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PQ Ref 23881/22

To ask the Minister for Health his views on the recent findings that members of the Traveller, Mincéirs community have high rates for self-harm presentations at hospital emergency departments.

Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to your question above.

The high rates of suicide among Irish Travellers are well documented and as such Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide, 2015- 2020 (extended to 2024), *Connecting for Life* highlights the Traveller population as a priority group with vulnerability to an increased risk of suicidal behaviour.

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention regularly supports research to better understand how to target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health among priority groups. One such initiative is a study looking at the incidence of self-harm and suicide-related ideation among Irish Travellers presenting to hospital emergency departments. This study uses data from the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Self-Harm and is a collaboration between the HSE and the National Suicide Research Foundation at University College Cork.

The aims of the study were to compare the incidence of hospital-presenting self-harm and suicide-related ideation by Travellers to non-Traveller patients, and to describe any differences in the aftercare received. The study is the first national study conducted on self-harm and ideation related presentation in 24 ED services based on the Traveller population of Ireland.

The results of the study show particular cohorts of Travellers who are more at risk of self-harm as well as particular methods of self-harm used. It also emphasises the opportunity for suicide prevention training of ED staff, an initiative currently underway as part of the National Office for Suicide Prevention Education and Training Plan and as part of the training delivered by the National Clinical Programme for Self-Harm.

Further information on supports

Currently the HSE delivers a number of targeted initiatives at a CHO level and in partnership with voluntary partners aimed at improving the mental health of Travellers. These targeted initiatives are broadly based on three evidence informed priorities, namely: improving mental health and wellbeing; early intervention and prevention; and improving access to services. Significant progress has been made in taking forward these priorities through the recruitment in 2017 by the HSE of nine Mental Health Coordinators for Travellers. The focus of these roles is to work within the CHOs to support improved access, consistency and integration of mental health services to meet the mental health needs of Travellers. The Coordinators are responsible for driving, managing and supporting the implementation of agreed improvement programmes and projects for Travellers within CHOs and in collaboration with Mental Health Services and voluntary providers.

In line with Goal 3 of Connecting for Life which is 'To target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health among priority groups'. The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) provides funding support to two key national mental health projects outlined below:

Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Mental Health Service

The service is a Traveller-specific service designed to improve mental health and overall wellbeing of Travellers and to reduce the likelihood of suicide within the community. The Service aims to address inequalities that Travellers may experience by working with individuals, families and communities and service providers, deepening understanding, improving referral pathways and aiding recovery. It supports and delivers culturally appropriate programmes through partnership approaches. The Service has established working groups in Dublin, Limerick, Sligo, Meath, Waterford, Kildare and the Midlands.

Offaly Traveller Movement Travelling to Wellbeing Mental Health Service

In partnership with the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention and local CHOs, Offaly Traveller Movement provides the Travelling to Wellbeing Mental Health Service.

In 2019, the service launched a Guide to 'Developing a Local Co-ordinated multi-agency Crisis Response Plan for the Traveller Community' to ensure more support for individuals and families in the event of suicide incidences or crisis situations. It provides a framework for developing a Local Co-ordinated Crisis Response Plan for the Traveller community which is activated following the occurrence of an attempted suicide, suicide or unexpected death.

I trust this information is useful for you. Please do revert if you require anything further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Meehan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Mr John Meehan

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& Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)
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