

A 2024 Study on Traveller Mental Health in North Cork: What We Learned

Why This Matters

Irish Travellers are a native ethnic group in Ireland who face serious discrimination. This impacts their mental health and suicide rates are up to 7 times higher for Traveller men and 5 times higher for Traveller women compared to the general population.

What We Did

This study looked at the mental health of **35 adult Travellers living in the North Cork area between January and September 2024**. The research was supported by Travellers of North Cork, a Traveller led human rights organisation. The study was designed by Rachael Dunne, a then medical student at University College Cork, and Dr Alin Dumitrescu, a consultant psychiatrist at St Stephen's Hospital Glanmire and the clinical director of North Cork Mental Health Services. Participants took part in an anonymous survey (no names) to explore their **mental health, risks for suicide, substance use, and experiences in getting help for their mental health**.

A score was created to try to predict an individual person's relative risk of suicide, that is **how much more likely they are to die by suicide**, based on the responses they gave in the study. This was called the **Mental Health Risk Score**. It can be very difficult and shocking when someone loses their life to suicide. We hoped that by finding a way to predict who is most at risk, we can reach out earlier and offer help and support for that person before they make any permanent decisions. Suicide prevention is very important in helping the Traveller community as grief can worsen people's mental health and this contributes to a vicious cycle.

It is important to remember that there are lots of complicated reasons why a person decides to take their own life and why they feel like they have no other choice. **This score doesn't account for all of those complex factors and is not perfect**, however the results show how serious the issue of mental health and suicide is in the Traveller community in North Cork.



This study was ethically approved by SREC on 20th December 2023 and was not funded by any external organisation.

Key Findings

- Less than 1 in 3 people said their mental health was 'good' or 'very good'. 1 in 5 said it was 'bad' or 'very bad'.
- Nearly everyone suffered with a mental health disorder and **1 in 5 said they tried to take their own life**.
- The average Mental Health Risk Score was 14.35. That means that **the average person in this study was roughly 14 times more at risk of suicide than a settled Irish person**. The highest risk person in this study was 47 times more at risk of suicide using this calculation.
- **1 in 5 people don't know how to get help during a mental health crisis**.
- **Most people had lost a loved one to suicide (91%)**.
- Nearly half said they faced barriers in trying to get help, such as lack of privacy, embarrassment or difficulty travelling to appointments or remembering dates far into the future.
- **People with worse mental health faced more barriers in trying to get help**.

What's Working?

- Almost half had used mental health services, and **most were satisfied with the help they received**.
- Nearly all said they trust their doctor (89%) and most are willing to talk about their mental health (74%).
- A positive attitude towards health care was linked to spending longer in full time education.

Where Do We Need to Improve?

- **1 in 4 said they experienced discrimination in healthcare**.
- Some issues, like alcohol or substance problems, may not be fully appreciated.
- Many people in the community struggle with **literacy**, which may limit their representation and access to support.

What's Next?

This research shows the urgent need to:

- Make mental health services more **culturally aware** and **accessible**.
- **Support bereaved families** and those at risk of suicide.
- Continue developing tools to **predict and prevent suicide** in the Traveller community.