

# Traveller Mental Wellness Continuum Framework: A Cultural Intervention Model of Mental Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention for Members of the Travelling Community in Ireland

Principle Investigators: Professor Margaret Barry, University of Galway, Ireland and  
Mr Jacopo Villani, HSE Mental Health Service Coordinator for  
Travellers in CHO2

Researchers: Dr Tuuli Kuosmanen, University of Galway, Ireland and  
Ms Margaret McDonagh, Community Development Worker,  
Balbriggan Travellers Project

Funded by: HSE National Office of Suicide Prevention  
(NOSP) and the HSE National Office of Mental  
Health Engagement and Recovery (MHER).



HSE  
Mental Health  
Engagement  
& Recovery

The study was conducted with the support of the Network of HSE Mental Health Service Coordinators for Travellers, Offaly Traveller Movement and nine Traveller Organisations nationally.

## Background

This collaborative research project set out to explore the views of Travellers on the strategies needed for Travellers to achieve optimal mental wellbeing and prevent suicide. This project aims to inform the development of a Traveller Wellness Continuum Framework, rooted in Travellers' views and knowledge on the determinants of mental health and encompassing all aspects of Travellers' life and cultural identity, which the community perceives as essential to prevent suicide and achieve and sustain positive mental health over the longer term. The findings from this research will identify, from the perspective of Travellers, the actions needed to improve Travellers' mental health and wellbeing, reduce suicide rates, and improve Travellers' engagement with services.



## Aim and Objectives

This study aims to create the research base for the development of a culturally sensitive continuum of mental wellness and suicide prevention strategies for and by members of the Irish Traveller community. More specifically this study has the following objectives:

- To explore the views of Travellers and Traveller groups on the factors and strategies needed for Travellers to achieve optimal mental wellbeing and prevent suicide, including timely access to mental healthcare services.
- To examine the meaning and nature of culturally appropriate suicide prevention and mental healthcare services from the perspectives of members of the Traveller community.
- To identify the core requirements for the development of a comprehensive continuum of care for Travellers (mental health promotion, suicide prevention, treatment, recovery) which can be integrated into mainstream health services and community actions.

## Design and Methods

This study employs a community-based participatory research approach consisting of 13 participatory workshops, augmented by five individual interviews, with 87 adult members of the Traveller community. Study participants ranged in age from 18-78 years (mean = 33 years) with the majority (83%) being female. Ten Traveller organisations were involved in organizing the participatory workshops across 10 different locations nationally. Seventeen Traveller peer researchers were engaged in the collection and analysis of the data, working in collaboration with the core research team, which also included a Traveller research assistant.

## Findings

The findings from this qualitative peer research study identify a number of critical issues to be addressed in order to improve Traveller mental health and wellbeing and reduce the risk of poor mental health and suicide. The data indicate the importance of the following key factors: Traveller cultural identity and expression; the right to equal opportunities and life choices; the detrimental effect of discrimination on Traveller's mental health and wellbeing; the changes needed in how health and community services are delivered.

The findings suggest a range of community supports, services and intersectoral actions that members of the Traveller community deem to be essential in promoting and protecting their mental health and wellbeing. The importance of addressing the social determinants of mental health comes through clearly from the data analysis, including improving educational, training and employment opportunities, improving Traveller accommodation, curbing discrimination, celebrating and reviving Traveller culture and improving access to culturally appropriate mental healthcare. These strategies call for coordinated intersectoral action to improve Travellers' mental health and wellbeing.

## Dissemination

Villani, J., Kuosmanen, T., McDonagh, M, Barry, M.M. (in prep). *Traveller Mental Wellness Continuum Framework: A qualitative peer research study of Travellers' views*. Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Galway (publication due in 2023).

McDonagh, M., Villani, J. and Kuosmanen, T. (2022). Translating research into action: Traveller mental health study results. *National Traveller Mental Health Conference*, Dublin, 22 November 2022.

## Patient Public Involvement

This study was conducted in close collaboration with members of the Traveller community including, Offaly Traveller Movement and nine Traveller Organisations nationally, together with the national Network of HSE Mental Health Service Coordinators for Travellers.

Traveller peer researchers were involved in both the data collection and analysis stages of the study, working in collaboration with the core research team, which also included a Traveller research assistant. The involvement of peer researchers together with the support of the Traveller Organisations and the Research Steering Group, which had a strong Traveller representation, increased the relevance and acceptability of the research project.

## Knowledge Translation

Based on the study findings and consultations with the Research Steering Group, a number of specific actions are identified, supported by reference to existing policy frameworks and strategies.

An overarching recommendation from this study is that there is a need for the implementation of a national plan to urgently address the specific mental health needs of the Traveller community. There was a clear view that national plans need to be realised through a process that is owned and led by members of the community and supported by national and local agencies. The project report will be submitted to the HSE National Office of Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and key findings from will also be disseminated among key stakeholders nationally.



Offaly Traveller Movement



Connecting for Life