



# How do members of the Traveller community experience accessing counselling in the UK and what, if any are the implications for psychotherapeutic practitioners?

## AIM:

To explore if members of the Traveller Community seeking and wanting to access counselling and psychotherapy, experience any barriers in doing so; to better inform practitioners of any barriers experienced by members of this community.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

Three overarching themes emerged from our data seemingly impacting on participants' seeking out counselling services. The community's attitudes towards mental health problems and participants being unable to talk to about mental and emotional issues appeared to lead our participants fearing community judgement; in turn preventing them from seeking outside help. External barriers appeared to rest in the discrimination experienced by our participants from authorities such as the police and other statutory services; evoking feelings of being pushed out and misunderstood. Those participants who did successfully access counselling described difficulties within the psychotherapeutic alliance, due to practitioners' misunderstanding of the Travellers' way of life; apparently leading to participants' growing weariness and reluctance in seeking support from sources outside their community.

## DESIGN METHODOLOGY:

Semi-structured interviews were audio recorded with four self identified members of the Traveller community who had attempted to and/or had accessed counselling. Interviews were transcribed and data was extracted using thematic analysis informed by IPA principles (Smith et al 2009).

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS:

The generalisability of our findings may be limited by the relatively small number of research participants (McLeod 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS:

The findings suggest negative attitudes towards mental health issues within the Traveller community played a role in discouraging our respondents from engaging in counselling and psychotherapy. Practical barriers to accessing services such as low literacy, financial instability and lack of IT skills also inhibited our respondents from engaging in mental health services. It seems such services are perceived as authoritative. A pre-existing lack of trust in statutory services due to discrimination experienced by our respondents added to the distrust. The distrust appears to have been increased through respondents experiencing a lack of understanding from practitioners within the therapeutic relationship in relation to the lived experience of Travellers.



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