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No room for racism

Anti-racism survey report

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Commissioned by: Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group



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Foreword By the Social Work Anti-Racism Oversight Group

We are honoured to present this report, commissioned by the Social Work Anti-Racism Oversight Group, as a foundational step in our collective journey toward an anti-racist social work profession in Scotland.

This survey was not conducted in isolation, it was a deliberate and necessary act to listen, to learn, so that we can take resolute action towards dismantling racism in social work.

As stated in our 2024 Statement of Intent on Anti-Racism in Social Work:

“We acknowledge that racism exists within social work in Scotland, both structurally and interpersonally, and that it causes harm to practitioners and the people we support.”

This report gives voice to those experiences. It reflects the realities of social workers across Scotland and highlights the systemic and interpersonal barriers that we must now address. The findings will directly shape our Action Plan and will continue to guide our priorities and actions because we are clear that the voices of those with lived experience of racism must be central to our work. We are therefore committed to listening, learning, and acting on what we hear.

This report is both, a testament to that commitment and a new call to action. Anti-racism is not the responsibility of a few, it is a shared responsibility, so we call on all social workers, leaders, educators, and organisations to join us in this work.

In line with our commitment in the Statement of Intent, we recently published an action plan that sets out the concrete steps we will take to address the issues highlighted in this report. This plan was shaped by the voices in this survey and will serve as a roadmap for meaningful, measurable change across the profession.

We extend our deepest thanks to all who contributed to this survey. Your courage and honesty are the foundation of change.

We also thank the researchers and partners who supported this work with integrity and care.

Let this report be a catalyst, not a conclusion. Together, we can build a profession that is safe, inclusive, and equitable for all.

Social Work Anti-Racism Oversight Group
24 July 2025

Executive Summary

Background

Racism is an issue that is impacting every aspect of society in some way or another. Because of this the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group commissioned Iriss to conduct a survey of the social work workforce.

For this survey, we received about 203 responses from people working in social work ranging from social work students and newly qualified social workers to managers and policy makers.

This survey had the purpose to gather data on the understanding of racism and anti-racism in social work, as well as the perceived impact and prevalence in social work in Scotland.

Understanding of racism

There is a gap in understanding of racism in the social work workforce and the forms racism might present as in the workforce, particularly microaggressions.



94% of survey respondents from Minority Ethnic groups identified racism as an issue in social work. This compares to only 61% of White / Ethnic majority respondents believing this.



Only 20% of Minority Ethnic respondents felt that the organisations they worked for were committed to anti-racism and only 38% of Minority Ethnic respondents felt their team did enough to address racism.



Impact of racism



Racism has a disproportionately negative impact on Minority Ethnic respondents. While White / Ethnic Majority respondents reported impacts, such as increased anxiety and worse mental health.



Racism has an impact on retention of social workers, as racism is a reason that leads Minority Ethnic social workers consider leaving their job or profession.



The survey responses indicate that the impact of racism is not as visible to White / Ethnic Majority social workers. This can be due to not being as aware of racist actions or because they are working in all White / Ethnic Majority teams.

Policies and procedures

Only 74% of survey respondents knew there was an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy at their workplace. Less than 50% were aware of reporting structures for racism.



70% of Minority Ethnic respondents felt that policies and procedures were not effective in tackling racism. At the same time 58% of White / Ethnic Majority respondents felt they were effective.



20 respondents had reported racism in the past 12 months. In nine cases no action was taken following the reporting. In cases where action was taken responses were mixed on the effectiveness of the action.



Education and training



Only 57% of White / Ethnic Majority respondents and 30% of Minority Ethnic respondents felt that social work education had prepared them to address racism in their work.



Social work educators and students explained that the anti-racism training is currently woven into the education material but is not a distinct module or class.



About a third of respondents had taken part in anti-racism training over the past year. The training was often criticised for not being tailored to social work which made it difficult to see how to apply the learning.

Recommendations

Shared responsibility:

It is important to ensure that there is a balance between involving individuals from Minority Ethnic backgrounds and not placing all responsibility to eliminate racism on people with lived experience

High - quality training:

We need high-quality and targeted training on addressing racism in social work, including day to day scenarios social workers are likely to encounter and concepts, such as microaggressions.

Reporting structures

There needs to be an assessment of reporting structures locally and nationally particularly in regards to the effectiveness of processes and the safety of those using them.

Continued monitoring of progress

To understand how effective changes and policies are, we need to create a robust and regular data collection on racism within the workforce.

Introduction

Background

While racism is not a new issue by any means, conversations around racism and particularly systemic racism have become more prominent in politics, the media and the general public again in recent years. This most recent increase in discussion can likely be attributed to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the United States in 2020 which led to global 'Black Lives Matter' protests. These conversations and policy discussions around racism were further fuelled by a range of election campaigns and a rise of far-right parties across the world.

Not just an American problem

There seems to often be a notion, which was also expressed in some of the survey responses, that racism and particularly structural racism is an American, specifically United States, issue and does not apply to the UK or Scotland in the same way. This, however, is not true. In Scotland, the most prominent case of structural racism has been the inquiry into the death in police custody of Sheku Bayoh in 2015. The inquiry is at the time of writing still ongoing.¹ Davidson and colleagues (2018) 'No problem here: racism in Scotland'² also challenged conventional understanding that Scotland was relatively free of structural and institutional racism, based on its civic nationalism and welcoming policies towards migrants and refugees. This opened up a debate on racism and anti-racism, previously shut down for too long, and before Black Lives Matter.

¹ Sheku Bayoh Inquiry (2025) Available at: <https://www.shekubayohinquiry.scot/>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025.

² Davidson N, Liinpää M, McBride M, Virdee S (2018) 'No problem here: racism in Scotland' Edinburgh : Luath Press Limited; 2018

In Scotland, Black Lives Matter and the experience of racism reported in Scottish schools resulted in the 2021 launch of the 'Anti-Racism in Education Programme' bringing together separate pieces of work already underway focused on: education leadership and professional learning; diversity in the teaching profession and workforce; curriculum reform; identifying and addressing racism and racist incidents in schools.³ Further evidence of structural racism is reported in the anti-racism progress review 2023 by the Scottish Government. This highlights structural differences in access to housing, healthcare, education, employment and much more based on the ethnicity of individuals.⁴

Studies conducted in the UK and in Scotland on racism in the workforce often primarily focus on the healthcare workforce. These studies show that doctors from Minority Ethnic groups are more likely to encounter barriers to career progression, frequently experience microaggression and more.⁵ There has been a survey on racism within the social work workforce in England which is referenced throughout this report. This report also indicates that social workers from Minority Ethnic backgrounds experience challenges to career progression, negative (mental) health impacts and are more likely to leave their roles or progression because of racism in the workforce.⁶

Policy development in Scotland

The main legal framework in Scotland that aims to eliminate racism in the workforce is the Equality Act 2010 which focuses on enshrining the right to equal opportunities for everyone regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender,

³ Scottish Government (2023) Anti-Racism in Education: Factsheet Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/anti-racism-in-education-programme-factsheet/>. Last accessed: 28 March 2025

⁴ Scottish Government (2023) Anti-racism in Scotland: Progress Review 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/anti-racism-scotland-progress-review-2023/pages/2/>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025.

⁵ Firi P, Baryeh K. Racial microaggressions within the UK Healthcare System: a narrative review. JRSO Open. 2024 Aug 2;15(8):20542704241232861. doi: 10.1177/20542704241232861. ; Tim Tonkin (2022) Racism an issue in NHS, finds survey. British Medical Association. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/racism-an-issue-in-nhs-finds-survey>. Last Accessed: 25 March 2025

⁶ Gurau, O. & Bacchoo, A. (2022) Anti-racism report. Available at: <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/anti-racism-survey-report/#:~:text=The%20survey%20found%20that%20nearly,racism%20from%20colleagues%20or%20managers>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025

disability, sexuality or religion.⁷ In addition to this, the Scottish Government has set out its commitment to race equality, tackling racism and reducing barriers to people from Minority Ethnic groups in multiple strategies. One of these is the ‘Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016 to 2030’ which focuses one section on employability, employment and income.⁸ Another relevant strategy includes the ‘Anti-racist employment strategy - A fairer Scotland for All’ which focuses on reducing barriers to employment, as well as an increase in anti-racism training and support mechanisms to report and address discrimination.⁹

Looking forward, 2025 will see the launch of the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland. Its stated aims are to hold the Scottish Government and public sector bodies accountable on their commitment to anti-racism and to drive collective change to dismantle structural racism. As part of this it intends to host local, national and international expertise on how racism is seen in society, and help the Scottish Government deliver sustainable anti-racism policies and practices. They aim to engage with people and communities to do this and, most importantly, listen to people and communities to not repeat past mistakes.¹⁰

Anti-racism in social work

The Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) “Racism in Scottish Social Work: a 2021 snapshot” identified racism as a live issue for social work.¹¹

⁷ UK Government (2010) Equality Act 2010. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025.

⁸ Scottish Government (2016) Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016 to 2030. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/race-equality-framework-scotland-2016-2030/pages/3/>. Last accessed: 15 March 2025.

⁹ Scottish Government (2022) Anti-racist employment strategy - A fairer Scotland for All. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-anti-racist-employment-strategy/pages/1/>. Last accessed 25 March 2025.

¹⁰ Anti-racism observatory (2025) Available at: <https://antiracismobservatoryforscotland.org/>. Last accessed 28 March 2025

¹¹ <https://basw.co.uk/articles/racism-scottish-social-work-2021-snapshot>

For social work in Scotland, the establishment of the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group in 2023 and the release of the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group: statement of intent in 2024 show the commitment to tackling racism within the sector.¹² In addition, the Code of Practice in social work also highlights the professional values for social work which include respect, compassion, supporting the rights of others, and ensuring dignity of those they support.¹³

Social work's role within anti-racism might also consider the wider context. Social Work's relationship with the (UK-wide) PREVENT duty, discussed by Shall in her 2023 Iriss Insight identified tensions in the policing, surveillance and pre-crime work expected to prevent radicalisation and extremism, and its role in challenging any underlying racist assumptions, discriminatory and oppressive practices.¹⁴

Looking ahead, we are also aware that there are likely changes to come in the next few years based on current policy discussions and restructuring of social work in Scotland which might impact the anti-racism work moving forward. This survey was conducted in the policy environment explained above.

About the survey

This survey was designed by Iriss in collaboration with the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group, as well as other critical friends including lived experience panels of organisations represented in the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group. The survey questions covered a range of topics, including awareness, education, policies and experiences of racism and anti-racist activities in social work. The survey questions were informed by

¹² Scottish Government (2024) Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group: statement of intent. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/anti-racism-social-work-statement-intent-social-work-anti-racism-oversight-group/pages/1/>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025

¹³ Scottish Social Services (2024) SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers 2024. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-02412/en-us>. Last accessed 25 March 2024.

¹⁴ Shall, S. (2023) Social work's relationship with the PREVENT duty. Available at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/social-works-relationship-prevent-duty>. Last accessed: 28 March 2024

previous surveys run on this topic including the Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) “Racism in Scottish Social Work: a 2021 snapshot”¹⁵ and the “Anti Racism Survey Report” by Oana Gurau and Anna Bacchoo focusing on social work in England¹⁶.

The survey was open to the public between the 11th of November and the 13th of December 2024 and was accessible via the survey platform jotform. The survey was distributed by the members Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group through their professional networks, as well as through social media and press coverage.

The survey was completed by 216 people. Out of those, 13 people did not give permission to be included, therefore this report includes the responses of 203 respondents. It is important to note that respondents were not required to respond to all questions, which means for some questions the numbers of respondents are less than 203.

The survey results were analysed by Iriss and are presented in this report. While the sample of the survey is robust, there are some limitations to be aware of when reading this report:

- We were aiming to get good representation across different experience levels, job roles, employers and areas of social work. We did achieve good representation across some categories. It is not clear if the survey simply did not reach other groups / areas or if there were any other issues to completing the survey (i.e. time constraints).
- While our team has been working to educate themselves on matters on anti-racism as much as possible in the lead up and throughout this survey and has had input from lived experience forums through the

¹⁵ <https://basw.co.uk/articles/racism-scottish-social-work-2021-snapshot>

¹⁶ Gurau, O. & Bacchoo, A. (2022) Anti-racism report. Available at: <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/anti-racism-survey-report/#:~:text=The%20survey%20found%20that%20nearly,racism%20from%20colleagues%20or%20managers>. Last accessed: 25 March 2025

Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group, we are also aware that our team working on this project is White.

About the survey respondents

The main criteria for people to be eligible for the survey was that they work or have worked in social work. Therefore, we have been able to engage people from a variety of backgrounds in the survey.

The largest group of respondents were Social Work Practitioner - Care Staff¹⁷ with 38% of the respondents. This was followed by Social Work Practitioner - managerial 24% of the respondents and by Social Work practitioner - auxiliary roles with 18% of respondents. The vast majority worked in the public sector with 95% of the respondents indicating this as their sector. 85% of the respondents were full-time employed and 14% of the respondents were on part-time contracts. The remaining 1% were equally split between agency work and self-employment (s. Figure 1).

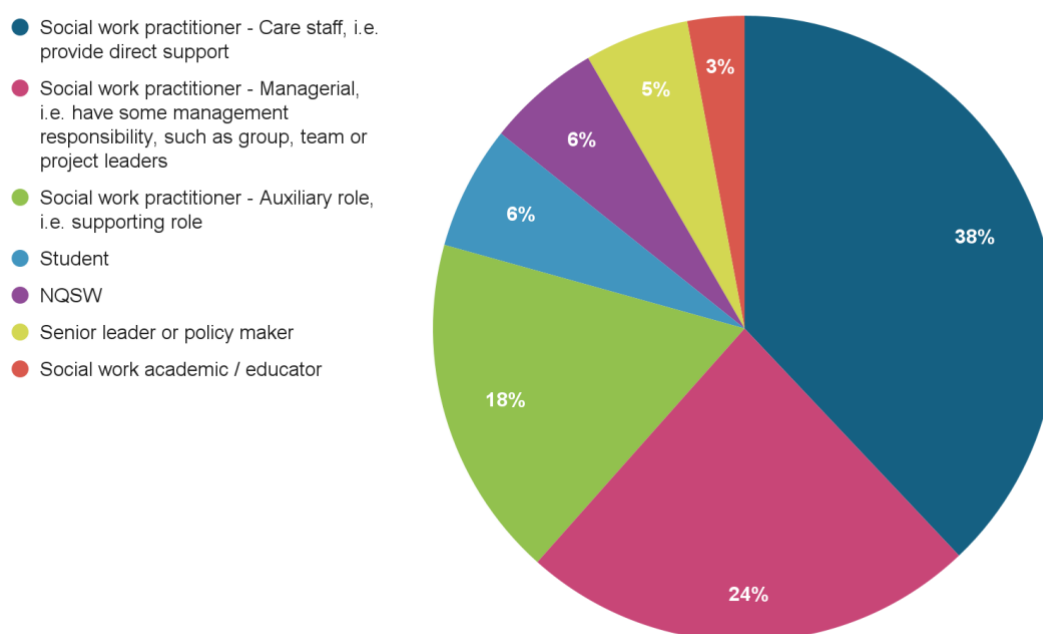


Figure 1: Job role of survey respondents [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=203]

¹⁷ The classifications are based on the job function codes explained in the SSSC workforce report. Available at: https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/WDR/WFDR_2023_20240826.pdf This means C2 to C4 staff levels.

We asked the respondents to share where they worked, this included both their area of social work and their working location. This included responses from:

- Individuals working in 24 councils across Scotland, Scotland wide and some students awaiting a decision of where they would work.
- 77% of respondents were based in large urban or urban areas and 14% were based in accessible small towns.¹⁸
- Almost half of the respondents worked in Adult Social Care, followed by Children and Families Social Work.
- 7% of the respondents indicated working across multiple areas of social work, most commonly working in Adult Social Care and were a Mental Health Officer (n=5).
- Other answers included primarily specialist teams (s. Figure 2).

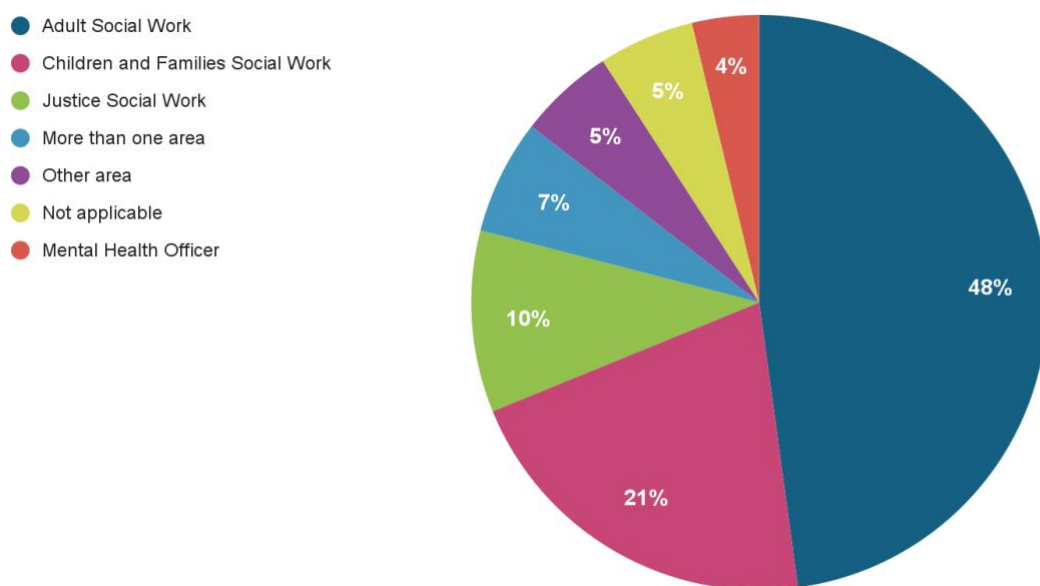


Figure 2: Social work area [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=186]

It was important to us to also hear from social work students. We received feedback from 13 students. We had respondents from Year 2 to postgraduate studies. 23% (n=3) had not yet taken part in placements. Almost half of all

¹⁸ The classifications are based on the job function codes explained in the SSSC workforce report. Available at: https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/WDR/WFDR_2023_20240826.pdf This means C2 to C4 staff levels

respondents had a previous placement in the statutory sector and about a quarter in the third sector.

About ethnicity

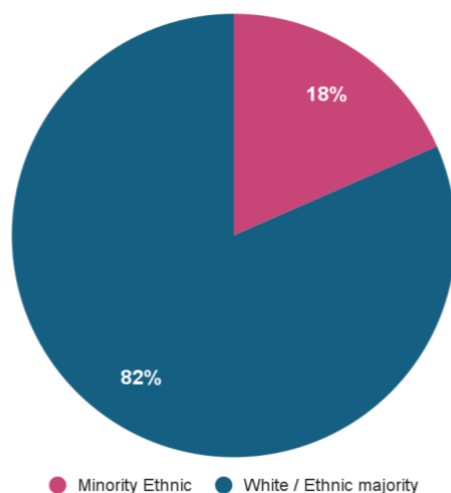


Figure 3: Ethnicity of social workers [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=190]

As this survey focuses on anti-racism, we asked survey respondents to disclose their ethnicity. This question was the only mandatory question. After discussions with the Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group, we decided to ask individuals if they identified as Minority Ethnic or White / Ethnic Majority and further provided them the space to self-describe their ethnicity.

As seen in Figure 3, 82% of respondents identified as part of the White / Ethnic Majority and 18% identified as Minority Ethnic. Out of those that reported their ethnicity in our survey as White / Ethnic Majority, 91% identified as White Scottish, White British, White English or White Irish. The remaining 9% included predominantly White European, White American or White New Zealand. For those who identified as Minority Ethnic, 46% identified as Black, Black African, Black Scottish, Black British or Black Caribbean and 34% identified as Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian. The remaining 20% included Mixed ethnic groups, Jewish, and Gypsy, Roma or Traveller. For students, 23% (n=3) were from a Minority Ethnic background.

In other data sets, there are usually a high percentage of 'unknown' cases of ethnicity reported. In the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) workforce report from 2023, the ethnicity for 25% of all staff were unknown. Only for 6% of the staff the ethnicity was recorded as Minority Ethnic (2% Asian, 4%

Black).¹⁹ The high number of unknown ethnicity in other data sets makes it difficult to assess how our data compares to the overall workforce. For students, according to HESA, the latest 2022 to 2023 data shows that 88% of social work students were White, 5% were Black and all other ethnicities were less than 5%. Data for 3% of all social work students' ethnicity was unknown.²⁰

Understanding and awareness of racism

One of the key parts of this survey was to gather a better understanding of how much individuals working in social work know about racism and anti-racist activities in the sector.

We were curious to understand how individuals self defined anti-racism and what that looks like to them. There was a wide range of definitions provided; yet the most common themes in the definitions included:

- **Fight discrimination:** Ensuring that everyone is able to live their lives free from fear of and acts of discrimination.
- **Social justice:** Focusing on equity and equality in terms of access to support and opportunities for everyone. This also includes the challenging of social structures that support and allow structural racism.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Ensuring that the workforce is representative of the diverse communities they support. However, it also gets highlighted that it is not only about having people from diverse backgrounds represented but also that these individuals are meaningfully included in decision-making within the workforce.

¹⁹ Scottish Social Services Council (2024) Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2023 Workforce Data. Available at: <https://data.sssc.uk.com/data-publications/22-workforce-data-report/359-scottish-social-service-sector-report-on-2023-workforce-data> Last accessed at: 24 March 2025

²⁰ Provided via email to the research team.

Some of the most common words mentioned in the definitions focused on **being active** in fighting racism and **challenging one's own opinions**, thoughts and the system. This shows that there is a reasonable understanding that to be anti-racist requires actions from individuals and not just being aware of racism.

Some of the definitions provided can be found below:

“Actively challenging any racist or discriminatory practices, beliefs, views or cultures. Looking for, identifying and challenging structural, systemic and everyday racist behaviours or discrimination.” - Survey respondent

“Anti-racism means taking a proactive approach in addressing all forms of racism and in all environments, even internal. It relies on education, awareness, and conversation. It requires nuanced discussions around culture and identity. Anti-racism is more than not being racist yourself, but working towards a society that challenges the status quos that perpetuates racism and other forms of discrimination.” - Survey respondent

“To me, being anti-racist means actively working to recognise, challenge, and dismantle the systems and beliefs that uphold racial inequalities, rather than passively rejecting racist ideas.” - Survey respondent

Several survey respondents also highlighted the importance of looking at **intersectionality** when discussing racism and anti-racism as individuals might face discrimination and challenges due to a number of characteristics.

While the majority of responses were able to identify some of the key elements of anti-racism, there were other **responses that show that there is a lack of understanding on what anti-racism means** and at times why anti-racist action is needed. These comments and definitions primarily questioned: the importance of anti-racist action (particularly in Scotland),

the belief that White people were experiencing racism in the UK, the belief that anti-racism and the terminology is creating division in the UK, and the belief that anti-racism leads to people not being able to think critically or independently.

In some of the survey responses, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was mentioned, often with reference to concerns that CRT was being used as a way to suppress White people. This is a view that has been expressed by Donald Trump throughout his presidential campaigns and has gained popularity since then.²¹ This is a misunderstanding of what Critical Race Theory stands for. Critical Race Theory is a theoretical approach to understanding and addressing racism developed in the United States. It focuses on the relationship between race, racism and power within the context of economics, history, context, group-and self-interest, feelings, and the unconscious. It does not advocate for the oppression of White people but advocates for eliminating structural and institutional racism. It primarily focuses on racism against Black Americans, but in more recent years there have been increased subgroups of other minority groups, such as Asian Americans or members of the queer community.²²

Understanding terms associated with racism

We also asked respondents if they had heard about a number of concepts related to racism, if they knew what they meant and knew how to apply them in their day to day lives. We asked about the following concepts:

- **White privilege:** 'White privilege is the privilege of not having to be concerned that the way in which you are racialized will be the specific cause or motive for unequal treatment, in majority-white societies.'²³

²¹ Lang, C. (2020) President Trump Has Attacked Critical Race Theory. Here's What to Know About the Intellectual Movement. Available at: <https://time.com/5891138/critical-race-theory-explained/>. Last accessed: 19 March 2025.

²² Stefanic, J. & Delgado, R. (2010) Critical Race Theory: An Introduction. Available at: https://scholarship.law.ua.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=fac_working_papers. Last accessed: 19 March 2025.

²³ Jackson, A. (unknown) Understanding White Privilege. Available at: <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/community/decolonising/understanding-white-privilege.pdf>. Last accessed 20 March 2025.

This can, for example, mean not being asked to speak on behalf of an entire ethnic group or being the only person of a different ethnicity in a group / meeting. It can also mean not being discriminated against when trying to rent or property or in applications based on only your name or ethnicity.²⁴ This does not mean that White people are not experiencing challenges or discrimination in parts of their lives, it just means that they are not experiencing this due to their race.

- **Unconscious bias:** ‘Unconscious bias is a negative concept that most people are unaware of. This aspect has adverse effects on interpersonal relationships and relationships in social life.’²⁵ This includes the unconscious impact of racial biases and stereotypes on day to day interactions.
- **Systemic racism:** ‘Racism in any society is fuelled by a number of factors, often acting independently of each other, or, at times, in concert with each other. [...] This situation is compounded by the fact that many individuals and organisations appear to lack the understanding and courage to call out racism and the will and power to meaningfully tackle it.’²⁶ An example for this became visible during the Covid-19 pandemic when Minority Ethnic groups were more severely impacted due to structural racism, including in access to healthcare and overcrowded housing conditions.
- **Cultural appropriation:** ‘Cultural appropriation refers to the taking of items (whether tangible or intangible) from one culture by another. [...] Whilst sharing or experiencing cultures other than one’s own is a rich part of human experience, it remains problematic because of the

²⁴ Bhopal, K. (2023). Rethinking White Privilege. *Annual Review Sociology*. 2023. 49:111-128. Available at: <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-123710>. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

²⁵ Suveren, Y. (2021) Unconscious Bias: Definition and Significance. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry* 2022. 14(1):414-426. Available at: http://www.cappsy.org/archives/vol14/no3/cap_14_03_14_en.pdf. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

²⁶ Miller, P. (2021) “System Conditions”, System Failure, Structural Racism and Anti-Racism in the United Kingdom: Evidence from Education and Beyond. *Societies*. 11(2). Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/11/2/42>. Last accessed: 20 March 2025

damage it may cause, especially when the culture who has been taken from is marginalised, [i.e.] either a minority or indigenous culture.’²⁷

- **Microaggressions:** ‘Racial microaggressions are defined as ‘brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour’. Racial microaggressions can be difficult to manage due to their intangibility; they are often minimised as simple racial faux pas or cultural missteps.’²⁸ Examples include ‘where are you really from?’, ‘You are a great representation of your race.’, ‘I don’t see skin colour.’, ‘As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.’²⁹
- **White Saviour Complex:** ‘A narrative that implies White people full of agency offering up salvation to the world.’³⁰ While this concept is often associated with White people going abroad to ‘save’ people in impoverished countries, it is becoming increasingly visible in more domestic areas too. There the definition is more likely to focus on ‘a White person’s desire to help a [Minority Ethnic] person in a self-serving way.’³¹
- **Redlining:** ‘Redlining refers to the practice of systematically denying various services (e.g., credit access, [social work or care support or healthcare]) to residents of specific neighborhoods, often based on race / ethnicity and primarily within urban communities.’³² This

²⁷ Arya, R. (Unknown) Cultural Appropriation: What It Is and Why It Matters. Sociology Compass. Available at: https://pure.hud.ac.uk/ws/files/39481863/SOCO_1743.R1_Proof_hi.pdf. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

²⁸ Morrison N, Zaman T, Webster G, et al. (2023) ‘Where are you really from?’: a qualitative study of racial microaggressions and the impact on medical students in the UK. *BMJ Open* 2023;13:e069009. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069009

²⁹ University of Minnesota (Unknown) Examples of racial microaggressions. Available at: <https://sph.umn.edu/site/docs/hewg/microaggressions.pdf>. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

³⁰ McCurdy, J. (2016) The Privileged Guardian Angel: An Examination of White Saviour Complex in Western Media. *Political Science Undergraduate Review*. Fall 2016. 1(3). Available at: <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/psur/index.php/psur/article/view/60>. Last Accessed: 20 March 2025.

³¹ Garber, E. (2020) The White Saviour Complex. *Contemporary Racism*. Available at: <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/psur/index.php/psur/article/view/60>. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

³² Egede, L. et al. (2023) Modern Day Consequences of Historic Redlining: Finding a Path Forward. *J Gen Intern Med*. 38(6):1534-1537. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11606-023-08051-4.pdf>. Last accessed: 20 March 2025.

concept is primarily used in the United States conversations around racial inequalities but is a part of systemic racism.

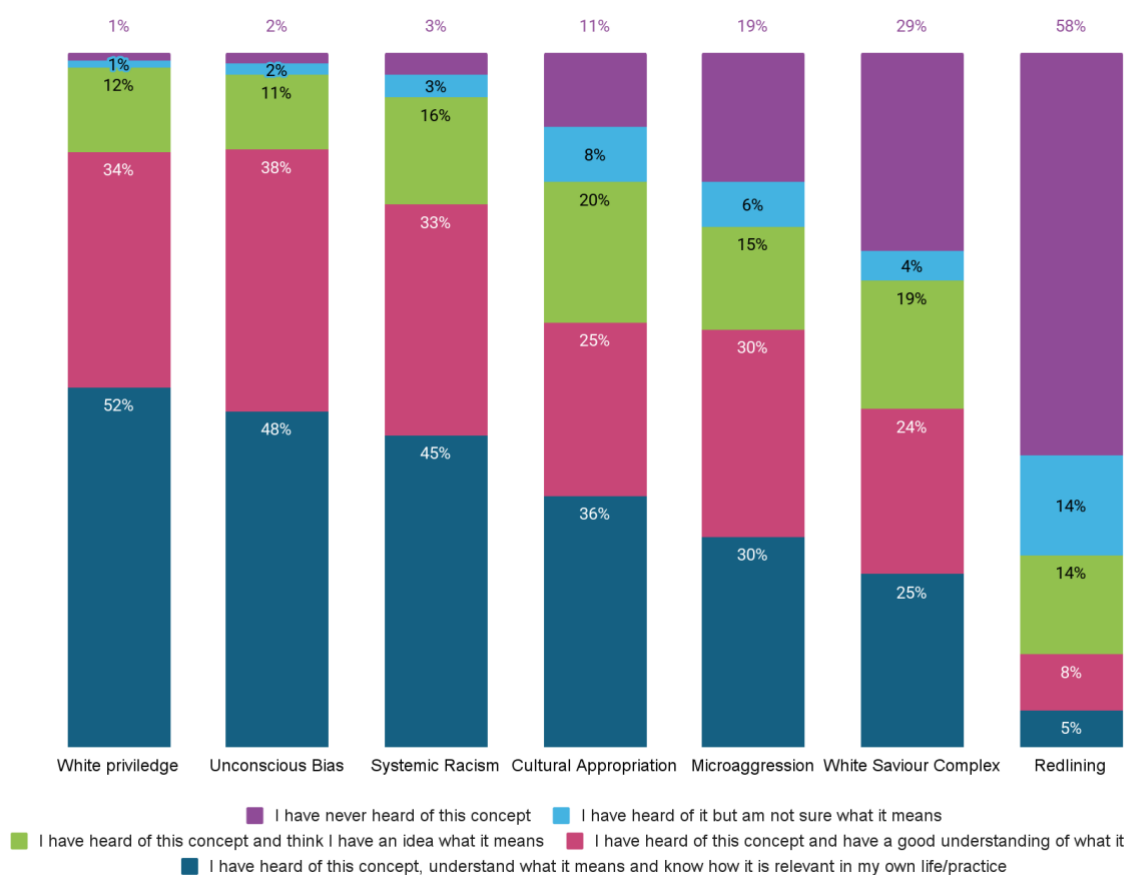


Figure 4: Understanding of concepts relating to racism [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=189]

As seen in Figure 4, Respondents seemed to have a good understanding of terms such as white privilege, unconscious bias, systemic racism and cultural appropriation. Interestingly, microaggressions and white saviour complex were less well known to the respondents. Particularly, microaggressions are likely to be something social workers are encountering most frequently but are potentially not aware that this is happening. These findings were mirrored in the data from students responding to the survey. It shows that there is a need for more training and education on how racism presents itself in our day to day lives among social workers.

Understanding of importance of issue

We also wanted to understand how much of an issue respondents perceived racism to be in social work. The responses to the statements are summarised in the following figure:

I think that...	White / Ethnic Majority	Minority Ethnic
Racism is a problem in social work	61%	94%
Racism is a problem in my organisation	36%	71%
I feel confident that reporting racism will lead to appropriate action.	76%	47%
My organisation is committed to promoting anti-racism.	82%	20%
I believe my team is doing enough to address racism.	73%	38%
There is someone in my organisation I could approach to support me, if I witnessed or experienced racism.	89%	47%
I feel prepared and confident intervening, if I witness racism.	84%	56%

Figure 5: Agreement with statements relating to racism in social work [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=189]

It is clear that there is a significant difference in how respondents identifying as White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic perceive racism in social work. This indicates that there needs to be more action taken to reduce racism in the workplace, but particularly to make Minority Ethnic social workers feel safe and heard.

This section shows that while there is, to an extent, an understanding of what racism and anti-racism is among the social work workforce, there seems to be a disconnect between being aware of concepts of racism and anti-racism and what this looks like and manifests itself within the day to day lives in our organisations.

There is also a clear issue around people from Minority Ethnic groups being able to trust that they will be taken seriously when they report racism. With the high percentages shown in Figure 5 that the strong believe that enough is being done to address racism and the comparatively low believe that racism is a problem within their own organisation among White / Ethnic Majority respondents, explaining why the confidence in reporting racism, feeling like they can approach someone to support them when experiencing or witnessing racism, is significantly lower for Minority Ethnic respondents. This discrepancy of perception means that people from Minority Ethnic groups are likely to have to do a lot of emotional and mental work when reporting racism and are likely fearing to not be believed, not see any positive action and fear negative repercussions towards themselves when talking about or reporting racism.

Perceived prevalence of racism

We refer to this as perceived prevalence of racism and not as actual prevalence. This is because it is not based on the number of reported instances of racism in social work. Nor is it based on legal definitions of racism. This is only based on what the survey respondents perceived as racist incidents. The actual prevalence of racism in social work in Scotland is difficult to measure and has so far, as far as we are aware, not been

measured, especially as official numbers of reported racism would likely only provide a fraction of the incidents that took place.³³

We asked respondents if they have experienced or witnessed any racism in their work. The results shown in Figure 6 are disaggregated by how survey respondents identified based on their ethnicity.

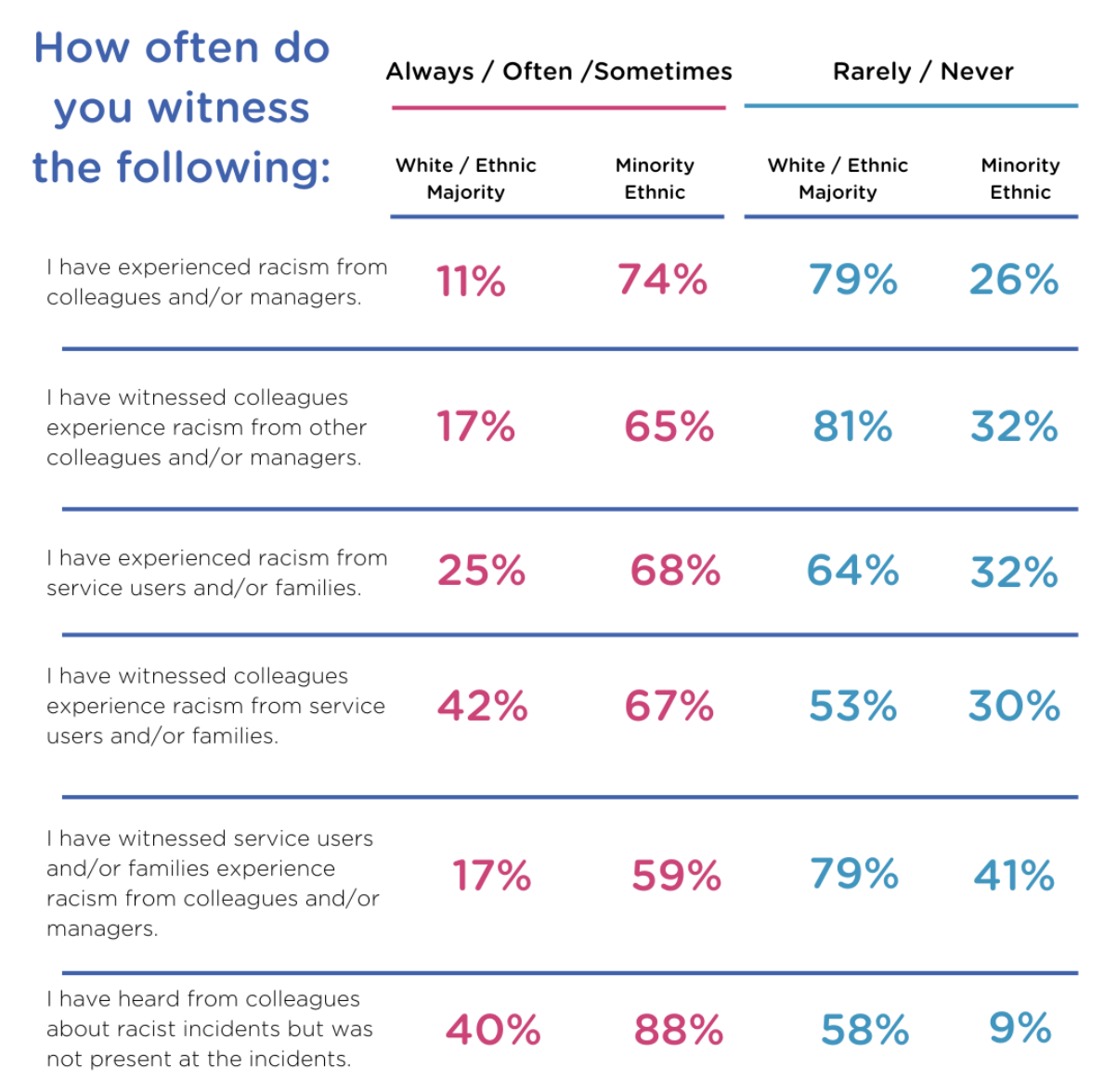


Figure 6: Perceived frequency of experiencing and witnessing racism [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n=189; Where the percentage does not add to 100%, the remaining responses were N/A]

³³ Becares, L. & et al. (2024) The persistence and pervasiveness of racial discrimination in Great Britain: capturing experienced racial discrimination over time and life domains. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01419870.2024.2372043> Last accessed: 19 March 2025.

For the survey, we purposefully asked about respondents experiencing and witnessing racist actions to better understand the prevalence but also awareness of racist actions taking place. There are again significant differences in the responses from White / Ethnic Majority respondents compared to Minority Ethnic respondents. This is particularly concerning when it comes to the differences in witnessing racism, as the differences between White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic respondents raise some questions, such as:

- Do these differences in responses stem from a lack of awareness and understanding of what racist actions are?
- Are these racist incidents happening in one on one situations and, therefore, there are no witnesses?
- To what extent is the workplace culture impacting how comfortable individuals who have experienced racism feel coming forward and reporting or talking about the racist actions they have experienced?

This survey is not able to answer these questions and it will require further (qualitative) research and self-reflection on the individual and organisational level in the local and national context to better understand the differences. It is, however, crucial to understand why this discrepancy exists and to take action to lower this.

Experiences of racism

In the survey, we asked respondents to provide instances of racism they have experienced or witnessed. To ensure the anonymity of respondents, we have summarised common themes within the experiences to provide here:

- **Derogatory language:** This includes racial slurs used by colleagues, either towards the survey respondent or people accessing the social work. This includes instances of directly speaking to a person or overhearing colleagues speak about others in official and unofficial settings.

- **Questioning of capabilities:** This includes questioning qualifications, work ethic and intelligence of Minority Ethnic colleagues. This type of racism often came from line managers and people accessing the support. One of the reasons behind the questioning was also named as 'cultural differences' that would make these colleagues not capable of their roles. In some instances this led to fitness to practice hearings.
- **Xenophobia:** There have been instances described where people accessing the services asked for other social workers, if the social worker was perceived as foreign either based on their perceived ethnicity or their accent. They did not want to be supported by someone perceived as not from the UK.
- **Generalisation:** Colleagues and people accessing the service making Minority Ethnic social workers responsible for actions of or judging them based on interactions they have had with other people from the same perceived ethnic background before.
- **Minimising experiences:** Social workers reported and witnessed other colleagues minimise or dismiss the experiences of Minority Ethnic social workers. This includes telling social workers they were overreacting or that they were imagining racist behaviour.
- **Verbal abuse:** Social workers reported having witnessed or experienced colleagues and people accessing support verbally abuse Minority Ethnic social workers because of their ethnicity.
- **Changes in behaviour:** Social workers reported people accessing services changing their behaviour after meeting them in person. This was reported in cases where interactions firstly took place over the phone and then attitudes and behaviours changed when the social workers met the people in person and it was perceived they were from a Minority Ethnic background.
- **Allocation of work:** Social workers reported that they were being allocated placements or cases based on their perceived ethnicities. This led to non-statutory placements hindering job opportunities or

only cases with people of the same perceived ethnicity because they will have a 'better connection with them'.

- **Usage of names:** Social workers reported they have experienced or heard colleagues refuse to learn to pronounce or use the names of colleagues or people accessing support from Minority Ethnic groups.
- **Negative stereotyping of people accessing support:** Social workers reported having overheard colleagues make assumptions about people accessing their support based on their perceived ethnicity without speaking to the individuals. This included assumptions around terrorism, forced marriage or abusing the welfare system.
- **Comments about appearance:** Social workers reported experiencing or witnessing comments from colleagues about individuals perceived 'ethnic features' such as hair or noses, as well as clothes.
- **Questioning of deserving of services:** Social workers reported overhearing colleagues talking about how social work should focus on supporting Scottish people and not support immigrants.
- **Physical abuse:** Social workers reported experiencing physical abuse from people accessing the support because of their ethnicity. This included primarily items being thrown at them.
- **Antisemitism:** Social workers reported hearing increased antisemitism sentiments and speech since the war between Palestine and Israel.

This shows that there is a need for a range of interventions to educate about what racist behaviour and language includes. But it also highlights the importance of ensuring there are structures and support in place that protects Minority Ethnic social workers better from racist behaviours from people accessing services.

We wanted to understand how frequently these racist incidents are taking place. The responses differed substantially between those respondents identifying as Minority Ethnic versus those identifying as White / Ethnic Majority. Almost two thirds of White / Ethnic Majority respondents indicated that they never witness racist incidents. At the same time, Minority Ethnic

respondents reported encountering or witnessing racist incidents more frequently (see Figure 7). This difference in the perceived frequency of racist incidents mirrors the difference in understanding and awareness highlighted earlier in this report.

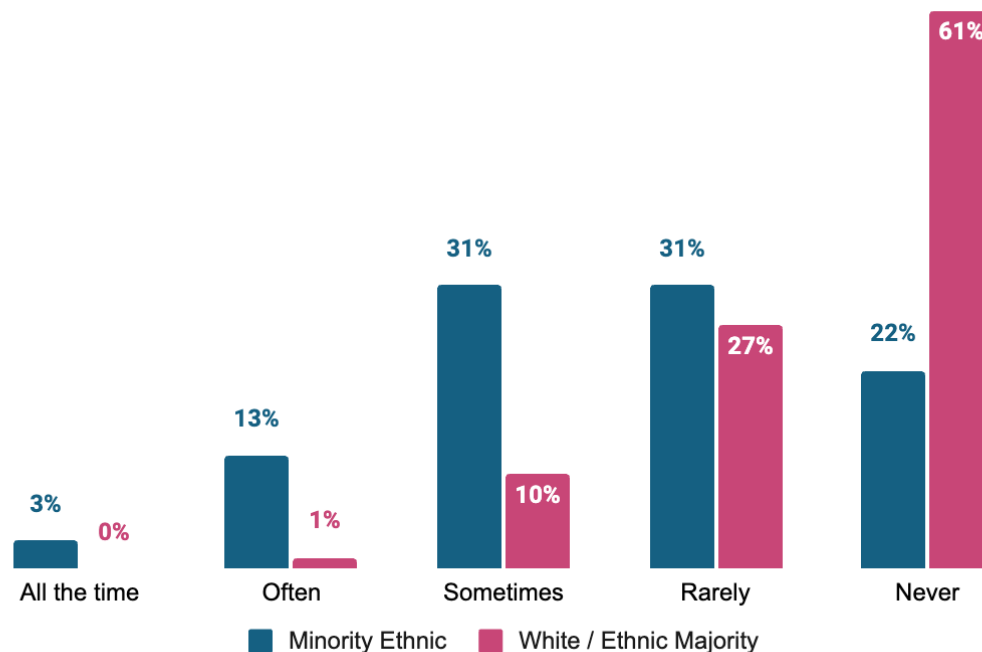


Figure 7: How frequently do you overhear or hear about colleagues talking in a racist manner? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 32 Minority Ethnic n= 153 White / Ethnic Majority]

Impact of racism

Through this survey, we were keen to understand what impact racism has on individuals, as well as the profession as a whole. Firstly, we were keen to understand how racism might impact people moving into social work, as well as their prospects for progression.

Career Progression and Equal opportunities

We asked survey respondents if they felt that all employees, regardless of race or ethnicity have equal opportunities for advancement within their organisations. Perceptions are strikingly different between respondents from White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic groups. As seen in Figure 8, 70%

of those of the White / Ethnic Majority agreed or strongly agreed that there were equal opportunities for everyone to progress in their organisations. At the same time, 63% of Minority Ethnic respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. This shows that there is likely limited awareness among the Ethnic Majority group of how racism is impacting the progression of their colleagues.

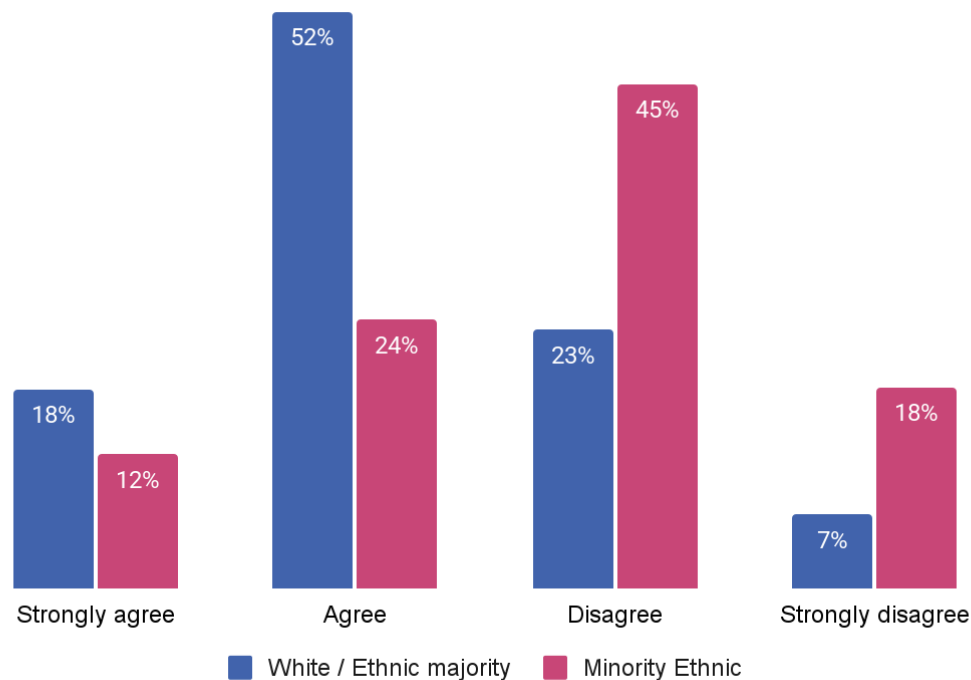


Figure 8: Do you think everyone has the same progression opportunities regardless of their ethnicity? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 33 Minority Ethnic n= 150 White / Ethnic Majority]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a disproportionate number of social workers from Minority Ethnic backgrounds experience fitness to practice hearings, fail or repeat work placements or face other obstacles. In the survey, 16 respondents each of White / Ethnic majority and Minority Ethnic respondents experienced these. While an equal number of respondents had these experiences it is important to note the difference in proportion. Out of those from a White / Ethnic Majority background, it was 10% of respondents who experienced these challenges, while it was 46% of Minority Ethnic respondents (s. Figure 9). For White / Ethnic Majority respondents the most common challenge was fitness to practice processes. For Minority Ethnic

respondents, there was an equal split between fitness to practice processes and failed or repeated placements. This confirms the previous evidence of disproportionate numbers of a Minority Ethnic background facing measures slowing their entry to social work and likely having a lasting effect on their progressions.

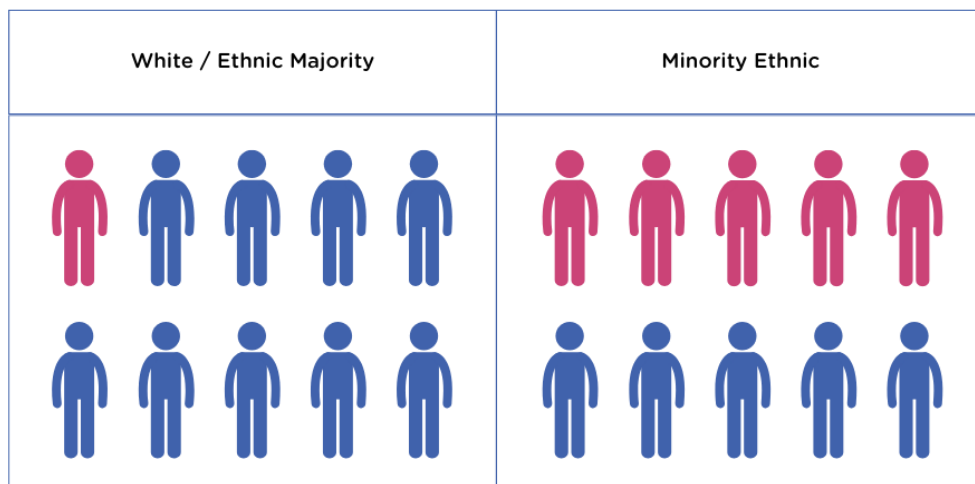


Figure 9: Have you ever been subject to measures that delayed your progression? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 33 Minority Ethnic n= 155 White / Ethnic Majority]

Similarly, while one White / Ethnic Majority student reported a failed or repeated work placement or fitness to practice hearing, two out of three Minority Ethnic students reported the same.

Impact on individual's life

The following figure (Figure 10) shows how survey respondents perceived the impact of experiencing or witnessing racism on themselves in the 12 months prior to the survey. We then calculated the percentage of respondents by reported ethnicity to see the difference in prevalence of the impact. This shows that while there can be an impact of racism on individuals of the White / Ethnic majority, the impact is much more common among people of Minority Ethnic backgrounds. It is also important to note that 84% (n= 131) respondents who identified as White / Ethnic Majority reported no impact on themselves. At the same time, only 18% (n=6) respondents identifying as

Minority Ethnic reported no impact on themselves. Respondents were able to report more than one impact on themselves.

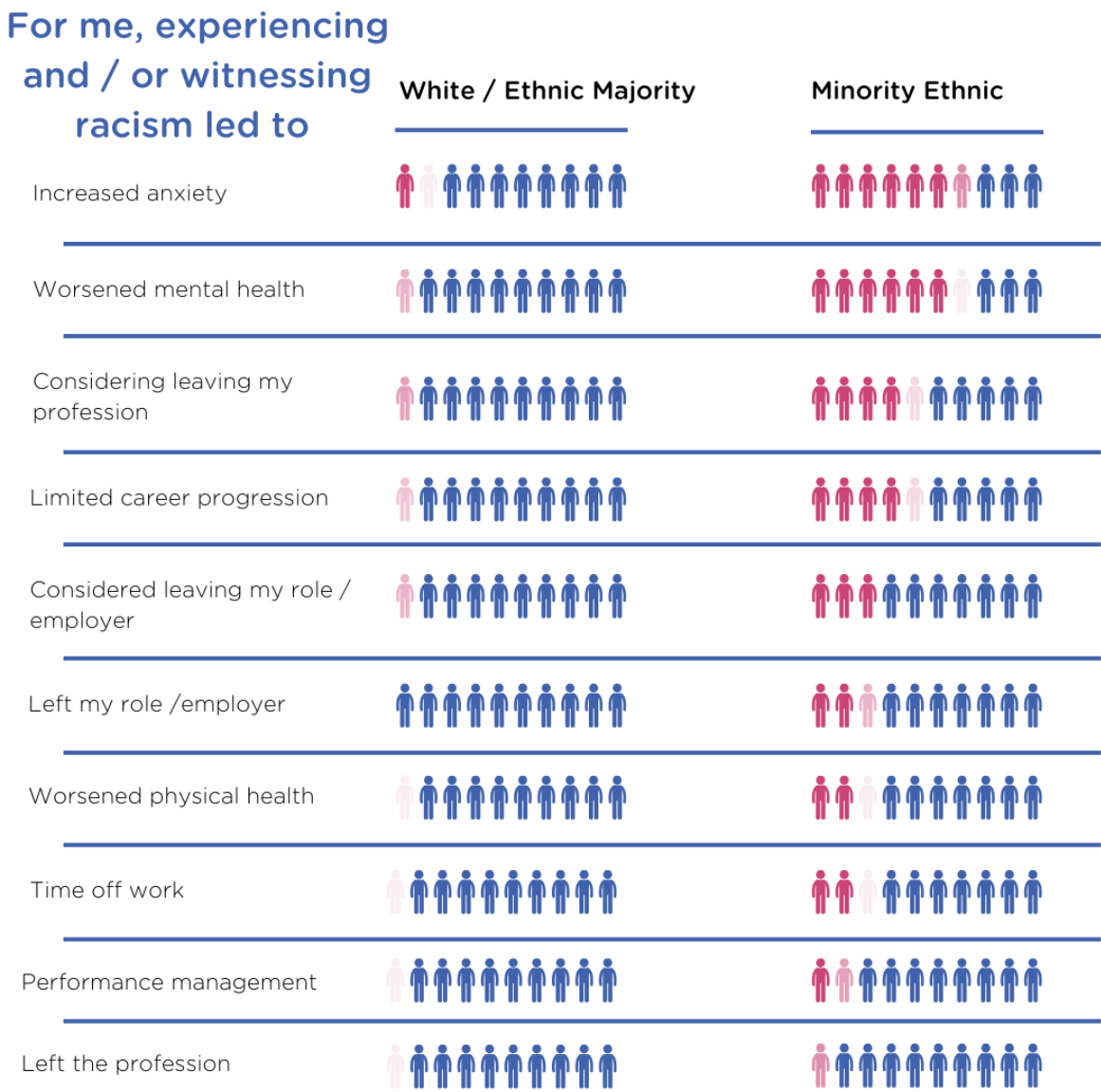


Figure 10: The impact of racism on individuals. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 32 Minority Ethnic n= 153 White / Ethnic Majority; pink equates to 10% of people who answered in the affirmative, lighter shades of pink when less than 10% (the darker, the higher the percentage)]

Figure 10 clearly shows the difference in prevalence of the impact of racism on social workers identifying as White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic. It shows that over half of Minority Ethnic respondents experienced increased anxiety and worse mental health due to racism they experienced and / or witnessed. It also showed that 21% experienced worse physical health.

In times where there are national conversations around a lack of social workers and challenges around recruitment and retention, it is also important to acknowledge the role racism plays in this. As shown in Figure 10, 42% of Minority Ethnic respondents considered leaving the profession in the past 12 months and 30% considered leaving their job. 24% actually left their roles and 6% left the profession. This amplifies that anti-racist work is not only crucial to individuals but to the profession as a whole and does impact everyone in social work directly or indirectly.

We also asked respondents to tell us about what they perceived the impact on their colleagues to be. 51% of respondents (n=93) reported not having observed any impact of racism on their colleagues. The overwhelming majority (90 out of 93) of those who did not observe any impact of racism on colleagues identified as White / Ethnic majority. This likely indicates that there is less awareness of the impact of racism on individuals among White / Ethnic majority social workers or that they work within all White teams. This could also explain why there is a discrepancy in the perceived prevalence of racism or on the importance placed on anti-racist work among White / Ethnic majority respondents. Put simply, individuals might not see it as an important issue when they do not see the impact of it in their day to day lives. While this is a potential explanation, it remains important that we continue to work and educate ourselves as the White / Ethnic Majority to be more vigilant of racism in our workplace and the impact it has on our colleagues.

49% of respondents (n=88) indicated that they saw some impact of racism on their colleagues. We asked respondents to report any impact they observed, meaning respondents were able to submit multiple responses to this question. The most frequently observed impacts included:

- 72% observed **increased anxiety** in their colleagues (n=63)
- 56% observed **worsened mental health** (n=49)
- 40% were aware their colleagues **considered leaving their job** (n=35)

- 33% were aware of **limited career progression** for their colleagues (n=29)
- 32% were aware of colleagues **taking time off work** due to racism (n=28)
- 31% were aware of colleagues **considering leaving the profession** due to racism (n=27)
- 20% were aware of colleagues **leaving their jobs** due to racism (n=18)

Some respondents included 'other' options which included their colleague not speaking up or reporting racism because they didn't want to be perceived as 'making a fuss' and the colleague of the respondent losing trust in and respect for the management team.

Students witnessed or experienced racism at similar rates to the remaining respondents. This includes that students experienced or witnessed discrimination based on the perceived ethnicity through people accessing services, classmates and educators at similar rates. Out of 11 students that responded to the question on the impact of racism on themselves and colleagues, almost all White / Ethnic Majority students reported no impact while the Minority Ethnic students reported worsening mental health, physical health, limited career progression and considering leaving their course. This shows that even before they reach the workforce, Minority Ethnic students are considering leaving their course more frequently and this could lead to less Minority Ethnic social workers.

These responses are in line with the findings reported in Figure 5 about respondents from Minority Ethnic groups not feeling confident reporting racism they experience to someone within their organisation.

Workplace culture

Policy and practice

We wanted to get a better understanding of how aware people were of the current policies and practices in their workplace that aim to address racism and the impact of racism. As seen in Figure 11, there is a lack of awareness of measures to address racism within the workplace. As one survey respondent phrased it:

“The fact that I don't know speaks volumes.” - Survey respondent

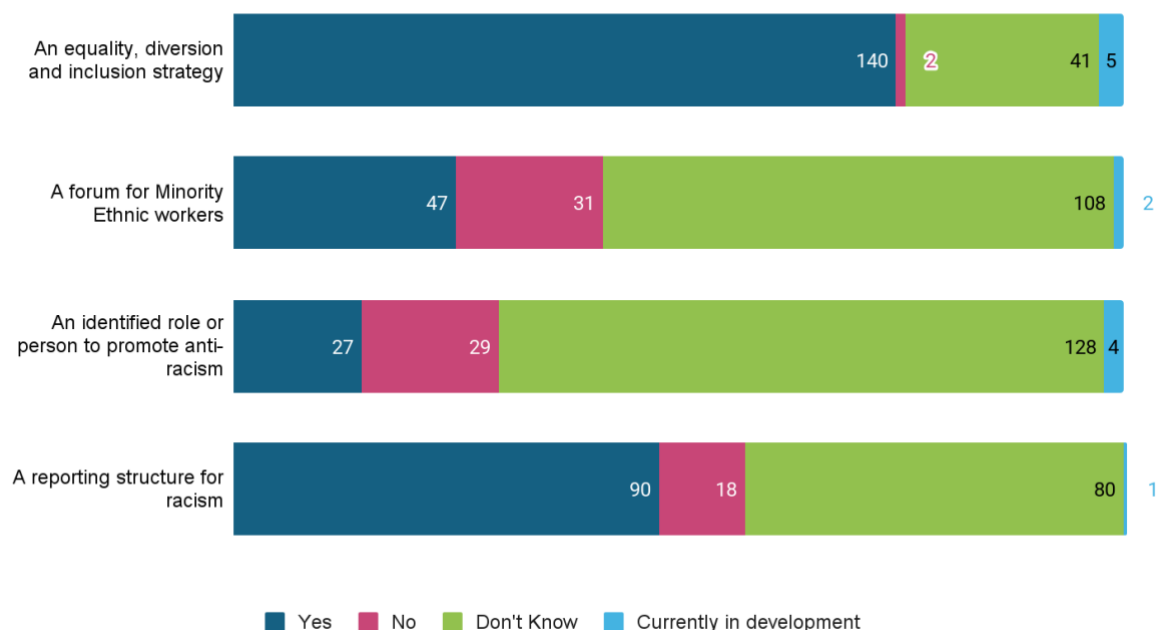


Figure 11: Awareness of policies and practices to address racism [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 189]

Figure 11 clearly shows that there needs to be a change in how policies and practices are shared and communicated within organisations and teams. As the figure above shows, only 74% of respondents were aware of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies in their workplace and less than 50% were aware of reporting structures. Knowing policies or procedures exist is needed for people to enact them or to know where to look for / ask for help, if they are not sure.

When asked how effective respondents thought the current policies and procedures are there were again differences in the responses from White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic respondents (s. Figure 12). 70% of Minority Ethnic respondents felt that the current policies were not very or not at all effective (n= 23), with only 15% feeling they were mostly effective (n=5). At the same time, 58% of White / Ethnic Majority respondents felt that the current policies were fully or mostly effective (n=83) and 40% felt they were not very or not at all effective (n=57). It becomes clear that the existing policies either need to be adjusted or that they need to be used more effectively to make the impact they desire. The difference in perception also suggests that there needs to be more involvement of those with lived experience in the development of these policies to increase their effectiveness.

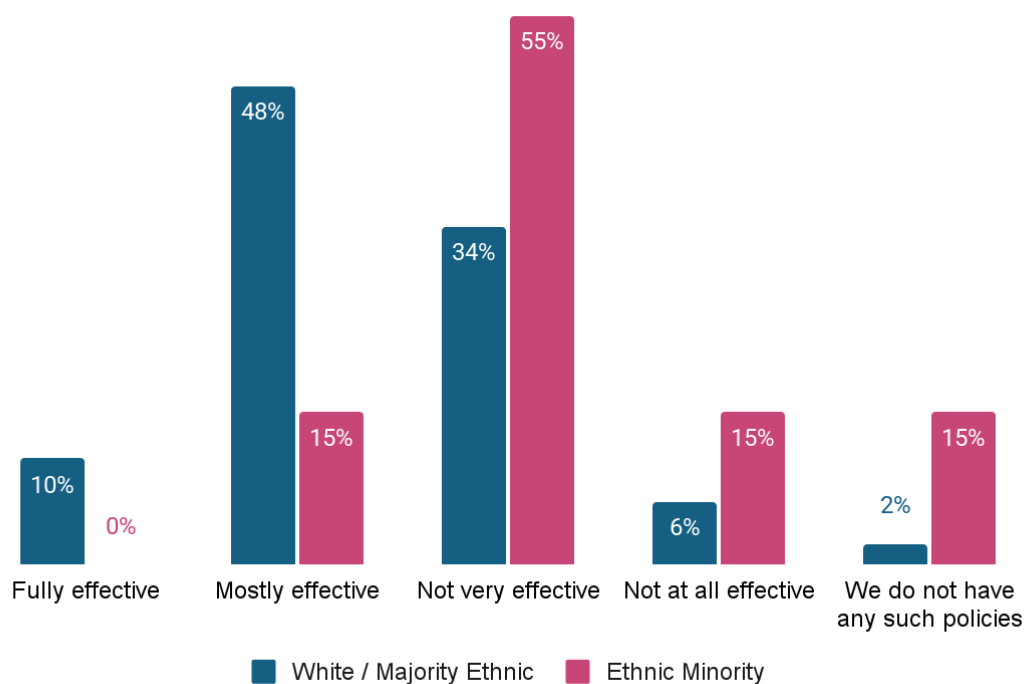


Figure 12: How effective are policies and practices to address racism [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 188]

Survey respondents who did not deem the policies effective commented on the fact that a policy is often just ‘words on paper’, but that the effectiveness comes from the effort and commitment to implement these policies into practice. The main reasons given for the perceived lack of effectiveness are

missing visibility of policies across the organisation, a lack of training and education on the topics of the policies, particularly on racism, and that the enforcement of policies often depends on the awareness and commitment of individual line managers, team leaders or senior management.

Similar differences to the responses on effectiveness of policies can be seen when we asked respondents about how committed they believe their employer or educational institution to be to incorporating anti-racist practices in social work. As seen in Figure 13, White / Ethnic Majority respondents more commonly believed their organisations were committed to incorporating anti-racist practices compared to Minority Ethnic respondents.

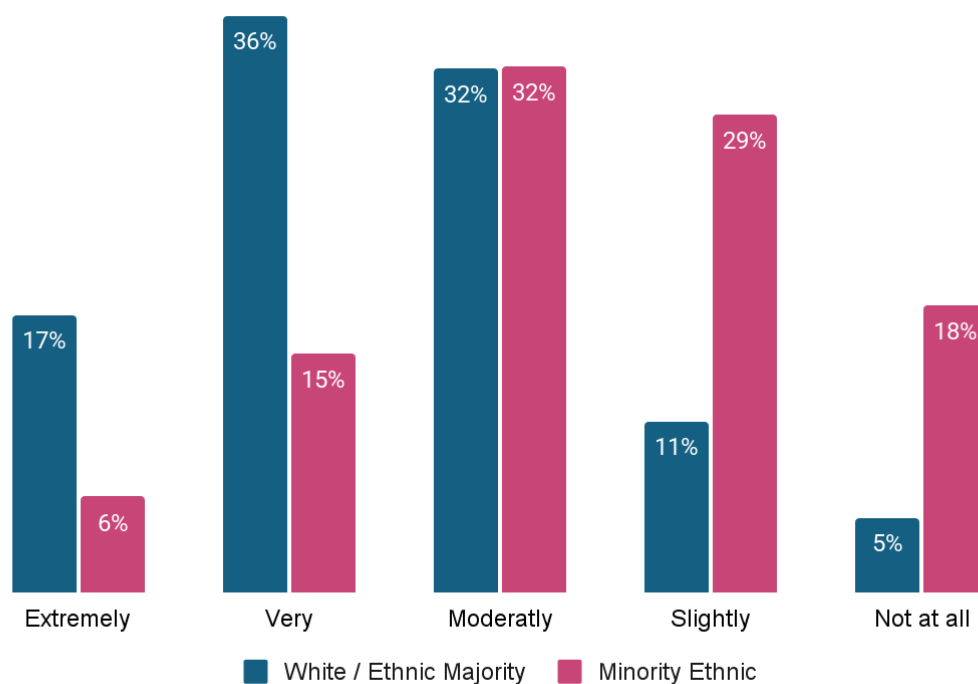


Figure 13: How committed is your employer / educational institution to anti-racist practice? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 186]

We wanted to understand how confident respondents in managerial roles feel to identify, develop and implement policies on anti-racism. As seen in Figure 14 below, the main barriers for respondents with managerial responsibilities are having enough knowledge of anti-racism policies and having enough resources to develop and implement anti-racist policies.

Something that could be beneficial is to allow for more national forums to allow individuals in managerial positions to learn from each other and to help each other overcome challenges.

How do respondents with managerial responsibilities feel about identifying, developing and implementing anti-racist policies?








	Strongly agree / agree	Strongly disagree / disagree
 I have enough knowledge about anti-racism to develop and implement policies.	45%	55%
 I have enough resources (time, budget, personnel) to develop and implement comprehensive anti-racist policies.	24%	76%
 I have enough support in the wider organisation to develop and implement policies.	62%	38%
 I ensure that anti-racism is a priority in my leadership.	95%	5%
 I am able to create an inclusive environment where all employees, regardless of race or ethnicity, feel valued and heard.	91%	9%
 I hold myself and my team accountable for upholding anti-racist values.	100%	0%
 I have opportunities to engage with other leaders and organisations across Scotland to exchange what works.	50%	50%

Figure 14: Factors influencing managers abilities to create and implement anti-racist policies and procedures. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 189]

The themes across this section raise the following questions for reflection:

- Is there a sufficient understanding of what anti-racist practice looks like and how we are incorporating them in our work?
- Are people from Minority Ethnic groups included and heard in conversations around the creation and implementation of anti-racist practice?

- Are we communicating clearly what these anti-practices are and how they should be used in the day to day work of social workers?

“I think dismantling racism within institutions is challenging and there is great resistance. I think many institutions will clearly object to racism, but contributing to anti-racist efforts takes more work, requires more change.” - Survey respondent

Intervention

Two thirds of White / Ethnic Majority respondents felt confident to intervene when witnessing racist incidents. This was also the most common response for Minority Ethnic respondents, however, the percentage of individuals feeling confident to intervene is lower than of their White / Ethnic Majority counterparts. In total, 33% of all Minority Ethnic respondents reported not feeling comfortable to intervene.

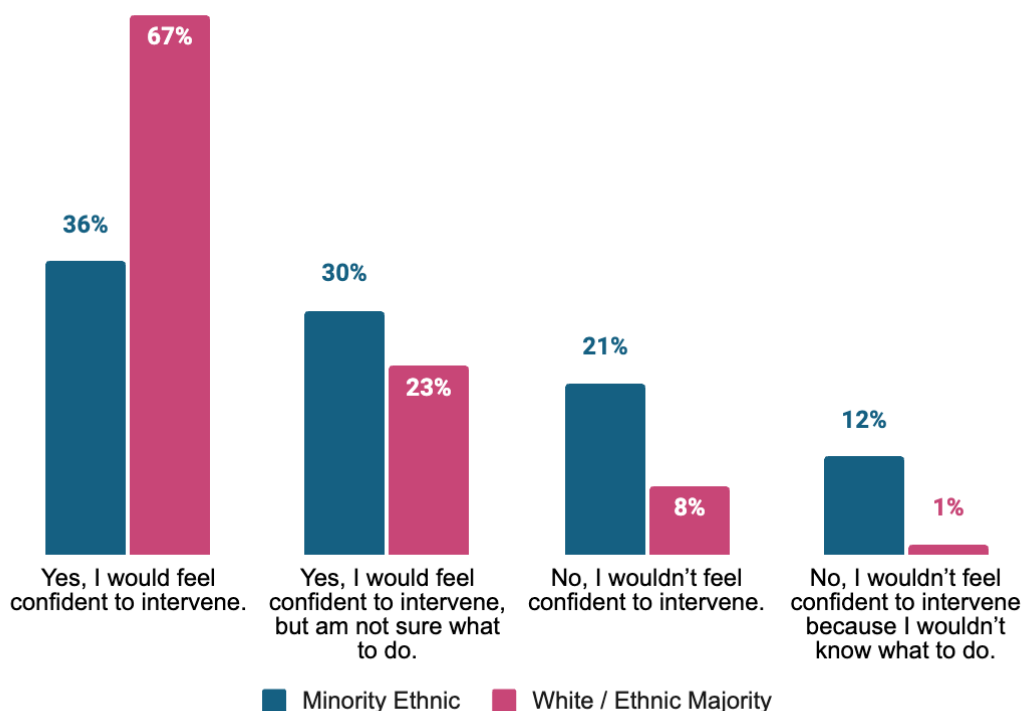


Figure 15: Would you feel confident to intervene when witnessing a racist incident? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 187]

We wanted to understand what motivated the responses for this question and what made respondents feel more confident or comfortable to intervene in racist incidents. The Figure 16 below outlines the factors respondents identified as factors that made them currently feel comfortable in intervening.

What makes you comfortable or uncomfortable to intervene in racist incidents?

Makes it easier to intervene	Makes it more difficult to intervene
 Experience intervening	 Lack of knowledge on how to intervene
 Sense of responsibility	 Workplace culture
 Using skills around difficult conversations from social work training	 Worry about becoming a target
 Trust and good relationships	 Fear of getting it wrong
 Being aware of own privilege	 Fear of being isolated
 Workplace culture	 Breakdown of working relationships
 Good knowledge and understanding	 Lack of trust in reporting structures
 Personal values and beliefs	 Feeling that speaking up is not enough
 Wanting to protect colleagues from the impact of racism	 Identifying subtle forms of racism
	 Fear of overstepping

Figure 16: Factors making respondents more or less confident and comfortable to intervene. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 99]

It is interesting that workplace culture is mentioned as both a factor that makes it easier and more difficult to intervene. This emphasises the mixed reports on how unacceptable racism and racist actions are perceived

between different teams and individuals. The main barriers to intervening seem to be motivated by fear. This shows that there is a clear need for changes in workplace cultures, as well as providing people with more confidence that they have the skills to intervene and to assure there are no negative repercussions for reporting racism.

We asked what survey respondents would want from their colleagues, if they were or have experienced racism. The most common response was to take racism seriously and address it appropriately, as well as having the support of their colleagues. Respondents hoped that they would be listened to with compassion and understanding.



Figure 17: Aspects respondents would believe they would like to see in an intervention; n= 113]

At the same time, respondents were hoping for wider education on racism and for colleagues to promote long lasting and wide-ranging change that eradicates racism.

These responses highlight that there is a disconnect between the attitudes and willingness to intervene and the support that Minority Ethnic respondents have experienced. This means there are a couple of questions we will need to address locally and nationally:

- What can we do better to show up for our Minority Ethnic colleagues?

- How can we make our workplaces safer to speak up when we witness racism?
- How do we address situations of racism when it happens verbally and there is no written or recorded evidence?

Reporting racism

11% of respondents (n=20) had reported racism in the past 12 months. In eight cases action was taken and in nine cases no action was taken. For three cases, the respondents were not sure if action was taken.

When asked if the action was appropriate, we received mixed responses. This is partly because no action was taken and or the action was escalated further and the respondents were not aware if or how effective the consequences were, as they didn't hear about the outcome.

In cases where action was taken, there seems to be a number of cases where the action was deemed appropriate. However, in cases even when the action was deemed appropriate the respondents believed action at times were “too little too late” or only addressed in an informal setting. Some of the respondent highlighted that while the action was deemed appropriate it came at the cost of fear and concern over retaliation from the colleagues they reported, as illustrated by this survey respondent:

“The action is appropriate, but it is hard when I don't wish to make a formal complaint for fear of retribution.” - Survey respondent

A few respondents reported that the action taken in their cases was not appropriate as no action was taken and that they were not believed.

It is important to keep in mind that through the survey we were not able to collect detailed information on the individual cases reported and can, therefore, not make a judgment on how appropriate the action taken in these specific cases following reports of racism have been. However, we need to acknowledge that in almost half the cases no action was taken. This comes in

the context of Minority Ethnic respondents reporting that they do not feel comfortable reporting racism (s. Figure 5). This means as a sector we need to evaluate how effective our reporting structures are and how safe they are to use.

These experiences reporting racism are contradicted by the responses of respondents with managerial responsibilities. 87% of respondents with managerial responsibilities feel very confident or confident in supporting individuals experiencing racism and 77% feel very confident or confident to take appropriate action, if a racist incident is reported to them. The reasons why respondents felt confident primarily included the relationships they have with the people they supervise, knowledge and trust in policies and procedures and their managerial experiences.

64% of respondents with managerial responsibilities felt that the policies were very effective or effective. However, in the 16 qualitative explanations of why people felt they were effective / not effective, eight responses explained that they had never had a racist incident reported to them but felt the policies would be effective and seven responses felt that anti-racism policies were not as known as they should be within their organisation. This shows that there is a mixed perception of policies and experience of respondents with managerial experiences when it comes to handling reports on racism.

This raises several questions on reporting structures:

- In what way do we regularly assess our reporting procedures?
- What work are we doing to build confidence within our workforce in reporting structures?
- How are colleagues with managerial responsibilities educating themselves on policies and procedures?
- How do we ensure a safe environment for individuals to report racism free of fear from retaliation from colleagues or negative consequences for their career?

Education and training

This section looks at the level of education and training on anti-racism, as well as the perceived quality of these that social workers receive. Firstly, we wanted to understand how prepared social workers felt to address racism after leaving social work education. When interpreting these results, it is important to keep in mind that social workers who responded to this survey have left social work education at different times and social work education has changed in this time. However, this data can give an indication of the ongoing training needs in the social work workforce as it is now. As seen in Figure 18, 57% of White / Ethnic Majority respondents felt that social work education had fully or to some extent prepared them to address racism in their work (n= 86). This contrasts to 69% of Minority Ethnic respondents that felt that social work education prepared them to a little or no extent to address racism in social work (n=23). This again reiterates the challenges outlined throughout this report of the difference in understanding and perception of racism and anti-racist action across different ethnicities.

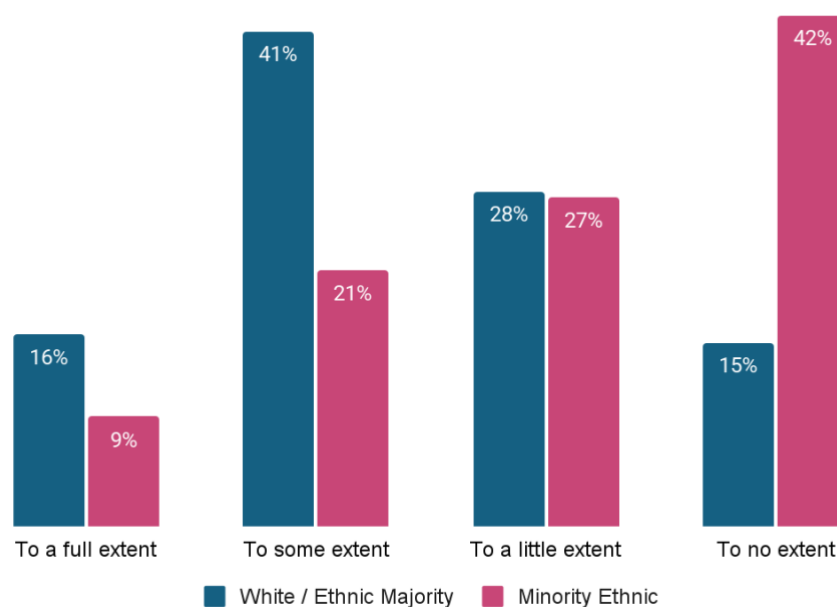


Figure 18: To what extent do you feel social work education prepared you to deal with and address racism appropriately in your day to day work? [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 151]

To further assess the potential training needs of the workforce we asked about training that respondents took part in over the past year. As seen in Figure 19, about a third of respondents had taken part in training on anti-racism in the past twelve months. Slightly less respondents had taken part in external training or used external or national resources. This indicates that a relatively small proportion of respondents have taken part in training on anti-racism over the course of the past year.

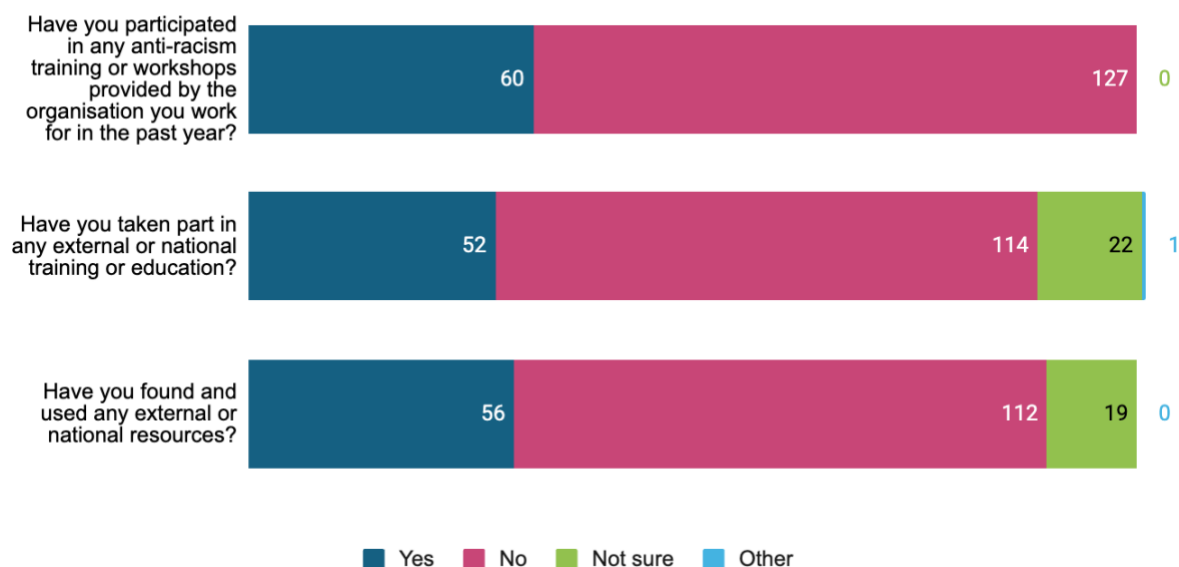


Figure 19: Participation and use of training and resource and workshops [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 187 to 189]

Respondents expressed that there are some aspects of the training and education they would like to see more of:





			
Mandatory training	Face to face training	Real life examples	Bespoke training
It seems to not be mandatory across all local authorities to take part in specific anti-racism training. Those who took part in training believed that training should be encouraged more and where needed made mandatory.	Those who had face to face training on anti-racism believed that they benefited from having in depth conversations with colleagues. Those who took part in training online think they would have preferred an in person training.	Survey respondents believed that they would have benefited from having more real life examples in the training that would help them understand different scenarios and help them understand how to act in those situations.	Some local authorities / teams had a bespoke training which they believed made the training more beneficial to them and their work. This included focusing on the local context, but also more broadly to have a social work specific training.

Figure 20: Wishes for the future for training on anti-racism. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 32]

It is important to note that the majority of educators seem to disagree with or strongly disagree that the current teaching is appropriate (s. Figure 21). Part of this seems to be that most of the time anti-racism is not a distinct topic but is woven into the curriculum. This means that some people might not pick up on the anti-racism teaching as such. Educators also highlighted that at times there are challenges to raise or bring up conversations around anti-racism.

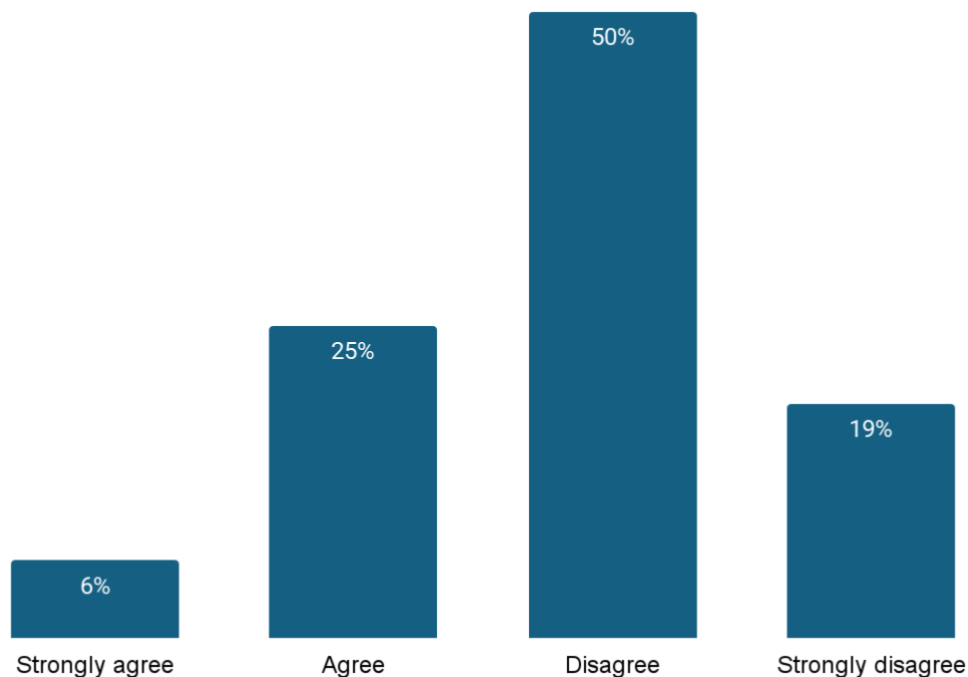


Figure 21: The teaching on anti-racism in the (degree) course is appropriate. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 16]

Students felt that anti-racism was woven into the course materials, but there was limited specific teaching or modules targeting anti-racism. To what extent students believed anti-racist practices were integrated in their studies or work depended highly on their ethnicity with White / Ethnic Majority students more likely to find anti-racism is integrated in their studies or work with Minority Ethnic students finding it lacking. There were mixed responses with 25% for each option from to a full extent to no extent on how prepared social work students feel prepared to address racism appropriately in their work. This suggests that there is not sufficient training or focus on anti-racism in social work education with 50% of student respondents not feeling prepared to address racism.

Changes in the past year

We wanted to understand if respondents had observed any changes in the approach to anti-racism in the past twelve months within their organisation. There were mixed responses ranging from no changes to people reporting more diverse workforces, more access to information and informal conversations around anti-racism in the workforce. Unfortunately, there are a few responses that report negative changes and are reporting an increase in racism in the past year. Some examples of the changes included:

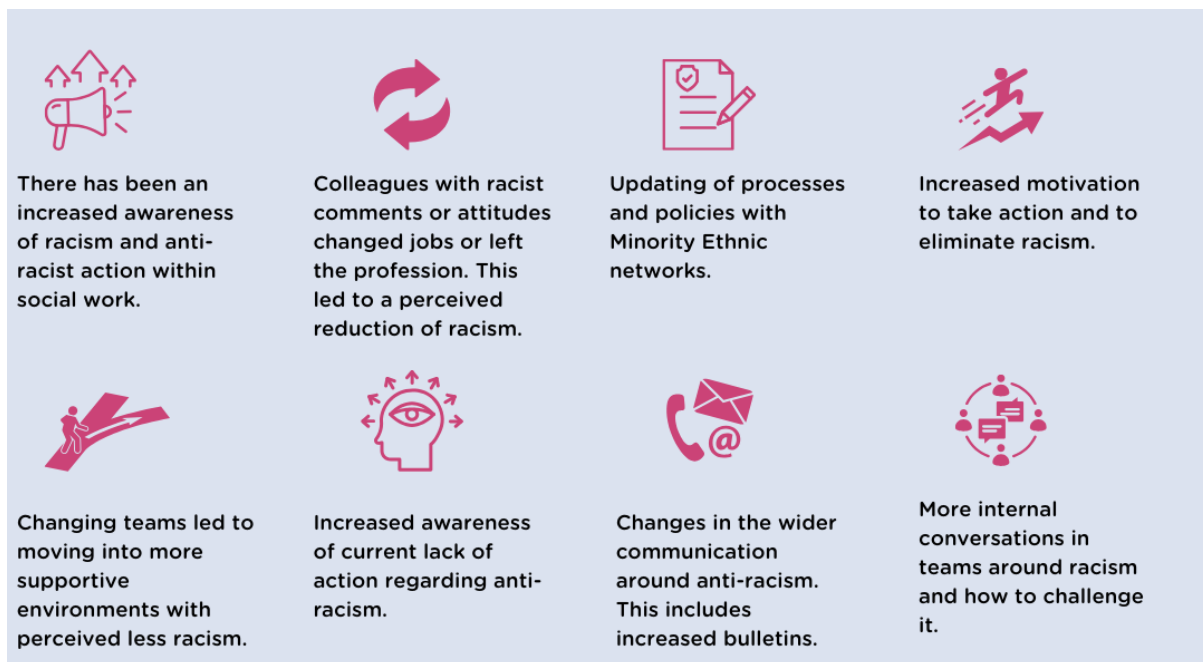


Figure 22: Observed changes over the past year [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 110]

Some positive changes were seen at the same time as reports that conversations around racism and racist policies are becoming more normalised. The combination of these perceived changes, both positive and negative, highlights the divide within our society and organisations.

The survey cannot evaluate the changes or the impact these changes had on the prevalence of racism within social work. It, however, does indicate that there is motivation for individuals and teams to eliminate racism within social work.

Intersectionality

Due to the sample size, we have been able to do some limited intersectional analysis of the data. As a proxy of attitudes toward racism in social work, we did an intersectional analysis of the level of agreement with the statement of “Racism is a problem in social work”. We have only included data where the sample was more than 10 responses to ensure anonymity of the responses. This, for example, includes data on respondents who identified as trans or non-binary as they were only 3% of the respondents. Similarly, the responses

to prefer not to say or other on some occasions were too low to analyse. For other cases, such as different identities of the LGBTQ+ community, different answers, such as Gay Man, Gay Women / Lesbian, Bi and Queer, were added together to ensure anonymity. There were no significant differences in those answers that would have required distinct reporting.

Agreement with “Racism is a problem in social work”






		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Women:	26%	41%	29%	4%
	Men:	16%	49%	29%	6%
	No disability or long-term illness:	21%	44%	30%	5%
	With disability or long-term illness:	32%	41%	25%	2%
	LGBTQ+:	28%	56%	16%	0%
	Heterosexual:	21%	44%	30%	5%
	Prefer not to say:	36%	36%	29%	0%
	No religion	25%	47%	23%	5%
	Christian:	19%	39%	38%	4%
	Other religions:	27%	60%	13%	0%
	English as first language:	18%	42%	34%	5%
	Multi-lingual:	41%	59%	0%	0%
	Other first language	38%	63%	0%	0%

Figure 23: Demographic data provided voluntarily [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 200]

As seen in Figure 23 above, there were minimal differences in the perception of ‘racism is a problem in social work’ between men and women. The main difference is that women tended to strongly agree more often that racism

was a problem in social work compared to men. For both men and women, 29% disagreed that racism was a problem in social work.

This data on intersectionality shows that individuals that identify with one or more protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, such as having a disability or being part of the LGBTQ+ community, are more likely to view racism as a problem in social work. For example, 71% of respondents with a disability strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, compared to 65% of respondents without a disability. Similarly, 84% of respondents belonging to the LGBTQ+ community strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to 65% that identified as heterosexual.

Looking at religion, 72% of those who responded to not belonging to a religion strongly agreed or agreed that racism is a problem in social work. There was a significant difference in the responses of individuals based on their religions. Those that identified as Christian were least likely to agree that racism is a problem in social work. At the same time, those that belonged to other religions were most likely to believe that racism is a problem in social work.

Looking at age as a protected characteristic in Figure 24, it shows that respondents between the age of 50 to 54 years were most likely to disagree with racism being a problem in social work, with almost half of the respondents believing this (n=9). Respondents between the ages of 40 and 44 were most likely to strongly agree or agree with racism being a problem in social work, closely followed by those aged 25 to 29. There were also no correlations between age and gender that differed from the overall differences between age groups. This data shows, however, that there is a need for more training and education across all levels and age groups.

Agreement with “Racism is a problem in social work”

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Under 25:	Sample too small for analysis			
25 to 29	30%	50%	20%	0%
30 to 34	14%	62%	19%	5%
35 to 39	35%	35%	29%	0%
40 to 44	27%	54%	19%	0%
45 to 49	24%	43%	24%	10%
50 to 54	16%	37%	42%	5%
55 to 59	26%	37%	31%	6%
Over 60	28%	48%	28%	3%

Figure 24: Demographic data provided voluntarily [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 200]

Conclusions

This report shows that while there is good intent by a vast section of social work to tackle racism within the workforce, there is still a lot of action needed moving forward.

The main finding from this report is that there is a clear discrepancy between the perception of racism and the impact of anti-racism among those that identified as White / Ethnic Majority and those identifying as Minority Ethnic. This was evident throughout all survey findings. Some of these differences can likely be explained through a lack of awareness and understanding of racism among White / Ethnic Majority colleagues. However, this should not be used as an excuse to not take action. As the White / Ethnic Majority we have the responsibility to educate ourselves on racism and how we might (unknowingly) contribute to it. This does not mean that people from White / Ethnic Majority groups should feel ashamed of their ethnicity, but to learn to

understand how our ethnicity impacts our (work) life in the same way individuals from Minority Ethnic groups likely have had to do for most of their lives.

This survey also highlights the need for us to think about how we incorporate anti-racism better in our education and training within social work, as well as how we strengthen our policies and procedures to have the desired effect. While many survey respondents reported that they hadn't encountered racism in the workplace before, which is likely to partly be because they are working in all White / Ethnic Majority contexts, it is important that we think about anti-racism to ensure we create an environment that allows for diversity in the future.

Most importantly this survey shows that we have to work more proactively as a profession towards inclusion of people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds and to create safer environments for all our colleagues in the future.

Future priorities and Recommendations

Respondents were asked to rate a number of future priorities in Figure 25. Each respondent was able to rate all options. The options also included neutral responses. The use of neutral was significantly higher among White / Ethnic Majority respondents compared to Minority Ethnic respondents. This shows that taking action to eliminate racism in the social work workforce is a higher priority among respondents from Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Future priorities	Very high / high priority	
	White / Ethnic Majority	Minority Ethnic
Better training on anti-racist practice	67%	88%
More anti-racism training locally	62%	88%
More collaboration across Scotland	57%	87%
National standards for consistent approach	61%	87%
Evidence-based anti-racist practice	70%	84%
More inclusion of lived experience in change-making	61%	84%
Improved process for addressing racism	65%	84%
Improved sense of shared responsibility for addressing racism	65%	81%
More anti-racism training nationally	59%	81%
More ethnic minority social workers in leadership roles	48%	69%

Figure 25: Future priorities, responses to high or very high priority. [source: Anti racism survey 2024; n= 187]

Increased and better-quality training on anti-racism, especially locally, is seen as one of the most high-ranking priorities for the respondents in the coming years. This matches the findings earlier in the survey, where respondents highlighted that they felt there was insufficient good quality training available to them.

Another theme across the responses is that there need to be some changes to the governance of addressing racism. These include having national standards, focusing on evidence-based approaches, improving processes and including more lived experience voices in the decision-making process.


It is interesting to note that having an increased number of staff from Minority Ethnic backgrounds in leadership positions is seen as the lowest priority across both White / Ethnic Majority and Minority Ethnic respondents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey and what respondents perceive as the priorities for the future, we recommend the following:

- **Shared responsibility** - There is a need for more shared responsibility when it comes to addressing racism locally and nationally. It is important to ensure that there is a balance between involving individuals from Minority Ethnic backgrounds and not placing all responsibility to eliminate racism on people with lived experience. This can be achieved through collaboration and increased action of White / Ethnic Majority staff to educate themselves on racism and anti-racist action without relying on Minority Ethnic staff to have the burden of educating their colleagues.
- **High-quality training** - The survey identified a current gap in high-quality and targeted training on addressing racism in social work. This includes day to day scenarios social workers are likely to encounter, such as microaggressions and structural racism that is impacting their colleagues and people they support. Training is needed on how to intervene when witnessing racist incidents. A training module focusing on this is currently in development through SASW.
- **Involvement of lived experience** - There needs to be more meaningful involvement of Minority Ethnic staff in the design of policies and decision-making processes. The survey shows that the current policies and processes are not seen as effective. Ensuring that Minority Ethnic staff across different employment levels are able to safely contribute to the decision-making process could help improve the effectiveness of processes and policies.

- **Reporting of racism** - Local and national reporting structures should be assessed in regard to the effectiveness of processes, as well as the training and education of those hearing / assessing the reports. The emotional, wellbeing and safety need should be prime focus to ensure that those reporting harm feel safe and protected from retaliation. This includes both the reporting of racist behaviour from colleagues but also people accessing the support.
- **National standards for a consistent approach** - A more consistent approach to addressing racism across Scotland is needed. A potential solution could be having a set of standards which would allow local authorities to benchmark their action and progress over time. It is important that national standards are a starting point for action accompanied by guidance and support to local authorities to implement changes. It is not sufficient to have standards which are difficult / impossible for local authorities to implement.
- **Improved communication** - There is a clear issue around the communication around racism within social work employers. This includes internal awareness around policies and processes, as well as access to and availability of training.
- **Continued monitoring of progress** - To understand how effective changes and policies are, we need robust and regular data collection on racism within the workforce. This includes ensuring that we collect evidence on the change made and have time and space for reflection when we do not see that change.
- **Data collection** - There are currently no national figures on the prevalence of racism in the social work workforce in Scotland that can help show the progress made in this area. It would be important to gather and create evidence of the scale of the issue to ensure any action taken is appropriate.



If there are any queries or questions, please reach out at: data@iriss.org.uk
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