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**Nine Gypsy and Traveller Young People Interview their
Peers about the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill –
Section 4.**

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For us. By us

Peer Research
Young people in
North Yorkshire
VOICES



"I wish we didn't face so much aggression"

We are OK if we are invisible and pretend, we are not really Travellers



Respect and dignity?

Evicted from our own land because of planning rules. Then deemed 'intentional homeless', so now cannot get on housing waiting list.

"We have no rights now. We are dirt to most people."

I thought we had some kind of rights or something... like they can't make rules that go against us? ... who else is this going to make a difference to?

Nine Gypsy and Traveller young people interview their peers about the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - section 4.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research explored young Gypsy and Traveller people's knowledge and understanding of Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, prior to its Royal Assent.

The peer research was carried out by nine young people from Romany Gypsy or Scottish Gypsy Traveller and Irish Traveller backgrounds. The aim was to work with individuals who had little or no interaction with statutory or third sector services. The research used random sampling to carry out 29 interviews spanning different ages, genders, residential and socioeconomic backgrounds. All researchers and interviewees were based in North Yorkshire.

The research found that none of the interviewees held any real knowledge of the Act, which would situate at least six of them and their families immediately on the front line for criminal convictions as a result of being statutorily homeless.

"We need a home; I can't keep doing this. I have two babies, one a new-born. It's too hard, we have never lived this life. But my mam and dad can't have us on their place. Her mam and dad live on a site [but] we can't go on their slab."

Male participant - Aged 20

All 29 interviewees expressed negative feelings towards the act, including the two who felt it would have no impact on their lives at present. It is worth noting that the two young people who felt it would have no impact on them personally were of higher socioeconomic backgrounds and lived in houses owned either by themselves or their families.

The report recommends scrapping Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, as it will have a detrimental impact on Gypsy and Traveller families living roadside. The level of despair felt currently will only serve to create greater divides in community cohesion, ultimately leaving Gypsy and Traveller families to feel that England does not have a space for them. Interviewees felt that the Government needs to look seriously at how they address the issue of statutorily homeless Gypsy and Traveller families, because simply making their only options criminal will not stop it being the only option they have. This report calls upon the Government to address the lack of accommodation as the real response to statutorily homeless Gypsies and Travellers.

This report also calls for a roll-out of the Negotiated Stopping approach across the country, which makes space for Gypsy and Traveller people to stop safely and legally.



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INTRODUCTION

Peer Research: For Us, By Us. This research came about following several small-scale projects. This included a Community Journalism course in Doncaster, South Yorkshire and research looking at the impact of lockdown on young peoples' mental health. Both projects were carried out without true co-design, this meant that interviewees felt no ownership or affinity with the research. The Community Journalism project sparked a real interest in how and why research was carried out. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore young Gypsy and Traveller people's views and reactions to Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The research came about after a group of Gypsy and Traveller young people were participants in different research projects. They enjoyed being asked but struggled to find relevance to their lives within the questions.

Through this Moving for Change project, participants set about upskilling themselves to co-design the research that produced this report.

The research subject needed to be relevant and useful to Moving for Change, so armed with this one criterion, the young people set about exploring issues within their own lives.

They decided that the then proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act¹ had the biggest impact on their lives and fitted well with Moving for Change objectives.

The researchers hoped to give a voice to other young people and to share those voices with as many individuals and organisations as possible.

The researchers were keen to ensure that those being interviewed had little or no interaction with Gypsy and Traveller activism and organisations. To find appropriate interviewees, the researchers went to family and friends and held informal conversations to identify whether they would meet this requirement, by asking what help they get and from where.



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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To share voices of young Gypsy and Traveller people.
- To explore issues that matter to young Gypsy and Traveller people.
- To co-design a training session and interview process with young community members.
- To create a report in which Gypsy and Traveller young people felt heard.
- To interview people who do not typically get approached to voice their views.
- To gain an insight into young Gypsy and Traveller people's understanding and views on Part 4 of the proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.
- To work with young Gypsy and Traveller people to create a report they can be proud of and which represents their findings accurately.

METHODOLOGY

Nine Gypsy and/or Traveller young people were upskilled in peer research.

They attended 15 training sessions in total, covering subjects such as data protection, data capture, open and closed questions, choosing a sample, the pros and cons of different media, designing a questionnaire, putting your participant at ease and data analysis.

The researchers comprised of five males and four females. Seven were aged 10-15 and two were aged 16-20. Their housing situations also varied: one on a private site and two on socially-rented, four in bricks and mortar housing, and two individuals living roadside.

The young researchers then went on to interview 29 individuals. All interviewees were within the researcher's own age groups, and all were known to the researchers personally.

Researchers used a wide sample group and recorded their interviews electronically for accuracy.

To give participants a safe space to be open and say as much as they felt comfortable, the interview was designed to be short, with open-ended questions. The participants could decline any questions that they wished.



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SAMPLE

The researchers conducted 29 interviews.

Age		Gender		Ethnicity		Housing Situation	
10-15	8	Male	13	English/ Romany Gypsy	10	House/Flat	9
16-20	13	Female	15	English Traveller	2	Site with Planning	5
		Non-Binary	1			Site without Planning	4
21-25	8			Irish Traveller	11	Roadside	6
				Scottish Traveller	5		
				Traveller	1		

The interviews were purposefully carried out with Gypsy and Traveller young people, who were not engaged in organisations or activism. Attempts were made to find interviewees from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, however because finances are often taboo in different cultures, the researchers kept track of this using their own personal knowledge. This was done through noting whether people were on benefits or not, as well as other visual indicators of wealth.

DATA COLLECTION

The researchers carried out one to one open conversation to attain the data. A simple set of questions were used to guide each conversation. Researchers also used a consent form to gain consent from the participant, which was also used to confirm they had received their “thank you” for their time.



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DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data was entered into a spreadsheet, however most of the data was qualitative. This was broken down into responses to specific prompts within the questionnaires. A team of three then worked through the data and pulled out any themes that arose.

RESULTS

Question: If you could change your housing situation, would you? What would be your ideal? Do you think your ideal is achievable - if not, why not?

The six participants who were roadside would all change their circumstances on some level, ranging from receiving less aggression from locals, as well as longer stays in one place. Very few wanted to live a different way and enjoyed seeing new places and moving with friends and family. They were all unmarried with no domestic responsibilities.

"It would be nice to have places that we're safe, we love moving about...It's just a bit trashing [frightening] sometimes when you hear people shouting stuff at night."

Female – Aged 17.

"Most of the time I would not change a thing. There are times when you get tormented and it's like we don't deserve to live, we don't deserve to breathe the same air as them. Maybe[having] somewhere proper would change that."

Female – Aged 19.

Only two roadside respondents would change their circumstances completely.

"We need a home; I can't keep doing this. I have two babies, one a new born. It's too hard. We have never lived this life. But my mam and dad can't have us on their place. Her mam and dad live on a site, we can't go on their slab."

Male – Aged 20.



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"We had a place, but it got turned down for planning. The people here said we can't go on the site, and we can't get a house with the council."

Male – Aged 13.

The family referenced above had owned land which they were evicted from due to rejected planning permission to pitch there. The council deemed them intentionally homeless. The site that their parents live on is managed privately with strict criteria to gain a pitch.

Four participants on Local Authority (LA) sites and three in social housing would change their situation.

"It's horrible, I can't have a horse, we can't have a fire. I'd loves my dad to buy his own place so we can do what we want, I would miss [name] though. He's my best old friend."

Male – Aged 10, living on an LA site.

"It's torture, you can't turn a motor, can't park nowhere. If someone wants to chat to someone you are stuck there for 10 minutes whiles they do."

Male – Aged 19, living on an LA site.

"Who would choose to live like this, the shed be's freezing, they are mouldy and the paint be's dropping off. If we had a place we owned it would be done up and that."

Female – Aged 15, living on an LA site.

The reasoning often revolved around site management issues, lack of places to play or work and general upkeep.

It is worth noting that of those who lived in private accommodation, whether in houses or on private sites, very few said they would change their circumstances. The responses from this group are below:

"No I wouldn't change it, it's perfect as it is. We have a place of our own, my mam and dad, my two sisters have their own houses on there with their husbands and I'm getting married next year and will get a house built. I wouldn't want to live any other way!"

Male - Aged 21, living in a privately housed with a site.

Only two of those in private accommodation would make any changes. One was regarding the permanence of their current home, whilst the other was simply a dream of having a home of their own one day.



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"We would love a place of our own, we just got married so we need to earn it and then find somewhere and that. But it's a long way off. In the summer we would love to go up and down the country and that, I love being on camps and seeing new people. I've never done it as a married woman. Only with my mam and dad doing everything so don't know how I could manage."

Female – Aged 18.

"I would let us stay here forever. We don't have proper [temporary] planning on here. It's hard. I go to school, I try to make friends, [but] we could be put off soon. My ma is always upset when she comes back from the planning people."

Female – Aged 11.

Question: Do you know about the new Police Crime and Sentencing Bill that's being discussed in parliament?

Of the 29 respondents, only six were aware of the bill, and those who were aware of it only had a vague understanding of the legislation. The general response was of complete lack of awareness to this potentially life-changing legislation. 21 responses to this question were:

"What?" "eh?" "Not a clue what you are on about."

The most aware of the responses was:

"Is that the thing where they are trying to make it harder to camp up and down?"

Female – Aged 18.

This is incredibly worrying, given the massive impact that the legislation could have on these young people's lives.

The young people were read a short description of Part 4 of the Act:

Part 4 of the Bill creates a new criminal offence of "trespass with intent to reside". It will make it a criminal offence for a person aged 18 or over to reside or intend to reside on land without consent of the occupier of the land if they have, or intend to have, at least one vehicle with them on the land; and they have caused or are likely to cause significant damage, disruption, or distress.



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This will be accompanied by powers to seize a vehicle (including a trailer) as well as imprisonment and fines.

In addition, Police powers of eviction under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) are to be increased, including increasing the period in which trespassers directed away from the land under sections 61 and 62A of the CJPOA must not return from 3 months to 12 months.

Question: How does that make you feel?

After reading the short description above, 17 needed to reread it themselves or have it broken down and explained.

All 29 expressed negative feelings about the proposals, even those who felt it would have no impact on their life, either now or in the future.

"It's bad for them that lives up and down the roads, they don't want us here, do they? We are ok if we are invisible and pretend we are not really Travellers.... They can't do that, surely to God?"

Male – Aged 21.

Reactions from the majority of respondents were of confusion, sadness, and disbelief.

"What do reside mean? ... So a camp? Can I read that myself f... So we don't even have to do anything wrong. Just people thinks we might. And you can have your home took and go to prison."

Female – Aged 18.

"They can't do it; how can they do that. So, all the Travellers on camps, nowhere to go, trailer parks won't let them on, you can't double up on sites, no yard are getting planning, where do them people go. To prison? Didn't someone else do that? Made laws to make people criminals and then put them behind bars?"

Male – Aged 21.

"I thought we had some kind of rights or something. I thought they had to treat us like Black people or something. Like they can't make rules that go against us. But this is just about making Travellers lives hard, who else would this make a difference to? Who else lives would this put on its head? I don't understand what we are supposed to do, we are not bad people.... I don't know."

Female – Aged 19.



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“Mary mother of God are they trying to do away with us? We have no rights now; we are dirt to most people. We will have nothing left will we.”

Female – Aged 18.

Respondents generally felt that the legislation was harsh, unhelpful, and a way to end the Gypsy and Traveller cultures in England.

Question: What do you think it means to you now?

Only two of the 29 respondents felt it had no impact upon their lives currently. It was noted by researchers that they were higher in socioeconomic scale and lived in houses that they owned.

The remaining 27 respondents all gave examples of how it could impact them, ranging from going to visit family, family fallouts, heading to horse fairs, religious gatherings commonly called missions and conventions, and attending funerals and weddings.

“So, we are on this bit of land and the people who own it say they don’t want us here because we might do something wrong, so my mam and dad get locked up? Where do we go? Who has us? How long would they get?”

Female – Aged 10.

“I don’t know, it means... where do we go? We don’t have nowhere. Does this mean we won’t be able; I don’t know... don’t no one want us?”

Male – Aged 14.

“So if say this, my family decide they don’t want me and [my husband] on here no more, we falls out or have a row or something. We can’t just go on any site, what if someone don’t like how we live, don’t like we are two married men. I always planned to just pull on a bit of ground till it calmed down and I could come back. Where...does that leave me and [name]. So being Gay is no longer a criminal offence but being a Gay Traveller man with nowhere to call home. That makes me a criminal!”

Male – Aged 19.

“So if they dos that? Where would my two babies go? And then they takes the trailer, do they impound it like motors? How long do they keep that for? Do we have to pay fortunes to get our babies and their homes back?”

Female – Aged 18.



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Question: How do you think this will affect your future?

Only one of the respondents felt it would not impact their future. This person had lived in bricks and mortar housing for a number of years and was financially able to get accommodation they were happy with.

The other responses ranged from stunned silences followed by simple responses such as “*not good*” or “*in every way*”.

A couple were able to offer more in-depth responses which were all negative:

“My husband won’t travel, he won’t risk it. He never took a penny chew, won’t do nothing that he thinks would get him in trouble. It will be a very lonely miserable life. It frightening to think what would come next.”

Female – Aged 18.

“We need to find somewhere to live, when will this be done? Can they arrest them now? Will they do it now? When is it coming in?”

Male – Aged 13.

“Do we have no rights, are we nothing in this world? We are not bad people, we try to do our best. I have a job, I try to be a good person, I go to church. What harm would I be doing on a bit of old ground? But someone can say they might do something wrong so arrest them.... We all are capable of maybe doing something wrong, we are humans, not one perfect.”

Male – Aged 19.

Question: How do you think this will affect Gypsy and Traveller people’s future?

24 respondents were unable to answer this question fully. Most gave no reply other than a head shake, followed by saying “*I don’t know*”. Others chose expletives to express their feelings.

Four respondents expressed hopelessness:

“It will be the end of the last bit of freedom we have.”

Male – Aged 17.



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“And they wonder why people are killing themselves left right and centre, what are we scum to them? Just something to get rid of?”

Male – Aged 19.

“We don’t have one [a future] if this comes in do we, not one we would choose!”

Female – Aged 18.

“Do we have a future if this comes in? Didn’t they make it that you have to travel to be a Traveller? No sites anywhere, no caravan clubs will let us on. How do we have a future as Travelling people?”

Female – Aged 20.

One respondent raised a solution:

“We need to have more proper places to live don’t we. We need more sites.”

Male – Aged 13.

Only one response was slightly hopeful:

“It’s bad for some, it’s bad for them in trailers, I think. But it might mean they pass more places. In Ireland, they passed a lot of places before they did this. Might do that here.”

Male – Aged 21.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations as a result of the data gathered in this report would be a request to scrap Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, as it will have a detrimental impact on Gypsy and Traveller families and individuals living roadside. The level of despair felt will only serve to create greater divides in community cohesion and leave Gypsy and Traveller families feeling very much like England does not have a space for them.

The government needs to look seriously at how they address the issue of homeless Gypsy and Traveller families, as simply making their only options criminal will not stop it being the only option they have.

This report also asks that the Government rolls out the Negotiated Stopping approach across the country.



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Any future “consultation” needs to be conducted in a real and meaningful way to enable those who are to be most affected to have a voice.

Better communications between communities are key in ensuring we have a system that is fair and equitable for all, not just those with access and knowledge to briefing papers and support agencies. Those affected need to be made aware of changes to legislation, policies, and practices at an early stage. The communications also need to be in a format that is assessable and understandable to everyone.

It was also felt that those with power needed to collaborate with the Gypsy and Traveller communities to find solutions other than criminalisation. It is worth noting that going to a “support agency” or “head person” was felt to be not enough. The government needs to ensure that the message is clear and accessible to everyone affected.

And finally, it was keenly expressed that the overarching message was a simple one:

“Please give us some respect and dignity, we are human beings, not a problem to be pushed out of existence.”



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BIBLIOGRAPHY

1 [The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

APPENDICES

Research Questions:

- *Name*
- *Age*
- *Gender*
- *Ethnicity*
- *Housing Situation*
- *If you could change your housing situation, would you? What would be your ideal? Do you think your ideal is achievable - if not, why not?*
- *Do you know about the new Police Crime and Sentencing Bill that's being discussed in parliament?*
- *Read short description*
- *"Part 4 of the Bill creates a new criminal offence of "trespass with intent to reside". It will make it a criminal offence for a person aged 18 or over to reside or intend to reside on land without consent of the occupier of the land if they have, or intend to have, at least one vehicle with them on the land; and they have caused or are likely to cause significant damage, disruption, or distress.*
- *This will be accompanied by powers to seize a vehicle (including a trailer) as well as imprisonment and fines.*
- *In addition, Police powers of eviction under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) are to be increased, including increasing the period in which trespassers directed away from the land under sections 61 and 62A of the CJPOA must not return from 3 months to 12 months"*
- *How does that make you feel?*
- *What do you think it means to you now?*
- *How do you think this will affect your future?*
- *How do you think this will affect Gypsy and Traveller people's future?*



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We exist to improve the quality of life for nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and the communities in which they live across the UK.

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