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**To: Chairman & Each Member
Mid-Western Health Board**

**Report No:
Item No on Agenda**

**REPORT FOR MEETING OF THE BOARD TO BE HELD ON
11TH JANUARY, 2002**

**Travellers' Perceptions and Experiences of
Maternity and Child Health Services**

Dear Member,

The Traveller Health Unit of the Mid-Western Health Board commissioned the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway to look at Traveller Women's perceptions and experiences of the Maternity and Early Child Health services in the Region.

Aim of Research:

To examine the use of and experiences of maternity and child health services among women in the Travelling Community in the Mid-Western Health Board region.

The Participants were Traveller women and non-Traveller women of comparable age, either currently pregnant or recently delivered, were recruited through Public Health Nurse records or by means of visiting antenatal clinics. 52 Traveller and 41 non-Traveller women were interviewed, yielding response rates of 93% and 87% in each case. 91 service providers across disciplines were identified as key contact persons. A total of 58 General Practitioners, Public Health Nurses, District Midwives, Hospital Based Midwives and others replied, giving a response rate of 64%.

The study mainly consisted of one-to-one semi-structured interviews that included self-reported obstetric history and perceptions of satisfaction with services:

- antenatal hospital clinics and GP,
- delivery at maternity hospital,
- post-natal contact with Public Health Nurse
- and GP.

All women had at least one interview. Efforts to trace Traveller respondents for a second interview were successful in 34 cases (65%). Ten Traveller women took part in discussion groups to verify the findings

Results:

Self-reported obstetric history revealed more pregnancies and at a younger age in Travellers than non-Traveller women. Non-Travellers were more likely to report stitches, which may reflect the larger number of deliveries in the Traveller group. Travellers were more likely to report having had Pethidine or gas.

Qualitative interviews with both groups of women revealed high overall levels of satisfaction with the maternity and child health services. While satisfaction was generally high, the Traveller women were less satisfied with their experience in the maternity hospital and post-natally from their GP, including some sense of perceived discrimination due to their status as Travellers.

There was a strong sense of cultural identity evident amongst Travellers, for instance the fact that they depended on peers and family for antenatal support as opposed to traditional classes. The same applied in relation to breastfeeding practice.

Within the survey of service providers, the majority of these were general practitioners. Respondents were asked to grade perceptions of changes over time in well-established barriers to service provision in this group using a Likert scale. There was a high level of perceived improvements on factors like literacy, compared with less improvement as regards transience. Open-ended questions reinforced these views. Comparison of GPs versus PHNs revealed differences in perceptions of prejudice on the part of the public and of service provider, perceived uptake of immunisation, and post-natal care, willingness to go on calls to halting site, with the nurses being more optimistic generally.

Summary

- Travellers tend to have their first babies at a younger age
- Travellers tend to have larger families
- Traveller women were more likely to have visited their GP or hospital with a sick baby
- Travellers are less likely to attend for Ante-Natal Care
- Travellers are less likely to Breast-Feed their babies

Overall, both groups of women were satisfied with the services they received from the Mid-Western Health Board. However, the following findings are pertinent:

- For all women, it was important that health professionals take time to listen to their patient, answer questions in an understandable way and provide reassurance

- For Travellers, it was especially important that health professionals showed an understanding of their living conditions and way of life
- Experiences were poor if health professionals were hurried, impersonal, used technical language or did not offer enough information
- Travellers gave examples of poor treatment they felt was due to their status as Travellers

Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the findings from the present study and in the context of wider initiatives to improve care for Travellers generally:

- Extension of cultural Awareness Training for both service providers in contact with Travellers and for Travellers in relation to service provision is strongly recommended
- There should be more dedicated and Outreach health services aimed at Travellers
- Breast Feeding among Traveller Mothers should be promoted and supported
- Ante-Natal support should be provided and outreach Ante-natal classes initiated
- The Community Mothers programme should be expanded for Travellers.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Kevin Kelleher
Director of Public Health