Research re social work with Gypsies and Travellers 1983-2012

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Background

• Butler (1983) referred to mutual suspicion between Gypsies and social services and ‘a de facto conspiracy to ignore Gypsies’ (p26)
• Social work with Travellers not generally seen as high priority by the communities or local authorities
• But vulnerable children (and sometimes adults) do interact with social work services
• Two opposing strands in problematic relationship: i) hegemonic over-involvement leading to loss of children into care ii) failure to support the needs of vulnerable children
Cemlyn study 1998

- CJPOA 1994 and associated guidance potentially brought social services into position of influence re unauthorised camping
- Study aimed to i) map social services provision for Traveller children and families ii) explore impact of CJPOA and how competing legal duties and powers were managed
- National postal survey in 2 stages, second shorter questionnaire to non-respondents
- 4 multi-agency area studies and other interviews (43 in total) (Cemlyn 1998, 2000a, 2000b)
Garrett, Greenfields, Morran and Power studies

• Garrett (2004, 2005) interviewed 8 practitioners working with Irish families including Travellers
• Greenfields (2002, 2006, 2008) explored contact with non-resident ‘New’ Traveller parents, plus subsequent legal work
• Morran (2002) interviewed Scottish social workers working with housed Traveller families
• Power (2003, 2004) reviewed provision across multiple policy domains for Irish Travellers including social work and criminal justice
Policy and monitoring

- Assessment mainly linked to corporate policies re eviction, i.e. control not support as prime driver
- No ethnic monitoring (only introduced in 2011 census) so difficulties collecting quantitative data
- Strong common themes between different studies about nature of provision, from qualitative findings
Relationships with services

- Fraught relationships i) fear on part of Gypsies and Travellers re losing children to authorities – historical experience and current threat ii) uncertainty, fear and hesitation on part of social workers
- Mostly crisis response in child protection and youth justice, minimal community engagement / prevention, leading to further alienation, mistrust and damage. Sometimes failure even of crisis response (Cemlyn 2000a, Garrett 2004, Power 2004)
- No development of culturally appropriate services e.g. fostering, or encouragement of Gypsy and Traveller foster carers
Barriers to access

- Mutual suspicion as above, fear, avoidance
- Lack of realistic and accessible information about services (Cemlyn 2000 a, b, Greenfields 2002, 2006)
- Social services geared to sedentary lifestyles, failure to respond to frequent movement of families, leading to neglect of children’s needs (Cemlyn 2000, Power 2004)
- Neglect / avoidance of wide issues facing Gypsies and Travellers, despite social work values
Discriminatory services

- Failure to provide culturally appropriate services can lead to great damage (Allen 2013)
- ‘Institutional blindness’ in failing to take account of homeless young people’s situation (Power 2004)
- Specific neglect of cultural issues for Travellers in housing, but in Morran’s Scottish study (2002) awareness of cultural continuation - and ambivalence
- Direct racism –Traveller culture as ‘something that needs to be broken’ (Garrett 2005, p1368)
- CJPOA involved social services in additional areas of control and surveillance (Cemlyn 2000a, 2008)
Positive developments

- A few authorities in Cemlyn’s study took a proactive children’s rights approach re unauthorised camping, or a reactive approach that developed through advocacy
- Two specialist social work projects demonstrated outreach, engagement, advocacy, multi-agency development (Cemlyn 2000b; Power 2004)
- Some individual social workers reached out to communities, built trust
- Morran (2002) found sensitive attempts by Scottish social workers to engage appropriately with the ‘shifting marginalised identities’ of housed Travellers
- More research needed re good practice
References


References continued


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