

Economic Opportunities, Changing Times and “Turning a Penny a New Way”: ‘Settled’ Gypsies’ and Travellers’ Employment Careers since Residence in Housing.

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Introduction:

This paper draws on data from an interconnected series of studies, which examine the experiences of English (Romany) Gypsies, Irish Travellers and New Travellers resident in ‘bricks and mortar’ accommodation. The research was undertaken in diverse urban/rural localities across southern England and utilises findings from 40 in-depth interviews, focus groups and over 200 questionnaires, which explored a range of accommodation and employment related issues. The Housing Act 2004 placed a specific requirement on local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in their area and where appropriate we have also drawn upon findings from these Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs).

Background to Gypsy/Traveller ‘settlement’:

It has been estimated that there are 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers living in the UK with the proportion living in housing as high as two-thirds (CRE, 2006; Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Long established communities of housed Gypsies living in London and other urban centres have been recorded and some families have been resident in conventional accommodation for several generations (Mayall, 1988; Griffin, 2008). However, the decline of nomadic lifestyles and the transfer from sites into public sector housing in recent decades has been driven largely by the shortage of authorised (lawful) sites, difficulties gaining planning permission for private sites and the virtual outlawing of nomadism following the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. In some localities in which the authors (and other colleagues) have worked as many as 75 per cent of housed respondents to GTAAAs reported having moved into ‘bricks and mortar’ due to site shortage and a lack of suitable alternative accommodation.

Despite the relentlessly pro-sedentarist nature of policy towards Gypsies and Travellers, (McVeigh, 1997; Cemlyn et. al., 2009) recourse to a repertoire of adaptive responses and coping mechanisms have allowed many members of these communities to resist assimilation by reformulating an approximation of ‘traditional’ community life within public housing estates. David Sibley, in one of few efforts to theorise the urbanisation of Gypsy communities, notes that

what distinguishes the culture of peripheral groups such as Travellers from the dominant culture based on accumulation is a conception of continuity, and adaptation to structural changes in order to ensure cultural survival. This argues Sibley, *"implies the existence of a cultural boundary that serves to absorb or deflect pressures exerted by the larger society"* (1981: 14) and further, that, *"it is apparent that economic and institutional factors have combined to bring Travellers into the city on a more permanent basis without altering the essential elements of their world-structure"* (Sibley, 1981: 76)

The essentially inward-facing, kin-focused world-view of many Gypsies and Travellers which valorises the notion of 'travel' and 'community' in opposition to sedentarism and individualism means that adapting to life in conventional housing can be a difficult adjustment for many. The loss of close-knit community ties; physical isolation and loneliness can lead to the breakdown of physical and mental health identified by a number of researchers (e.g. Parry et al., 2004; Matthews, 2008). In addition, the practical difficulties of dealing with regular monthly bills instead of (for example) purchasing new gas bottles when required, and restrictions on the ability to pursue traditional economic and cultural activities (see below) add to the problems with adaptation that faces many when first housed.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, significant numbers of first attempts at settlement into housing fail. Niner (2003) noted that a quarter of all Local Authority's surveyed reported that the majority of Gypsy and Traveller tenancies ended within a year and 16 per cent of authorities she surveyed said approximately half of such tenancies were terminated within a year. Despite these significant ethnic inequalities in housing allocation outcomes little research (with the exclusion of Shelter, 2007; Emmerson and Brodie, 2001 and the current studies) has been undertaken into the experiences of these communities' whilst residing in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. Further papers are in preparation for a series of planned publications, which explore the psycho-social dimensions of Gypsies' and Travellers' adjustment (or not) to house dwelling and how settlement impacts on their sense of place, community and neighbourhood. Within this paper however, we focus on actual and perceived changes in employment opportunities and practices arising from the transition into housing.

Gypsy and Traveller Economic Exclusion

Raising the employment levels of excluded and marginalised groups has been a central principle in the Government's social inclusion agenda (see 'Ready for Work' DWP, 2007:9). However this policy drive has largely bypassed Gypsies and Travellers. Indeed recent changes in the structure of the advanced economies and a series of policy driven processes may have increased the economic exclusion of many members of these communities, as witnessed in the rise in welfare dependency and an associated range of problems that afflict both unemployed and economically Gypsies and Travellers. For those with impaired literacy and basic skills (estimated to affect around one in five of the mainstream population (Moser Report, 1999)

and likely to be far higher amongst Gypsies and Travellers) considerable barriers may need to be overcome in order to encourage and support individuals into formal education, training and employment opportunities (Greenfields, 2008).

The majority of housed Gypsies and Travellers surveyed for GTAA's and for the current studies are resident in public housing with many living in relatively socially excluded localities. Localities where residents have low levels of qualifications, skills and training tend to have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment and have greatly decreased life chances across a range of domains (Palmer, et. al., 2007; SEU, 2004). Evidence suggests that newly housed Gypsies and Travellers are frequently accommodated in 'hard to let' properties or may deliberately transfer to 'undesirable' estates in order to live in close proximity to relatives, which in turn re-activates social support networks and enhances bonding capital (see Greenfields and Smith, forthcoming 2010). Residence in such locations whilst potentially supporting enabling social mechanisms has the unintended consequence of compounding pre-existing economic exclusion and minimising opportunities for entering into employment. Accordingly Gypsies and Travellers in housing are subjected to heightened risk of economic exclusion when compared to their sited peer group.

Whilst (see below) for significant numbers of Gypsies and Travellers the transition into housing has been perceived of as economically disastrous, others have found niches and opportunities that utilise traditional features of the Traveller's economic base within a new context enhancing opportunities for self-employment, flexibility and adaptability. Within this remainder of this paper the presenters will discuss emerging findings on Gypsies and Travellers economic strategies and adaptations to working practices within the context of wider socio-economic changes, the decline of nomadic lifestyles and settlement in conventional housing.

The Sample

The findings presented below are drawn from a series of data-sets. The presenters have accessed statistics on the employment status and housing careers of Gypsies and Travellers from six GTAA's with which they have been involved. In addition, we have utilised qualitative data from three projects (consisting of in-depth interviews and focus groups) which specifically explore the experiences of 'housed Gypsies & Travellers'; both those who had made the transition from caravans and young people born into housing but who espoused a clear Gypsy/Traveller identity and ethnicity. The latter more in depth studies include an area in the South West of England where large numbers of Gypsies and Travellers are resident in housing on run-down estates along the South Coast. A second study was implemented in the South East of England (in a county renowned for the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population) to explore whether findings from the initial study would be replicated, or if regional variations in attitude to accommodation, socio-

economic opportunity and community relations resulted in differing outcomes. Finally, a third (on-going) study is being conducted in an inner-city area, examining the experiences of Irish Travellers. In the two other localities, the majority of participants (78 per cent) are Romany (English) Gypsies. For the purposes of this paper, data from GTAAs is presented in 'broad-brush' format, whilst the findings from the three study areas are treated to greater elaboration. The South Western locality is referred to as Study Area One; the South East region as Study Area Two and the inner-city location (emerging findings) as Study Area Three.

Gypsies, Travellers and Employment Practices

Defining conventional employment categories are problematic for a group whose work practices have traditionally been distinguished by self-employment, flexibility and adaptability (Okely, J, 1983). Typical 'traditional' occupations include field work, market or horse trading and activities associated with gardening such as 'tree-logging' (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). The combination of greater mechanisation of agricultural activities; farmers' access to cheaper overseas farm labour; bureaucratic and legislative restrictions on the use of 'casual' labour and the gradual increase in 'no cold calling' zones which impact on Travellers going 'on the knock' for work; have had a significant impact on the economic well-being of those members of the community who are not qualified, literate or flexible enough to take advantage of economic diversification (Cemlyn, et. al., 2009). Evidence from completed GTAAs in East Anglia and the West Country emphasise the shift away from 'traditional' field labour into (male) building related work particularly fascias/plastics; gardening/tree-surgery or for those with less adaptability, a decline into unemployment.¹ Employed Gypsy and Traveller women tend to be concentrated in 'care' work; personal services such as hairdressing and beauty therapy or cleaning. Amongst long-term settled Gypsy and Travellers (particularly in the Home Counties) a number of women reported being employed in 'mainstream' office work or in professions such as teaching assistants or nursing, occupations.

The employment choices and preferences of Gypsies and Travellers are both shaped and restricted through adherence to community values and other cultural factors combined with the relations that exist between Gypsies and wider social institutions and agencies. Accessing training and employment outside the traditional kin-based working patterns leads to greater integration with, and knowledge of, wider 'gorjer'² society. Focus group discussions frequently highlight the ambiguity with which many Gypsies and Travellers regard this process, which simultaneously increases the risk of acculturation

¹ By contrast, this was less so in Surrey and other 'Home Counties' where respondents tend to have been 'settled' for longer and have a more varied employment base coupled with greater literacy levels.

² Romani term for 'non-Gypsy' person/community. The corresponding Pavee (Irish Traveller) term is 'country person'

or exposure to racism whilst increasing economic opportunities for the benefit of the family group. Further, given the largely conflictual relationship between Gypsies and agencies of the state, young people were often dubious about the value of accessing training for careers in social work or mental health nursing (Greenfields, 2008). It was widely considered that these career choices would lead to social due to the potential that they would report concerns to 'the authorities'. Young women contemplating health related careers also voiced concern at the taboo nature of providing personal care to unrelated males; and the potentially polluting nature of certain types of work, particularly those involving blood or bodily fluids. Young Irish Traveller women in particular reported that their future husbands and other family members would be opposed to their working outside of the home once they were married regardless of the type of employment they chose.

Overall, despite increased knowledge of a range of employment and training opportunities over 70 per cent of participants reported a strong preference for 'traditional' employment practices. Boys largely expressed a wish to work alongside their kin group noting the benefits of both learning a trade from their fathers/uncles and of being able to adjust the supply of labour to demand through drawing on family networks. Young people referred to the fact that relatives (often grandparents who exerted an influence on the overall family structures) were frequently keen for them to leave school at a young age and either work with their fathers (boys) or remain at home (girls). School and 'gorjer' attitudes and influences coupled with external social pressures on women to work outside of the home were regarded with some hostility by older people. Many older participants spoke with regret about "*changing ways*", that reflected a deeper concern that young people were "*getting gorjified – not satisfied, wanting to be something different from our own people*". The potential for intergenerational conflict is therefore not dissimilar to that identified within second generation South Asian communities whose 'westernised' attitudes were at odds with those of their more 'traditional' elders (Bhopal, 1997; Ghuman, 2003).

Whilst divergence in the aspirations of young Gypsies and Travellers and their parents and grandparents may indeed exist, little evidence was found of conflict between generations, with the majority of those interviewed living in close proximity to relatives, (not infrequently in households consisting of more than one generation). Despite a growing awareness (often expressed as a grudging acceptance) by both young people and their parents that many of the traditional employment patterns were economically unsustainable in post-modern Britain, many young people still espoused a clear demarcation of gender roles and employment practices based upon a system of values, which were similar to those expressed by their parents and grandparents.

The importance of '*having a bit of paper*' to demonstrate one's skills was a source of frustration for many participants: literacy difficulties, the preference for obtaining skills 'on the job' generally from older relatives and frequent movement whilst growing up meant that it was difficult to compete with other tradesmen in an increasingly bureaucratised world "*well I'm good at what I do but haven't got the paper see*". Another young man commented that he "*worked alongside of my Daddy – didn't go to school*". Where parents of teenagers were

favourable to their children accessing post-compulsory education and training, this was overwhelming focussed on skills pertaining to employability or lifestyle such as *“getting a chainsaw licence”* or *“help with reading for her driving test”*. Academic study for the sake of obtaining qualifications and deferred employment opportunities whilst training for a ‘career’ were regarded by all but a tiny percentage of respondents as a waste of time *“it would be wasted – the boys want to be out and earning money and the girls – well once they’re married and have babies who would want to work?”*.

However these views, although generally held, are not universal. One divorced mother of teenage daughters emphasised the importance of *“having something they can do – you never know if you will have to look after your children on your own, so a good training, qualifications – just in case”*. Other parents recognised the importance of encouraging children to obtain vocational qualifications and skills especially when these fitted in with traditional cultural orientations and gender roles: *“she’s at college and training in beauty therapy – she can do that from home or part-time when the children are small”*. Another father commented that his son *“would like to be an electrician – can earn good money and work with family on the building – they are in the plastics [installing double-glazing and UHPV doors]”*. The predominant discourse related to adjusting traditional modes of employment and working practices to meet changing demands and conditions rather than contemplating alternative careers or investing longer periods in education. Parents and young people emphasised that Gypsies and Travellers were considered as adults from their early teens and accordingly were ready to leave the education system and learn skills in a work setting (Cemlyn et. al., 2009; Derrington & Kendall, 2004). In part cultural conservatism leaves little space for voicing aspirations outside of the ‘norm’ for members of these communities, a tendency which was noted by teaching staff interviewed.

“even the most able boys – there is a sort of glass ceiling – they don’t think beyond manual trades”;

“young people need more Gypsy and Traveller role models... their aspirations needs to be raised – helping them to break out of stereotypes of working - having a little job - until they get married [girls] and getting a well-paid job (self-employed by preference) and supporting their family [for boys]” (Greenfields, 2008:49)

Where participants in the series of studies reported that they were engaged in ‘non-traditional’ employment (or variations on former trades e.g. having made the transition from casual construction related work to skilled installation of plastics, roofing etc) a clear correlation was found to exist between occupation, access to stable accommodation and longer-term engagement with the education system. As noted above, although the working patterns of many housed Gypsies and Travellers have worsened notably following settlement in housing and the decline of traditional work activities others have been more adept at adapting to this new environment and a polarisation of economic fortunes was evident. Most noticeably, (although not exclusively)

those in 'non traditional' forms of employment and/or those that were relatively successful in material terms was where Gypsies and Travellers are resident in housing or on a self-owned licensed (authorised) site.

Occupation Patterns in Study Areas One and Two

Despite the link between stability of accommodation and take-up of a wider range of jobs evidence of up-skilling amongst housed respondents was not found (other than in a handful of cases) in either Study Area One or Two. Little variation in employment (or unemployment rates) was found between adults who had moved from sites or the roadside into housing relatively recently, and young people who had been born into settled accommodation and who had, presumably, access to a range of education and training opportunities. In both Study Areas, male interviewees tended to be clustered in low-skilled occupations or as self-employed tradesmen (e.g. gardeners and construction work) following similar professions to their fathers and other male relatives. Scrapping metal and market trading were more commonly reported by participants in Study Area three (emerging findings from inner-city area) with both young men and (unmarried) women involved in these activities. A high percentage of women in all Study Areas were not actively seeking work but were involved in family and child care related activities.

Unemployment and long term unemployment rates are significantly higher than in the general population. When combined with low or non-existent literacy skills there is a high risk of permanent economic exclusion and/or a drift into crime. At the time of interview 10 per cent of the households in Study Area Two had at least one unemployed member and 25 per cent were economically inactive (of which 15 per cent was comprised of retired households). 65 per cent of the households had at least one adult in full-time employment, most commonly males who were engaged in building and/or gardening/tree felling. 20 per cent of employed participants were involved in some form of trading or selling and all others were self-employed. This compares to 46 per cent of households where at least one household member was in paid employment with the pattern of work in Study Areas One and Two showing little variation. Study Area One demonstrated higher rates of unemployment at 36 per cent but lower levels of economic inactivity at 18 per cent of the sample.

It is notable that individuals who self-classified as 'other' but whose demographic profile and family networks matched to 'traditional' Gypsies or Travellers were all in employment. This, of course, raises the question of the extent that ethnicity is hidden amongst individuals working alongside 'gorjers'. In a number of GTAA members interviewees routinely report disguising their background when working stating that *"they don't know I'm a Gypsy"* or *"they wouldn't give me a job if they knew, so I make sure I use a 'care of' address [to avoid mention of living on a site]"* (Greenfields, et. al., 2007; Home & Greenfields, 2006). Cemlyn et. al. (2009) found evidence of employment-related discrimination and cases of apparent constructive dismissal of Gypsies and Travellers once their ethnicity became a matter of public note.

Amongst 'traditional' Gypsies and Travellers, falling demand for agricultural labour and the rising use of migrant field labourers, combined with the increasing difficulty of conducting a nomadic lifestyle have profoundly impacted on the material base of their culture. Most of the respondents in Study Area Two over the age of approximately 35 had extensive experience of agricultural labour and recalled previously moving around for seasonal farm work, though in more recent years this source of work has almost disappeared. Older Gypsy/Traveller respondents (over 45) in Study Area One had similar experiences (predominantly travelling to work in harvesting in adjoining counties), although since the closure of a number of local authority sites and the mass re-settlement of the Gypsy population into housing in the 1970s this type of employment had become rarer. By the 1980s, it was predominantly New Travellers who transited across the county working in the fields though more recently there has also been a sharp decline in such employment for this group as East European labour gangs have increasingly been employed to undertake the work.

Employment related contacts: Gypsies/Travellers and 'sedentary' populations

Respondents in the depth studies were asked to recount their experiences of working alongside gorjer/sedentary/country people and to consider how their employment experiences impacted on their attitude towards, and relationships with, other communities. In Study Area One respondents were generally neutral about their work related contacts with non Gypsy/Traveller populations "*some are OK, some not*" "*they treat me alright*" with two (self-employed tradesmen) stating that "*it's fine*". Only one female (working in an office) made a particularly positive comment about her co-working "*its alright, I get on OK with everybody*". New Travellers were generally less positive about their working relationships with non-Travellers, and this appeared to relate more to visible identity markers of this group such as tattoos and piercing. Typical comments from those who responded to this question, were "*I don't get on so well with straights*" [non Travellers] or "*they won't give me a job, they judge by appearances, dreads, tattoos*". Two other Gypsies and Travellers who were currently unemployed stated that they "*hadn't ever worked with any*" or "*don't know, never tried to find a job*". For many respondents in Study Area Two working alongside a non-Gypsy workforce in the fields was their most extensive contact with the wider society. Notwithstanding the potential for romanticising the past (Lummis: 1987), experiences of *working* alongside the 'gorjers' were generally a lot more positive than when being forced to *live* alongside them (see Evans: 2004). Participants recalled that "*Back in the farm days we all got on well*" and "*on the farms we were all the same, we were a big team and there were hardly any problems*" when asked about their experiences of working with non-Gypsies.

Partly, the formalisation of previously casual forms of short-term labour along with the necessity of completing application forms and supplying national insurance numbers has reduced the ability of Gypsies and Travellers to access types of employment where they would previously have had regular contact with people from a wider variety of backgrounds. The increase of bureaucracy and complex employment regulations has therefore acted as an unforeseen barrier to community integration in some cases. As pointed out during a focus group discussion undertaken by the authors as part of a wider GTAA.

“They can’t read the forms, they’ve got no idea what the forms are about, they go home and show the families, and they say they need your national insurance number and you need this and that, and they go ‘well all I want to do is pick some fruit’. And that’s it, they don’t bother going back ‘cos half the time half the people can’t read the papers.”

Amongst currently unemployed and economically inactive Gypsies and Travellers, the extent of contact of ‘gorjers’ was often limited to encounters with parents or teachers at school (which are often viewed as negative, threatening or result from parents’ having to complain about racism experienced by their children). Other encounters tended most commonly to be with ‘officials’ such as welfare benefits and local authority staff whom GTAA and focus group findings indicate are often perceived of as unhelpful or prejudiced (Greenfields, et. al. 2007) or the potentially conflictual relationships which exist between neighbours (Ray & Reed, 2005; Gidley & Rooke, 2008). In this way, for some members of these communities, the distance between themselves and ‘gorjer’ communities is becoming more pronounced and may lead to an unduly negative opinion of such interactions, despite the communities living in ever closer spatial proximity, particularly when resident in housing. A phrase from the 2001 Independent Community Cohesion Review of the civil disturbances in former mill towns could just as easily have referred to the situation of many respondents interviewed for these studies: *‘many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives..[that] often do now seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote meaningful exchange’*. (Cantle 2001: 9)

Impact of Residence on Employment Opportunities

In contrast to a number of respondents in GTAAs who commented negatively on their ability to obtain work if they gave a ‘Gypsy site’ as an address, residents of housing, perhaps because of their relative ‘invisibility’ tended not to report such difficulties in initially finding employment *“well not now I’ve got a qualification”*. Three respondents working in ‘mainstream’ occupations commented along the lines of *“most people don’t know and those who do, well they don’t say much about it – or not twice”*, with the majority of self-employed tradesmen stating that *“they don’t care if they get a good deal”* or *“I*

work with my uncles so it doesn't matter". Whilst ethnicity may not present a particular barrier to employment for some respondents, the regulations associated with residence in rented premises have for others without formal trades or skills, proved a barrier to certain types of formally accessible economic activity.

For a traditionally nomadic people, the division between workplace and place of residence is not as distinct as in sedentary society, and regulations and restrictions on what activities are permitted in social housing has curtailed many traditional economic pursuits such as 'scrapping', car breaking and breeding animals. Despite adapting to modernisation, the restrictions and limitations placed on traditional economic activities and discrimination in the waged labour market (often accompanied by poor literacy skills) has inevitably been accompanied with an increase in welfare dependency (Power: 2004, pp. 32-33). One interviewee in Study Area Two explained how the move into housing resulted in the loss of their livelihood and subsequent unemployment

"I used to keep chickens and sell eggs, when we moved here they says you're not allowed to keep chickens here so we've got none now 'cos we can't keep them (so) I can't make my own money anymore. We don't like it here at all".

Another pointed out that his family's financial situation had drastically worsened after moving into housing, as he could no longer follow his previous line of work that involved long periods of travelling with his family.

"There's nothing good about living here at all. We can't leave this house empty for long and I won't leave them [family] without me 'cos the grief we get here and that means I can't get about to get more work no more".

Within GTAAs in the areas which adjoined Study Area One, over sixty percent of respondents resident in social housing reported that regulations precluded their keeping either a caravan or working vehicles at their home. For some these restrictions impacted uneasily on their sense of identity as a Traveller, as well as affecting their participation in traditional forms of employment such as mobile tree-logging or collecting scrap *"you don't just feel you can get up and go no more"*; *"can't go travelling for work now"* ; *"they doesn't let you strip the cables here"*. In addition, stringent local authority regulation of disposal of industrial waste (e.g. greenery from garden work or rubber coatings left over after stripping out copper from cables) has meant that various short-term or opportunistic employment followed by families has been curtailed as the cost of disposal of 'industrial waste' through public rubbish

tips, or even an outright ban on disposal of employment related rubbish, has minimised the possibility of accepting this type of work.

“We want access to a rubbish tip – how can you work without? They don’t want us dumping the branches but how’s we supposed to get rid of it if they don’t let us in?”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the complex regulations have led some respondents to GTAA’s and the current research to conclude *“they just don’t want us to work no more... they are taking away our livelihood and our culture”*

Changing Employment Strategies

For many Gypsies and Travellers (particularly those who were formally nomadic) making the transition into housing has proved economically disastrous, with significant numbers of respondents lapsing into long term unemployment. One young woman in Study Area One made the linkage between the ending of traditional lifestyles, increased rates of unemployment and disillusionment amongst her relatives *‘the older ones and that...no offence, like but they don’t have a job, they’re all on the dole and sit around all day and have kids and basically that’s it’*. She expressed considerable ambiguity about her future prospects reporting being drawn to the traditions of her community, yet recognising that many of the young Gypsy men were ill-equipped to financially support a family in a changing world. She acknowledged that if she *“married a Travelling boy”* it would be difficult to go onto college or work outside of the home with the weight of tradition leading most young couples to early parenthood with huge strains on their financial well-being and future opportunities.

Some younger housed Travellers (and individuals with skills which are in short-supply in their local areas) have adapted to their changing situation through adopting flexible working practices. The tensions between wishing to work in traditional employment sectors (particularly alongside relatives) and the limitations imposed by literacy difficulties or skills deficits have, for some families, been remedied by encouraging young people who have attended school to access training which will benefit the wider family group: *“he is going to college to be a mechanic – then he will have the piece of paper even though he knows how to do it along of [taught by] his Daddy”*.

The difficulties for young women in developing a career of their own were acknowledged by Irish Traveller women in Study Area Three who reported that *“if you wanted to work, you’d need to marry a Country Person – not a Traveller”*. However, women in all study areas appeared more likely to be flexible than men in their approach to identifying economic opportunities and their willingness to adopt paid employment rather than opting for being self-employed, the favoured strategy of Gypsy and Traveller males. As noted above, women were in a number of cases employed in care work and cleaning roles, jobs which were regarded as flexible enough to fit in with family responsibilities and yet which did not require significant periods of academic training and certification. In Study Area Three, (emerging findings) a

small percentage of Irish Traveller women were actively seeking to remain in (or return to) education, citing a preference for studying child-care skills with a view to training as nursery nurses, or enabling them to work in a community setting.

A growth employment area amongst housed Travellers (identified within GTAA's in both the South West and London regions, and in Study Areas Two and Three) consisted of (predominantly) women engaging in community activism. As a result of their involvement with community groups a small but growing percentage of women who were either unmarried or whose children had grown up and were themselves married, were gaining core skills and training opportunities which both enhanced their confidence and enabled them to access employment opportunities. A number of women in one area had become engaged with community support groups and were paid for working on a part-time or casual basis with voluntary sector agencies who were undertaking outreach work with Gypsy and Traveller communities. In all three study areas, women were identified who were involved in delivering training programmes, which are often linked to diversities and equalities schemes and set out to enhance awareness of Gypsy and Traveller culture. Whilst earnings from such employment tends to be erratic and fairly poor, participants often use their experience of these projects to gain further employment or opportunities through voluntary sector agencies, or in several cases to train as classroom assistants, accessing skills-based training in a local school.

Although males in all localities appeared significantly less likely than women to become involved in voluntary sector employment; the experience of residence in housing had for some (predominantly younger) men led them to explore employment opportunities which would be regarded as 'non-traditional'. In the South West GTAA, one man reported that he was a security guard – a post which he felt he would not have obtained if he had been living on a site as he would immediately be subjected to prejudice from potential employers and perceived of as *'being a criminal'*. The relative anonymity of residence in housing could therefore act as a *"smokescreen"* for Gypsies and Travellers (see Cemlyn et. al. 2009, for discussion of racism in employment settings).

Self-employed Gypsy and Traveller men working as mechanics; buying and selling cars or engaged in building trades generally reported favourably on the fact that many local residents were employed in similar professions. The problematic of giving a 'Gypsy site' as an address was therefore extinguished, with customers who might have been reluctant to deal with a Traveller being none the wiser. In the South West area, several men reported that they were able to make a good living, often providing services to neighbours, with proximity to other residents supplying new financial opportunities and economic networks they would otherwise not necessarily have encountered *"if it's a good deal but only with them ones that I know"* (see further Smith, 2005 for a discussion of marginal economic activities amongst residents of housing estates). In the words of one participant *"times have changed but we haven't. It's just about turning a penny in a new way"*

Conclusion

Whilst the majority of Gypsies and Travellers interviewed in the three study areas who are economically active are still engaged in 'traditional' employment (e.g. building or gardening/tree work, which in Study Areas One and Two are the largest categories reported by males, both averaging 22 per cent or responses). Just under one third of respondents of working age were unemployed and over half of all women interviewed were not economically active but were engaged in family caring responsibilities. For both men and women, the majority of employment activities were relatively low-skilled and insecure, and were frequently poorly paid. Approximately two thirds of participants reported that since moving into housing they considered that their economic well-being had declined. It is therefore argued that the combination of 'fixed' bills and decreased opportunities for casual employment opportunities means that the current economic downturn has impacted disproportionately on members of Gypsy and Traveller communities who are (in the main) poorly equipped to compete with other low-skilled workers resident in similar localities.

The relatively small percentage of Gypsies and Travellers interviewed who have accessed additional training and education appear (at this stage of analysis) to be in a comparative economic position to the surrounding populace, albeit with literacy skills which may potentially be at a lower level as a result of disrupted educational experiences. Further analysis is required to explore the variables in employment trajectories between Gypsies and Travellers who have been '*born to housing*' as opposed to moving into such accommodation from sites. However at this stage of the study it would appear that the strength of community networks and the importance of bonding capital both provide support mechanisms and potentially act as a restraint on both ambition and the development of bridging capital. Individuals identified within these studies who have achieved economic success have largely proved successful in adapting traditional skills and employment opportunities to changing circumstances with limited evidence of a wholesale shift towards new fields of endeavour. It is however likely that Gypsies and Travellers who are economically and academic successful may be adept at 'hiding' their ethnicity (see Cemlyn et. al.2009). Hence, community members engaged in 'non-traditional' employment are difficult to identify and may be reluctant to engage with surveys of this type.

A project (commencing Summer 2009) will explore the characteristics and experiences of economically 'successful' Gypsies and Travellers in England. Members of the current research team will be associated with the Economic Exclusion Study (coordinated by Irish Traveller Movement Britain) and it is expected that publications will arise which include comparison of variables relating to family background, ethnicity; accommodation tenure and access to a range of diverse capitals. Whilst this paper is largely descriptive of Travellers' employment strategies, as further data continues to be gathered the development of a theoretical framework pertaining to Gypsy and Traveller economic behaviours will emerge.

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