

Overlap between mental health problems and employment issues for young people aged 16-24

A scoping review

March 2019

Background

Having meaningful work is widely recognised as a key part of wellbeing. However significant social changes mean that today's young people can face particular difficulties in finding their place in the labour market. Over 6% of young people age 16-18 are officially recorded as not in education employment or training (NEET) despite the recent rise in the age for continuing participation in education or training¹. In total, in mid-2018 there were 783,000 young people aged 16-24 who were defined as NEET in the UK². In addition, the UK has the third highest percentage of early leavers from education and training in the EU³. Overall we also know that three quarters of mental health problems start by the age of 24⁴, and young people's mental and emotional wellbeing can significantly affect their ability to apply for, obtain and maintain work. Particular groups of young people can be more affected by these issues.

The Department of Health and Social Care has funded a group of organisations led by the [Young People's Health Partnership](#) to develop a resource to help improve understanding about the link between mental health problems and employment in this age group, and to help those working to support young people.

This scoping review is designed to set out what existing research and data tells us about young people, mental health and work and to add to learning gathered from talking to young people, employers, charities, mental health providers and the Department of Work and Pensions. We want to understand the issues young people are facing and what professionals are doing to help them. We want to find new and promising practice and understand what employers need to support them to engage with young people affected by mental health issues. Specifically, this scoping review addressed the following questions:

- How many young people are affected by mental health problems and difficulties finding employment?
- What are the particular issues facing young people with mental health problems when they seek employment?
- What do we know about practical ways of helping young people with mental health problems into employment? And what helps them to stay in work once they find a job?
- Are there particular sub-groups of young people who require more tailored support?

Methods

This paper provides an overview of evidence on young people, mental health and work and what we know about the links between these issues. It is not a comprehensive review, although we have drawn on electronic database searches and the collation of official statistics undertaken as part of AYPH's 'Key Data on Young People 2017', and we have followed up leads from relevant existing reviews and from contacts in the field.

The paper provides a context for the subsequent work on this project including focus groups and interviews with young people, employers and mental health providers. It also helps to clarify key issues to highlight in the resource which will be developed from this project.

Definitions of the main terms are outlined in the box below.

Definitions

Young people: The World Health Organisation defines young people as those age 10-24 years and youth 15-24 years. There are 11.7 million young people in the UK making up almost 20% of the population. The focus of this paper is on 16-24 year olds as this is the age that the majority of young people make the transition into employment.

Mental health problems: Some of the most frequent mental health problems for young people include anxiety and depression and it is low level anxiety and depression that we have focused on in this project. However young people are also affected by eating disorders, conduct disorder, substance use disorders, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and difficulties associated with autistic spectrum disorder.

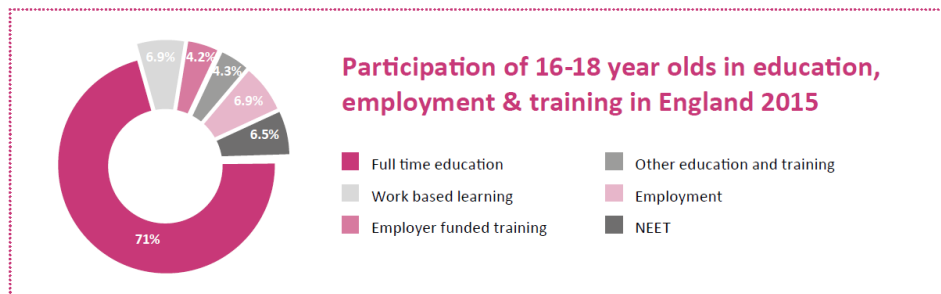
NEET: Not in education, employment or training. Young people in England are legally required to participate in education or training until they are 18.

How many young people are affected?

Mental health problems often arise in adolescence. Surveys suggest that a quarter of young women and 1 in 10 young men aged 16-24 have common mental health disorders⁵. Rates are similar in the general population and in the population of university students⁶. Young people from deprived areas and particular groups of young people including looked after

young people, young carers, LGBT young people and young people with special educational needs are more likely to have poor mental health than their peers⁷. Many young people with emotional and mental health needs have unidentified communication and interaction difficulties which can affect securing and retaining employment⁸.

As noted, the rate of young people age 16-18 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the UK has been slowly decreasing since 2009 and officially stood at 6.2% in 2018⁹. One of the challenges of understanding how many young people are NEET is that young people will move in and out of education and employment. Analysis for the Department of Education published in 2018 demonstrates this well. It showed that of students who completed Key Stage 4 in 2010/11 80% were not NEET by 2013/14, 5% were NEET for the whole 12 months and the remainder were spread fairly evenly between 1 and 11 months during the year¹⁰.



Source: Department for Education (2015). Participation in education, training and employment

63.3% of young people who are not in employment, education or training are also classified as economically inactive i.e. not actively seeking employment. In 2017 this included 211,000 young men and 279,000 young women ages 16-24¹¹. Since 2015 there has been a 10% rise in the number of young men who are NEET and economically inactive¹².

The statistics on the officially unemployed are slightly different than for those who are NEET. Official statistics on unemployment for young people (16-24 years) currently suggest a rate of 11.9%. However, figures can be calculated in a number of different ways and may be an underestimate. Most estimates suggest that approximately 1 million young people are unemployed (e.g. CBI) but the latest House of Commons briefing on the topic suggested 523,000 young people 16-24 were unemployed in August-October 2017 (a rate of 12%)¹³. Over the past two decades, the lowest officially recorded unemployment rate for young people was 11.6% in 2001 and the highest was 22.5% in 2011.

Data on the extent of the overlap between mental health problems and NEET status or employment issues specifically for the 16-25 age group are somewhat limited. However evidence suggests that young people with NEET status have a dramatic increase in the likelihood of mental health problems, with young NEET respondents particularly at risk and more than twice as likely to have these issues¹⁴. Similar results are found for young people who are NEET in other comparable high-income countries including Sweden, Australia and Ireland¹⁵. An analysis of the association between labour market trends and trends in young

people's mental health in ten European countries between 1983 and 2005 concluded that there was a correlation and that labour market trends may have contributed to the deteriorating trend in mental health among young people¹⁶. An analysis of Scottish longitudinal data has also highlighted that NEET experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental health in the long term (after 10 and 20 years). It also showed NEET young people were over 50% more likely to have a prescription for depression and anxiety than the non-NEET group¹⁷.

Data from the Public Health England East of England region from 2018 highlighted that 50% of all ages claiming employment support allowance were doing so due to mental or behavioural disorders. For those under the age of 24 this increased to 70%¹⁸. A separate survey of 18-24 year olds undertaken for Youth Access showed that those reporting employment rights problems also reported mental health problems and that employment problems were closely associated with loss of confidence¹⁹.

These statistics indicate that a significant proportion of the 16-25 age group are likely to experience the overlap between mental health problems and difficulties finding employment. An additional proportion will have found employment but will be struggling to cope with the demands.

The implications of low level mental health problems for young people's experience of the labour market

There are multiple, significant barriers to people with mental health problems participating in education, training and employment. These may also be exacerbated for young people as they will have had less life experience, less time to accumulate work experience, and less time to learn how to live with and manage their mental health problem. The barriers can include characteristics of the illness, stigma and discrimination, financial disincentives to working, and characteristics of the workplace²⁰. The relationship is likely to go both ways; having a mental health problem may make entry to the labour force difficult, or having a poor labour market experience may contribute to the development of mental health problems. As a result, young people with low level mental health problems need targeted approaches to address these barriers to participation.

Challenges of finding work and the impact of unemployment

Employment is one of the most important determinants of physical and mental health. Changes in the labour market over recent decades have impacted particularly heavily on young people not taking an educational route at this age. In addition, in recent recessions, youth unemployment has risen more steeply than all-age unemployment²¹. Young people who have been NEET for a substantial period are less likely to find work later in life, and more likely to experience poor long-term health²². However there are far fewer studies on the impact of unemployment, lower skilled jobs and insecure work for young people than for those who have been in the labour market longer.

Looking for work in this challenging context is particularly hard for those with low level mental health problems. Challenges are posed by the episodic nature of these disorders, and by the social anxiety and lack of confidence that they produce²³.

In addition, not finding work when you want it clearly has negative implications for wellbeing. The What Works for Wellbeing centre has highlighted the negative effect of unemployment. Unemployment is damaging to everyone's wellbeing and unlike the impact of many other life events their wellbeing is permanently reduced. In addition men's wellbeing is more affected and wellbeing may decline further for young people particularly if the spell of unemployment is longer. Wellbeing is highest for those making a transition from school into employment but young people who made the transition into non-career jobs were less happy than others²⁴.

Importance of the quality of employment

There is evidence that links the quality of work to wellbeing. 33% of young people aged 16-24 are on zero-hour contracts compared with 12% for all people in employment²⁵. Whilst research has highlighted that zero hour contracts which are properly managed can work for people there is some evidence that they work particularly well for older people who want more flexibility during or as they near retirement. The same research also highlights the need for clarity about employment status and rights for zero contract employees. Finally these contracts can lead to less access to training with only 75% of zero hour contracts allowing access to training²⁶. As young people enter the labour market it is clear that navigating these issues could be particularly challenging.

IPPR research highlighted the importance of permanent work for wellbeing. It found that younger workers in temporary jobs were 29% more likely to experience mental health problems than those in permanent jobs. It also highlighted that 1 in 5 younger workers aged 16-24 are underemployed (19%) – more than double the rate among workers aged 25 and above²⁷.

Risk of disengagement and exclusion

Research from 2011 identified one of the main issues of youth unemployment as disengagement from formal societal institutions – with many NEET young people (particularly 16 and 17 year olds) having little or no contact with existing institutions as they do not qualify for support. This creates a risk of disconnection for these young people and the research stressed the need for interventions to focus on prevention and building skills²⁸.

European work on social inclusion of young people highlighted that whilst young people can deal relatively well with short term unemployment lasting unemployment or disengagement has a strong negative impact on their future labour market outcomes and their wellbeing generally. Long term disengagement from the labour market results in financial strain and lower psychological and social wellbeing that can be long lasting.

What can support young people into work?

Helping build confidence and experience: Although there is a limited research base on what works specifically for young people, building confidence and relevant experience has been shown to help improve outcomes for adults with mental health problems²⁹. For young people this might include:

- supporting young people to engage in the labour market – whilst they are at school or in the school to work transition
- developing flexible work experience programmes that work for young people with anxiety and/or depression
- supporting basic literacy and numeracy skills
- alternative options to the basic academic route e.g. apprenticeships and vocational education and training

Supported employment: A literature review on how to help young people with mental health problems to find and keep employment identified two main models. The first was supported employment – the ‘place then train’ model. The second was pre-vocational training - the ‘train then place’ model. Existing evidence clearly supported the supported employment model, and there was less support for relying on pre-vocational training³⁰.

The supported employment model has been implemented in the UK as the Individual Placement and Support model, but in general this relates to people with severe and enduring mental health problems rather than young people just starting out on their careers³¹. Supported employment for young people might include³²:

- supported internships (currently provided for young people with SEND but could be extended)
- training of job coaches

Working with employers: As well as financial barriers to interventions resistance from adults and institutions can be a challenge and focusing on improving participation mechanisms for young people is important as part of this agenda. Some important considerations for success include^{33 34}:

- reducing stigma around mental health problems
- a greater emphasis on the motivation and active engagement of young people
- effective partnerships amongst all local stakeholders

- providing young people with a financial incentive

Overall, the key to improving employment outcomes for young people with low level mental health problems is ensuring interventions are good quality, with a clear focus on sustainable and supported employment, together with an approach to social inclusion which is broader and goes beyond the labour market – approaches such as mentoring, counselling and volunteering are often supported by not for profit organisations.

Challenges facing particular groups of young people

There are particular groups of young people who are affected disproportionately by mental health issues and who struggle to access work. This project will explore these barriers with young carers, young LGBT people, young people who have experience of the criminal justice system and young Gypsy and Travellers. This will help to further understand the particular issues affecting these groups.

Young people from marginalised groups

Department for Education analysis³⁵ published in 2018 demonstrates how marginalised and vulnerable groups of young people are more likely than their peers to not be in education, employment or training long term. Of the cohort they analysed of the young people who were NEET for a whole year, 15% were looked after children, 36% had been identified as Children in Need, 5% had accessed alternative education provision or a Pupil Referral Unit, 36% had Special Educational Needs, persistent absence or had been excluded and 3% had free school meals.

Evidence from the Office of National Statistics labour force survey also demonstrates that the proportion of 16-24 year olds who were NEET was higher for those with disabilities (29%), compared to those without (9%) 16-24 year olds without any qualifications were almost 2.5 times more likely to be NEET when compared to those who had at least GCSE qualifications In addition, the proportion of 16-24 year olds was highest for those who identified as having a Pakistani/Bangladeshi or a mixed background. Only 5% were not from any identified group.

Young adult carers

Being a young adult carer is a risk factor for young people's mental health. The 2017 GP Patient Survey found that 45% of young adult carers reported suffering from depression or anxiety compared to 31% of young people not in a caring role³⁶. Research into young adult carers and employment has also found that 51% of young adult carers reported having mental health problems³⁷.

For many young adult carers, having a mental health issue acts as an additional barrier to work, with lower educational attainment and challenges in managing work alongside a caring role, to limit their ability to get into and stay in employment. See Appendix 1 - *Data and Evidence Summary Young Adult Carers*, for more information.

“A couple of the young adult carers that I am supporting at the moment have really struggled to engage in education and employment as a result of a combination of their caring situation paired with depression and anxiety.”

Young Adult Carer Worker, Newcastle Carers

Long term NEET

The types of interventions that work to reduce the level of young people who are NEET vary for different groups of young people. Young people who have been NEET for a shorter amount of time may benefit from more effective sign posting. But this is not likely to impact young people who have been NEET for a longer time and greater effort is needed to reach the most vulnerable groups of young people who are more likely to be in this group.

Conclusions

Although there is a fairly extensive literature on the relationship between employment and mental health, there is less that is specifically focused on young people at the start of their working lives. Yet significant proportions – perhaps as many as a quarter of young people – start experiencing low level mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Helping them to establish themselves in the workforce is critical to their successful transition to adulthood. They need help in overcoming barriers including the challenges of applying for and starting work, as well as the challenges of adjusting to the workplace and finding the support they need to keep going. The benefits of engaging in work are clear, and it is worth investing in new ways of providing this support.

Emerging evidence suggests that there are a number of initiatives that may help, including preparing young people before they tackle the labour market, but also – and perhaps particularly importantly – supporting them through the first few months of their jobs, and helping them if the pathway is not clear. Certain groups of young people may be doubly challenged, through both mental health problems and the life situation they are in, such as young people separated from their families, or providing the role of carer. There is also some focus on the importance of collaborative cross agency working at a local level that can help to facilitate young people’s access to work and the support that they need to remain in work. The remainder of this project will build on this review and begin to establish the best ways to achieve the extra support these groups of young people need.

About the organisations undertaking this work

This work is part of the additional work programme of the [Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#), a group of 21 organisations that have been brought together to bring the voluntary sector's voice and expertise into national policy making. Together with the [Young People's Health Partnership](#) the project is being delivered by the following members of the Alliance:

- Carers Trust
- Friends, Families and Travellers
- The National LGB&T Partnership
- Association of Mental Health Providers
- Nacro
- NAVCA
- The Men's Health Forum

Emma Rigby, Ann Hagell and Rakhee Shah, Young People's Health Partnership

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Appendix 1 – Prepared by Carers Trust

Data and evidence summary – young adult carers and the issues they experience around employment and mental health

Introduction

Young adult carers are young people aged 16-25 who provide unpaid care to a family member who is disabled, physically or mentally ill, or misuses substances who are transitioning into adulthood.

The 2011 census identified more than 375,000 young adult carers in the UK, but this is believed to be a huge underestimate of the true numbers as many young adults hide their caring role or do not identify themselves as carers.

BBC News released findings from new research in September 2018¹ showing that 800,000 secondary school pupils identified themselves as young carers within a recent Nottingham University survey – the equivalent of six young carers in every secondary school classroom. This represents an increase when compared with similar research from 2010, which suggested there could be around 700,000 young carers within secondary schools in England.

Evidence suggests that young adult carers are particularly at risk of developing mental health issues, and experience particularly challenges getting into and staying in employment, often related to their caring role.

Young adult carers and education

Young adult carers' challenges in employment can be influenced by their previous experiences in education. Young adult carers can struggle to manage their caring role alongside their education, which has consequences for their attainment in school, college and university.

- Young carers responding to a survey missed or cut short many school days every year. The average was 48 school days missed or cut short because of their caring role².
- Young carers have significantly lower educational attainment at GCSE level than their peers, the equivalent of nine grades lower overall than their peers (i.e. the difference between nine B's and nine C's). The most frequently reported highest qualification held by the respondents to this survey were GCSEs at grade D–G (28%)³.
- 54% of young adult carers surveyed by the University of Nottingham on behalf of Carers Trust thought that they would have got better grades at school if it was not for their caring role⁴.

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- A survey by the National Union of Students found that only 36% of students in college and university with caring responsibilities feel able to balance their responsibilities, compared to 53% of their peers without a caring role⁵.
 - Research by Carers Trust and the University of Nottingham found that 29% of young adult carers had dropped out of a course at college or university because of their caring role – four times the national average⁶.

Young adult carers and employment

Young adult carers are twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) than their peers without caring responsibilities.

Young adult carers are vulnerable to periods of unemployment because of their caring responsibilities which can be misunderstood by employers. This is particularly difficult when a young adult carer is at the outset of their career and has not yet had the opportunity to establish themselves or their capabilities professionally.

In 2013, Carers Trust commissioned the University of Nottingham to undertake research to understand young adult carers' experiences of getting into and staying in work. These are collated in the report [‘Young Adult Carers and Employment’](#).

Findings in this report are informed by the responses of 295 young adult carers aged between 14 and 25 to a survey issued and analysed by the University of Nottingham.

Key findings include:

- Of 77 respondents to the survey who weren't in education, almost half (49.6% were unemployed. This represents 21% of survey respondents who were no longer in school.
- Of the 39 respondents who were in work, 44% had chosen the job because it was not far to travel, and 38% had also considered flexibility of working hours when choosing their job – so that they could continue to care. This tight criteria on potential jobs restricts the types of jobs young adult carers feel able to apply for and leaves them vulnerable to periods of unemployment.
- 32 young adult carers in work (67%) informed their managers of their caring role. 41% of these reported that their managers were not supportive.
- On average, young adult carers were absent from work for the equivalent of 17 days per year, and were late or had to leave early on approximately 79 days per year because of their caring responsibilities. This suggests that ongoing caring commitments can have a substantially disruptive effect on workplace attendance. Even when managers are sympathetic, there is a risk that young adult carers should be perceived as inherently unreliable or unsuitable for promotion.

Young adult carers and low level mental health problems

Being a young adult carer is a risk factor for young people's mental health.

The 2017 GP Patient Survey found that 45% of young adult carers reported suffering from depression or anxiety compared to 31% of young people not in a caring role⁷.

The University of Nottingham’s research into young adult carers and employment, also found that 51% of young adult carers reported having mental health problem⁸.

For many young adult carers, having a mental health issue acts as an additional barrier, with lower educational attainment and challenges in managing work alongside a caring role, to limit their ability to get into and stay in employment.

Claire Briston, a Young Adult Carer Worker at Newcastle Carers said:

“A couple of the young adult carers that I am supporting at the moment have really struggled to engage in education and employment as a result of a combination of their caring situation paired with depression and anxiety.”

How young adult carers can be supported to get into and stay in employment

Carers Trust have produced a guide, [Getting Into Work](#), designed to help young adult carers find a job and stay in work. The guide supports young adult carers with applications and interviews and provides guidance on employment policies, such as how to request flexible working.

Our [professional resources](#) regarding carers and employment also highlight a number of steps that employers and other professionals can take that would support young adult carers to get into and stay in work.

- **Targeted career advice** - targeted career advice should be available to young adult carers which addresses their caring responsibilities, recognises any additional skills they have developed in their caring role and supports them to consider all available options
- **Creating a carers policy for the workplace** - workplaces can have policies in place that specifically deal with issues that carers could face, for example periods of absence or requesting flexible working. By creating policies specifically for carers, workplaces show that they support, value and understand their needs and reduce uncertainties and stresses that young adult carers might have when applying for jobs. These can be supported by local carers services and other organisations that support carers.
- **Identify young adult carers, and ensure they receive the assessment and support they are entitled to** – young adult carers approaching 18 years of age are entitled to a Transition Assessment under the Care Act 2014. This assessment not only prepares young adult carers for the transition between children’s and adult services, but also examines any impact that their caring role is having on their mental health and wellbeing and provides young adult carers with the opportunity to discuss their short and longer term aspirations in education and work. A Carer’s Assessment, which young adult carers over the age of 18 are entitled to under the Care Act 2014, should also examine whether the young adult carer’s caring role is affecting their health or ability to engage with education and work. Professionals working with 16-25 year olds, including those in mental health settings, should take steps to identify anyone they suspect as being a young adult carer and refer them for appropriate assessment and support from their local authority.

Queries and further information

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Bennett, Acting Head of Policy or Lindsey Crawford, Policy and Development Officer, lbennett@carers.org or lcrawford@carers.org

References – Appendix 1

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Appendix 2 – Prepared by Friends Families and Travellers

Data and evidence summary – young Gypsies and Travellers and the issues they experience around employment and mental health

Introduction

Young Gypsies and Travellers are defined for this study as aged 16-25 years old.

There are around 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in England¹. A number of different groups fall under the umbrella term 'Gypsies and Travellers'. These include Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsies and Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and Travellers, New Travellers, Boaters and Travelling Showpeople.

Although only Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities have been established as distinct ethnic groups through case law, Scottish Gypsies and Travellers and Welsh Gypsies and Travellers would meet the same criteria and therefore should be considered as members of protected characteristic groups.

Whilst New Travellers, Boaters and Travelling Showpeople are not considered to be ethnic groups, many members of these communities experience similar levels of disadvantage as ethnic Gypsies and Travellers. Many families within New Traveller or Travelling Showpeople communities have been on the road for three or more generations and may one day be considered to be distinct ethnic groups.

Of almost any group in England, young Gypsies and Travellers face some of the greatest issues in accessing and benefiting from the education system. The impact of this follows young Gypsies and Travellers into their working life and can place an additional strain on their mental health.

Young Gypsies and Travellers and education

Young Gypsies and Travellers face many challenges within the education system.

Nearly nine out of every ten children and young people from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background surveyed for the Children's Society reported having suffered racial abuse and nearly two thirds also reported having been bullied or physically attacked².

Around one quarter of Gypsies and Travellers lead nomadic lifestyles and within this around 3000 families live on unauthorised land, largely to due to a chronic lack of site provision^{3 4}. These children are subject to constant evictions, making it difficult to go to school, breaking up continuity in the curriculum and leaving them behind their peers.

Young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities often leave school just before entry to secondary education. Young Irish Travellers in a 2015 study by Pavee Point indicated that peer pressure played a role in them leaving school. Participants said that when all of their friends were leaving, they felt they should also leave. Several participants said that there was no pressure at home for them to stay in school⁵.

Until recent years, the majority of local authorities had a dedicated Traveller Education Service (TES) who supported parents to access school places for children, supported children in the classroom and gave advice and support to staff. This was a useful resource for many Gypsies and Travellers, but can now only be found in some local authority areas⁶. Teachers and those in positions of authority can often have low expectations from young Gypsies and Travellers in the classroom and may not push young Gypsies and Travellers to their realise their full potential⁷.

The Race Disparity Audit and the 2011 Census revealed that:

- Gypsies or Irish Travellers over the age of 16 had the highest proportion of people with no qualifications for any ethnic group at 60%. This is considerably higher than for England and Wales as a whole, where the equivalent was 23%⁸.
- 47% of Gypsies and Travellers aged 16-24 had no qualifications compared to 11% of England and Wales as a whole⁹.
- Gypsies and Travellers were the ethnic groups with the lowest proportion of respondents who were economically active at 47 per cent, compared to 63 per cent for England and Wales as a whole¹⁰.
- Pupils from the Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller ethnic groups had the lowest average score in GCSEs of any ethnic group in 2016/7¹¹.
- Pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ethnic groups had the highest 'overall absence' rates and 'persistent absence' rates of any ethnic group in 2016/7¹².

Young Gypsies and Travellers and employment

With these figures in mind, the challenges for young Gypsies and Travellers to enter the employment market are huge. Not only are many young Gypsies and Travellers lacking in formal qualifications, we know from our local work that issues with low levels of literacy can potentially further widen the gap to employment and lead to increased anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

The 2011 Census revealed that:

- Gypsies and Irish Travellers were the ethnic groups with the lowest proportion of respondents who were economically active at 47 per cent compared to an average of 63 per cent amongst all residents of England and Wales¹³.
- The most common reason for Gypsies and Irish Travellers being economically inactive is looking after the home or family at 27 per cent¹⁴.
- Gypsies and Travellers are twice as likely to be self-employed compared to the majority population in England and Wales¹⁵.

Studies have consistently highlighted that young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities often leave school before entry to secondary education¹⁶. Boys and young men often begin to work alongside their fathers, learning their trades, and girls and young women often stay at home helping their mothers run the family home and caring for younger siblings, children or other family members.

Sadly, there is an acceptance among many young Gypsies and Travellers that they are unlikely to find employment, in part due to leaving school earlier and having fewer qualifications. Participants in a study by Pavee Point equated employment with having to hide their identity and strongly believed that a settled person “would get any job before one of us”¹⁷.

Fear of facing prejudice is well placed. In 2018, the Equality and Human Rights Commission carried out research on social attitudes which found that 44% of the British public surveyed openly expressed negative feelings towards Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, more than double that of people expressing similar sentiments for any other protected characteristic group¹⁸. High levels of discrimination can impact particularly on self-employed Gypsies and Travellers who may find it difficult to gain the trust of new customers.

Young Gypsies and Travellers and low level mental health problems

Within Gypsy and Traveller communities, speaking about mental health or admitting poor mental health can often have a stigma attached to it¹⁹. In Friends Families and Travellers’ experience, Gypsy and Traveller men and boys in particular may find these conversations difficult because of their traditional role as providers for the family and a desire to be seen as strong. Some Gypsy and Traveller young people report feeling shame when speaking about mental health and suicide²⁰. It is clear that there is a need for work to challenge stigma around mental health and to open up dialogue around poor mental health.

Mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression are common in young adults across the board²¹. In the absence of centrally collected and disaggregated data on the health of Gypsies and Travellers, it is difficult to make a precise statement on the levels of prevalence of poor mental health. However, in the biggest piece of research of its kind, academics from the University of Sheffield found that Gypsies and Travellers are nearly three times more likely to be anxious than the general population, and just over twice as likely to be depressed, with women twice as likely as men to experience mental health problems²².

Additional issues faced by young Gypsy and Traveller people may lead to an increase in poor mental health, meaning that finding, entering and staying in employment becomes more difficult. Participants in a focus group carried out for this project by Friends Families and Travellers stressed how important young Gypsies and Travellers felt it was that schools supported children into employment and participants emphasised that support needs to come as early as possible for Gypsy and Traveller children.

Obstacles around literacy for young Gypsies and Travellers may mean they (and their family members) have little or no knowledge of mental health issues, diagnosis or what services are available. This may result in young people suffering in silence, through fear of being stigmatised. From Friends, Families and Travellers’ experience, within Gypsy and Traveller

communities mental health is rarely openly discussed, instead being referred to as ‘bad nerves’ or ‘stress’. Young people suffering from low level mental health issues may not be aware they have a condition or that they can access support. This will compound any stress, anxiety and depression.

In addition, if not regularly attending school, young Gypsies and Travellers will miss out on any Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and therefore not be aware of how to improve mental health.

Fear of discrimination in the workplace for being a Gypsy or Traveller may lead to poorer mental health. Our focus group identified lack of self-confidence as being a big barrier to entering the work place, and this is exacerbated by young people feeling they have to hide their ethnic identity.

How young Gypsies and Travellers can be supported to get into and stay in employment

Building upon the findings of our focus group, we have developed a number of recommendations to support young Gypsies and Travellers into and to stay in employment. These include:

- There was generally a strong feeling from our focus group that schools are the key to supporting children into employment and more support needs to come from them as early as possible for Gypsy and Traveller children. It is critical that staff in schools and other organisations understand and are supportive of Gypsy and Traveller culture.
- Training for employers around mental health issues should be more widely used. One participant from our focus group had real concerns that employers and peers in the workplace are not aware of poor mental health issues or taking them into account. The young Irish Traveller participant said *“Employers need to realise what special educational needs (SEN), depression and anxiety are. Physical disabilities are accepted and catered for in work, but people with hidden mental health problems just get badly treated even if they do manage to get a job.”*
- Employers offering improved apprenticeships and internships with less onus placed on formal qualifications also came out of the focus group as an important means to supporting young Gypsies and Travellers to enter employment.
- Improving access to information around employment opportunities that young Gypsy and Traveller people can reach is also critical. For example, the participants in our focus group talked about how a local hub with integrated support from employment and advice services would be something they would feel comfortable accessing.
- Including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller categories in ethnicity monitoring to assess if services are already being utilised by members of these communities and addressing an underrepresentation where it exists.
- In a 2010 report, the Department for Education recommends offering individualised and accessible activities and curriculum content for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, as well as facilitating family/community engagement with schools²³.

Queries and further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact fft@gypsy-traveller.org.

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