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Proposed research study into the age at death and cause of death in Gypsies and Travellers

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Abstract

This study will identify the age of death and the major causes of death in Gypsies and Travellers.

Reliable information as to the causes of death in this population is not available. This study will provide very valuable data to those working with Gypsies and Travellers, and to the community itself, as to the predominant causes of death. This will then be used to strategically design healthcare interventions.

Gypsies and Travellers have poor health status and low life expectancy compared to other English-speaking minority ethnic groups. To inform healthcare service provision and interventions it is important to accurately identify the prevalent causes of death in this population and which causes differ from the general population. Gypsy or Traveller ethnic status is generally not collected on NHS systems and ethnicity is not recorded at death; therefore age and cause of death cannot be accurately determined in this community. This study will link ethnicity and cause of death data.

An appropriate funding source is currently being sought.

Objectives

The study will

- identify the most appropriate methods for collecting mortality data in Gypsies & Travellers
- inform development of health interventions for this community
- develop a plan for a larger scale study, incorporating specialist traveller services nationwide, looking at the effectiveness of particular strategies/interventions.

Design & methods

The design will use multiple sources to capture as much data as possible which will be de-duplicated. The proposed design involves collecting identifiers eg, name and DOB, of known Gypsies and Travellers who have deceased.

Proposed sources include:

- Travelling Families Service based within the Trust
- General Practitioners in Leicestershire
- possibly the community themselves in Leicestershire

This information will be used to interrogate mortality data available from the Office for National Statistics. The age, underlying causes and contributing causes of death will be compared with that of the general population using analysis of standardised mortality ratios by age bands and gender. This will allow excess deaths to be identified.

Community involvement into the design is ongoing.

Impact

The findings will be disseminated (i) within the Gypsy and Traveller community with the help of the community themselves, (ii) to frontline NHS staff working with this community and (iii) to relevant strategic decision making bodies. The study will

- o inform the community of their health issues
- o allow the community to make informed life style choices
- o give researchers/healthcare professionals data on which to base
 - healthcare provision
 - interventions
 - strategies
 - local/national policy
 - further research

The long term aim being to reduce health inequalities in this community.