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R REPORT DETAILS

ANTI RACISM SURVEY REPORT

This report, detailing the findings of a survey of nearly 2,000 registered social workers, highlights the toll racism is taking on social workers in England.

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March 2022

Summary

This report, detailing the findings of a survey of nearly 2,000 registered social workers, highlights the toll racism is taking on social workers in England. Nearly one in five children and adult social workers who responded to the survey reported that workplace racism had increased their anxiety. Ten per cent had considered leaving their organisation as a result of racism, with 8% considering leaving social work entirely. The survey found that nearly one in ten social workers (9%) had experienced incidents of racism directed at them by colleagues and managers at least five times in the previous 12 months, while a similar number (9%) reported witnessing service users or families experiencing racism from colleagues or managers.

The findings from the survey, and the discussion groups convened in light of the survey, will help shape the Anti-Racist Steering Group's forth-coming action plan to address racism within social work.

Objectives

The project was developed by the Anti-Racist Steering Group, composed of representatives from the Adults and Children's Principal Social Workers' Network, the Department for Education, Social Work England, Office of the Chief Social Workers Department of Health and Social Care and What Works for Children's Social Care. The Steering Group sought to gain a better understanding of the scale and nature of racism in social work and where examples of good anti-racist practice could be built upon, followed by a series of engagement events to reflect on the findings and plan next steps.

How we went about it

The survey was developed by the Anti-Racist Steering Group, who devised an initial set of questions, which we then refined by researchers from WWCSA to ensure they were phrased in a clear and valid way. The survey was a combination of multiple choice questions, which allow us to monitor the prevalence of racism and initiatives to address it, and text box responses which give more nuances about those experiences and initiatives. Survey participants were also invited to take part in a focus group discussion to review examples of good anti-racist practice.

The survey was live from 17 June to 11 August 2021 and received 1,958 responses, which is approximately 2% of all social workers. Of these, 457 indicated that they

would be open to participating in a focus group discussion.

The analysis of the multiple-choice questions was quantitative and focused on the response frequencies and proportions of each choice from each question.

As there were a large number of text responses, we selected a sample of these for analysis. The responses were analysed using a thematic approach, identifying key themes in experiences of racism and strategies to further anti-racist practice.

Key findings

Experiences of racism in the workplace

- 9% of respondents reported experiencing racism five or more times from colleagues and managers in the previous 12 months, and a further 9% reported witnessing racism directed towards service users/families from colleagues and managers five or more times in the same period
- Social workers from ethnic minorities typically experience increased scrutiny and negative assumptions about their skills based on their ethnicity, despite the higher workloads they are assigned.
- Social workers repeatedly referred to cases where opportunities for career progression were either denied or unavailable to individuals from ethnic minorities.

Reported impact of racism on self

- One in ten respondents has considered leaving their organisation because of racism
- Nearly one in five respondents (19%) reported that workplace racism had increased their anxiety, and 13% reported worsened mental health.

Organisational mechanisms to address racism

- Social workers described various forums and peer networks for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority colleagues, including reciprocal peer mentoring programmes for

minority groups.

- Several respondents shared concerns regarding their organisations' current equality and diversity strategy

Factors enabling colleagues to intervene

- The majority of social workers surveyed (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable and confident intervening when they witnessed racism.
- Over three quarters (76%) felt that there was someone they could approach for support if they witnessed or experienced racism.
- Factors enabling colleagues to intervene where they witnessed racism varied both at an individual and an organisational level.
- Nearly one in five (18%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organisation was doing enough to tackle racism. Black and Asian social workers were more likely to feel that their organisation and team was not doing enough to address racism (40%) than their White colleagues (34%).

Implications

The survey found that racism in the social work profession is widespread and has a serious impact on the wellbeing, career progression and retention of Black and Minority Ethnic social workers. The findings indicate that efforts to address social workers' experiences of racism should focus on racism from people who are receiving a service, as well as from colleagues and managers. Work to strengthen anti-racism in organisations needs to address issues highlighted in the survey, including increased scrutiny of Black and Minority Ethnic social workers' performance, lack of career progression, and passive racism, in the form of microaggression and unconscious bias.

Next steps

The Anti-Racist Steering Group plans to conduct further engagement work with key stakeholders, such as directors of children's services and directors of adult social services, to garner support for an action plan to address the findings of the survey.

The action plan should take account of other programmes of work with shared aims, such as the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standards, to ensure strategic alignment and avoid duplication.

- Read the summary report
- Read the full report
- Read our blog post