



ANTI-RACISM REPORT

The purpose of the survey was to better understand the scale and nature of racism in social work and where there are examples of good anti-racist practice that we can build upon.

The respondents were 1,958 social workers in England (from both adults' and children's social care) and the survey focused predominantly on experiences of the workforce rather than the experiences of people who have a social worker and their families.

The survey was created by the Anti-Racist Steering Group, comprised 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 survey was hosted by What Works for Children's Social Care.

We surveyed 1,958 social workers in England

The survey gathered the following information:

Demographics

Demographic characteristics of social workers including their gender, age, ethnicity and whether or not they had a disability

Organisational efforts

The social worker's experience of their organisation's efforts to address racism

Experiences

Participating social workers' and their colleagues' experiences of racism within the workplace and the impact of those experiences

Perspectives

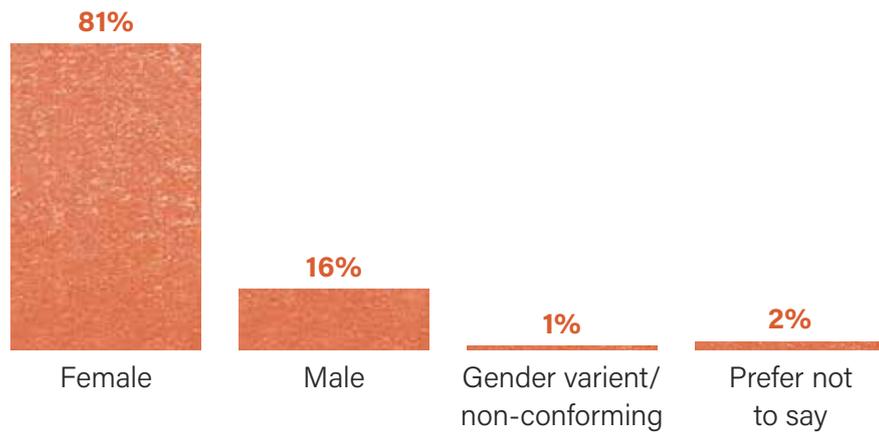
Perspectives on what can help address racism in social work

Roles

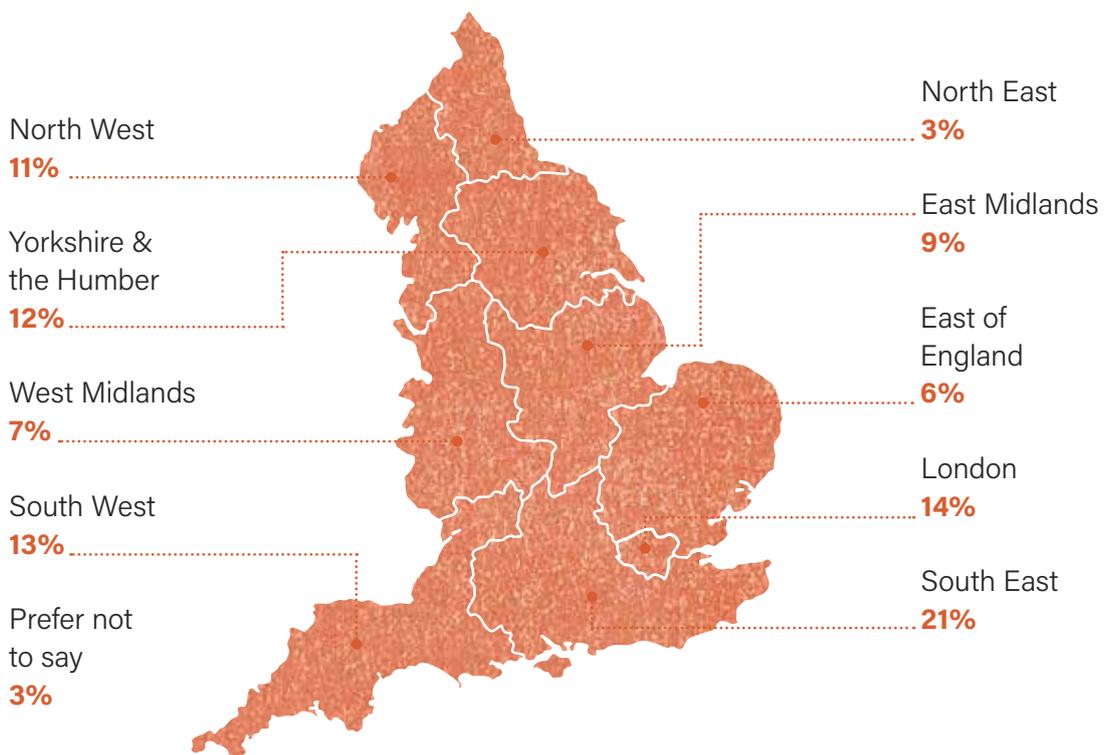
Information about the role of participating social workers e.g. years of experience, whether they are employed on an agency contract, whether they predominantly work with children or adults.

Respondent demographics: Who took part?

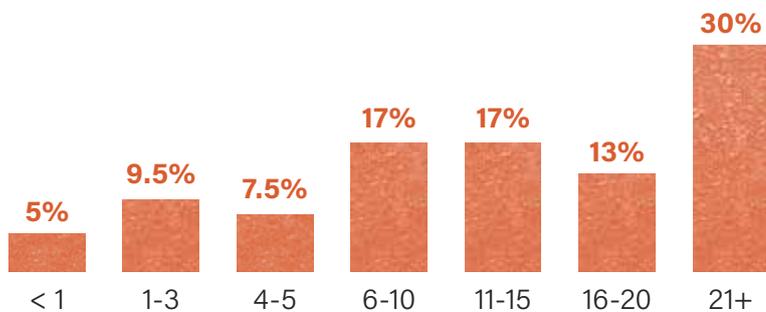
Gender



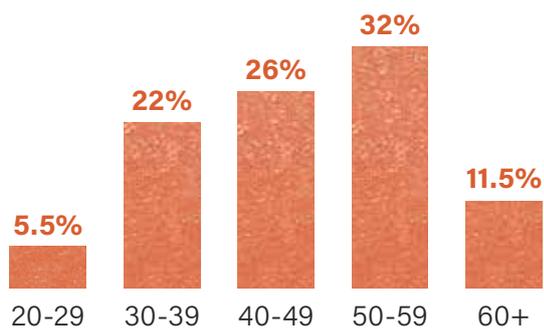
Location



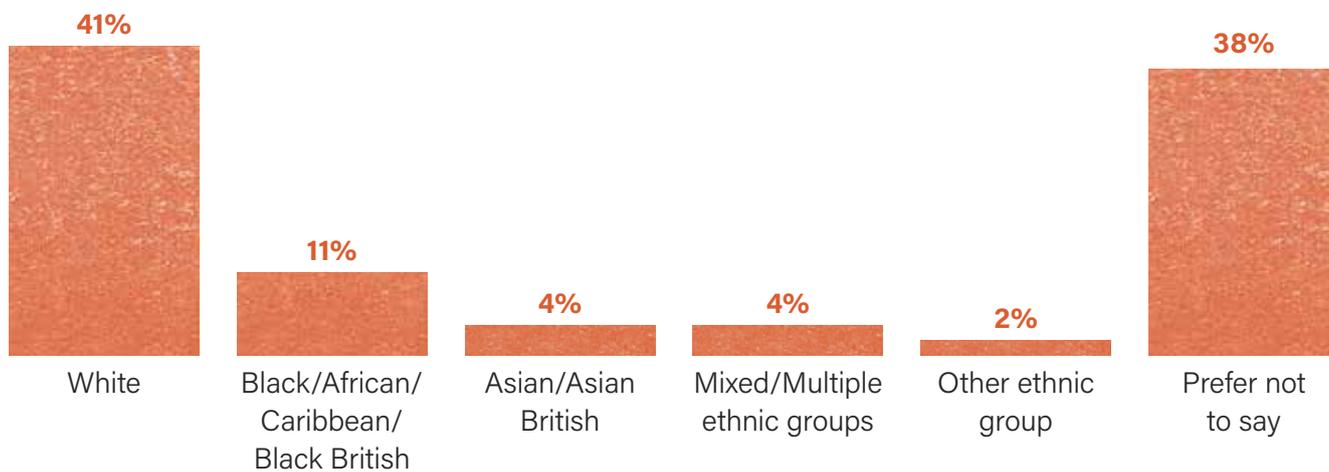
Years of Experience



Age



Ethnicity



Experiences of racism in the workplace

When asked whether they had witnessed or experienced incidents of racism, 9% of respondents reported experiencing racism from colleagues and managers themselves, and a further 9% reported witnessing racism directed towards service users/families from colleagues and managers more than five times. A notable result showed that 20% of respondents witnessed colleagues experiencing racism from service users and/or families more than five times, whereas 13% experienced similar incidents themselves.

These experiences varied considerably by ethnicity. Unsurprisingly, social workers who identified as Black or Asian reported experiencing racism from colleagues (on five or more occasions) far more often than their White colleagues. In addition, 34% of Black respondents reported incidents of racism from service users/families, compared with 5% of White social workers.

Higher workloads and greater scrutiny

A pattern in responses reflects that 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. When race is specified in the answers, Black social workers are overwhelmingly the subjects of reported incidents. Several respondents reported that Black workers in particular were allocated higher caseloads or more complex cases. Additionally, one social worker discussed how this results in "Black co-workers being overloaded and then criticised for underperforming." Another practitioner shared that their work was under more scrutiny compared to White colleagues.

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witnessed colleagues experiencing racism from service users multiple times

34%

of Black respondents reported incidents of racism from service users/families, compared to 5% of White social workers

Lack of career progression

Social workers repeatedly referred to cases where opportunities for career progression were either denied or unavailable to individuals from ethnic minorities. Instead, according to the respondents, opportunities appeared to be prioritised to White candidates.

"I have seen several incidents where Black and Asian colleagues, including myself, seem to be treated unfairly compared to white colleagues. For example, Black colleagues have been rejected for promotion when they appear to have as much or more experience than white colleagues who have been promoted."

Microaggressions and unconscious bias

Social workers shared that a large proportion of racism witnessed is "more of a passive racism" in which "people [are] not recognising the impact of the statements or actions they are making on people from Black and minority ethnic groups." Several social workers reported "frequent microaggressions" in the workplace derived from unconscious biases.



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Reported impact of racism on self



1/10
had considered
leaving their
organisation
because of racism

19% of respondents reported that workplace racism had increased their anxiety, and 13% reported worsened mental health. 10% revealed they had considered leaving their organisation and 8% considered leaving the profession, which suggests that this may be a driver for turnover rates.

When describing the impact incidents of racism had on them, several social workers shared the emotional toll and discrimination they have experienced which, in some cases, has led them to consider leaving the profession. For example, one respondent reported being "left with feelings of anger and helplessness". We also encountered several statements from social workers who experienced distress due to witnessing their colleagues experience racism.

As a consequence of racist incidents, several social workers described changing teams or even exiting the workforce and experiencing financial difficulties as a result. One shared that "after 30 years I could not tolerate anymore". Several social workers explained that they were treated differently to White colleagues and that their reputation was undermined or under attack. Two social workers shared that they had been subject to employment tribunals which were related to "assumptions" and "preconceived ideas" made about them.

Reported impact of racism on colleagues

Social workers were also asked to reflect on the impact that experiences of racism had on their coworkers. We noted recurrent references to colleagues feeling demotivated and cases where experiences of racism contributed to a "loss of confidence", impacting negatively on energy levels as workers were having to contend with additional obstacles. Others shared that they felt unappreciated - one worker commented that their colleagues were "made to feel worthless, hopeless."

In contrast, others felt that they could not identify the impact of racism on colleagues, stating that the remote work conditions make such assessments difficult. However, as one social worker highlighted, that does not necessarily indicate that there was no impact:

"I'm not aware of any, but that doesn't mean it hasn't happened or had any impact. Just that I'm not aware."

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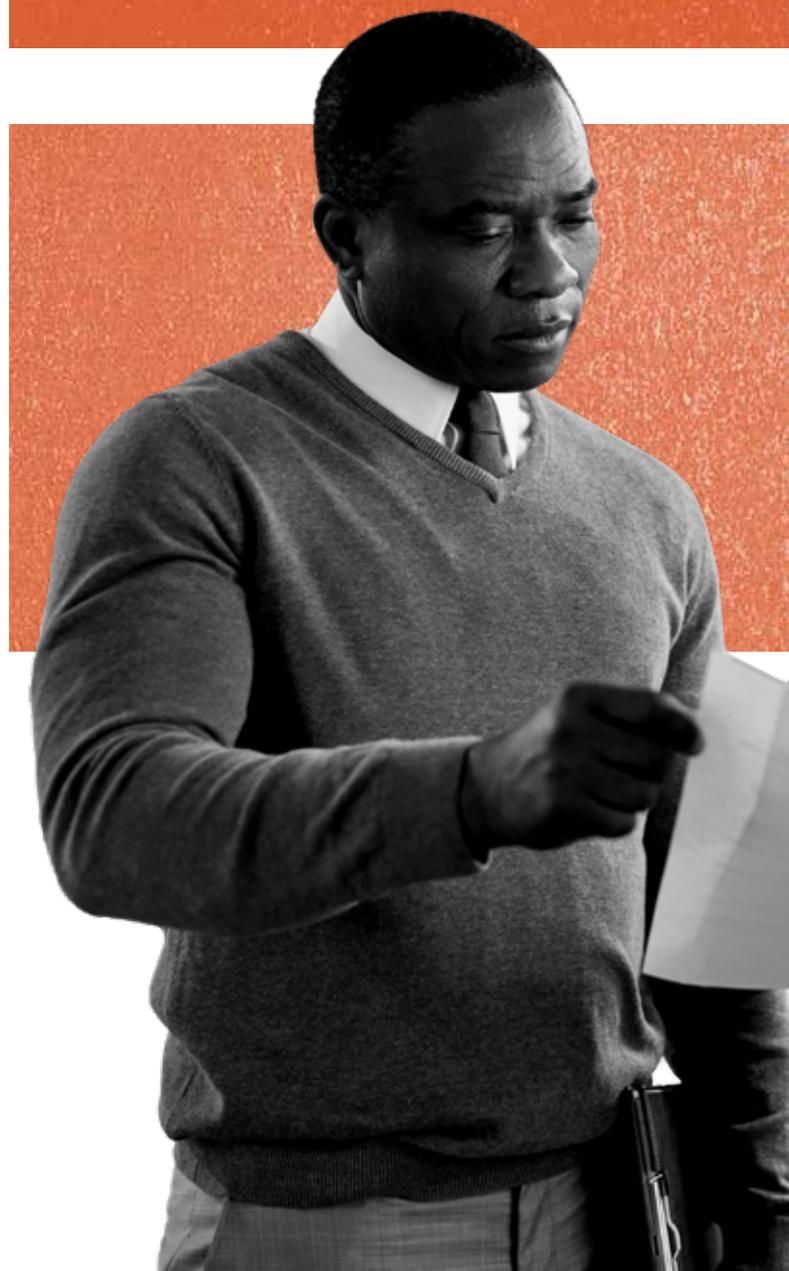
Organisational mechanisms to address racism

Social workers described various forums and peer networks for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority colleagues. Some respondents shared that they offered, or were currently developing, reciprocal peer mentoring programmes for minority groups. Respondents also discussed some of the ways that their organisations are promoting anti-racist practice through strategy and training. For example, one worker shared that they have “Values Champions” in their organisation.

However, several respondents shared concerns regarding the organisations’ current equality and diversity strategy. One practitioner commented that anti-racist, unconscious bias and equality and diversity training are not mandatory requirements within their local authority. Another felt that their current organisation’s strategy diminishes anti-racist practice:

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Factors enabling colleagues to intervene

80%

agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable and confident intervening when they witnessed racism

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. Support was one of the factors cited, including having someone informed and knowledgeable to speak to about experiences of workplace racism, both generally in the workplace and at a senior managerial level. Social workers also expressed their need for encouragement from managers to report racism and a clear “zero tolerance policy” was suggested as key to empowering people to intervene or report racism.

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%).

Respondents suggested strategies such as an anti-racist culture and ethos throughout the organisation and the use of systemic clinicians, who staff can speak with on issues of “power, difference, and discrimination”. Also, regular discussion in team meetings on diversity, and an anonymous and independent work helpline were thought to be enabling factors.



Engagement events

Data from the survey was analysed and reported to the Anti-Racist Steering Group in September 2021. Survey participants who indicated that they would be interested in joining a group conversation about anti-racist practice were invited to a series of engagement events, organised by Social Work England. Nine events were offered in January 2022 and invitations were sent to 451 survey participants.

Attendance at the engagement events was low, with 39 people attending in total, which may be due to time elapsed from the survey (5 months). The events were facilitated in pairs by Social Work England Regional Engagement Leads and Principal Social Workers. Participants and facilitators self-selected their event from a timetable without knowledge of who else would be there. Facilitators met together ahead of the events for a briefing session. It was emphasised that the attendees' wellbeing should be prioritised, and where possible the discussion should be steered towards identifying positive examples of anti-racist practice, or what action the Anti-Racist Steering Group could take to improve social workers' experiences. Attendees were sent a copy of the anti-racism survey headline findings in advance of their session.

Following each session, facilitators created a simple record reflecting the key discussion points and these were collated into themes by What Works for Children's Social Care. Four broad themes emerged from the engagement events:

1

Organisational responsibility for anti-racism

This was the strongest theme, and many examples were given of how organisations should act beyond providing a mechanism for reporting racist incidents. Attendees gave examples of programmes that currently exist in organisations, such as reverse mentoring and forums for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff. Many suggestions were made about ways to increase the frequency and nature of conversations about racism in organisations, such as including it as a standing item at team meetings and in supervision sessions. The lack of diversity at senior management level was also raised multiple times as something that needs to change in order to mitigate against structural racism.

2

Allyship

Attendees noted that some White colleagues seem to lack confidence engaging in conversations about racism, or do not see it as relevant for them. There were calls for White social workers and leaders to have a greater understanding of structural racism, micro-aggressions, and the impact of these types of racism on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic social workers.

3

Professional standards as a mechanism for improving anti-racism

Discussions included ways that anti-racism could be embedded in the profession, and this turned to the role of the regulator, Social Work England. Attendees suggested that the professional standards could be more explicit about anti-racism, and that registration renewal could have an anti-racism requirement.

4

Social work education

Several sessions discussed how anti-racism is not always specifically highlighted in social work qualifying courses, and that teaching about anti-discriminatory practice alone is not sufficient to create an anti-racist workforce. Attendees also said that good quality training for social workers and other professionals, including foster carers, would contribute to anti-racism.

These themes are useful, however, the very low number of contributors mean they should be treated with caution, particularly in comparison to the findings of the survey which had a much larger sample size. The first two themes are broad and would require thought and behaviour change in individuals as well as at a system level. They also broadly align with the findings from the survey. The third and fourth themes are mechanisms by which behaviour change could be encouraged and evidenced. No questions were asked in the survey that link to these themes, so they have a significantly weaker evidence base.



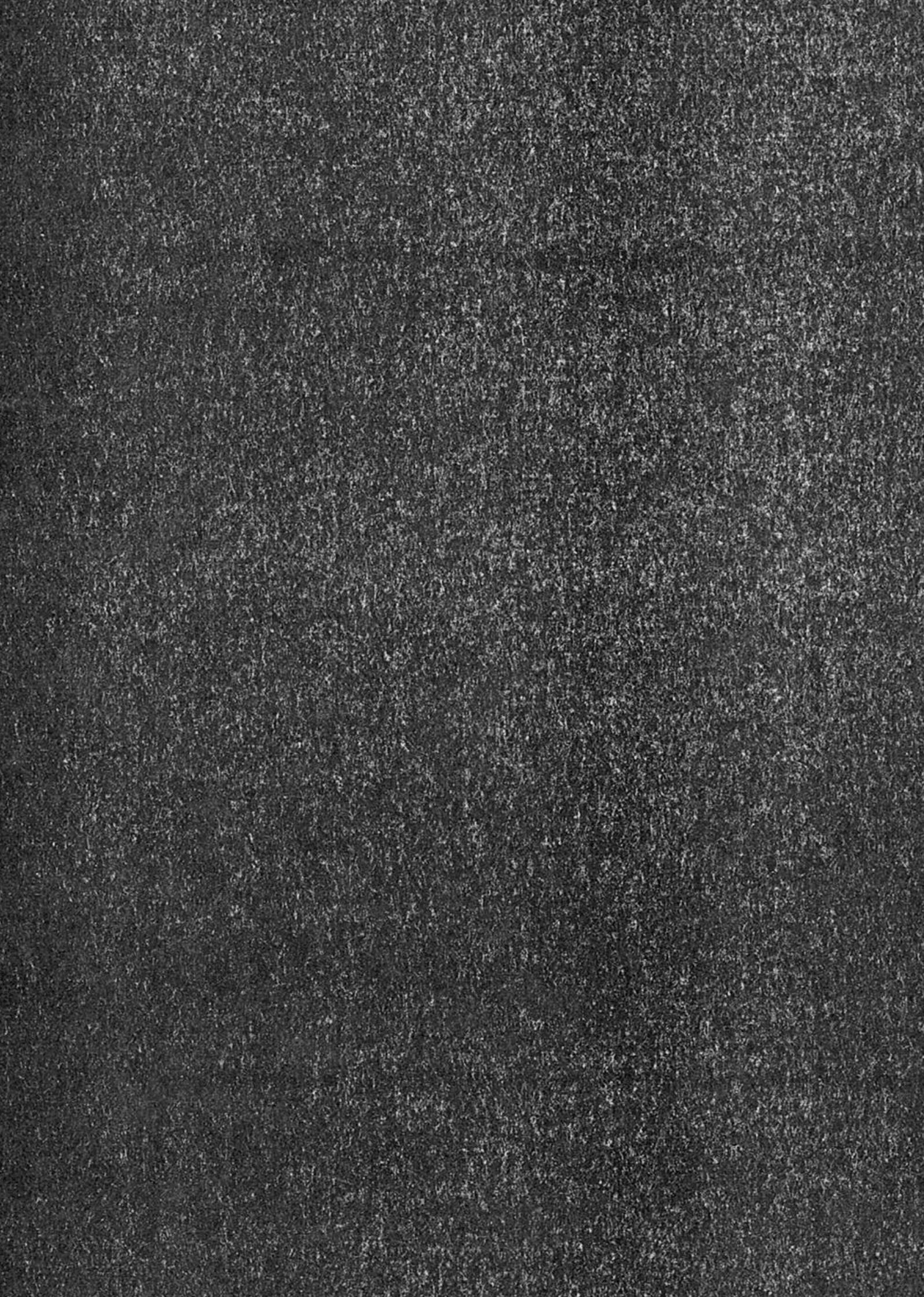
Future work

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. A high proportion of participants (80%) felt comfortable to intervene if they witnessed racism, and future work could consider whether this translates into action through reporting incidents of racism, or through other ways of intervening.

One in ten survey participants said they had considered leaving the profession due to racism. This statistic, along with the other measures in the survey, could be used to track progress towards anti-racism through future surveys. Over time, this would grow the evidence base on social workers' experiences of racism and continue to highlight where anti-racism efforts should be directed.

Social Work England co-hosted a roundtable discussion with Skills for Care in December 2021 and shared survey findings with sector leaders and explored the actions we can take in our own organisations and collectively. The Anti-Racist Steering Group would like to conduct further engagement work with key stakeholders, such as directors of children's services (ADCS) and directors of adult social services (ADASS), 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.







Technical note

The survey was completed by 1,958 social workers online, between 17 June and 11 August 2021.