

When remaining silent is no longer an option : Reflections on anti-racist social work education and practice.





About Me

- 25 years qualified and 15 years teaching social work in UK HEI's (OU, Northampton, Anglia Ruskin)
- Currently on a 4 year contract at the United Arab Emirates University, UAE

Research Interests

- Equality & Diversity in Social Work practice and education
- Anti-oppressive practice, anti-discriminatory practice, anti-racist practice
- Faith based abuse, culturally sensitive social work approaches
- Critical Race Theory

Most recent practice expertise

- Child Safeguarding advisor to the Home Office Family Returns Panel (Ministerial appointment 2011-2018)
- Currently supporting the setting up of a child abuse helpline for Abu Dhabi

Aims for the session

Examine the importance of Anti-Racism in Social Work Education and Practice.

Outline key messages from research about Black students experiences on SW Programmes.

Consider what lessons Ireland can learn from existing research.

The value of anti-racism

- ✓ Race has no biological ground however it still has social effects.
- ✓ Social work education can create and re-make social inequalities.
- ✓ Many social workers assume that the problems of Black and other ethnic minority people are a result of their family and home situation.
- ✓ Understanding the effects of racism is important because racism impacts the lives of service users in different ways.
- ✓ Ignoring it can have negative consequences when assessing and intervening. Families would bear the costs of failing to receive services they need or are entitled to.

The global definition of Social Work

- “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, *social cohesion*, and the *empowerment and liberation of people*. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and *respect for diversities* are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and *enhance wellbeing*. (IFSW, 2014)

Messages from Research

- Hussein et al (2008) reported that male students, students with disabilities and BME students had poorer progression rates on SW programs than other groups.
- Students from BME backgrounds reported less satisfaction with their practice learning experiences than other groups (Bartoli et al 2009).
- Male students and students from BME backgrounds are more likely to fail practice placements than any other group (Furness 2012).
- BME student participants identified that it was discriminatory behaviours and attitudes among practice assessors, other professionals, and service users that contributed to the differences between their experiences and those of their white peers (Bernard et al 2011)

Messages from Research II

- Tedam (2014) reported the presence of racism on placements and that for one student of African heritage, her PE 'put the phone down' on her saying she didn't understand her accent.
- Tedam (2021) Found that the covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated the plight of Black African students on placement.
- Black African social workers reported racism in the workplace, exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic in England. (Tedam, forthcoming 2021 British Journal of Social Work)

Messages from Research (International)

- **Scotland** - Hillen et al (2013) - Poorer experiences and outcomes for BME students
- **Australia**- Harrison and Ip (2013) Poorer experiences reported by Aboriginal and minority social work students.
- **Australia**- Gair et al (2014)- Aboriginal students experiences of racism
- **Canada**- Razack (2001) Poorer relationships between field supervisors and students of ethnic minority backgrounds resulted in difficulties on placement
- **Canada**- de Bie, et. al. (2020) who found that discrimination was sometimes framed as 'learning experiences' for diverse students.
- **Australia**- Gatwiri (2021) Experiences of racism and microaggressions in managerial roles – 'You are lucky to be in this position' Are we lucky or are we skilled?

Black and ethnic minority social workers disproportionately subject to fitness to practise investigations

Social Work England promises action as figures show disproportionately low number of ethnic minority panel members making decisions about social workers' suitability to practise

by **Mithran Samuel** on July 31, 2020 in **Workforce**



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Featured jobs

Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work setting (2009)

When Failing Doesn't Matter: A narrative inquiry into the practice learning experiences of black African social work students in England (2014)

Enhancing the practice learning experiences of BME students: Strategies for practice education (2015)

Black African Students' Experiences of Social Work Practice Learning in England: A Critical Race Inquiry (2015)

Group support for transformational social work education: a study of the Black Academics Forum (2016)

'We just don't matter. Articulating the Experiences of Black African SW Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic (2021)

Why people stay silent about racism

For 'victims'

- Not sure whether it is racism or not; usually when covert microaggressions are involved.
- Do not wish to be labelled or seen as causing trouble, rocking the boat, chip on their shoulder, over sensitive, 'playing the race card' etc etc
- Poor procedures/processes to formalise and address complaints

For bystanders/witnesses

- Colonial mindset (I do not need to understand, apologise). Its 'their' problem.
- Not wanting to get involved
- Not understanding racism and its impact
- Trying to stay loyal to a friend/family member



Why people stay silent about racism- Not Me!

- Schick (2000) research found that, on the one hand, students 'intend to make a difference' (p. 84) yet, on the other hand, they demonstrated a resistance to uncovering racism, and an active maintenance of white identities without critical awareness of the implications for their chosen profession.
- Students saw themselves as 'innocent' learners and 'good students' who also projected a 'not me' stance on racism.

We need to change this approach.

The 4D2P Framework (Tedam 2021)

4D2P

Social Work Practice

Discuss

Build rapport/assess

Discover



Result of assessment

Decide



Analysis and decision

Disrupt



Intervene/make better/improve



Power

Privilege

Disrupting- Speaking Out

We *Disrupt* racism through:

- Dialogue/Mediation (social)
- Applying policies and guidelines (legal)
- Using strategies to close the 'award gap' (academic)
- Supporting families financially or with other resources (economic)

We **DO NOT** disrupt racism by staying silent.



Ideas for the Irish Context

1. Focussing on a research agenda in the area of race and racism in Ireland specifically in social work education and the many areas of practice. This will enable a better understanding of the nature and extent of racism; causes, nuances and impact leading to the development of timely strategies to address this..
2. Ensure policies, guidelines and protocols are robust and straightforward, allowing for a timely investigation into allegations of racism. For upheld cases of racism, the sanctions need to be decisive.
3. MANDATORY anti racism training with opportunities to 'retake' training where a minimum score has not been achieved.
4. Experts by experience as visiting lecturers to University courses (be sensitive to the emotional trauma experienced from recounting experiences of racism)

Ideas for the Irish Context

5. SW Education course/curriculum reviews and updates should reflect contemporary concerns in relation to race and racism (covid-19, virtual workplaces, virtual placements).
6. Language changes eg 'attainment gap' to 'award gap'.
7. PE's other educators to enable anti-racist learning and teaching environments.
8. Meaningful representation of diversity at all levels of practice and education
9. Collaborate with others- there are many individuals, groups, communities doing anti racism work. No need to reinvent wheels- share and expand your knowledge and reach.
10. Anti-racism is not a one off activity- it is active, deliberate and requires persistence and continuity.



Conclusion

Remember anti racism is the practice of **identifying**, **challenging**, and **disrupting** behaviours, values and structures that perpetuate racism.

PLEASE do **not** use terms like 'white privilege' as a means of shutting down important dialogue with white colleagues. Respectful dialogue is important.

Allyship is another important strategy and is a lifetime commitment (already part of your strategy).

As we remember George Floyd – one year on....what do we hope to achieve 2 years on?

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THANK YOU

The text 'THANK YOU' is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. Below the text is a decorative graphic consisting of two parallel, wavy blue lines that curve from left to right, ending in a small swirl.