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Traveller outcomes in education: A Traveller perspective.

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Abstract

Travellers have lower outcomes in education and employment compared to their settled counterparts in education alone 69% of Travellers have completed primary school education or lower and they have an 84% unemployment rate (CSO 2011) The government reaction to Travellers since 1963 has been one of assimilation and cultural genocide. Policy was introduced to segregate Travellers while trying to absorb them in the general population. Some positive steps were made in policy through changing to a rights based model in the 1990's, yet despite this travellers were disproportionately affected by cuts to education and accommodation. Research confirms the low educational attainment and the stark inequalities that Travellers face. Discrimination against Travellers is a regular occurrence and structural discrimination and internalised oppression has helped to maintain the status quo.

Adding supports to engage Traveller parents and reinstating funding to Traveller education and liaison teachers will help to increase Traveller participation and educational attainment. There is also a need for Positive role models in the curriculum and normalisation of Traveller culture in schools rather than segregation. By considering Traveller culture and helping Travellers to maintain their culture while also participating in society the government would find this would help with relationships between Travellers and settled people. Positive discrimination in apprenticeships and public sectors would also open the door for more Travellers to become employed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Travellers in Ireland

There are 29,573 Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) statistics in 2011. CSO statistics also show that 84% of Travellers are unemployed and 69% of Travellers are educated to primary level or lower (CSO, 2011). When these statistics are compared with those of the settled population in Ireland they make for shocking reading. Unemployment in the majority population was only 14.6% the same year, while only 10% of the majority population had been educated to primary level or lower. (*Ibid*) So why are there such stark differences from the two communities when they live in the same country? There are many reasons why Travellers fare so badly when compared to the majority population. This research will explore from a Traveller perspective why Travellers don't progress to further education and why they don't see third level as a valid option in life. Travellers don't need to go to third level to have a decent quality of life but it should be an option for them.

To analyse why Travellers don't finish secondary school and why they don't progress to third level education thus effecting their quality of life, this paper will first look at the cultural norms around marriage, family and education and how they can prevent Travellers from progressing. Travellers themselves believe the 'norm' is for them to leave school at 16 and many believe that education is not in the best interest of Travellers. This internalised oppression is due to previous experience and low expectations. This research aims to show that this idea is institutionalised within the Traveller community. Traditions and norms play a crucial role within the community itself, but there are other external forces that keep Travellers from progressing in life. Travellers also don't feel like they belong in the school system and in wider society in general, this can also be a reason why they don't stay in school. There are also structural explanations for why Travellers don't progress this could be lack of internet, post box, proper facilities, transport issues, laptop etc.

1.2 Inequality

Martin Luther King Jr wrote in a letter from jail that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”(Editors n.d) Dr King wrote this about the terrible discrimination and racism faced by African Americans at the hands of their white counterparts. Calling on all his fellow Americans to stand up to the injustice that African Americans were facing, Dr King argued that this would mean that justice would be better served. What does this mean in contemporary society? Studies show that inequality for one group in society is bad for society as a whole. In his article ‘*Inequality is bad for everyone, not only the poor*’ Malik writes that “An analysis of 132 developed and developing countries found an inverse relationship between inequality and improvement in human development.” (Malik 2014) This means that inequality actually slows development. In the Irish context unemployment is down overall to 14.6% in 2011 (CSO 2011) yet, 84% of Travellers are unemployed. Life expectancy has increased yet Irish Travellers are still dying an average of 15 years less for males and 11.5 years less for female Travellers. (Pavee Point 2010) Travellers make up such a small portion of the population yet disproportionately suffer lower outcomes in education and life in general compared to the majority population.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Education in Ireland

The constitution of Ireland provides for the right to an education for all children under Article 42. All children are required to “receive a minimum education, moral, intellectual and social.” (Government of Ireland 1937) It is also compulsory for all children in Ireland to attend school between the ages of six and sixteen. The Irish state provides free state run primary and post-primary education for Every child in Ireland. (Living in Ireland) The problem with this so called free education is that there are other costs that parents must pay in order for their children to receive an adequate education. These costs can include uniforms, books, lunches, extracurricular activities, school tours, voluntary contributions, transport and sports equipment. According to the Irish Times the average cost per year for a child attending primary school is “€816 per child. Parents of secondary school children will spend an average of €1,313 per child.” (Pope 2015) When you take into account that 84% of Travellers are unemployed and on social welfare payments and that 40% of Traveller women had at least 5 children (CSO 2011) it is not difficult to see why these families face difficulties. There is some assistance from the social welfare in regard to a clothing allowance but the rates of payment per child in 2015 were only €100 for children aged 4 to 11 and €200 for children aged 12 to 22. (Back to School Allowance 2015) this is deficit of over €700 for primary school children and over €1100 for secondary school children. While third level education is not free in Ireland there are grants that can be accessed to pay fees for low income families. The problem here also lies with the expense for books, registration fees, stationary and travel etc. making it almost impossible to attend third level without some form of additional income. These financial barriers to so called free education do not encourage an already impoverished community to pursue academic achievements.

Coupled with financial barriers, Travellers and Gypsies also face cultural barriers in schools. Traveller and Gypsy children also have their educational rights protected under Article 28 and 29 of the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). Article 28 covers the rights of every child to an education and declares that “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity” State parties are also required to “make primary education compulsory and available free to all”. As stated above Ireland provides primary and secondary education for all but the additional costs of that education can cause barriers. Article 29 of the convention declares that

“States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, The development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values”. (CRC article 29)

Despite this, the Irish education system has yet to implement sufficient culturally appropriate material into the curriculum. This implementation would not only make Travellers feel more at ease in the school environment and possibly help to encourage higher levels of school attainment, but it would also help settled children to become more culturally aware of Travellers. The Irish education system’s failure to consider Traveller culture has meant that that a community that is already segregated is isolated even further. This lack of cultural awareness also means that the state fail to fully prepare all children in society to be fully responsible in society and by doing so children grow up lacking the understanding of “peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” as stated in article 29. (*Ibid*)

Travellers and other minorities face indirect discrimination through this lack of respect by the state to accommodate for their cultural needs

“Evidence suggests that minority ethnic groups are still subjected to education systems that are unresponsive to, or even repressive of, their cultures. The “Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasised the need to ensure education which is relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality”. (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2003)

Previous attempts made by the state to encourage Travellers to complete their education has been through assimilation policies. State policy going back as far as 1963 to the 'Report on the Commission on Itinerancy' which looked at assimilation of Itinerant (Traveller) children in to the settled population as the best way to educate Travellers. The report recommended that itinerant children were put in special classes until they were up to standard with the settled population. It was also recommended that there should be special schools located in large halting sites (Commission on Itinerancy 1963: 65-70)

After the commission report the Department of Education established a committee to consider the provision of educational facilities for the children of itinerants. Published in 1970, this report "makes explicit the Department of Education policy that these children should attend school in the same way as other children, securing full integration, but the two options of segregated classes and segregated schools remained." (Hegarty, 2013:23) However, where numbers were too small for a special class, it was also recommended that "remedial teaching or joining a class for educationally retarded could also serve the needs of itinerant children requiring special assistance" (*Ibid*)

The follow up to the commission report in 1983 acknowledged that Travellers preferred to be called such and did not wish to be called itinerants. This report looked at the integration of Travellers into settled society as opposed to their previous assimilation attempts. The issue here is that integration in this context was used as another means of assimilation. This report while encouraging education for Travellers, still saw the nomadic way of life as an obstacle to receiving a decent education. (Health Service Executive) The 1983 report still viewed Travellers as a problem and focused on what could be done to fix the Traveller people rather than looking at sustainable goals to include Travellers in society while helping to maintain their way of life.

On a European level, Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. The convention was ratified two years later. The UNCRC placed a high value on education as a human right: "Children are to be encouraged to reach the highest standard of education of which they are capable... Minority or indigenous children are entitled to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion. Everyone has a right to practice their own culture, language and religion." (UNCRC 1990) The Convention emphasized this right in cases where the practices and cultures are not

those of the majority of the population. This coincided with and reinforced the modification in Irish society policy making to that of a 'rights' discourse.

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee was published in 1993 which stated that schools "should adopt an inclusive, intercultural approach to curriculum development so as to ensure that their School Plan, class programme and teaching materials reflect a positive attitude towards the special customs, traditions and lifestyle of minority groups including the children of Travellers." (Special Education Review Committee, 1993, p. 160) This report recommended that Traveller children should be educated along with settled children where possible and should not be segregated.

Further reports and strategies from 2002 to 2006 highlighted the need for cultural diversity and educational support for Travellers and other minorities. Consultation with Traveller groups and parents saw recurrent themes surrounding "Negative attitudes towards Travellers from principals, teachers and other students, impacting on the entire school experience. Segregation in provision, leading to segregation in society and resulting tensions." (Government of Ireland 2002) Traveller parents also reported that where children had positive experiences that this was mainly due to encouragement from one, or a small number of committed teachers or staff members. Traveller parents placed academic achievement lower on the list of priorities than not getting bullied. This is mainly due to their own experience of discrimination in school. The 2011 budget declared the removal of the Resource Teacher for Travellers service. The budget also withdrew the services of 42 Visiting Teacher for Travellers, recommending instead that the School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison services adapt to undertake work with Travellers. There have been calls from various human rights organisations to the government to implement policy and reinstate funding that was disproportionately cut from Traveller education. (Pavee Point, 2015)

2.2 Hegemony and Counter Hegemony

Attitudes towards Travellers have gotten worse over the years. The majority population have a negative perception of Travellers. To understand why this is, we need to look at Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony through consensual control. Consensual control is when society as whole accepted the world views of the dominant group. In this case, the view in Ireland since the early 1960's has been that Travellers were a problem that needed to be fixed. Consensual control can be achieved in many ways for example through the media, education, religion, legislation, entertainment and politics, etc. The dominant people in society have an ideology that they want the public to adhere to. (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1972) For example the Irish government introduced policies and legislation that slowly eroded the Traveller cultural way of life. While this has been going on the media have projected a biased opinion of Travellers which is mostly negative. McGarry explains that "public perception of Travellers is shaped by the media" (McGarry 2008) In education, Travellers were segregated into special classes or were put to the back of the class and ignored. Some Travellers were taken away from their families and placed in industrial schools in order to absorb the Travellers into the general community. An Ideology gains hegemonic status when it becomes common sense to everyone and is absorbed into the culture. Travellers have also participated in their own oppression due to the fact that they have become so used to being seen as the problem that they too have accepted the ideology that Travellers are seen as something to be fixed. Travellers have tempered their own behaviour so that they do not fit the perceived stereotypical view of Travellers and even apologies for speaking up or being angry when they feel they are being oppressed or discriminated against.

"I often see travellers in a pub and they'll be real careful with the glasses, you know the way tables are rocky, you'd spill a glass of porter, and the travellers would be mopping it up and if they broke a glass they'd keep apologising and apologising. Settled people would do it, it's an accident and they wouldn't think about it, where Travellers would be mopping it up." (Joyce, 2000: xiv)

This oppression has become so ingrained that many Travellers do not report discrimination or racism against them as they feel that it will go nowhere or that it will still happen anyway. This is also the case in schools, in the past Traveller children have rarely told their parents if they have been discriminated against by teachers, staff or students. Gramsci also looked at counter hegemonic cultures. No society is completely hegemonic there will never be a universal consensus on beliefs. There will always be people who view things differently and try and change current views on different subjects. Gramsci terms these as ‘counter hegemonic cultures’. Cultural hegemony is not fixed there is always a struggle for the dominant class to maintain their status while the counter hegemonic cultures fight to have their alternative views recognised as valid (Lears 1985). Some Travellers as individuals and along with Non-Government Organisations (NGO) groups have used public platforms for example through protests and meetings to put forward an alternative view that Travellers are not some failed group that need to be fixed and that they do want to work and even go to school but that there are various internal and external factors that prevent this participation in society. This is a prime example of Gramsci’s ideology of counter hegemonic cultures. This has caused the dominant group, in this case the government to be forced to eventually compromise until the subordinate culture are placated. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to change attitudes.

2.3 Research on Travellers

Much of literature on Travellers in education is written from a settled perspective, (Helleiner, 1995;1997;1998;2000;2003) although there have been articles that have researched Traveller perspectives (McDonagh, 1994; 2000). This dissertation will add to previous discussions and the authors position as a Traveller may help to gain some valuable insight into why Travellers do not complete their formal education. The book “*Do You Know Us At All*” is a collection of papers promoting attitudinal change towards Travellers. Sile Nunan wrote a paper “Travellers in education” she discusses the segregation of Travellers in separate classes and special schools in the 1970’s and 1980’s and how some Traveller children were “refused from enrolment in school altogether, if they lived in unofficial sites. This was

done so as not to legitimise their unofficial roadside status” (Hyland, Nunan 1993:65-77). Nunan also spoke about the introduction of a visiting teacher project in 1980 which created a link between Traveller families and schools. Traveller families who had access to the visiting teacher felt more trust in the school system (Hyland, Nunan 1993:65-77). Sally Flynn wrote a paper “My Experience of Schools” which talks about her perspective as a Traveller in school. Flynn discusses her experiences in different schools and the impact that the different practices had on her education. While Flynn had no issue in her first school her further experiences left her feeling isolated. she was called names and told she didn’t need education to be a “tinker on the side of the road” Flynn also discussed being made to take showers whether you needed them or not . Flynn did mention that when she went to secondary school she met a lovely teacher who encouraged her. The difference meant that Flynn worked harder for a teacher who believed in her. (Hyland, Flynn, 1993:79-85) Flynn argues that support and encouragement makes a difference in Traveller engagement in schools.

In the United Kingdom (UK) context Bhopal wrote several articles between 2004 and 2013 that look at Traveller and Gypsy children and their experiences of the education system in the UK. Bhopal’s article “Gypsy Travellers and education: changing needs and changing perceptions” looked at parents views on their children’s education and the changing view of Traveller and Gypsy parents in regards of educating their children to a higher level and possibly seeking mainstream employment as opposed to traditional manual or craft employment. Bhopal views Travellers and Gypsies as interchangeable and even refers to them as one group Traveller Gypsy. (Bhopal, 2004:47-64) Although they have similar cultural norms Traveller and Gypsies are two distinct groups. They should not be confused with one homogenous group. The article looks at structural and cultural implications on educational attainment. It has highlighted lack of funding and also nomadism as issues that affect education. Bhopal does identify that there are complex reasons why Gypsy and Traveller children do not finish school including; racism, bullying and parental pressure, due to parents not seeing value in education beyond basic literacy. In 2011 Bhopal looked at attitudes of teachers towards Traveller and Gypsy children. Many teachers at one school displayed negative attitudes towards the children and one spoke about how she dreaded teaching them. In another

school teachers spoke about the prejudice that the children experienced from other pupils and how the Traveller and Gypsy children treated the teachers better and with more respect when the children felt they were being taken seriously when experienced the prejudice. (Bhopal, 2011:465-483) In 2013, Ross Deuchar and Bhopal looked the experiences of Traveller children themselves in school. In the article '*We're still human beings, we're not aliens*' they again examined the structural and cultural issues that hinder Traveller children when accessing sufficient education. Traveller children spoke of feeling isolated and feeling like "aliens". There were various policies introduced in the UK and a new curriculum to encourage students to have positives views of Travellers and Gypsies, yet despite these policies, the English government can't seem to accommodate Traveller children when they are out of school travelling. However, they can support those who are chronically sick or truants. Traveller children are labelled with learning difficulties rather than recognising the impact of interrupted education (Deuchar, Bhopal, 2013:733-750). Bhopal and Deuchar's work on Traveller and Gypsy education, informs this research due to lack of sufficient research in the Irish context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research

According to C. Wright Mills In the sociological Imagination (2000:11), a personal problem becomes a public issue when it begins to affect a significant number of people in a group. The problem is no longer just on the individual and what they can do to change but on structural issues in society. Traveller outcomes in education is a public issue as 69% of Travellers have an educational attainment of primary level or lower. To research this issue this paper will be using two different types of research techniques; Qualitative and Quantitative.

3.2 Quantitative Research

A deductive approach was taken for part of the research to validate previous research in the area of Traveller outcomes in education. There is a lot of information available around Travellers and education but the majority of this information is taken mainly from the perspective of a settled person. To conduct this research the author built on previous survey questions compiled in another module and applied that knowledge to the search. These questions were expanded on to include structural questions like asking respondent's if they have access to post and transport. The author also asked cultural questions for example; is the tradition of marrying young still an important custom. This helped to gain a deeper understanding of any obstacles or barriers that may be in the way when attending school.

3.3 Qualitative Research

An inductive approach was taken with the qualitative research. This was done to get the subjective experiences of those who were interviewed. These questions were open ended which allowed the participants to elaborate on their experiences within the education system and what barriers they faced or

if they had positive experiences. There were sixteen Travellers surveyed to gain a broad range of opinions. The research set out to ask eight Traveller men and eight Traveller women questions around their educational outcomes and their employment status. As the research could not be generalizable with such a small sample of people, the focus instead went to whether there were particular reasons or experiences that led to some Travellers progressing in school while others did not. This involved surveying one Traveller from each gender who only received primary school education and the same for secondary school and third level education. The remaining twelve participants were selected based on gender quotas through availability sampling and snowball sampling.

3.3 Surveys

All Interviewees/Participants were sourced through family and work networks. To get the most out of the research, the initial six people were specifically chosen for their educational attainment.

3.3.1 Primary school education

The first group were two people who had only been to primary school. One of these needed to be male and one needed to be female. It was important to determine from the research if there were specific circumstances that meant these Travellers only went to primary school and did not progress further. The reason that a male and female were chosen was ascertain whether gender played a part.

3.3.2 Secondary school education

The next group interviewed were a male and female who had progressed to second level education. Again, the aim of the research was to learn what circumstances if any had changed that meant this group progressed to second level. The criteria for this group was attendance to second level only. The participants did not need to have completed second level education.

3.3.3 Third level education

The third group were a male and female who had attended third level education. The criteria for this group was for attendance only as there was no guarantee that a participant who had completed third level could be sourced and willing to participate within the time constraints.

3.3.4 Random participants

The final group were made up of the remaining twelve participants and were randomly selected. There were no specific criteria for this group apart from membership of the Traveller community. This group were important to give a broader view of Traveller experiences in the education system.

3.3.4 Limits of research

There are 29,573 Travellers living in the republic of Ireland, in order for this research to be generalizable several hundred people would need to be interviewed. Due to work and college commitments and time constraints there was a limit to the amount of people who could be interviewed for this dissertation. In total, there were sixteen people surveyed for this research. This meant that this research is not generalizable for the entire Traveller community. The focus was shifted instead to subjective experiences of Travellers in education and why the participants did not progress to further education, and if they did progress what enabled them to do so. In order to identify the initial six participants, purposive non-probability sampling was used. This was done through personal knowledge of family networks and connections. Some participants were also sourced through work connections using the same method along with quota sampling. Availability and Snowball sampling were used for the remaining ten interviewees. Availability sampling makes use of any participants who fit the gender quota and the Traveller ethnicity background. Once this had been exhausted Snowball sampling was used to query

whether the interviewees knew if anyone they were acquainted with would like to participate in the survey. Schutt (2009) refers to this as “a method of sampling in which sample elements are selected as they are identified by successive interviewees.”

The author Travelled to different Traveller group housing sites and halting sites in order to gain as broad a view as possible. While this dissertation is unable to generalise for the entire Traveller community with this research, it will still give a good idea of Traveller opinion on the topic. The surveys were conducted on weekends and in the evening in order to ensure a diverse group of participants. Three rounds of interviews were conducted to guarantee the required number of participants were surveyed. This was done over the course of several weeks at different intervals to allow for missed appointments or delays. An email was also sent to Traveller Organisations in the eastern region but only one participant replied during the required timeframe and this interview was cancelled due to clashes in schedule for the participant. Once the surveys were completed the data was compiled and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) system which was utilised to analyse percentages of the data that was gathered. The research was Traveller specific so no settled people were interviewed, this was important to show a Traveller perspective. Due to the type of research being conducted all interviewees were known to the author in some capacity. This could leave the research open to assumed bias as the author is also a member of the Traveller of the community. This issue has been identified and discussed in the ethics portion of this dissertation. The sampling method leaves the research open to being queried on grounds of systematic bias and generalisation. Systematic Bias means that the research is a non-random sample of the Traveller population due to the fact that all Travellers were not equally likely to be selected. This was unavoidable due to restrictions in undergraduate research. Similarly, the sample does not lend itself to being generalised. Therefore, on the one hand the findings and analysis in this research are specific to the sample used and cannot be generalised to the entire traveller community. On the other hand, the research findings in this dissertation have supported previous arguments made in academic literature and policy, as well as the subjective evidence from conversations within Traveller organisations

and groups. This suggests that a wider probability sampling method may not have produced unrelated outcomes.

3.3.5 Ethics

The Author's position as a Traveller woman had the potential to bias the research. To counteract this the author continually reflected on her own position and asked questions to gain as accurate information as possible. The author kept all information confidential and private and explained to all interviewees that there was no information used in this thesis that could identify them. To ensure this all Interviewees were called participants and numbered accordingly. The author also provided every interviewee with a consent form, information sheet and a signed letter from the author's thesis supervisor. To accommodate the interviewees that cannot read the author read out the information on both forms and asked the interviewees to sign their mark on the consent form. The author gave each interviewee the option to have a third party read any information given to them and to look at a blank survey to ensure that the interviewees were fully informed of what they were being asked. All interviewees were aged 18 and over.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The findings of this research validated previous statistics of low educational attainment for Travellers. Due to the small sample group, it would not be possible to generalise the percentage of school attainment on a broad scale. The findings did show however, that while 75% of the participants attended second level education only 6.3% of participants said they had finished secondary school. To discover why educational attainment was so low for Travellers various areas needed to be researched, these are outlined below.

4.1 Structural Reasons

Participants were asked structural questions around accommodation, facilities, internet access and postal access etc. These questions were grouped for comparison into current situations and the situation when participants were growing up. Most participants said they had moved around quite a bit when they were growing up so, when asked about accommodation type and status they were asked to think about where they spent the longest amount of time. The research showed that 62.5% of participants spent much of their childhood in Traveller specific accommodation. Findings for current accommodation outlined that 81.3% of participants currently live in Traveller specific accommodation. It should be noted that when questioned whether they would prefer to be in Standard housing or Traveller specific accommodation most of the participants said they preferred Traveller specific accommodation this included those in Standard housing currently. Due to the minimum age for participants being eighteen it was less likely that participants would have had access to internet, laptops or phones growing up. The research reflected this with just 12.5% of participants saying they had access to mobile internet growing up. This was compared to present day percentages of 62.5%. Access to some form of computer equipment was also limited when participants were growing up with 31.3% saying they either had a laptop or desktop growing up, compared to most participants saying they currently had one or more forms of computer equipment. Participants currently fare worse with access to facilities and post, 50% of participants said they have shared access to both electricity and post rather than personal access. 43.8% of participants also say they currently only have access to a portaloos instead of a flush toilet.

4.2 Experiences of Travellers in formal education

4.2.1 Discrimination

When asked if they had ever received discrimination based on their ethnic identity in their lifetime 100% of participants who were interviewed said yes. 68% of participants claimed they had experienced

discrimination within the last year, with 25% of participants claiming they experienced this type of discrimination within the last week. Discrimination also played a significant role in Traveller experiences of school. 56.3% of participants claimed that they had experienced discrimination by teachers or staff while in school. When asked to elaborate, participants spoke about being put to the back of class, not being allowed to partake in certain subjects and being called names by teachers or staff. 68.8% of participants also claimed they had been discriminated against by other students. Again, when asked to elaborate responses given included being excluded from games, being ignored and being talked about like you were not in the room. When asked about their overall experience in school many said they had received no encouragement from teachers or staff. Participants who had not received direct discrimination from teachers, felt that the general attitude from teachers in schools was that of indifference. Participants spoke about the understandings of discrimination they had experienced in their own lives with many of those interviewed saying that discrimination was a part of their lives and that they had to get used to it. When the author inquired about further education many participants said that it never occurred to them to further their education. Those that had considered further education said they did not receive much support when they expressed desire to progress. Participants also claimed that parental attitudes were usually that of indifference. Most of the participants said that while they did not receive any active discouragement from parents to leave school they did not receive encouragement to stay either. These findings have confirmed previous literature on the subject including areas of segregation and discrimination. 50% of participants said they received educational supports in school. Educational supports were described as a helping teacher or a separate class. Of the participants that received educational supports in school 31.7 % said they were not assessed as having needed the supports.

4.2.2 Cultural

The importance of Traveller culture and traditions was emphasized by the group with 93.8% saying that being a Traveller was either important or very important to them. The participants also agreed that the tradition of marrying young was still widely practised by Travellers. Furthermore, participants were asked whether this tradition was still considered important and 81.3% said it was either important or very important. The general consensus from participants was that Traveller culture was not very visible in the school subject material, with over 62.5% saying it was not visible at all. Some participants felt that when they were growing up moving around from school to school did not help with their education. Many participants also said that education was not seen as important when they were growing up and that their families did not see the 'value' in formal education, although they did highlight that this attitude had changed over the years.

4.3 Barriers that Travellers face in formal education

When asked about barriers that Traveller parents might face with children in school. Many of the participants said that they thought that the parent's education was still a crucial factor when it came to homework. One participant said that they could only help their children to a certain level before the child's homework became too difficult for them as a parent. Although 75% said they had very proficient reading skills only 56% said the same about their writing levels. Overall parent said that their lack of education was a barrier to their children's education. Participants also said that this made it hard for them to know if their child was doing well in school. Low levels of educational attainment in the parents of the participants could have contributed to the low achievement of the participants themselves with just over half over their parents completing primary school education. Most of the participants who were parents themselves also said they feared that their child would be discriminated against and while they did say they felt attitudes in school had gotten a bit better they also worried about bullying and discrimination.

When the question was raised around why they thought Travellers don't stay in school; various reasons were given including young marriage, discrimination and some participants said they think Travellers don't stay in school because they don't benefit from it. One Participant was quoted as saying

“why go to school to get an education just to be refused from every job you go to, all I have to do is give my address and I won't get the job. Sure, if I went for the same job as a settled person they would get it before me even if we had the same qualifications. It is because of my name and my accent and my address it gives it away and all I end up with is disappointment”.

Interviewees also spoke about the lack of supports in schools to help Travellers. Participants said that schools assumed you could get help at home but did not take in to account that literacy levels and school attainment was so bad, especially for older Travellers. It was noted by the group that there were no supports in place for Traveller parents to engage with the schools. The overall experience for the Travellers interviewed outlined that school was generally a negative environment where they felt unwanted. While facilities growing up were not a particular problem for the participants that were interviewed when it came to attending school, many of those interviewed continually talked about the discrimination and treatment at the hands of teachers and other students. Participants spoke about being excluded from certain subjects and isolated and that these experiences made them wary and nervous for their own children. Some parents also spoke about their lack of awareness when it came to furthering their own children's education claiming they would not know where to go if their child wanted to progress. Certain participants also felt that Travellers themselves were a barrier to staying in school. They felt that cultural pressures played a part with early school leavers. Structural issues were also mentioned as a barrier with participants acknowledging that they found it hard in their current unofficial accommodation to get children ready for school. Washing facilities and lack of central heating in winter was emphasized as a big problem.

4.4 Effect on employability

The research findings disclosed that low educational attainment had an effect on employment rates with 62.5% of the group unemployed. It should also be noted that 66.7% of the participants who were employed were employed by Traveller organisations in either full-time or part-time roles. This particular statistic is relevant due to the fact that 62.5% of the group said they had to hide their identity when looking for work with 68.8% claiming that their identity kept them from getting or keeping a job once their identity was discovered. With Traveller organisations being a Traveller is a positive rather than a negative. Travellers who seek jobs in these organisations know that they will get a job or not based on their skills and experience. Travellers also know that literacy is not a barrier when seeking a job in a Traveller organisation. 50% of those participants who said they were currently unemployed said they had previously looked for work with only 12.5% of participants saying they had never looked for work before. The author explored this further and asked why these participants had never looked for work. Some of the group feared rejection when it came to looking for work and felt that their lack of education and their ethnicity would hinder their effort. Participant 1 was quoted as saying “I am uneducated and I don’t think I would get a job because of my identity”. There were also some in the group that never considered working. Participant 10 who was a female was quoted as saying “I never thought of it, because my husband works I don’t need to”.

4.5 Subjective Experiences

As the research could not be generalizable to the entire Traveller community the focus was switched to subjective experiences. Six participants were chosen, three from each gender to analyse if there was a particular reason why certain participants only went to primary school while others progressed. These participants were placed into three groups.

4.5.1 Group one: Primary school

These participants only attended primary school. The female participant with a 32-38 age range did not complete primary school education. The male participant is in the 25-31 age range. Neither participant can write very well and the female participant cannot read at all. Both were given educational supports in school yet neither participant recall being assessed as having need for these supports. The male participant was not given any reason for being put in a Traveller only class for part of each day. The female participant said that she was told it was regarding her reading yet, to this day she cannot read and has minimal writing skills. She can only write her name. the male participant can read but struggles with it a lot. When asked to elaborate on their school experiences both spoke about their extremely negative experiences in school and how the other students “looked down on you because you were a Traveller” “you were called names and bullied even the teachers didn’t like us” these participants shared very similar experiences of school and comparable outcomes from that education with neither progressing to second level and both working in traveller organisations.

4.5.2 Group two: Secondary School

This group both progressed to second level education. However, the male participant aged between 18-24 did not complete secondary school unlike the female participant aged between 25-31.

The male participant is employed full time but when asked if people knew he was a Traveller in work he said “no I don’t tell them. I heard them talking bad about Travellers but, if I said anything they would know I was one and I could lose my Job.” The female participant is unemployed young mother. Overall both participants claimed they had a positive experience in school. The female said this even though she was bullied and discriminated against by other students. This woman received educational supports and

was specifically told it was because she was a Traveller. This woman also said when queried about what barriers Travellers face in schools that there is a lot of pre-judgement of Travellers and said “I constantly had to defend Travellers when I was in school”

Both participants had mixed levels of encouragement and discouragement to stay in school. The female participant received encouragement from other Travellers to stay in school and from some teachers. Although, when she expressed a desire to progress to her teachers they did not support her or encourage her to progress.

The male participant reached junior cert level in school and was encouraged by some of his siblings to go further and by other siblings to leave school. This participant said that he received no discrimination or bullying in school and mostly had a positive experience in school but, he said that he just didn't like school and wanted to leave as soon as possible.

He also said that while he didn't receive any discrimination in school but that he “was told loads of times by my brothers and sisters about what they went through in school and some of my older sisters were put in special classes for nothing”

The lesser levels of discrimination seem to have played a part in these participants staying in school for longer. The fact that both participants expressed that they had an overall positive experience and received some encouragement from people to stay in school is also a factor.

4.5.3 Group three: Third level Participants

Similar to group one, the participants in this group had a largely negative experience in school. Both experienced bullying by classmates and discrimination at the hands of teachers and other students. The female participant aged between 25-31 only attended second level education for a year, while the male aged between 32-28 only completed primary school education. Both participants are employed by

Traveller organisations and have very good reading and writing skills. Interestingly each of these participants went to third level education as mature students after they started working in their current job. When asked why she decided to go to third level the female participant said that when she in school further education “never occurred to me, I didn’t think it was something that I could do. It was never mentioned to me in school they just put me at the back of the class. It was only after starting work in my job that I was encouraged to go to university.” This group also spoke about exclusion from subjects like Irish lessons. They also highlighted their experiences of bullying from other students and how they and family members were made to feel unwanted in the school.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Findings

There are four major themes that have emerged from this research. The first is the need for cultural awareness training for teachers, staff and students in schools. The second theme is the barriers around school work and the third theme is the fear of traveller parents surrounding their children's education. The fourth theme is the effect of educational attainment on employability. There is a distinct lack of cultural awareness of teachers and students on the identity of Travellers. The research has shown that Traveller children have faced discrimination regardless of gender or which decade they went to school in. This can be solved with cultural awareness training. Theme number two can be solved with reinstating the Traveller school liaison teacher and the resource teachers. The third theme can be resolved by having supports put in place to encourage the engagement of Traveller parents. The final theme can be solved by affirmative action.

5.1 Cultural Awareness Training

Cultural awareness training could be added to teaching modules for primary and secondary school teachers. This could be done through a specific module in teacher training. The module could be created with the consultation of Traveller organisations and Traveller parents. Some Traveller organisations like Pavee point already provide in-service training to trainee nurses, doctors and social workers on request. This training could be adapted to teacher training. The module would need to be a compulsory requirement for trainees to become a qualified teacher. For teachers that are already qualified and staff in schools the module could be a mandatory course in order to continue teaching and working in the school. This would ensure that all teachers and staff were culturally aware. There should also be subject material added to the curriculum that show Traveller culture so that Traveller children could feel that they were represented in the material and may feel more confident so that they would not feel they had to hide their identity or that they constantly have to defend other Travellers.

5.2 Reinstate Traveller Resource teacher

In order to reinstate the Traveller resource teachers and the liaison teachers the funding to Traveller education would also need to be reinstated this could be factored into the 2018 budget. The resource teachers could help with school work for Traveller children to ensure that children do not fall behind. The liaison teacher could work with parents of Traveller children to make sure that the parents were included in their children's education and to help children that want to progress to further education, helping to make Travellers more aware of the options. The government have an even bigger responsibility to reinstate this funding due to the recent recognition of Traveller identity on the 1st of March 2017.

5.3 Supports to engage Traveller parents

The third theme is more difficult to deal with as it involves Travellers and their culture. Participants spoke about the need to hold on to their culture and not becoming absorbed into the wider community. Young marriage is still important in Traveller traditions there would need to be supports made available that would allow Travellers to marry young and continue their education if they desired. Some Travellers do not want to progress to further education in formal settings. For these Travellers apprenticeships and alternate forms of education should be made available. In conjunction with a liaison teacher and resource teacher these supports could help Traveller parents feel more secure and make them more willing to engage.

5.4 Affirmative action

The final theme could enable Travellers who want to engage in mainstream jobs to have the option to do so. This would involve large companies to have quota's that would require them to employ a certain amount of Travellers. These quotas would mean that employers in certain areas would have to employ Travellers once they had the required skills and experience. This would also deal the unemployment rate in Travellers along with encouraging Travellers to stay in school.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Reinstatement of funding and supports

This research has confirmed previous research results that show Travellers have an overwhelmingly negative experience in schools. There are vast inequalities for Traveller and Gypsy children in schools compared to their settled counterparts and Traveller educational outcomes are shocking. There is a great need to reinstate funding to Travellers that's been cut through the guise of Austerity measures. Reinstating previous funding to Traveller education is only one area yet it would improve Traveller lives greatly. Tied with reinstatement of funding is cultural awareness training. This can go a long way to dispel myths and fears that settled people may have about Travellers and also make Travellers feel more included in the school system. Adding supports to engage Traveller parents will have the added benefit of helping the child that is in school. If a parent is comfortable with engaging with teachers or staff they can highlight any potential issues that may arise around homework and other areas.

By taking into account Traveller culture and helping Travellers to maintain their culture while also participating in society the government would find this would help with relationships between Travellers and settled people. If all children learn about Traveller culture at a young age and it is a requirement for qualification in a teaching degree then this could mean lower levels of discrimination it could also mean that Travellers feel more included and wanted in schools which could encourage them to stay longer in formal education. Positive discrimination in apprenticeships and public sectors would also open the door for more Travellers to become employed

6.2 Reaction

It should be noted that reinstatement of funding and positive discrimination in the form of Affirmative action would quite likely be open to a lot of criticism from the public due to the overwhelmingly negative perception that settled people have of Travellers. The only way to counter act this would be to push forward with the training and funding. The reason for this is the only way to change the negative perception is through training and time. Once Traveller outcomes in education and employment improve the public perception could only go in a positive direction.

6.3 Further Work

The cultural, economic and social barriers to Travellers in education have been touched on in this dissertation. However, further research is needed to analyze the scope of these barriers and to address them fully. Nevertheless, based on the academic literature reviewed and the research conducted, reinstatement of funding to educational cuts and cultural training for teachers would benefit the educational attainment of Travellers and their employability in society. The only way this could be done in an effective way is to have full input from Travellers to ensure that their needs are understood and met.

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