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Domestic Violence within the Travelling Community:
A Challenge for Social Work

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**Domestic Violence Within The Travelling Community:**

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**Introduction**

This paper explores the experience of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) amongst the travelling community in Ireland. The issues raised relate not just to the Irish travelling community, but as an Irish ethnic minority, their experiences can add to our understanding of the needs of other minority women experiencing abuse within intimate relationships. The paper will firstly explore the international experience of IPV, and will then look specifically at the experiences of ethnic minority women. The findings and recommendations of the paper are based on a qualitative research methodology and incorporate the perspectives of both traveller women and service providers.

Intimate Partner Violence, more commonly known as domestic violence, is a significant international social problem. The United Nations defines such violence as: "violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty" (UN Secretary General's, 2006).

The most recent approaches to this problem emphasis the wider dimension of coercive control within IPV (Stark, 2006). Coker at al's (2003:260) definition captures the overlap of such control with physical and other forms of violence:

*A process whereby one member of an intimate relationship experiences vulnerability, loss of power and control and entrapment as a consequence of other member's exercise of power through the patterned use of physical, sexual, psychological and /or moral force*

Prevalence Rates

International prevalence rates for this form of violence vary considerable. The WHO multi country study revealed prevalence figures of between 15% in Japan to 71% in Ethiopia for lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual abuse (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006). The European Union estimates that at some point in their lives, one in five women in Europe will experience abuse by a male partner, while 25% of all reported crimes involves assaults by a man on his wife or partner (EU, 2007). It is also the major cause of death and disability for women aged between 16-44, accounting for more death and illness than cancer and road accidents (Council of Europe, 2002). In Ireland, the most recent National prevalence study found that 15% of women have experienced severely abusive behaviour at some time in their lives (Watson and Parsons, 2005).

**Intimate Partner Violence and Ethic Minority Women**

Research indicates that common experiences can be identified among ethnic minority women in domestic violence situations and that responsive social work and other service provision requires an awareness of, and sensitivity to, such experiences. In reviewing this research however, it is important to acknowledge that psychosocial, economic and cultural factors can interact in complex ways to place ethnic minority groups at increased risk of domestic violence without ethnicity necessarily being a risk factor in and of itself. It is also important to recognise that there is considerable diversity among different ethnic groups in terms of the prevalence, nature and impact of domestic violence.

**Culture**

Attention is drawn in the literature to the fact that there are varying cultural perceptions of what constitutes abuse (Ahmad et al, 2004; Wenzel et al, 2006; Yoshihima, 2002). A point of emphasis is that cognisance must be taken of the cultural norms and values that foster violence against women, and that ethnic minority women must be able to voice their concerns about how violated they feel within a cultural framework that is meaningful to them (Asylum Aid, 2002; Memmott et al, 2001; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a). Certain culturally-mediated factors can be influential in deterring ethnic minority women from disclosing abuse or seeking assistance. These factors include gender roles, familism, inter-family structures, shame and collectivism. A range of studies, for example, of ethnic minority communities in the UK and US indicate that abused women often live within a cultural milieu that makes them fail to recognise intimate violence as a social problem (Ahmad et al, 2004; Bui, 2003; Dasgupta, 2000; Hicks, 2006; Preisser, 1999). They can also face tremendous cultural pressures when they attempt to break from the cycle of abuse (Hicks, 2006). Because certain cultural traditions emphasise family privacy and require the individual to turn first to her family, seeking help in the community means confronting cultural prohibitions against causing 'loss of face' for oneself and one's family (Bui, 2003). Such studies also suggest that women do not always receive family support when they decide to leave their abusive husbands because a woman is judged to have failed in her role if she cannot maintain her marriage and provide her children with a father, regardless of his conduct (Dasgupta, 2000; Hicks, 2006). A women's desire, therefore, to protect the family name and to avoid ostracism from her community can prevent her from seeking help outside her family.

As a consequence of these cultural perspectives, women may be reluctant to report their experiences of abuse because domestic violence is not acknowledged as a social problem within their communities or because it is traditionally viewed as a private matter. Reluctance to engage with services may, in consequence, emanate from fear of bringing shame on their families or from apprehension about sanctions or rejection by extended family networks. Secondly, the centrality of family in the lives of many ethnic minority women as well as cultural prescriptions in relation to the primacy of their roles as wives and mothers mean that, for some women, family unity pre-empts individual safety. How a woman perceives and manages her experience of domestic abuse can, therefore, be strongly influenced by culturally-specific factors in particular communities.

**Racism**

Racist beliefs and practices can also serve to prevent minority women from seeking or finding effective interventions. Because of the experience of stereotyping and discrimination when seeking assistance, women from ethnic minority groups can feel unprotected by the domestic violence, social service, health or criminal justice systems (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Cole, 2001; Kasturirangan et al, 2004). Furthermore, their experience as victims of racial prejudice by majority group members may make family and community ties all the more important (Dasgupta, 2005; Pittaway, 2004). In addition, institutionalised racism can operate in covert and overt ways to perpetuate exclusionary practices in services and to subtly render domestic violence in minority communities invisible (Hamby, 2005).

The notion that domestic violence is 'cultural' for some communities and, therefore, does not warrant a serious response from agencies has been documented as a significant factor placing ethnic minority women at great risk from violent partners or family members (Bograd, 1999; Burman et al, 2004; Donnelly et al, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a, 2005b). In this context, it is noted that when domestic violence is defined as culturally normative, the victimisation of women is denied, and this translates into a failure to recognise the need for intervention strategies (Dasgupta, 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a, 2005b; Volpp, 2005). If service providers characterise ethnic minority groups as inherently violent, they tend to view intervention efforts as futile (Burman et al, 2004). Stereotypes may also lead professionals to underestimate the impact of abuse on minority women or to overestimate the ability of these women to cope (Donnelly et al, 2005). Furthermore, the internalisation of stereotypes may contribute to some minority women not perceiving themselves as victims of abuse or as being in need of help (Nash, 2005).

The evidence in the literature also indicates that women from ethnic minority groups typically experience anxiety and lack of trust when they engage with services because of well-founded expectations, if not actual experience, of racist attitudes and behaviour. In particular, the point is consistently made that women with a devalued racial identity feel ambivalent about using the police to deal with domestic violence because they fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment by the criminal justice system as well as confirm racist stereotypes about their own community (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Bui, 2003; Cole, 2001; Dasgupta, 2005). The literature specifically highlights the twin problems

of aggressive policing and of under-policing, as well as the issue of intrusive and coercive interventions by child welfare agencies, as being key factors in deterring ethnic minority women from engaging with services (Campbell et al, 1997; Homel et al, 1999; Pittaway, 2004). Racism, therefore, can make it appreciably more difficult for ethnic minority women to access the resources they need to escape domestic violence.

**Socio-Economic Status**

Current research on domestic violence in marginalised ethnic groups indicates a strong correlation between family violence and socio-economic disadvantage, particularly in terms of the experience of persistent and chronic poverty, social isolation, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, family disruption, residential mobility and population density (Hampton et al, 2005; Kasturirangan et al, 2004; West, 1998, 2005). These stressors are further documented as placing ethnic minority groups at increased risk of alcohol abuse which is associated with higher levels of physical assault and with the endorsement of more approving attitudes to violence (West, 1998). While alcohol is commonly blamed for violence in ethnic minority groups, the literature argues that it should be more correctly viewed as an exacerbating or situational factor rather than a direct cause (Homel et al, 1999; Memmott et al, 2001). Socio-economic disadvantage is also associated with a range of psychological problems, such as lack of self-esteem or self-respect, powerlessness, frustration and shame, which impact on the risk of victimisation by domestic violence (West, 2005).

Women living in poverty are also more vulnerable to such abuse. Without adequate resources, women have difficulty accessing services and are unable to relocate and, therefore, to avoid contact with their violent partners. Indeed, women's access to material resources is deemed one of the most critical factors in determining their vulnerability to domestic violence (Bui, 2003; Sharma, 2001; West, 2005). The observation is made that the violence and control by an individual abuser is not the only form of violence experienced by abused minority women. Lack of adequate institutional support in the form of welfare, social services and housing is another level of violence which occurs in ways that are racialised as well as gendered and classed (Coker, 2005; Sokoloff and Dopont, 2005a). The literature, therefore, highlights the need for strategies to address socio-economic inequalities as well as the social processes and community-level characteristics that engender domestic violence (Hampton et al, 2005).

**METHODOLOGY:**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, (Quinn Patton, 2002) in order to access the views of both traveller women and services providers. A postal survey was distributed to a wide range of providers, including Refuges, drop in services, The courts service, free Legal Aid Services and the Police. The questionnaire included both closed and open ended questions in order to allow as much flexibility as possible for the participants to express their opinions. Individual interviews with a number of traveller women who had themselves experienced abuse were carried out, as well as a focus group with a mixed age range of traveller women. These research strategies were utilized in order to access as wide a range of opinions and experiences as possible. The three research strategies were carried out concurrently. The data analysis has been integrated in the presentation of the findings (Creswell, 2003).

**The Travelling Community in Ireland**

'Travellers' are predominantly an indigenous European ethnic group (Cemlyn, 2008) and there are an estimated 23,681 travellers in Ireland (CSO, 2002). While the Irish Travelling Community is not legally recognised by the state as an ethnic minority, there is a growing consensus that they are a distinct community, with traditions that differ from the majority community. They have their own language (Clarke, 1998) and a nomadic lifestyle, with a strong extended family network. Roman Catholicism is an important Religious tradition for the Irish Travelling Community (Cemlyn, 2008).Travellers are acknowledged as one of the most marginalised ands disadvantaged groups in Irish society. They fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, education and training, gender equality,

access to decision making, accommodation (O'Connell, 1998). Their culture has been devalued and in some cases demonised and their identity has been shaped by exclusion, marginalization and oppression (McCann, 2007)

**Prevalence of Abuse.**

Violence and abuse within intimate relationships is a factor for a significant number of traveller women. However, while it is not possible to provide accurate prevalence data on the extent of this abuse within the Traveller community, there is no evidence to suggest that it is more or less prevalent than in the community in general (Watson and Parsons, 2005). What is clear is that the legal and support mechanisms that have been introduced, and which are to a certain extent effective in facilitating settled women to eventually access safety from abuse, are not, for a number of reasons, as effective for traveller women. As was noted in the research discussed above, the reasons for this lack of effectiveness lie in structural and cultural factors both within the systems themselves and within the traveller community.

**Forms of Abuse.**

The forms of violence reported to this study reflect the forms of violence found in most studies of domestic violence i.e. physical abuse, (including life threatening assaults), verbal and psychological abusive and coercive control (Stark, 2006: Watson and Parsons, 2005). The nature, extent , dynamics and aetiology of the violence as reported by the respondents in this study appear to mirror very closely the experience of abuse in other communities and societies (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006).

**Family and Cultural context of Violence.**

The cultural context which the respondents in this study outlined can be described as a closeknit community, which supports  traditional family values and the indissolubility of the

marital relationship. Women's roles in this closknit society are primarily child centred and family oriented. Few women either work or live outside the family unit, and consequently they have few independent financial resources. Men are expected to be in charge of their families. This reflects the 'familial' cultural context discussed in the international literature (e.g. Hicks 2006, Bui, 2003).

Young women tend to live within their husband's extended family network, and in close proximity to his parents and siblings and their families. Such a family context can provide support, such as shared child care and prevents isolation for young women. However in the event of domestic abuse, the other strong values of the community appear not only to counteract the supportive nature of such a closeknit familial life style, but tend rather to emphasise the abused woman's responsibility to the family system as a whole, 'locking' her into the abusive situation. The importance of marriage, which couples tend to enter into at a young age, is underscored by the pressure exerted on both parties to remain in the marriage at whatever cost. This reflects the traditional Catholic (and other religious) family values which many older women in all communities would cite as reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship.

*"If you're married, you're married to stay".*

These intra cultural pressures interact with the structural difficulties which exist in the systems and agencies on which abused women rely when seeking to access safety.

**Women's Help Seeking**

The traveller women  reported a range of help seeking behaviours which reflect those noted in other studies (Goodman et al, 2003, 2005). Many of these help seeking activities however, involve interaction with official systems and services which are not designed for, nor always supportive of, the nature of the travelling community's family oriented way of life. Examples of these difficulties which the women described include the following:

*Police*

The first of these difficulties is the lack of support they may receive from their extended families if they call the police for protection from violence: as one woman described it-*"They*

*don't get involved".* The 'loss of face' for the man appears to accentuate the fear of retaliation, which is a common fear for many abused women who seek external help.

> *"You get them arrested, and you're guaranteed the minute they get out of the police station, they're going to come back and break you up and the trailer as well. Its for shames sake as far as they're concerned, their credibility is gone."*

For a woman who does risk this retaliation and calls the police, she needs to be sure that she can be protected from violence. Such protection can only be assured if

i). The police respond promptly to her call for assistance:
ii): They intervene appropriately and according to the Force's own Domestic Violence Policy:
iii) She can, if necessary, leave the site (even temporarily) and go somewhere he cannot access her. To do this she will need time to organize herself and her children to go to a place of safety, for example a refuge, and she will need the means of getting there. This research would suggest that none of these conditions are guaranteed if she calls the police.

> *"If they do come, some of them drive in and say 'we got a phone call', and he [husband] says, 'everything's fine here and they just drive out and you're left dripping in blood…..they never walk in and ask you 'are you all right'. They just don't care, they think' it's the traveller culture, let them at it."*

The Service Providers who were surveyed also recognized the discriminatory pattern of responses by many members of an Garda Siochana. They recognized the complexity for women who live on sites beside their husband's family or even their own family, which was also referred to by traveller women themselves. It would appear that for traveller women, both their ethnic identity and their physical location prevent them from obtaining the same level of protection as settled women (problematic as this may be for settled women also).

> *"Police and other services will not respond to call outs to the site in some cases."*

**Finding Refuge**

Finding a place in a refuge is always a difficulty for abused women, as Refuges are constantly full and must turn women away. For a traveller woman, her chances of getting a place are even slimmer, as most refuges have a policy of admitting only one traveller woman at a time.

Women also may not have the bus or taxi fare to bring her to the refuge, thus adding to the difficulty of her efforts to escape a violent situation. While the practice of some refuges was described by many respondents as excellent, and '*supportive, 24/7',* there were concerns expressed about the response by staff in one or two refuges. Concern was also expressed about the reality of discrimination and *"being looked down on"* by some of the other residents. The ban on male children over the age of 14 was also a barrier to the use of refuges by traveller women.

Echoing the concerns of traveller women themselves, most of the service providers acknowledged that the principal barrier to traveller women's safety was the lack of suitable accommodation, either emergency (i.e. refuges), or longer term accommodation.

The refusal of Refuges in all areas of the country to admit only one traveller woman at the same time is sometimes perceived as discrimination, but the rationale behind this policy is the danger posed to women if a member of her husband's extended family is in the refuge at the same time. This highlights again the complexity of the 'familial' extended family culture within the travelling community. Added to this barrier to safety, is the overt discrimination traveller women may experience from Bed & Breakfast owners, where she may be referred if there is no refuge space available. As abused women will not wish to leave their children in the care of their abusive husband, finding suitable emergency accommodation with a large number of children (especially if there are teenager boys) will be particularly difficult. Traveller women may not have access to their own income and therefore may not have a bus or taxi fare to bring them to a refuge or hostel with their children, even where there is a vacancy for all of them. Finding suitable permanent accommodation greatly compounded the lack of safety for traveller women and was noted as such by the majority of the service

providers. Some of these providers recommended the provision of specialized emergency and social housing to meet the specific needs of traveller women.

**Legal Remedies**

As recent figures show, obtaining a barring order is becoming increasingly difficult in the Irish legal system (Watson and Parsons, 2005). For traveller women, there are added difficulties in either obtaining a barring order, or taking charges against her partner. The closeknit family lifestyle may mean that not only is a woman now confronted by an abusive husband, she may also be confronted by angry in laws, and perhaps even, by her own parents and siblings, who do not wish to see her marriage fail. She may also have literacy difficulties which make the form filling and legal procedures necessary for obtaining a barring or protection order almost insurmountable. Added to this is the difficulty of bringing children into town, perhaps on a number of occasions, to complete this process. The delay in cases coming to court was also referred to as a barrier.

Enforcing a barring order, if the obstacles can be overcome to obtain one, presents traveller women with another difficulty. As one respondent described it, even though her husband was barred from their home (a caravan in a halting site) he simply moved to another bay on the halting site, from where he can verbally harass her:

> *Traveller men will not turn away another traveller man. The police can't do anything because he is not in your bay, even though he is in the halting site.*

> *If his family is around her (on a site) they won't like the idea of him getting arrested.*

It was suggested that a female police officer would be the most suitable person to help women with this procedure, calling to the site to help her fill out the necessary forms when possible.

Access to legal aid was also noted by the service providers  as being a further difficulty for traveller women. One of the primary reasons cited for this is a low literacy level amongst

traveller women, and the impact on the extended families of a legal action taken by one member against another.

> *"Protective orders sometimes are not relevant/useful especially on halting sites were the abuser may move only yards away."*

## Accommodation

The experience of the women who participated in this study is similar to other studies (Goodman et al, 2003) which find that specialized domestic violence services are cited as the most effective mechanism for women seeking safety from violence. Refuge providers are very conscious of the high level of take up of their services by women from the traveller community, but are aware that another level of service is necessary.

Despite the difficulty of finding immediate accommodation in a refuge, there are few alternative options available to traveller women. Staying with their mother was mentioned by some of the respondents, but very often she will not have room to accommodate her daughter and possibly a number of children.

> *"It's not always an option [going back to one's mother]. If you're in a trailer, or say your mother's in a trailer, for example, and you've five or six kids, where's she going to put you up, even if she wanted to?"*

If she does have such room, providing such refuge may create severe difficulties with her son in law's family.

> *"They [her family] will get the blame for breaking them up, so she wont go to them for fear of that."*

There were a variety of opinions expressed regarding the longer term options which would be most secure for women leaving violent relationships. Long waiting lists for social and public

housing for all members of the community were seen as a major barrier. Transitional housing provided by housing associations was seen by some women as an ideal solution to the problem of accommodation in the medium or even short term, but this may also result in pressures from a woman's in laws. Accommodation in a specialized 'group scheme' was suggested as one way to overcome this barrier.

In some cases distance and anonymity from their husband's family, together with long term secure housing (apartment or house) were seen as the best long term options which could assure a woman's safety if she left her abusive marriage. This means she would have to leave her home, break off all contact with her old friends and way of life, and bring her children to a new home, in a part of the country where she is not known by other traveller families. Even though she is the victim of crime, she is effectively 'on the run', living like a protected witness, but without the protection. This is a sad and isolating option, even if sufficient facilities were available. This would be a challenge for any woman, but for traveller women, for whom the extended family and community are integral to their cultural norms, it is an almost insurmountable task.

**Racism and Discrimination**

Amongst the service providers, there were a large number of responses which recognized that traveller women experience discrimination in accessing services and networks outside the traveller community. However, there were also a minority of comments which suggested that violence is more acceptable within the traveller community because of 'cultural' or 'religious' reasons. This was also noted in the literature reviewed above ( Donnelly et al, 2005; Burman et al, 2004). It would appear from this small number of responses, that greater cultural awareness and training is necessary to enable such staff to identify the specific barriers to women's safety, within both the traveller community and the wider society.

**Social Work**

While the protection of children is now a major social policy concern, the unintended consequences of this concern without a concomitant concern for women's safety has led to a fear by abused women of social work intervention. When women have become involved with the social work services, this concern appears to be focused on the abused woman's parenting ability rather than her husband's violence.

> *"I think most women with kids are afraid that the social worker's going to get on to the kids."*

This fear is not without foundation. Research carried out in Eastern Region of the country found that while travellers comprised just 1% of the population, 6% of the children in alternative care are  travellers (Traveller Health Unit, 2004). This focus on women's responsibilities rather than their husband's behaviour is not confined to traveller families, but combined with the other barriers these families experience it accentuates the need for better understanding by social workers of the effects of abuse on women's health and parenting abilities.

**Social Welfare**

Lack of independent financial resources are a particular difficulty for women attempting to leave an abusive relationship and has been noted in the international literature reviewed in Section 1. Some of the respondents pointed out that even when separate payments are being made, this can mean that a woman will be getting perhaps €175 for herself and her children while her husband gets €180 for himself. This inequitable situation, resulting from the 'male breadwinner' model social welfare system, appears archaic in the 21$^{st}$ century and adds to the difficulty women experience when attempting to leave a violent relationship.

**TRAVELLER MEN'S PERSPECTIVES:**

A parallel study carried out with traveller men also utilized a series of focus groups in various locations in Ireland (McCann, 2007). The participants in the groups ranged in age from late

teens to early fifties and most were married with children. These focus groups explored the causes and consequences of such violence, and the services needed to reduce its prevalence and impact on women. The findings of this research suggested that it 'happens regularly' and involves a range of abusive behaviours including even murder (McCann, 2007:14/15). The range of causes attributed to causing the abuse and violence included alcohol and drug use, arranged marriages, control, jealousy, learned behaviour and power- needing to show 'who the boss is' (p.16). These causes reflect the multi level factors suggested by Heise's (1998) Ecological approach, with contributing factors at the individual, family, community and wider structural levels of society.   A variety of initiatives were suggested to reduce the level and impact of such violence including providing more information for men on the issue of domestic violence, work with extended families around the issue and men taking responsibility for their own behaviour (p.18). The role of the police was also mentioned, echoing the concerns expressed by the Traveller women. The need for a culturally appropriate model of working with traveller men and women was also suggested (p.20).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study into the experiences of abuse amongst women in the Travelling community correlate closely with the findings of other research into abuse amongst ethnic minorities. Lanier and Maume (2009) highlight the impact of social isolation on the level and experience of IPV. Wilson (1987:60; cited in Lanier and Maume, 2009) defined social isolation as 'the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society". The structural dislocation of poor and minority communities leads to the impacts that social isolation can have on such communities. The closeknit life style of the community together with the economic disadvantages and discrimination which they experience ensure that they are very strongly 'socially isolated'. Studies in the US have demonstrated that women living in communities with above average levels of social disadvantage were significantly more likely to be victims of domestic violence (Lanier and Maume, 2009; Miles-Doan, 1998). Added to these risk factors is the Traveller culture's gender role demarcation which emphasises women's primary responsibility as that of caring for children and as home makers, with little or no emphasis on women's role as independent workers outside the family home with financial independence. Low educational achievements also leave traveller women vulnerable in an increasingly literate and technological world.  These risk factors, which leave abused women with few or

no resources if they wish to leave the family home, are strengthened by the 'familial' and patriarchal culture of the community, and the religious emphasis on the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. Added to these 'internal' community barriers, there are a range of 'external' barriers within the wider community in which services for abused women are located. Traveller women and many agencies noted the particular difficulty of an inconsistent and what is often experienced as a discriminatory police response to traveller women, which was also commented upon by Watson and Parsons (2005). Police and Court procedures place further barriers, even if a woman manages to leave her abuser.

The fear of social work child protection procedures and an emphasis on the woman's behaviour rather than her partner's abuse, discourage women from disclosing abuse or contacting a refuge. Service providers working from a settled white cultural paradigm may, for example, consider certain coping styles to be maladaptive or they may fail to accommodate differences in family structures and relationships, child-rearing practices and communication styles (Cole, 2001; Sokoloff and Dopont, 2005a, 2005b). This has particular relevance for social work practice with Traveller women. As Cemlyn (2008:164) has pointed out, there is an 'othering' of Travellers as seen from a sedentarist perspective, but an engagement with "travellers' perspectives and daily experiences would identify the risks from having nowhere safe to live" (p.166). Cemlyn (2008) suggests approaching social work practice with Travellers from a human rights perspective, yet while this essential, it is not sufficient when dealing with the complexities of domestic violence. Understanding the dynamics of control within all violent relationships, together with the particular complexities which cultural norms, socio economic disadvantage and discrimination and a very close knit community with strict gender norms, is essential if social work is to be supportive in its interventions. For example in carrying out risk assessments, service providers often do not recognise the consequences for ethnic minority women of being perceived as having betrayed one's culture and community. The tendency of many services to structure their interventions to support women who leave abusive relationships rather than those who stay is also problematic (Cole, 2001; Sharma, 2001). Alienation from the dominant culture, lack of resources and dependence on extended family networks can render it exceptionally difficult for women from ethnic minority communities, such as Travellers to leave a family situation that is abusive.

**CONCLUSION:**

This study reflects very closely previous work on domestic abuse amongst ethnic minority women internationally. There is growing recognition that many models of intervention are conceived from an ethnocentric perspective and cognisance is not taken of cultural differences in terms of family structures, role expectations, social opportunities and restrictions.   A lack of awareness by social workers of the cultural context in which Traveller women live can exacerbate women's vulnerability. Specialist social work services within Traveller agencies, together with work with Traveller men as suggested by McCann's study, such as pre-marriage courses which emphasise the equality of women and men, and appropriate short and long term accommodation, are all needed to enable Traveller women to live safe lives. Yet without a realistic and informed awareness of both the dynamics of abuse and the implications of cultural norms in intervening in such abuse, social workers will not be able to make an effective contribution to Traveller women's lives.

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