

British Association of Social Workers Cymru

Summary Report

Racism in Social Work: From Words to Action

May 2022



BASW
Cymru

The professional association for
social work and social workers

BASW UK's five-year Vision from 2020 - 2025 is that
***“Social work will be a thriving, influential, respected profession,
improving lives and upholding people’s rights across the UK.”***

Our mission clarifies what we do, why we do it and who for:

BASW acts for:

- Social workers:** Supporting, protecting, and inspiring social workers in all roles, and the next generations of professionals.
- Social work:** Developing professional ethics, practice, knowledge, research, and learning.
- A better society:** Speaking out for social work and social workers on social justice, equality, poverty, human rights, oppression, and other vital social issues in the UK and internationally.

BASW Cymru is part of BASW UK and is the professional membership organisation for social work. We are the independent voice of social work that champions social work and helps members to achieve the highest professional standards.

This summary report brings together our ‘Racism in Social Work’ survey findings, conducted across Wales last year. The survey was developed by the BASW Cymru Anti-Racist Social Work Practice Group and was accessible to students, practitioners, managers, and educators. Its aim was to explore the prevalence of racism across the social work profession.

We explored the data which provided crucial insights and now present it so we can use the contents to have further constructive discussion about effective change within the social work sector across Wales.

Key factors for consideration:

Terminology

People who experience racism are not a homogenous group. As such there is no one word or phrase to describe them. Just as 'white' does not adequately describe the myriad of variations in origin and backgrounds of people who might be racialised as such, neither do frequently used terms such as 'B.A.M.E' or 'people of colour'. The acronym B.A.M.E is a contested umbrella term used to describe people from Black, Asian and other Minoritised Ethnicities, including those from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) and Jewish communities. For the purposes of this report, we will use 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except the white British group. For an in-depth discussion of language and terms see [Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethnicity-facts-figures).

Sense of belonging

There is a growing body of writing about racism in social work, and change is being demanded.¹ Themes have emerged, which include a lack of diversity among social workers, particularly noticeable in senior management positions.² This has implications for the way social workers from different backgrounds feel included within the profession. "If you can't see yourself reflected in the profession, what does that mean for your confidence and sense of belonging When we say that we are committed to equality and diversity, how is that reflected in what (and who) is visible in the profession?" Reid & Maclean (2021)

Intersectionality

"Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorisations as they apply to a given individual or group. It is where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects."³

Social workers, like all members of society who experience racism, can also face discrimination or oppression due to other protected characteristics. These include, but are not limited to gender, religion, marital status, sexuality, and disability. Multiple forms of disadvantage can compound and impact on a social worker's experiences in the workplace. As such, we must apply an intersectional lens in any work we undertake to challenge racism.

Data limitations

The data in this summary report is a snapshot of a specific period of time. We acknowledge that there is much more about racism that has not been including in this summary report which are just as relevant. We hope to explore these at our future anti-racism round table event.

Survey Findings

Only 25% of our respondents felt that social work employers and educators are aware of white privilege, unconscious bias and racism within Welsh institutions and cultures.

Respondents added further comments:

'Aware mostly on a superficial level at best, do not wish to acknowledge.'

'I suppose I cannot imagine any way through the last year they cannot be aware.'

'Awareness is there...action if not.'

'But no acknowledgement. Brushed under the carpet.'

Only 13% felt that anti-racist values were emphasised in their experience. 25% felt that they were 'sometimes'. The rest of the respondents felt that anti-racism values were not emphasised.

The following comments were shared:

'Anti-racism is only paid cursory attention. The workforce and leadership lacks diversity. Lack of structure to embed, enforce, hold accountable.'

'I think where oppressive practice is addressed, it is subsumed in ADP or AOP, rather than specifying racism'

'Anti-racism has been pushed down the list of priorities as pressures upon employers and educational institutions to achieve 'more with less' has intensified with austerity and the impact of Covid'

88% of respondents said that they themselves or their colleagues/peers experienced racism or prejudice at work or in a practice placement. 38% of respondents received no support when they did report racist or prejudicial incidences.

Respondents added further comments about some of their experiences of racism:

'At work, implied and direct from colleagues at all levels. In education through a complete absence of teaching and education in anti Gypsy, Traveller, Roma racism. From being exposed to racist views of those who use social work services.'

'Yes. The tone of speaking is very pushy in meetings. Picking on words.'

'At placement, ID cards were given to us but while my white colleagues were given two years ID, I was given less than the period of placement and my complain was not considered.'

'A whole variety of ways. People minimising the experience of POC etc. Fewer overt examples as people are now less obviously using racist language or actions.'

'Over critical. Undermining'

'Comments about immigrants taking over and sharing racist social media memes were my last experience of overt racism in the workplace. These are easy to draw attention to and, for the most part, action was taken, although the perpetrators were not punished – an email was circulated to say sharing such media and emails is not acceptable but beyond that, nothing. How do you explain or draw attention to the myriad of slights, lack of promotions, access to the same opportunities or same support as your white colleagues? These things happen with great regularity but 'proving' it is racism is nigh on impossible and I have been told not to play the 'race card' by a senior manager in the past, so it remains very difficult.'

75% of our respondents felt that more needs to be done to create and sustain a more equal, diverse, and inclusive workplace and educational settings.

Respondents shared their comments below:

'If the Wales Equality Action Plan was actually implemented, we would see real change.'

'Yes. Name and shame. Strong leadership on the top.'

'Starting with acknowledging that racism exists and then outlining clear steps that can be taken to address this, without turning into another talking shop.'

'We have gone way past the days of plans, strategies, promises and supportive statements. The problems are well known, data is there. Action is needed.'

'Lot has been said over the years and legislation has been published. Words but no actions. People join the group to climb the ladder for their own personal gain.'

Our findings concludes that:

- Racism does exist within social work in Wales; it is occurring within employment and educational settings and is experienced by practitioners, managers and those who use services.
- White privilege and other notions of whiteness are not being discussed in Welsh institutions and cultures.
- Anti-racist values are not always promoted in Wales.
- There is evidence of significant emotional, psychological, and physical impact of racism on ethnic minority social workers across Wales.
- Racism is not dealt with in a transparent or robust manner when reported to leadership.
- There is a lack of acknowledgment, education, and awareness of racism within the social work.
- More work must be done to create and sustain equitable, diverse, and inclusive work and educational spaces.

BASW Cymru must continue to lead in modelling anti-racism to the wider profession.

The social work must be a profession that welcomes people from every background, and that has clear, fair structures to promote inclusion and equality. The Social Care Wales Code of Professional Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers state that any form of discrimination is unacceptable and should not be condoned by workers or employers.⁴

We know that racism, and the trauma it causes, has no place in social work. We must create brave and safe spaces for conversations about racism in all settings.

We must co-create with our workforces and those that use our services.

Understanding why and where racism exists is necessary to change the situation.

Underpinning social work training must be an understanding and awareness of the multitude of backgrounds students come from, the history of colonialism and racism in our society, how different layers of oppression intersect, and how those impacts on social workers themselves and on those we support. Social workers from ethnic minority communities must not be expected to resolve racism, exclusion, or discrimination on their own.

As the Professional Association, BASW Cymru will continue to listen to and support people with lived experience of racism and work towards educating and equipping all of us to eradicate racism. We will support those who are white to become real allies and to promote and strengthen anti-racism across all social work settings in Wales.

- BASW Cymru accept that social work values are being undermined consistently regarding the topic of race within the workplace and educational settings.
- We aim to work with our members, stakeholders including those with living experience to re-establish those social work values and strengthen them within the social work sector across Wales.
- We acknowledge the critical need for effective training on anti-racism across the social work sector including embedding this into the social work curriculum.
- BASW Cymru encourage and promote diverse leadership and collaboration with those with living experience of using social work services.
- We want to see anti-racism as an ongoing and deeply embedded feature in social work education and training and not 'one off' training events.
- BASW Cymru call for leadership to be diverse. To understand and represent the people they work with and serve.
- We call for safe robust supportive mechanisms to report racism and such oppressive practice. We call for clear processes and action to be taken and a zero-tolerance approach to be taken across Wales.
- We hope to hold roundtable very soon to discuss these findings further and discuss how we can support the Race Equality Action Plan.

Find out what actions the Welsh Government and Public Services will be taking

<https://gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan>

I gael rhagor o wybodaeth am y camau y bydd Llywodraeth Cymru a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus yn eu cymryd, ewch i <https://llyw.cymru/cynllun-gweithredu-ar-gyfer-cymru-wrth-hiliol>

References & Resources

'Black, Asian and minority ethnic community resources'. A compilation of useful reading, guidance and resources on the BASW UK website. www.basw.co.uk/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-community-resources

Let's Talk Social Work – Challenging the last acceptable form of racism.
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Let's Talk Social Work Podcast 'Anti-Racism'. BASW UK. Listen at:
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<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/anti-racism/id1511140451?i=1000523288660>
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¹ www.basw.co.uk/resources/psw-magazine/psw-online/anti-racism-social-work-struggle-real-and-you-are-part-it

² www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/10/20/senior-leadership-buy-in-critical-to-anti-racism-in-social-work-say-experts/

³ Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later | Columbia Law School

⁴ Codes of Practice and guidance | Social Care Wales

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