

- Document traveller culture (e.g. programmes (mushy woods))
- Outreach on early school ~~year~~ year.
- ~~Do~~ Research on early school leavers in the County.

MEMBERS OF OUR

IN SOLIDARITY TO

VIOLENCE AGAINST

WOMEN."

Position Paper on Combating Violence Against Women

INTRODUCTION

Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) condemns outright all forms of violence. GTM is committed to working to prevent violence occurring at all and any levels, and recognises the experience for Travellers who are suffering from violence. While GTM recognises that both men and women are subjected to violence, in the vast majority of cases where violence occurs among persons who are known to one another, research has shown that women are victims and men are the perpetrators [1].

The purpose of this policy document is to set out GTM's Analysis and Action Framework on violence against women. This is based on GTM's commitment to enable the Traveller community to be 'part of a movement that challenges structural inequality' based on principles of human rights. Our ethos is that social change must be transformative, and grounded in radical community work approaches[2].

We recognise the historical role of the feminist movement against sexual and domestic violence in breaking the silence around violence against women. We also recognise the limitations of current mainstream professionalised approaches which have been shaped primarily by the perspectives of settled, white, middle-class women. We are concerned at how movements against sexual and domestic violence have become increasingly professionalised and de-politicised, and often reluctant to address violence against oppressed people. Our policy aims to place the diverse experiences, knowledge, voices, leadership and political action of Traveller women at the centre of our approach to violence against women. This involves an understanding of the intersections of racism, sexism and other oppressions in Traveller women's lives.

This document is organised under the following headings:

1. ANALYSIS

- Violence against women as a human rights issue
- The dangers of relying on the criminal justice system to resolve the issue
- Economic and social rights
- Family and community networks
- Cultural rights

2. ACTION FRAMEWORK

- Organisational
- Grassroots Collective Action
- Responding to Individual Women

PART ONE: ANALYSIS

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

GTM recognises violence against women as an abuse of human rights. This is recognised by the Vienna Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) [3]. According to the BPfA:

Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.
(para 117)

Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement.
(para 118)

Women from every ethnic, cultural and social background can and do experience violence. In the majority of incidents of violence against women, the attacker is not a stranger, but is known to the victim and is likely to have, or have had an intimate relationship with the woman. Violence against women is not confined to physical abuse. It also includes sexual, emotional and financial abuse.

The Power and Control Wheel (Appendix 1) which forms part of the Duluth Model documents a broad spectrum of abuse experienced by women. GTM acknowledge also that other groups such as LGBT women and women with a disability are at a greater risk of violence.

Research on violence against women shows that women are at greater risk of sexual assault, rape, and physical/emotional violence from husbands, boyfriends, male relatives and acquaintances than from strangers[1]. Violent attacks of this nature are rarely once off occurrences, but are likely to be persistent and frequent with the objective of instilling fear in victims. GTM also recognises the negative impact of violence against women on children who witness such violence.

However, GTM's analysis goes beyond this focus on individual women and men to recognise the wider barriers which face Traveller women and their communities. Compared to women from the majority settled community, Traveller women and women from other ethnic minorities do have an increased risk of physical, emotional and financial abuse from strangers. This includes those who act and make decisions on behalf of the State.

The Beijing Platform for Action BPfA emphasises the indivisibility of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. This means that the protection and promotion of Traveller women's right to live free of violence cannot be separated from the protection and promotion of their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Traveller women face institutional forms of violence through discrimination, poverty, and the lack of recognition of Travellers' ethnicity. This increases the isolation of Traveller women, and adds hugely to their struggles in seeking help, support, protection and real hope for the future.

GTM therefore challenges the dominant framing of violence against women as a 'health issue' and a 'criminal justice issue'. This narrow framing does not allow for solutions of real transformation[4]. It can also increase the dependency of Traveller women on oppressive state institutions, and make them more vulnerable to further institutionalised forms of violence

THE DANGERS OF RELYING ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

The recognition by the State that domestic and sexual violence are crimes is a crucial hard-won victory fought for by feminists. This recognition needs to be strengthened. However, demands for social justice cannot be reduced to a reliance on the criminal justice system. Although some Traveller women do report positive experiences with the Gardaí, many members of the Traveller community have little confidence in the criminal justice system at present[5]. Many Traveller women are concerned that they will not receive an adequate response from the Gardaí when seeking protection from domestic violence, particularly if there is no evidence of physical abuse[6].

However violence against Traveller women also includes personal attacks and abuse perpetrated by members of the settled community; being refused access to a shop or hotel; organised intimidation and being forced to move from a site or housing estate[6]. The Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community stated that 'Traveller women also experience coercion and violence from 'Settled' people and their institutions in many areas of their lives[7]' (p.44). Despite Equality Legislation, the state has failed to protect Travellers from these forms of violence. An Garda Síochána Human Rights Audit[8] writes that, 'There was...a lack of response when members of the Traveller community reported crimes, and no action if Travellers were attacked by people from the settled community' (p. 91).

¹The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which was adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on the 25th June 1993 explicitly state 'The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.'

In fact, the criminal law itself is seen and experienced by many Travellers as 'a source of persecution and harassment and not as a source of protection' [5]. In relation to the Gardaí's treatment of Travellers, An Garda Síochána Human Rights Audit states, 'There were many incidents of heavy handed policing, and verbal and physical abuse.' The report also notes 'poor service for Traveller women.' It concludes that, 'on the basis of this audit it seems clear that there is institutional racism within An Garda Síochána' (p. 95) [8].

Traveller women fear that reporting experiences of violence to the Gardaí will result in discriminatory attitudes and treatment, including particularly harsh treatment of their partners. Furthermore, because of the level of distrust of the Gardaí that still exists within the Traveller community, they also fear a negative reaction from their own community[6].

The mainstream framing of violence against women which reduces questions of justice to a reliance on the criminal justice system does not therefore promote the protection of Traveller women. It can increase their vulnerability. But in addition, this version of justice hides the other forms of social injustice experienced by Traveller women. These add to the isolation of those who experience domestic and sexual violence.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The Task Force on Violence against Women states:

the effects of violence can be all the more traumatic for women living in geographically isolated areas, women living in poverty, women with physical or mental disabilities, women from different cultures and Traveller women. The cumulative effects of living in poverty, isolation and poor environmental conditions in themselves damage women's health. When these difficulties are combined with physical, mental and emotional abuse, the effects are enormous [9](p. 31).

Because of discrimination, Travellers are more likely to be unemployed, have low income and depend on social welfare payment. Traveller women are often financially dependent on their spouse/partner. This dependency can make it very difficult to leave a violent relationship. Many Traveller women do not have access to money, a car and in some cases, their own mobile phone. These factors are serious obstacles to Traveller women's ability to access support [6]. They have been made worse by Government policies of austerity.

Of particular concern is the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) which is proving to be 'a serious obstacle for Traveller women seeking to flee a violent relationship and get safety and support' [6]. The HRC is a restriction placed on certain social welfare benefits, requiring 'length and continuity of residence in the State'. It directly discriminates against migrants, and indirectly discriminates against Travellers who live a nomadic lifestyle and continue to move between Ireland and the United Kingdom (p61)[6]. Safe Ireland

also reports the terrible consequences this State measure has had for Traveller women and other ethnic minority women attempting to flee domestic violence[10].

But in addition, the State's failure to provide appropriate accommodation also colludes with domestic and sexual violence. For many Traveller women who may wish to leave a violent relationship, the only other option for themselves and their children is homelessness. In these circumstances, both staying and leaving present women with fears that State services will remove their children from them into care.

Furthermore, Traveller women's problems in accessing help and support may also be compounded by racist reactions and/ or cultural barriers:

Traveller women accessing domestic violence services still experience racism and discrimination. This may include hidden or invisible barriers while attempting to access services, such as issues of repeat visits, poor literacy or the refuge having an unwritten policy whereby, only one or two Traveller women are allowed access to the service at any given time[11].

Often, when a Traveller woman who takes the step to seek help in a refuge for herself and her children may also find that the refuge will not accommodate some of her children.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

There is a powerful taboo in the Traveller community to keep silent about the private domestic sphere as members are concerned to 'keep their business to themselves'[6]. This concern perpetuates silences about violence against women and increases women's isolation. These silences are often supported by patriarchal beliefs that violence is women's fault, and that she must have done something to deserve it. These beliefs are also common within the settled culture. However, mainstream approaches often fail to appreciate how the pressures on Traveller women to keep silent about abuse are often connected to the centrality of family and community networks.

Pavee Point notes for example that the economic base in the Traveller community is often linked to extended family networks. This creates pressure on Traveller women to keep the family together and may force a woman to stay within a violent relationship[6]. Women may also fear that reporting abuse will further stigmatise their community. Media reports continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Traveller men, and Traveller culture, as inherently violent. Traveller women experiencing violence may fear that disclosing will result in a reinforcement of negative prejudices and discrimination and so women will often choose to protect their community against further racist stereotyping by remaining silent about her own experiences (p.69)[6]. The 'burden of this myth' comes at a very high cost to women, children and men.

Since extended families tend to live together, a woman may also fear that disclosing to a family member might backfire, endangering her or family members, and risking conflict between families. As Pavee Point states, 'Violence also occurs internally within the Traveller community, against women and men which has undermined the solidarity of the community and reinforced negative stereotypes that violence is endemic to Traveller culture' (p.45) [6]. Traveller women living in rural communities can be even more vulnerable because of increased levels of social isolation.

But although concern about the extended family and community networks can go against a woman speaking about domestic violence, the extended family and close community relations also often provide important supports. The mainstream emphasis on the need for professional and expert intervention means that initiatives women often take to tell their stories to trusted family members, relatives, or friends in her community are invisible and undervalued. Also invisible and undervalued are the acts of support, care and solidarity from other Traveller women as well as Traveller men. Many members of the Traveller community take a stand against violence against women as wrong, and recognise that Traveller women are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

Therefore missing from the official view are the skills and knowledge held by many members of the Traveller community in negotiating complex family and community networks. In this, the contributions of Traveller women are of central importance:

'Traveller women continue to play an important role in their immediate family and the wider community. They usually have responsibility for the home, family and children and frequently struggle to survive on low incomes. However Traveller women also often take on leadership roles, acting as spokespeople and mediators with services. Traveller women have shown great strength in the face of poverty, disadvantage and social isolation and pervasive discrimination' (p14) [6].

But in addition, the official view, which stresses the need for 'expert' knowledge, also conceals how the State has undermined the delicate fabric of community supports through the criminalisation of Travellers' nomadic culture. In their study of domestic violence, which included a focus group with Primary Health Care workers, Parsons and Watson write: 'Whereas previously on the road side or in a halting site the women would be able to provide informal supports to one another there was the impression that now women were more isolated from one another and so the same level of support could not be offered' [12](Watson and Parsons...). They quote one Traveller woman:

"There was a more open life on the road, now we're living more private than we did years ago" (from Watson and Parsons, 2010, p...)

This suggests that the denial of Traveller's nomadic rights has made the domestic sphere more private.

CULTURAL RIGHTS

In summary, a transformative response which challenges male violence against Traveller women cannot happen without also challenging institutional forms of violence and discrimination. This includes the criminal justice system, and the State's failure to protect and promote Traveller women's economic and social rights. In addition, the silences and barriers which surround violence against Traveller women cannot be separated from the importance of family and community networks. Equally, the possibilities for resistance, support and leadership cannot be separated from the cultural strengths often available through these networks.

None of this can be separated from the ongoing cultural violence being perpetrated by the State against the Traveller community. Since 1963 [13], repeated Irish governments have enacted cultural violence against the Traveller community through policies of forced assimilation, the criminalisation of nomadism, and the ongoing failure to recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic minority. This has deeply oppressive consequences for all Travellers. In particular, it severely undermines the possibility of transformative responses to violence against Traveller women.

APPENDIX 1: POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



⁴The terms of reference for the 1963 Commission on Itinerancy were: "to enquire into the problems arising from the presence of itinerants and to examine the problems inherent in their way of life" (1963, p 11).

⁵Section 24 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 makes trespass on land with an 'object' such as a caravan, a criminal offence.

PART TWO: ACTION FRAMEWORK

This analysis will guide our strategy for action. It is based on the recognition that the taken for granted ways of responding to violence against women are not working for Traveller women. GTM is committed to supporting Traveller women to be at the centre of new transformative responses.

In this, we join with and are inspired by the struggles of other marginalised women elsewhere who are arguing that grassroots community action must be central to challenging violence against women. Through the feminist organisation Incite!, for example, women of colour in the United States argue that there is a need to let go of 'received assumptions about what a domestic violence program should look like'. They write that, 'it is impossible to seriously address sexual and intimate partner violence within communities of color without addressing these larger structures of violence'. The question instead must be: 'what would it take to end violence against us? What would this movement look like?'[14]. Our organising must be focused on places where state violence and sexual/intimate partner violence intersect. In this we gain 'a wider, deeper view of the diverse strategies needed to end all forms of violence' [14]

An initial framework of action for GTM:

Part 1: Organisational

Violence against women must be integrated into all areas of work in the organisation and seen as a cross-cutting issue for all GTM's strategic areas of importance. GTM will work to build strong collaborative partnerships with state agencies with the view to combating violence against women. GTM in association with the National Traveller organisations will continue to provide Equality and Diversity training to services with the view to achieving equality outcomes across services for the Traveller community. GTM will promote the implementation of the Public Positive Duty as part of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

Part 2: Grassroots action

The development of a grassroots community action project must involve the whole Traveller community-men, women and children to highlight that violence against women is a human rights violation. Grassroots actions would involve:

- Supporting and empowering Traveller women to name how state violence intersects with domestic and sexual violence, and to develop political action around this.
- Supporting the wider community to name the initiatives which some community members are already taking to support women who experience violence and to challenge beliefs that violence against women is acceptable.
- Supporting and empowering Traveller men to engage with gender equality issues, to take a stand against violence against women and against stereotypes of Traveller men.

- Meaningful Traveller Participation in the decision making will be central to all actions.

Part 3: Supporting Individual Women

In the long term, it is hoped that all community based supports and agencies with responsibility for services would be culturally appropriate where individual women can find the supports they need within the community.

GTM Response to women experiencing violence

This policy applies to GTM staff, CE employees, management, students, interns and volunteers working within the organisation. The policy applies internally within the organisation and in GTM's direct and external work within the Traveller community. The policy should be used in conjunction with other relevant GTM policies e.g. GTM's Child Protection policy.

ETHOS:

GTM recognises that violence against women is an abuse of Human Rights. It should not be rationalised or minimised. There is never an acceptable or tolerable level of violence.

Where violence against women is disclosed or suspected, this should always be taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

GTM recognises that violence against women covers a range of abuse, from physical to mental, sexual and financial abuse and violence may not always be visible, and may intersect with state and institutional forms of violence.

GTM will work towards creating a supportive environment where the issue of violence against women can be discussed and where women who are experiencing violence can feel safe, when disclosing abuse.

The approach of the GTM to women experiencing violence should be supportive, non-judgemental and consistent.

Our primary concern should always be the safety of women at risk and their children and any response should be based on their needs.

GTM is committed to developing an analysis of violence against women, seeing it as an issue of power and control and to communicate this understanding among project workers and management. This will be achieved by: staff training, accessing external training opportunities as they arise, as part of induction for new workers and as part of the code of conduct for all staff. GTM is committed to reviewing this policy annually as part of the health team and wider organisation.

Respect for the individual and the safeguarding of the person's rights, freedom of choice, privacy and desire for confidentiality are fundamental to an effective response. GTM recognises that confidentiality (except when there are significant concerns to the safety of a child) is essential in dealing with violence against women and that any breach in confidentiality can put women and their children at further risk when seeking support in relation to violence.

Posters and information on violence against women should be clearly visible in the office, to give information on the services available to women who are experiencing violence and to send a clear and unambiguous message that violence is not acceptable. In addition GTM will continue to challenge structural discrimination experienced by Travellers.

Response to Domestic abuse disclosure:

The staff of GTM are not in a position to mediate between a woman and her abuser, as this may increase the risk to her/our safety.

THREE R'S

Recognise: Know the signs, indications, patterns/nature and effects of abuse

Respond: Know how to respond appropriately (suitably/properly) and effectively (well/successfully) to help make sure a woman is safe

Refer: Know how to make a referral to an appropriate service/agency

RECOGNISE

- **Know the signs of abuse.**
- **Never ask a person about violence** unless that person is alone and you cannot be overheard.
- **Ask open questions** You seem upset, is everything all right at home? Are you frightened of someone or something? When I see injuries like this I wonder if someone could have hurt you?
- **Give the person time and space** to talk and open up. It is important to create a safe environment to disclose

RESPOND

- **Listen:** Listen to her and what she has to say. Try not to interrupt or ask too many questions. Don't push her for information if she doesn't want to give it. Give her the time to talk and help her feel supported.
- **Don't judge:** Don't blame or judge. Try to understand her situation. Tell her that she is not alone and that there are many women like her in similar situations.
- **Make her feel believed:** It is very important that the woman knows that you believe her. Acknowledge that she is in a difficult or dangerous situation.

➤ **Tell her that everything is confidential:**

Keep everything that the woman has told you confidential except if there are significant concerns to the safety of a child. If there are risks to the safety of children involved best practice is to explore the concerns in a supportive way with the person disclosing, acknowledging that supporting the mother is the best way to support the child. If the person does not wish to make a referral to the Child and Family Agency GTM staff are still obliged to do so and should refer to GTM's Child Protection Policy and consult with the Designated Liaison Person when doing so. Strong links should be maintained with the duty social worker and family support team in order to ensure a consistent and supportive service.

➤ **Tell her that violence is not acceptable:**

Tell her she does not deserve to be treated this way. A survivor of domestic abuse may find it easier to blame or excuse her partner's abuse on his use of alcohol or drugs, stress, money problems, gambling, mental health issues, troubled childhood etc. Her partner remains responsible for his violence – no matter how drunk etc. he is.

➤ **Be aware:**

Of the particular barriers and issues Traveller women face, such as possible literacy, discrimination etc. Fear of shame, stigma, family pressures relating to domestic / sexual violence can also impact on disclosure in this area.

➤ **Allow her to make her own decisions:**

Don't tell her to leave the relationship if she is not ready to do this. This is her decision. But help her to identify possible choices and discuss a safety plan.

➤ **Never contact the abuser:**

This may increase the risk to the woman's safety and to staff members own safety

REFER

- Tell her about the Women's Aid Helpline 1800 341900 and local helplines
- Give her information on local refuges and other support services. Talk through with her how to go about accessing these services. Be mindful not to give her any information which could be found by her abuser e.g. a card with contact details of local supports. The woman may not be ready to contact a service at the time and it is important to respect this. Never contact a service on her behalf without her consent as it may increase the risk to the woman's safety.
- If she has suffered physical harm, ask her if she needs to go to see doctor or go to a hospital. Suggest that it might be useful to have records of any injuries as abuse.

("3 R's" are adapted from Women's Aid & 'Gender-based Violence: A Resource Document for Services and Organisations Working with and for Minority Ethnic Women')

RESPONDING TO SECONDARY DISCLOSURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

(Adopted from Pavee Point's Domestic and Sexual Violence Policy)

- If a person who is not directly affected by violence reports a situation of domestic or sexual violence to a staff member, the person reporting should be told that GTM can only respond if the person affected seeks support.
- Confidentiality procedures should be explained and followed from this point on.
- Staff should explain to the person reporting that when a third party is seen by the perpetrator to be aware of the situation, the danger to the person affected by violence can increase significantly. Caution and discretion is advised in these situations.
- The person who reports should be provided with information about local domestic and sexual violence services that they can pass on to the person affected by violence.
- Staff should also check in with the person reporting and advise them to avoid any action or situation where their own safety may be put at risk.

GTM is committed to maintaining links with Women's Aid, Cosc, Pavee Point, National Women's Council and National Traveller Women's Forum, and local services as part of its commitment to challenging violence against women. GTM is also committed to working under the framework of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2016-2021.

This policy should be viewed in conjunction with Community Development Code of Practice on Domestic Violence, which GTM was involved in compiling.

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STAY IN TOUCH

GALWAY TRAVELLER MOVEMENT