

## A question of identity: the social exclusion of housed Gypsies and Travellers

Margaret Greenfields<sup>1</sup> and David Smith<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Buckinghamshire New University

<sup>2</sup> Canterbury Christchurch University

---

### Abstract

*This article draws upon a series of survey-based and qualitative studies in the UK to examine the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers resident in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. Many reported experiences of racial discrimination and being 'othered' by the surrounding population and by providers of public services. Despite sharing spatial proximity in often deprived locales of social housing, social relations with neighbours commonly displayed a notable degree of social distance. However, recourse to social networks which, in the absence of appropriate formal support mechanisms, provide important informal sources of support and a means of maintaining cultural identities helps to offset some of the difficulties associated with housing. Respondents frequently dwelt on the strength of their identity as a Gypsy/Traveller as a source of strength in a hostile environment and as a way of maintaining a boundary in relation to mainstream (sedentary) society, albeit often at the expense of developing close inter-ethnic/community relationships. Policy implications include the need for local authorities and other agencies to engage meaningfully with Gypsies and Travellers in housing, many of whom perceive themselves as 'officially' de-racialised once not living in caravans, and to recognise the particular difficulties experienced by many Gypsies and Travellers in housing.*

**Keywords:** Gypsies, Travellers, housing, resilience, communities

### Introduction

This article draws upon a series of studies conducted by the authors, examining the accommodation 'careers' and experiences of 'bricks and mortar' housing of Gypsies and Travellers. The article reports findings from a comparative qualitative study of housed Gypsy and Traveller communities in two localities of Southern England and also draws upon findings from three surveys of housed Gypsies and Travellers conducted in the same regions. These include a survey of 158 Gypsy and Traveller households (of whom 103 were living in conventional housing) commissioned by a social housing provider and two Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation (and other needs) Assessments (GTAAAs). Since the 2004

Housing Act, there has been a statutory requirement on local authorities to undertake GTAAAs, which require that a sample of housed Gypsies and Travellers are interviewed to ascertain their accommodation preferences. (This arose as a result of campaigners lobbying the Department of Communities and Local Government to recognise that a high percentage of housed Gypsies and Travellers were resident in housing as a result of shortage of authorised sites and not through choice.) In total we have data mined 202 GTAA questionnaires relating to housed Gypsies and Travellers in the areas surrounding the two study locations.

Secondary analysis of GTAA data, was undertaken through examining responses to a number of pertinent GTAA questions

which had been entered into large scale Excel datasets. Qualitative comments entered into open text-box questions embedded within the GTAA questionnaires and which had been entered into cross-referenced files were then explored to enable a picture to emerge of the demographic structure and accommodation preferences of housed Gypsy/Traveller families. Findings from the GTAA data are broad-brush and confined to reasons for entering 'bricks and mortar' accommodation and statistical data on satisfaction levels with housing and percentages of respondents who have experienced discrimination or racism whilst housed. The findings from these surveys raised several neglected issues - high levels of prejudice and racism experienced by housed Gypsies and Travellers from their neighbours as well as from professionals and service providers; poor inter-community relations; a high proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied and unhappy in housing and the corollary of this: a significant number of informants reporting that they would move onto a caravan site if such accommodation was available. It was felt that these issues warranted further investigation and the two qualitative studies, which form the basis of this article, are unique in undertaking an in-depth consideration of the experiences of housed Gypsies and Travellers living predominantly in public sector accommodation. The qualitative studies explored a range of issues emerging from the surveys and consisted of depth interviews with housed Gypsies and Travellers focusing on routes into and attitudes towards living in 'conventional' accommodation; housing 'careers' and perceptions of the estates on which they lived; local, community relations; the methods utilised to retain a sense of community within a potentially hostile environment, and social relationships and areas of conflict with neighbours from other ethnic backgrounds. In addition, two focus groups were held (one in each study location) with individuals who had not

previously been the subject of a depth interview (although they had in some cases participated in surveys). In one study area the participants were all young people aged 14 to 25, the majority of whom had spent their entire lives in housing, yet retained close links to 'sited' relatives. The other focus group consisted of fourteen adults most of whom were resident in housing, including some who had relatively recently made the transfer from site or 'roadside' residence to conventional 'bricks and mortar' accommodation.

Data from the qualitative studies (depth interviews and focus groups) were transcribed from audio tapes and analysed manually using the 'Framework' system – an approach which enables the researcher to develop a hierarchical thematic framework used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003).

This article presents findings from 37 in-depth qualitative interviews and two focus groups (consisting of a total of 25 participants) undertaken in two locations in Southern England. One of the qualitative studies was undertaken on a housing estate along the South Coast, which housed a large concentration of Gypsies and Travellers (Study Area One). A second comparative study was implemented in the South East of England (Study Area Two), in an area renowned for having a large Gypsy and Traveller population, to explore whether findings from Study Area One would be replicated or if regional variations in attitude to accommodation, socio-economic opportunity and community relations resulted in differing outcomes. In the two localities in Southern England reported in this article the majority of participants are Romany (English) Gypsies, with a small sample of Irish Travellers and New Travellers also included (Table 1).

**Table 1** Ethnicity of respondents (Study Areas One and Two)

	<b>Study Area One</b>	<b>Study Area Two</b>
Sample Size	28	34
<b>Ethnicity/Identity</b>		
English Gypsy/Romany	17	32
Irish Traveller	1	-
New Traveller	8	-
Mixed/Other	2	2

It has been estimated that there are over 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK with as many as two-thirds resident in conventional housing (Clark & Greenfields, 2006). Whilst some have willingly entered housing (often for health/age related reasons) the pace of transfers into housing has increased in recent years due to the closing off of traditional stopping places, a shortage of pitches on council caravan sites, difficulties gaining planning permission to develop private sites and a legislative assault on nomadism, in particular the 1994 Criminal Justice Act (CRE, 2006; Crawley, 2004). The cultural impact of the transition from caravans to conventional accommodation on this sizeable 'hidden' population is profound.

The duty to enquire into the housing or site requirements of this population, contained in the Housing Act 2004, arose in response to increasing public disquiet over the growth of highly visible unauthorised caravan sites (both on self-owned land without planning permission and 'roadside'). Secondly, the policy focus on accommodation issues emerged as part of a wide-ranging Government review of Gypsy and Traveller issues which sought to establish whether long-standing anecdotal evidence of health and other social inequalities were borne out (Greenfields & Home, 2007). The genesis of this series of studies is thus intimately

connected to the policy focus on Gypsies and Travellers in recent years and an increasing recognition by central and local government that housed Gypsies and Travellers have been effectively 'lost' within administrative statistics. For families who neither dwell in a caravan nor have school age children who are known to the Traveller Education Service, a lack of census or ethnic monitoring data means that many members of these communities have been essentially 'de-racialised' in terms of recognising their culture, ethnicity and support needs. Gypsies and Travellers have been included in the category of 'White British' or 'White Irish' whilst, in many ways, having profoundly different experiences from members of these majority populations. In particular, the extent of racial discrimination to which they are subjected and the reluctance of statutory bodies to identify and respond to anti-Traveller prejudice (CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). Emerging evidence demonstrates that a transfer into housing does not lead to assimilation and a homogenised culture of 'white Britishness' but often creates as many (if different) problems for housed families as they experienced when 'on the roadside'.

It is against this background of sparse data and a lack of institutional awareness of the needs and experiences of these communities within local authorities and amongst service providers that the qualitative studies were undertaken. In a situation where choices are severely restricted in relation to accommodation preferences it is noteworthy that a high number of respondents reported reformulating, as far as possible, 'traditional' community life through activating networks of kin living in close proximity (see Greenfields & Smith, forthcoming 2010). Co-residence with or amongst other Gypsies and Travellers provides a structured system of social support for families in transition or who are subject to racism and hostility within their

neighbourhood. However, as Putnam (2000, p.23) notes, 'bonding' (or exclusive) social capital, while creating strong in-group loyalty, may simultaneously result in strong out-group antagonism. The unintended consequence of such 'clustering' may be that the development of 'bridging' (or inclusive) ties to the wider community are inhibited and pre-existing social and economic exclusions are compounded leading to the creation of closed 'parallel communities' (Cantle, 2005).

### **Gypsy and Traveller communities**

Gypsies and Travellers are amongst the oldest and yet most invisible minority ethnic communities in Britain. Romany Gypsies, a people of Indic origin are first recorded as entering Britain in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century (Mayall, 2004). Since that time, and despite the enactment of frequently draconian legislation, the population has retained a constant presence in Britain (Fraser, 1992). Until the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century the majority resided in tents or wagons and travelled for seasonal work, with many experiencing movement in and out of housing in response to employment opportunities, illness or weather conditions (Mayall, 1995). Historical evidence indicates the existence of significant populations of housed Gypsies/Travellers in London and other urban centres since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Griffin, 2008). Irish Travellers are known to have travelled between Ireland and Britain as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century with an increasing population making their homes in England and Wales (and to a lesser extent Scotland) from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significant waves of Irish Travellers arrived in Britain in the 1950s associated with post-war employment opportunities and again from the 1990s in response to the introduction of severe legislative restrictions on nomadism in Ireland (Power, 2004).

New Travellers are not a distinct ethnic group but a loose-knit community of people

who may have grown up in conventional accommodation but who have lived 'on the road' for a considerable period of time. Although popularly associated with 'alternative' and 'festival' movements from the 1980s onwards, an increasing percentage of New Travellers have been individuals who have left care or the armed forces or who are unable to find employment (Earle *et. al.*, 1994; Greenfields, 1999; Webster & Millar, 2001). For some who were at risk of social exclusion during the major recessions of the 1980s-1990s, opting to become nomadic was identified as a more positive form of homelessness, offering the opportunity to undertake field labour and associated work whilst living cheaply and communally in vehicles. Although many have returned to conventional accommodation, a significant number were born 'on the road' and have parents and even grandparents who have followed the same way of life since the 1970s.

Over the past fifteen years Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers (and since late 2008 indigenous Scottish Travellers) have been legally recognised as Minority Ethnic communities (CRE, 2006). Whilst 'ethnic' Gypsies and Travellers are, in theory, subject to (limited) protection from racism and discrimination under the Race Relations Acts, New Travellers are not included within this legislation.

### **The cultural impacts of residence in housing**

It has been well established that residence on deprived housing estates can have a negative impact on members of all communities (Harker, 2006). However, particular concerns exist for the health and well-being of Gypsies and Travellers who have moved into such accommodation (Matthews, 2008). The cumulative effects of enforced settlement, low levels of literacy and a lack of familiarity with bureaucratic procedures associated with housing, separation from family members and a

familiar cultural milieu and exposure to pervasive prejudice and racism from the wider society can lead to extreme distress and social dislocation (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). When combined with a deficit of institutional knowledge among public service professionals concerning the distinct cultural and support needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers, a form of ‘cultural trauma’ not dissimilar to that recorded amongst Aboriginal communities in Australia and First Nation peoples in North America may occur (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Alexander *et al.*, 2004). Indigenous communities who find themselves subject to oppression, racism and destruction of their community norms and way of life tend to experience heightened levels of substance abuse, suicide and self-harm and indications exist that amongst housed Gypsies and Travellers similar patterns are emerging (Tatz, 2004; Health Council of Canada, 2005; Richardson *et al.*, 2007; Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). Parry *et al.*’s (2004) Department of Health funded research found that housed Gypsies and Travellers have the lowest health status of any other BME group in the UK with particularly high rates of depression and anxiety.

Many of those interviewed felt that they had been forced into housing through a lack of alternative accommodation options and considered this as a racially motivated assault on their culture and lifestyle. One Romany Gypsy couple interviewed in Study Area Two who had been housed for six years after failing to obtain planning permission on their own land, observed that “the councils make it nearly impossible to get planning permission and that’s because they don’t want us round here”. Despite official lip service paid to equality and diversity, survey and interview data indicates that many Gypsies and Travellers feel that a persistent and insidious institutional racism is directed towards them. Another man who at the time of interview was fighting a legal battle to gain planning permission on land that he owned,

pointed to discrimination in the planning process:

*I’ll tell you the difference between us and you. You can put in for planning permission. You haven’t gotta say who you are. We put in for it, we’ve gotta put in as a Gypsy. Then, you’ve gotta turn round and prove that you are a Gypsy. Now you tell me if that happens anywhere else.*

The reluctance to provide sufficient local authority caravan sites or to grant planning permission on private sites supports a commonly held view that the social status of Gypsies and Travellers has not improved alongside those of other ethnic minority groups, and that they are denied the rights and respect now given to other minorities. A female focus group member in Study Area Two who has been housed for over ten years commented that:

*all the other groups in society are allowed to keep their way of life so why not us? I hate it here in this house but where can I go? There’s no pitch on the site and they won’t give us planning when we buy our own land.*

In some localities in which the authors have worked, as many as 75% of housed respondents to GTAAs moved into ‘bricks and mortar’ due to site shortages and a lack of suitable alternative accommodation. The majority of housed Gypsies and Travellers surveyed for GTAAs are resident in public housing with many living in socially deprived localities, supporting evidence that many members of this community are frequently accommodated in ‘hard-to-let’ properties, or may deliberately transfer to ‘undesirable’ estates in order to reside in close proximity to relatives who already live there.

That a cultural aversion to housing exists among many Gypsies and Travellers is evident from several studies (Parry *et al.*,

2004; Power, 2004; Greenfields & Smith, 2010). Of 103 housed Gypsy and Traveller households surveyed for a social housing provider in the South East - whose tenants include a high proportion of Gypsies and Travellers - 45% would willingly give up their houses and return to life in a trailer or on site if this option was available (Smith, 2008). Cross-referencing whether respondents would return to living on site by length of time spent in housing revealed that the largest group who would remain in housing were those who have been housed for twenty years or more and considered themselves either too old or too accustomed to 'bricks and mortar' to return to living in a caravan:

*when I was a bit younger probably but I'm too old to be out on the roadside now.*

*My babies have all grown up in houses, it's the only life they've ever known.*

Sixty-five per cent of those who had lived in housing for between one and fifteen years reported that they would move onto a pitch on a caravan site if this was available. The most common reason mentioned by over half of respondents, was the alien nature of life in bricks and mortar: "I want to be in a trailer, it's my way of life the way I was brought up". Another respondent pointed to the impact of enforced housing on the communal nature of Gypsy/Traveller culture, observing that:

*we're all in houses now. It's not our way, it's scattered our people.*

Over 10% of those who would move out reported disliking 'everything' about housing and of experiencing feelings of claustrophobia, insecurity and anxiety:

*I feel shut in. I want to be in a mobile.*

Another commented that:

*I hate it. It's a house. It's not natural to us. (Smith, 2008, p.43)*

A key factor shaping attitudes towards conventional housing is the proximity of other family members. Gypsy and Traveller communities have been noted throughout history for the kin-based nature of their culture and the move into housing has impacted on this traditional communal and kin-based social structure (Greenfields, 2006). In the survey discussed in the previous paragraph, separation from family and kin was the second most frequently cited reason for wishing to move out of housing and return to a site, accounting for almost 40% of responses. Participants in both our study localities made frequent reference to the psychological and social isolation that can result in the absence of kin and other Gypsies and Travellers. One Romany Gypsy woman who had been housed from the 'roadside' three years previously commented:

*I'm among strangers here. I don't feel safe there's no family nearby.*

Another man, housed for three years in the South East noted that:

*I don't like it (in housing). Miss the old days travelling with the family. ... I'd give up this house tomorrow if I could but they don't want Gypsies on the road no more.*

Another woman, housed for over fifteen years complained that:

*I've been stuck in this council house for so many years now and living in this house has ruined my life. I would have liked to live on a site with my family if there were any spaces.*

It is, therefore, unsurprising that many housing placements for previously 'sited' or nomadic Gypsies and Travellers break down. Davies (1987) found that in the

period 1981-1985 approximately 20% of Traveller families in housing returned to a nomadic way of life while other reports put the rate as high as 50% (DoE, 1986). Reports of tenancy breakdown regularly involve experiences of social isolation exacerbated by poor relationships with surrounding residents; 'racist harassment' or 'neighbour trouble'. Difficulties adjusting to housing are often compounded by the sense of being 'othered' by both neighbours and authority figures with whom respondents come into contact (discussed below). Studies have indicated that, compared to other ethnic minority groups, Gypsies and Travellers are more resigned to racial hostility and are less likely to report it to the police than other ethnic groups (Netto, 2006). This reflects a widespread belief, often based in personal experience, that complaints of racism will be ignored by local authorities, social landlords, schools and the police. One male commented during an interview that:

*we have to put up with racist comments because nobody takes the complaints seriously but the gawvers (police) are always banging on our doors.*

Another recalled that:

*the people [are] always ready to call the police on me and they always come. If I call them about my neighbours' abuse or throwing stones at the window they never come.*

### **Institutional racism and relations with officials**

Gypsies and Travellers claim to receive an inferior standard of service in respect of health, education and in the criminal justice system compared to all other sections of society and research evidence supports this (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). Members of this community have the worst health profile and die younger than any other BME group (Parry *et al.*, 2004) while Gypsy and

Traveller pupils have the worst school attendance rates, highest levels of exclusions and lowest proportion leaving school with five or more GCSE's at grade A\*-C compared to all other minority groups (Derrington & Kendall, 2007). Evidence also indicates that Gypsies and Travellers receive discriminatory treatment in the criminal justice system, being more likely to receive custodial sentences and less likely to receive community sentences than other groups (Morran, 2001; Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). Respondents frequently claimed that local authority and social housing officers were as hostile towards them as were their neighbours, offering them a poor-quality service and being reluctant to intervene when racist incidents occurred in the neighbourhood. A common perception exists that:

*the government let the police and council discriminate against us from the day we're born. We're rejected because they don't want anything to do with us.*

Consequently, many avoid dealings with non-Travellers, hold a strong mistrust of officials and may display defensively hostile behaviour that increases already poor relations between Gypsies and Travellers and officials (Parry *et al.*, 2004, pp.49-50).

In 2008 the homeless charity Shelter published a good practice guide to consulting with housed Gypsies and Travellers, noting that many hide their identity both from neighbours and local authority support workers (2008, p.12). While discussing social and community relations in a focus group interview in Study Area Two, one English Gypsy who had been housed for six years acknowledged concealing his identity from his neighbours, adding that "they don't know so they're none the wiser and they won't point at me whenever anything goes missing or stop their lads playing with ours". The wife of a family housed for eight years after being evicted from a family owned plot of land

commented that they were 'very happy' in housing, though adding that "we never get any trouble from the neighbours but they don't know we're Gypsies so that helps". In the following quote the respondent complains of experiencing double-discrimination, from housing officers initially and then from local residents:

*they (housing officers) put you in the worse council estates that you could imagine 'cos they know you're as they say, 'the pikeys' (when) they know who you are you're instantly classed as the villains.*

The complaints concerning hostile and discriminatory treatment from agencies and service providers highlight the need for trained Gypsy and Traveller liaison officers to assist members of this community, who may have poor literacy skills and find bureaucratic systems unfamiliar and alienating, to access services and provide an advocacy service for members of this community.

### **Community/neighbourhood relations**

The enforced settlement of nomadic communities has brought them into close spatial proximity with other deprived and socially excluded populations who are increasingly concentrated into areas of social/local authority housing. Following disturbances in Oldham and other Northern towns in 2001 and a belated recognition that social relations between different social and ethnic groups are often non-existent, 'community cohesion' has received increasing governmental attention in recent years and has become a key policy objective (Cantle, 2001). The Denham Report (Home Office, 2001) identified a deficit of civic identity or polarisation of shared values along racial, social class and cultural lines as key factors behind social and community segregation. Community cohesion, therefore, is an extension of the concept of

multiculturalism and attempts to balance the increasing diversity and heterogeneity of communities with interaction between different groups and the nurturing of a sense of community and inclusiveness (Home Office, 2001).

The increasing settlement of formerly nomadic communities is resulting in a significant reformulation of social and community relations on many housing estates, especially in Southern England where Gypsies and Travellers have always constituted a significant minority population. In both our study locations social relations between Gypsies and Travellers and their neighbours were generally marked by social and emotional distance and mutual (unspoken) agreement to retain social separation from their 'gorger' (non Gypsy) neighbours. A female Gypsy interviewed in one of the South East locations remarked on the lack of social contact between housed Gypsies and their neighbours:

*people round here don't have much time for us because they think we Gypsies are dirty people. If only they knew.*

A number of focus group participants reiterated that with respect to their neighbours they:

*don't have much to do with them. Most just ignores us.*

One participant reflected the experiences of many when she observed that:

*I don't know many Travellers that mix outside their own community other than for work reasons. Usually we avoid each other.*

Social separation is partly a response to the antagonism experienced (or anticipated) from the wider society based upon widely held stereotypes associating Gypsies and Travellers with dirt, criminality and disorder

(Turner, 2002). However, similar derogatory stereotypes concerning standards of hygiene, child-rearing practices and immorality are attributed by Gypsies and Travellers to their 'gorger' neighbours, further encouraging social distance and division. One woman commented "I can't stand the gorgers - most of them round here are filthy dirty and would argue over a penny piece because most of them are scag heads". Although the notion of 'parallel lives' featured prominently in the interviews and focus groups, such divisions revealed a clear social class dimension. Respondents differentiated between the established working class community and newcomers to the area. Despite criticisms of the type discussed above, all of which provided a stimulus to social separation, such divisions were not complete and social interaction with their neighbours did occur:

*some gorgers is alright. If they're not stuck up and think they're too good to talk to us.*

Mutual suspicion and avoidance was not always so prominent in relation to 'locals' alongside whom the Gypsy and Traveller community may have previously worked in seasonal agricultural and labouring work and with whom they have long lived in close proximity. A localised and intimate history of conflict and co-operation between the two groups has led to the recognition that there is "good and bad in all, Gypsy or gorger". One man noted that:

*I live with mostly travellers, up the same road as me, but I live with gorgers as well. I get on quite well with them actually 'cos I've been brought up with them. I've known them all my life.*

Rather, the trend of 'parallel communities' is more prominent among newcomers who are moving into new private housing developments. In Watts' (2009) study of a suburban private housing estate, he employs the concepts of 'elective belonging' and

'middle class disaffiliation' to analyse how the middle classes concentrate in areas with people of their own class, spatially and socially excluding those who do not belong. His findings raise concerns regarding the value of 'social mixing' policies in reducing social segregation and the findings in this article contain similar implications:

*A lot of it is because of outsiders moving into our community ... you've got Londoners moving in ... and all our locals, all the original old locals that we grew up with, the outsiders well their children have never had that opportunity to grow up together. All they've grown up with is these Londoners coming in and everyone else from up-country and cities, saying how bad we are. How do they know? They've never lived with us.*

### **Housed Gypsy and Traveller communities**

Given the importance of creating and sustaining a community network in response to policy-driven settlement and frequent local hostility, patterns of 'migration-networks' are emerging which parallel 'chain-migration' processes identified among other BME groups (Haug, 2008). In spite of the difficulties experienced by many housed Gypsies and Travellers, positive social relations and immersion in localised networks were also prominent themes. In both study areas the majority of housed Gypsies and Travellers were concentrated in particular neighbourhoods in relatively tight-knit cohesive communities, usually in areas with a long historical association with travelling communities due to seasonal employment opportunities and/or the location of traditional stopping places. Thus the concentration of housed Gypsy and Traveller communities appears to be the outcome of a combination of historical and more contemporary 'push' and 'pull' factors (Ratcliffe, 2009). The main 'push' factor is housing allocation processes: many were offered accommodation on certain 'hard-to-

let' estates and found themselves living in proximity to others from their community after the closure of local sites and stopping places. The main 'pull' factors are those associated with age, ill health or in order to gain access to education and services.

Gypsies and Travellers have been noted throughout history for their autonomy and tenacity in resisting assimilation (Gmelch, 1977; Fraser, 1992) and evidence indicates that, within a restricted range of accommodation options, members of this community are adapting to life in housing through the re-creation of social networks and an approximation to traditional Gypsy/Traveller cultures. Interviews with local authority and social landlord housing officers report that on certain estates in both localities the population comprised of up to 50% Gypsy and Traveller households with initial housing allocation failing to account for the size of the population. Where an established housed Gypsy/Traveller community exists second and subsequent generations often request accommodation on the same estates as their own parents and siblings. This tends to have a cumulative effect as other residents transfer out when a locality gains a reputation as a 'Gypsy area' (Clark & Greenfields, 2006). Social networks then circulate information concerning potential 'swaps' and traditional kin-based communities evolve through these informal channels. Such strategies result in increasing socio-spatial segregation and the maintenance of cultural boundaries as different sections of the community live separate lives in ethnic enclaves. As one focus group member commented:

*As much as people try to separate Gypsies in housing in this area, they're wheeling and dealing to be in houses near their own families, so then you end up around this area with estates full of Travellers, and people don't understand why they want to be together. But it is that family network.*

When questioned on what respondents liked about housing, the proximity of family members and other Gypsies and Travellers was the most frequently cited response:

*I'm comfortable when I'm among my own. I've got family all over this estate and we're always in and out each others houses.*

The impact of housing exchange, either informally or through mechanisms such as Choice Based Letting, also make possible a high level of mobility *within* housing. A study of Irish Travellers in London reported more mobility among those *in* housing than among those living in caravans as many were unable to settle and moved through a succession of housing between squatting on sites or on unauthorised encampments (Emmerson & Brodie, 2001). Similarly, in the housing association commissioned study, just under half of the housed sample of 103 Gypsy/Traveller households had moved at least once in the previous five years, including over 20% who had moved three times or more (Smith, 2008, p.19). A local authority housing officer interviewed as part of the study observed that the mutual exchange system underpins the development of housed Gypsy and Traveller communities and facilitates a degree of mobility within conventional housing:

*they're moving around and using houses like wagons. The lifestyle doesn't stop just because they're in housing.*

## Conclusion

The findings reported here draw attention to both the positive and negative aspects of ethnic residential concentration. Clustering provides a structured system of support and protection:

*the gorgers wouldn't dare give us any trouble round here. There's too many of us and we can take care of ourselves.*

However, over-reliance on localised forms of 'bonding' social capital (Putnam, 2000) may also intensify existing forms of social and economic exclusion through hindering the development of wider 'bridging' ties to other sections of the community (Iddenden *et al.*, 2008). Procedures could be implemented in partnership with the Gypsy and Traveller community and relevant service providers through the establishment of forums to consider issues related to housing such as budgeting, sources of advice, advocacy and access to services. Indeed, such multi-agency mechanisms and dedicated Gypsy/Traveller liaison officers have already been established by some housing associations in recognition of the large numbers of housed Gypsies and Travellers in their properties, and these models of best practice could be implemented more widely.

Secondly, a proactive approach to tackling racism and harassment of this community, akin to the seriousness with which racism is taken when experienced by any other minority group, should be implemented by local authorities, social landlords, police, schools and race equality councils. Appropriate publicity material to encourage Gypsies and Travellers to report racist incidents should be introduced as well as formal monitoring of racist incidents. This should apply not only to racially motivated aggravation at the neighbourhood level but also to hostility and discrimination from local authority, housing and other 'officials' who deal with this community in their work. Many front-line workers may have internalised negative stereotypes of Gypsies and Travellers which will shape the manner in which they interact with this community in their work. This highlights the need for cultural awareness training and a more informed and knowledgeable approach to the history, culture and support needs of this group as well as an awareness of the difficulties experienced by many in housing, especially when housed for the first time

and when separated from other family or community members.

Finally, it is worth noting that forcing a Gypsy or Traveller to live in '*bricks and mortar*' housing when they experience a strong '*cultural aversion*' to such accommodation has been recognised in law as not only having a devastating impact on well-being and mental health but also being contrary to the Human Rights Act. In one leading case (*Clarke v SSETR [2002] JPL 552*, in Johnson & Willers, 2007) the Court of Appeal upheld the decision of the High Court Judge who at first instance found that refusing planning permission for a Gypsy site merely on the grounds that the applicant had been offered conventional housing was an error in law. In the Clarke case, the judge at first instance held that:

*If [an immutable antipathy to conventional housing] be established then, in my judgment, bricks and mortar, if offered, are unsuitable, just as would be the offer of a rat infested barn. It would be contrary to Articles 8 and 14 to expect such a person to accept conventional housing and to hold it against him or her that he has not accepted it, or is not prepared to accept it, even as a last resort factor.*

Whilst the Court of Appeal support for such an interpretation does not preclude local authorities offering conventional housing to homeless Gypsies and Travellers, the principle thus holds that an individual cannot be penalised for refusing such an offer.

Yet the findings presented here raise an even more fundamental question concerning the rationale behind effectively forcing Gypsies and Travellers into housing through a lack of alternative accommodation when many would prefer to live on a site. The provision of adequate sites is certainly a much cheaper option than the development of new housing stock and would, moreover,

free up an already insufficient supply of social housing as recognised by many of the participants themselves:

*why are they putting us into housing when we don't want to be there? Build us more sites and give our houses to those who need them.*

Indeed, when asked how their local authority's services could be improved to meet their needs the most common response, by over 60% of respondents, was to build sites for those who would like to be moved out of housing (Smith, 2008, p.62). Whether such a policy materialises depends on the depth of anti-Traveller prejudice in the media, local authorities and among councillors, and whether they adhere to a mistaken belief that housing Gypsies and Travellers will result in their assimilation. Certainly, historical and contemporary evidence points to the contrary. One focus group member was adamant that Gypsy/Traveller culture will survive and adapt despite the decline of nomadism:

*it will never disappear, because my kids, all these little kids, and their kids - there'll still be Gypsy generations even 20 years down the line. When mine grow up they'll say 'my mum was a Gypsy'.*

## References

- Alexander, J., Eyerman, R., Giesen, B., Smelser, N. & Sztompka, P. (2004) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cantle, T. (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, London: HMSO.
- Cantle, T (2005) *Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race and Diversity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Whitwell, C. & Matthews, Z. (2009) *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review*, London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Chandler, M. & Lalonde, C. (1998) 'Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, **35**(2), pp.191–219.
- Clark, C. & Greenfields, M. (eds.) (2006) *Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (2006) *Common Ground: Equality, Good Race Relations and Sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers: Report of a CRE inquiry in England and Wales*, London: CRE.
- Crawley, H. (2004) *Moving Forward: The Provision of Accommodation for Travellers and Gypsies*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Davies, E. (1987) *Gypsies and Housing*, London: HMSO.
- Department of the Environment (1986) *A Report on the Analysis of Responses to Consultation on the Operation of the Caravan Sites Act 1968*, London: HMSO.
- Derrington, C. & Kendall, S. (2007) 'Challenges and barriers to secondary education: the experiences of young Gypsy Traveller students in English Secondary Schools', *Social Policy and Society*, **7**(1), pp.119-28.
- Earle, F., Dearling, A., Whittle, H., Glasse, R. & Gubby, Y. (1994) *A Time to Travel? An Introduction to Britain's Newer Travellers*, Lyme Regis: Enabler Publications.
- Emmerson, A. & Brodie, A. (2001) *Housed Irish Travellers in North London*, London: Gypsy and Traveller Unit Publication.
- Fraser, A. (1992) *The Gypsies*, London: Blackwell.
- Gmelch, G. (1977) *The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People*, California: Cummings Publishing Co Ltd.

- Greenfields, M. (1999) *Travelling Light: The Impact on Family Relationships of 'Going on the Road'*, Unpublished MSc Thesis (part 1 – qualitative project), Bath: University of Bath.
- Greenfields, M. (2006) 'Bricks and Mortar Accommodation: Travellers in Houses', in Clark, C. & Greenfields, M. (eds.) (2006) *Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, pp.108-32.
- Greenfields, M. & Home, R. (2007) 'Women Travellers and the Paradox of the Settled Nomad', in Lim, H. & Bottomley, A. (eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Land Law*, Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, pp.134-54.
- Greenfields, M. & Smith, D. (forthcoming 2010) 'Travellers, Housing and the (Re) Construction of Communities' in Holt, L. (ed.) *The Geographies of Children, Youth & Families: an International Perspective* London: Routledge.
- Griffin, C. (2008) *Nomads under the Westway: Irish Travellers, Gypsies and Other Traders in West London*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Harker, L. (2006) *Chance of a Lifetime - The Impact of Bad Housing on Children's Lives*, London: Shelter.
- Haug, S. (2008) 'Migration networks and migration decision making', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, **34**(4), pp.585-605.
- Health Council of Canada (2005) *The Health Status of Canada's First Nations, Metis and Inuit People*, Toronto: Health Council of Canada.
- Home Office (2001) *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion*, London: HMSO.
- Iddenden, R.S., Porter, M., Alabady, K., Greene, T. & Taylor, A. (2008) *Hull's Gypsy and Traveller Health and Lifestyle Survey 2007*, Hull: NHS Teaching Primary Care Trust.
- Johnson, C & Willers, M. (2007) *Gypsy and Traveller Law*, London: Legal Action Group.
- Matthews, Z. (2008) *The Health of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK*, London: Race Equality Foundation.
- Mayall, D. (1995) *English Gypsies and State Policies*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Mayall, D. (2004) *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000. From Egipcians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany*, London: Routledge.
- Morran, D. (2001) 'A forgotten minority: workers' perception of Scottish Travelling People', *Probation Journal*, **48**(1), pp.26-33.
- Netto, G. (2006) 'Vulnerability to homelessness use of services and homelessness prevention in black and minority ethnic communities', *Housing Studies*, **21**(4), pp.581-601.
- Parry, G., Van Cleemput, P., Peters, J., Moore, J., Walters, S., Thomas, K. & Cooper, C. (2004) *The Health Status of Gypsies and Travellers in England*, Sheffield: ScHARR.
- Power, C. (2004) *Room to Roam: England's Irish Travellers*, London: Brent Irish Advisory Service.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Democracy*, USA: Simon & Schuster.
- Ratcliffe, P. (2009) 'Re-evaluating the link between 'race' and residence', *Housing Studies*, **24**(4), pp.433-50.
- Richardson, J. (2007) *Providing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Contentious Spaces*, York: Chartered Institute of Housing/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Richardson, J., Bloxson, J. & Greenfields, M. (2007) *East Kent Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment*, Leicester: De Montfort University.
- Ritchie, J., Spencer, L. & O'Connor, W. (2003) 'Carrying out Qualitative Analysis' in Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, London: Sage Publications, pp.219-62.

Shelter (2008) *Good Practice Guide: Working with Housed Gypsies and Travellers*, London: Shelter.

Smith, D. (2008) *Sittingbourne Gypsy and Traveller Survey*, Canterbury: Swale Housing Association/Canterbury Gypsy Support Group.

Tatz, C (2004) 'Aboriginal, Maori, and Inuit youth suicide: avenues to alleviation?' *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2004, Issue 2, pp.15-25.

Turner, R. (2002) 'Gypsies and British Parliamentary language: an analysis', *Romani Studies*, 12(1), pp.1-34.

Watts, P. (2009) 'Living in an oasis: middle-class disaffiliation and selective belonging in an English suburb', *Environment and Planning*, 41(12) pp.2874-92.

Webster, L. & Millar, J. (2001) *Making a Living: Social Security, Social Exclusion and New Travellers*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

### Notes on Contributors

**Margaret Greenfields** has worked with Gypsy and Traveller communities in the UK for over twenty years. She initially trained as a lawyer with a particular interest in family and housing law before moving into the field of social policy. Margaret's PhD was undertaken into Gypsy and Traveller engagements with family law proceedings. In recent years she has undertaken commissioned work on behalf of the EHRC, worked with central and local Government agencies and specialist charities engaged with Gypsies and Travellers and with community members involved in capacity building exercises. She is a founder member of the national charity Travellers Aid Trust and is currently employed as a Reader in Social Policy and Director of the Institute for Diversity Research at Buckinghamshire New University.

[Margaret.Greenfields@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:Margaret.Greenfields@bucks.ac.uk)

**David Smith** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University and has a particular interest in social exclusion, the social consequences of industrial and labour market restructuring and the impact of welfare reforms, in particular the development of 'social inclusion' policies. His PhD was an ethnographic study of social and economic change on a white working-class community in South London. This was later published by Policy Press ('On the Margins of Inclusion: Changing Labour Markets and Social Exclusion in London' (2005)) and won the Social Policy Association's 2006 award for 'Best New Publication'. More recently he has been pursuing a long standing interest in Gypsies and Travellers and has worked on several projects in this area including the *East Kent Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment* with Jo Richardson and Margaret Greenfields.

[david.smith@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:david.smith@canterbury.ac.uk)

### Address for Correspondence

David Smith  
Department of Applied Social Sciences  
Canterbury Christ Church University  
Canterbury  
Kent  
CT1 1QE

Tel: 01227 782406