back to young children. I think it is our responsibility to be educating our boys particularly, as well, from a young age.

[Woman 1]: My son saw it all. He is [age]. He has never hit his wife. I am originally from the [name] family. We never saw violence. I never saw my grandfather hit my granny. You are not going to educate boys. They are not brought up to hit women. My children were brought up to look after one another.

[Woman 3]: I do think it is worth a try, if they have seen it from a young age.

[Woman 2]: Yes, it is.

[Woman 1]: I understand that, but my children were never brought up to disrespect their sisters, their elders or women. My daughter tells my grandchildren, "You do not hit your sister". That is how we brought our boys up.

[Woman 4]: They will take it more from the family than they will from a country person because they think you do not understand them.

Q656 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** You were talking about the police and social services. Have there been any examples of organisations that have really helped you?

[Woman 2]: Yes. [social worker], who passed away in [date], did a lot of brilliant work for Travellers. He worked with a lot of young men, training them in football and everything.

[Woman 5]: He was a social worker.

[Woman 1]: He was a social worker, yes. He trained all the young boys in football. Unfortunately, he had a massive heart attack in [date], rest his soul. He was very good to us all. He was around me for 14 years. It was him who got me working with [community organisation] after my [relative] died. He was a good man. He worked very closely and he got people together. He got the Travellers working together with the police.



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Q657 **Chair:** Was he with a local authority?

[Woman 2]: Yes, he was with [area] Council.

[Woman 3]: There is a trust there, so Travellers will open up to services.

[Woman 5]: He had a lot of cultural awareness.

Q658 **Chair:** That was the council bringing people together.

[Woman 2]: Yes, but it was [social worker] who did all the council work, not the council itself. [social worker] would go out to sites when there were too many caravans in a park. He would organise all that himself and get the police involved. He would keep everything calm.

Q659 **Chair:** Has anybody else had that sort of experience of co-ordination in their community?

[Woman 4]: [social worker] was my social worker when I lived in [area]. If I talked to the council or anything like that, I would mention it so that when I came in, they knew who I was and I could skip the queue. It made things more comfortable and easier.

[Woman 1]: Mine has been [name]. I have known her for over 10 years. Social services turned up at the hospital two years ago. She was the first one I rang, and she was down. When I thought we had problems with housing, she was there. When my grandchildren were being bullied at school, she was there. She is my angel. She is a good one.

[Woman 4]: My experience with the police was actually good, to be honest.

Q660 **Chair:** It was good.

[Woman 4]: Yes. I never called the police for the [number] years I was with him, but once I left him he knew where I lived, so he would come round and harass me. The first time that I called the police, he had his foot and his arm in the door, and I was pushing the door and taking out the phone. I pressed 999, and he thought he was calling my bluff. He waited until it rang, I gave my name and address, and then he went. He came back to the flat a few times after that and I phoned the police, and the policeman came up. When a different van pulled up, I thought it was him.

Eddie Hughes: We are a bunch of MPs, or at least some of us are. What should the Government be doing, or what should Parliament or MPs be doing, to try to help more?

[Woman 3]: There should be a key worker for women, especially because 80% of Travellers and Gypsies are in houses, not in sites. Only 15% are in sites and 5% are nomadic. Those in houses are more isolated. If you lose everything and you are fleeing a partner, it depends on where



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the council puts you. You do not have anyone around you and you do not have the help, so you have to trust in services. Most women at that point go back. They do not leave. They do not stay away.

The hard part is that you have social workers, victim support, Women's Aid, police officers and other services—there could be a MARAC—which are calling you. With your mental capacity at that time, after everything you have been through with the violence, you do not want to be speaking to all these different people.

Q661 **Chair:** A key worker would really help.

[Woman 3]: It would really help: that one person who you can tell everything to, and who can also help you and explain to you. It is just a person you trust.

[Woman 4]: When I went to the refuge, I had moved out of the flat. When I went in, after all this ordeal, the first thing they came out with was questions that I was too distressed to even answer. I felt like I was being judged as well because they expect it from a Traveller. There are so many bad things said about us already that I did not want to add to them. A lot of people blame us for this as well: we allow it to happen, and things like that. I had a job and I had my child in nursery. The other two were in school. I was settled in [area]. They told me that I had to leave there and then, and never come back to [area] again. I would have to take my daughters out of school and go to [place] or somewhere like that. Then I decided I was being punished. Why should I have to move? We were taken from a situation like that to a worse one because they were isolating me and isolating my children. We would be put in a house with cameras. I just did not like the idea of it; he was free to roam wherever he could.

[Woman 1]: You must have had a bad experience because, at the Women's Aid that I went to and lived at for a year, there was none of that. From the day they took me in, it was at my pace.

[Woman 4]: They told me it had to be now.

[Woman 5]: Did they have experience of Travellers?

[Woman 1]: No, I was the first. They still continued to help me for two years. I do not see them now but I have their phone number. If I need to see those women, they will come to me. They were absolutely brilliant. They really put me back.

[Woman 4]: When I was in the room, which was a very small room, he said, "Take it now or leave it—option. The minute you leave the room, this little place will be gone". Our only option was to take it now. "We will collect your children from school". I did not like the distressing idea of strangers going and getting my children from school, and going and never coming back.



Chair: It was not very flexible.

[Woman 4]: They kept asking questions that were very intrusive. I thought, "I do not know you". I understand they had to ask the questions but I do not understand why it has to be so aggressive.

There are barriers to leaving your marriage, which is why the men have the upper hand. With the settled community, you just go your separate ways. You are not tied in. They know that it takes a lot for a travelling woman to leave her husband. They will not just leave at the first drop of a hat.

Q662 **Chair:** You perceive that, if you are just living together and you are not married, it would be easier to split.

[Woman 4]: I know it would not be easy but I feel it could be a little easier.

[Woman 3]: It is the religion but it is the community that you are in. It is being a Traveller. You punish yourself enough without your husband punishing you, but then everyone inside the community will punish you and you do not have any ties to the outside. You do not know anything about it, so you are tied in, from every angle, to that man.

[Woman 5]: A lot of refuges will not allow boys over 14. I have a son now who is [age] and has [health needs]. He has three diagnoses. If I was to get up and go away this minute to a refuge, I would not leave him behind, because he has the brain of an [age] year-old. For travelling women, even if your children are in their 20s, they are still your children. There is not a woman who would go and leave half their children behind if they are over 14. Refuges have a rule: no over 14 year-olds are allowed.

[Woman 1]: Social services especially should build the trust in our girls and let them know that they ain't going to come and can take their children. They are being punished by their husbands already. They need trust. They need to know that they can go these women and get help. Their children are not being taken. If you put a thing in and say, "You come to us and we are going to take your children", they are not even going to pick that phone up and ask for help. You are going to have a lot of dead bodies that you can count on your fingers. You need to educate our girls: "That is not the way that you were brought up. That is not what it means to be loyal or respectful. The first time a man puts a hand on you, you walk. You take your babies, you take yourself, you walk through that door and you keep going. You never look back". Social services need to let these girls know: "We are going to help you. Whatever help you need, we are going to help you". You need to put that in place.

Q663 **Chair:** What is the best thing that schools can do to help girls stay in school?

[Woman 5]: Make them Traveller friendly.



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[Woman 1]: Stop the bullying. For my granddaughter, stop the bullying. My children never had bullying at school. My granddaughter goes to a Catholic school. We had to go in and say, "My granddaughter does not like getting undressed in front of the boys. That is not allowed in our culture. Whether you are Irish or Romany, we do not allow that".

[Woman 5]: Yes, and sex education in front of boys.

[Woman 1]: Yes, we stopped that. There is no sex education until they get to the bigger schools, if they allow it, but my kids went all through school. With my grandchildren, I went in and said, "My granddaughter does not get undressed in front of the boys. If they are going to do PE, could you please make her separate?" They kicked up such a fuss over that: "Why?" "Because it is our way and our culture. We respect ourselves". They did not understand it.

Q664 **Chair:** Would sex education not help tackle some of these issues?

[Woman 1]: No. What has that got to do with anything? I don't understand.

[Woman 3]: It is to do with the name. If they made it "healthy relationships", Travellers would be keener to let the girls go. They do not understand what sex education is.

[Woman 5]: Let the girls watch it alone without boys being present. You are not going to get permission from any of the mothers anyway for them to watch it; it is never going to happen. Say one slips through and is accidentally there, the first thing she is going to do is get up and go out the door. If a boy and a girl who are courting go to the cinema together, a man and a woman can be only kissing and the first thing the girl is going to do is get up and go to the toilet until that part is over. If you are in my home, my daddy is there, we are both chatting and a man and a woman kiss on the telly, we would pick up the remote control and change the channel. That is respect.

Q665 **Chair:** Frame it as "healthy relationships" and it might be better.

[Woman 1]: I do not understand what sex education and teaching our girls or our boys has to do with domestic violence. Where is the link?

[Woman 5]: She means to make them know the difference between right and wrong.

[Woman 2]: Can I say something about this now and what I feel? In my personal belief, a lot of the young people have changed from walking out when they see someone kissing. Among themselves, they are all right. It is all the young people now in the travelling community. They are taking over the travelling community. Once you are past 21, you are out of date with the young people. They are well advanced about sexual things. They are not like we were when I was a little girl growing up. We would not be allowed to sit around where elders would even be talking.



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Chair: I am so sorry, but we have run out of time. We were a little late starting and I apologise for that, but can I thank you on behalf of the whole Committee for your time today? It is really helpful. I know we are talking about really difficult issues here, and your confidence in talking about them is awesome. We will go into an informal session now.