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# THE BLACK MALE EFFECT: CHALLENGES & EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG BLACK MALE SOCIAL WORKERS IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The idea for this research project stemmed from an incident which happened while I was on my second placement, and attending court proceedings with a colleague from the Care Planning Team. While sitting there with her and a Foster Carer, I was approached by a court clerk who wrongly assumed that I was a defendant waiting for my case to be heard. It was not until after she left that the Foster Carer pointed out that I was probably approached and stereotyped because I was the only young black man sitting there among a small group of white men and women. We then discussed how young black men are unfairly treated in all aspects of society and to make matters worse, I was a Social Worker who had my credentials displayed around my neck, but yet I was singled out by the court clerk as a possible defendant. I then started to think about other young black male Social Workers who may face similar challenges and experiences, and thus decided to make that the focus of my dissertation research project. So in that respect I must first acknowledge and thank that Foster Carer for planting that seed in my mind.

Thanks must also go out to my dissertation supervisor, Diane Apeah-Kubi, who supported me and gave me the best advice throughout the process of researching for this project, and writing up the many drafts which eventually led to this final submission. I must also extend my sincere and heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Dominic Barnett, an exceptional primary school teacher, who was a constant source of inspiration and encouragement throughout the process. His words of motivation and his belief in me provided the strength and willpower to see this journey through to the end.

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and resources needed to not only be an effective Social Worker but also to relish the prospect of continuous learning and development.

## **ABSTRACT**

In the United Kingdom, there are more women than men working in Social Work and Social Services in general. This is not at all surprising or shocking as Social Work has long been considered a profession dominated by and preferred by women. Even the majority of the intervention methods used within Social Work derive from a feminist standpoint, where men are seen as the aggressor and women are perceived as the victim. Academically, literature relating to Social Work has in the past, and even today, continues to portray men in a negative fashion and whom women and children need to be protected from. This negative portrayal of men in general has somehow found its way into the Social Work profession and male Social Workers are viewed with much scepticism.

Some of this scepticism has to do with the archaic view that men in general are not caring and empathetic individuals, and as such are not equipped to be involved in and be concerned about the welfare of children. In fact, men in Social Work are thought to have ulterior motives in joining the professions, and these motives are argued to be sexual in nature and sometimes perverted. Even though there is no reliable literature to support this notion, it is still however perpetuated within the framework of Social Services, but mostly so by the general public.

The sexuality and sexual orientation of men in Social Work has also been the subject of much debate and academic literature, and this has been said is one of the many reasons why men are not keen to enter into the profession. Male Social Workers are more than often regarded as or thought to be gay, and by joining the profession which is dominated by women, they somehow are able to reconcile their assumed homosexual tendencies with the caring aspect of the job. The job role, as argued by some academics, provide them with the cover they need to blend in and disguise their sexuality. However, this has backfired in some quarters as being male Social Workers, their assumed sexuality is highlighted more.

Now, if the challenges and experiences mentioned above are for men in general, then one can only imagine how it will be for black male Social Workers who have the added scrutiny on them due to their ethnicity and gender. One can even argue that the challenges and experiences faced by black male Social Workers are vastly different compared to that of their white counterparts. Research done for the purpose of this project shows that the same stereotypical and racist connotations attributed to black service users, are also attributed to black male Social Workers. Further, black male Social Workers are often typecast in regards to the cases they are allocated and the service users they work with. In the proceeding chapters, one will see that the Social Workers interviewed stated that they were given the cases involving gangs, problematic and difficult families. Some even said that the

service users they were allocated were all black or of ethnic minority backgrounds. This not only hampered their development, but also limits them demonstrating their potential as Social Workers.

This project explores the most common challenges and experiences faced by young black male Social Workers and how they have coped with them. It also looks at the progression opportunities available for them to advance in their careers, and if they are given the right amount of support and training. The concluding chapter will hopefully determine whether black male Social Workers' challenges and experiences are more positive than negative or vice versa. The working hypothesis, governed by direct knowledge and experience with the Social Work profession, is that the challenges and experiences of black male Social Workers are more negative than positive.

## INTRODUCTION

Rogowski (2010) argues that Social Work was once considered to be the jewel in the crown of professions aimed at delivering human services, but that prominence has been questioned and attacked especially due to the publicity received regarding tragedies involving child abuse and neglect. This has resulted in various legislations and aspects of managerialism being brought in to regulate and control what Social Workers are allowed to do and how they are allowed to do it. Further, the author stated that with the increased scrutiny that Social Workers receive, the profession has become too bureaucratic and has led to it being de-professionalised and targeted more towards achieving set outcomes rather than focusing on the individual needs of service users. There has also been a decrease in the number of persons studying Social Work and becoming qualified Social Workers as there is an underlying fear and apprehension that Social Workers are more than often the scapegoats of blame when anything goes wrong within the realms of social services (Ferguson, 2017). High profile serious case reviews involving Baby P, and more recently Charlie and Sam, Child H1, Joe in Croydon and Baby A in Sunderland (NSPCC, 2018) have all contributed to a reluctance on persons wanting to pursue a career in Social Work.

Many academics have researched and written about the lack of persons entering the field of Social Work and have listed a number of reasons why this is in addition to the blame game culture which already exists. Lloyd, King & Chenoweth (2002) and Kim & Stoner (2008) all argues that the stress of being a Social Worker and the personal and professional impact on persons have led to burnout, high staff turnovers and Social Work being viewed in a negative light. On the other hand, Kadushin (2014), in addition to also quoting job stress and burnout, have also highlighted that job bureaucracy and red tape, budget cuts and lack of adequate and beneficial supervision are other contributing factors to understanding why there is a shortage of Social Workers and also why it is hard to recruit persons onto Social Work training courses to become qualified Social Workers. However, as the aim of this research project is to look at the experiences and challenges of young black men as Social Workers and in Social Work, a perusal of academics who have written on or alluded to this phenomenon in their discourse will be done.

To accomplish this, one has to firstly explore the emergence of men as Social Workers and this will set the tone for the main discussion area of what young black men experience as they navigate the challenges of being a Social Worker. While Perry & Cree (2003) argues that there is a shift in genders of persons applying to study Social Work and become qualified Social Workers, Schaub (2015) counters by stating that when men show an interest in or apply to study and become Social Workers, suspicions are raised about their intentions and some red flags are raised concerning whether or not

they are sexual predators or have homosexual tendencies. Then there is the added factor of black young Social Workers facing incidents of racism while working in social services (Brockmann, Butt & Fisher (2001). This research project will hope to examine the lived experiences and challenges of young black men in Social Work and take a look at whether their gender, ethnicity and cultural background were determining and aggravating factors in the positive and negative aspects of their careers thus far.

### **History of CYP Social Work**

The profession of Social Work is believed to have its beginnings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a response and consequence of the government of the day enacting what was known as the Poor Laws. Individuals such as Elizabeth Fry, Andrew Flyn and Robert Dyson are credited with being some of the first persons to assume the roles of Social Workers or set up groups or organisations to deal with the social issues and concerns of the day. Since then, the profession has grown and developed into what it is today and is regarded as a moral, necessary and protected profession. There have been and continue to be legislations, policies and procedures which govern the practice and application of Social Work such as the Social Work Act 2003, the Children Act 1989 and the Social Care Act 2007. As this research project will involve black male Social Workers working with children, young people and their families, a brief look at the development of Children and Young People's Social Work should be done to provide some context for later discussion, analysis and reference.

The first recorded law pertaining to the welfare of children here in the United Kingdom according to Payne (2005), was the Custody of Children Act 1891. This piece of legislation allowed individuals or any institution to take children into their care and for just a little over forty years was the only law that specifically dealt with the welfare of children. Then in 1933, the Children and Young Person Act came into force and this was a more comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at the holistic welfare of children and was the first to direct supervision of children who were deemed to be neglected. The Children and Young Person Act 1933 over the years went through a number of reviews and amendments, such as in 1952 where there was an added duty to properly investigate children who were reported to be at risk, and in 1963 where Local Authorities had to act to prevent children from being placed in care. It is important to note that the amendment to the Children and Young Person Act in 1985 also initiated a preventative role for Social Work which has been developed with the passing of time and interventions.

Payne (2005) further states that some of those preventative methods, resources and guidelines became a part of the Children Act 1948 when Local Authorities were charged with establishing a Children Department and creating Children Officer roles. Subsequently, there were two amendments to the initial Act in 1989 and 2005. The amendment of 1989 served as the defining moment for the Children Act and henceforth it became the official legislation that guides Social Work practice for Children, Young People and their families. The two main focus of the Children Act 1989 was the established basis for dealing with child protection and setting the tone for partnership working between professionals and families. A further element for the mandatory duty of care and safeguarding children and the creation of a Children's Commissioner was the foundation for the amendment to the Children Act 1989 done in 2004 (Cree & Myers, 2008). However, even as these changes and amendments to the laws and legislations took place, Social Work has also suffered a number of challenges and setbacks.

### **Social Work Conundrum**

One of the challenges faced in Social Work is the issue of blame by other professionals and even the government of the day. Whenever there is an incident which leads to a serious case review, it is more often than not the Social Worker and the Social Work profession that is targeted for blame. The most glaring and famous example of this is the case of Baby P who was severely neglected and abused by his mother. Although the nursery he attended, the GP who saw him and the police who responded to reports and incidences of violence and abuse at the family home all played a role in him falling through the cracks of the system, it was the Social Worker, her managers and the local council that received the brunt of the blame for what happened to Baby P. Now, in no way is one suggesting that there was and is no justification for social services to be blamed, however, one must look at the chronology of events, when each service or professional became involved, what their observations and decisions were and how it all contributed to the unfortunate death of the innocent Baby P. To apportion the brunt of the blame to just the Social Worker and social services is considered unfair and unfortunate in this circumstance.

Fortunately, Social Work has also come in for praise for the intervention and preventative initiatives and measures implemented and used over the years to bring about positive and successful resolutions to challenges, difficulties and issues faced by children and families in and around the United Kingdom. As a result of direct work Social Workers, children have been moved from dysfunctional families where they were subjected to incidences of neglect, wilful physical violence, inexcusable sexual abuse and

demoralising emotional and mental degradation. Families were assisted with finding suitable temporary and permanent accommodations to prevent them being homeless, partners were removed from relationships where there had been domestic violence, rape and control and children rescued from parents who inflicted negative ideologies of incest, forced marriages, discrimination and oppressive behaviour. The vast majority of these interventions and solutions are not reported in the media or public domain, and thus some sections of the public are not aware of the positive difference Social Workers make in the lives of children and families even within their own neighbourhoods and societies. It is only when things go wrong that social services and Social Workers are portrayed as part of the problem and not a solution to the issues and concerns. This is also when Social Workers are prejudiced and stereotyped against. Assumptions are made and opinions are peddled and believed as facts.

### **Black Men in Social Work**

Information received from the HCPC confirms that there is already a low percentage of male Social Workers (Appendix G) and this is due to the fact that there are some negative assumptions in Social Work surrounding the issue of men working and having a career in Social Work. These assumptions can stem from the underlying reasons why a male would want to have a career in a female dominated sector to questions on the sexuality and sexual orientation of males working in social services and as Social Workers. For a black man, in addition to these assumptions and questions, there is also the stereotypical issues and concerns over the effectiveness and viability of him being a Social Worker. Stereotypes of drugs, gangs and violence are automatically attributed to young black men and for these young black men to pursue a career as a Social Worker, questions are asked about whether or not these stereotypical assumptions can be shaken or even avoided. Then there is the insinuation that these young men must have had some traumatic experience in their lives at a young age which landed them on the path to become Social Workers – an assumption that is not usually made about non-black young men choosing a career pathway into social services and Social Work.

On the other hand, there are those who would see young black men entering the social services sector as Social Workers as a positive thing. They would be able to relate more to service users who are from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities and perhaps offer more suitable, productive and effective interventions. However, the desire and lack of motivation for young black men to become Social Workers have been the subject of many debates, conversations and research. There have been many theories as to why this is including differential educational achievement, overt and covert

discrimination and oppression and even the lack of career progression as a Social Worker (Mbarushimana & Robbins, 2015). Then there have been many reports from black Social Workers about the experiences and challenges they have faced working in social services, such as lack of training and support, and those accounts have dissuaded many young black men from becoming Social Workers as they would not want to go through the same experiences and challenges that already qualified and established Social Workers go through.

### **Purpose of Research**

This research project is designed and initiated to take a look at some of the challenges and experiences of young black male Social Workers in an attempt to determine if their journey has been more or less rewarding than expected. Further, the research project would highlight some of the challenges and experiences – both positive and negative – and see if these experiences would encourage or dissuade other young black men from pursuing a career as a Social Worker. The final purpose of this research project is to gauge the opinion of the general public on whether or not they think a career as a Social Worker is a viable option for a young black male, whether or not they think young black male Social Workers are stereotyped based on their ethnicity and gender and also whether or not there is an assumption about the sexuality of young black men entering the Social Work sector.

When all the evidence, research and findings are analysed, it is hoped that a clear picture can be seen as to why the challenges and experiences of young black male Social Workers can determine whether or not more black males pursue a career into Social Work and whether or not the experiences and challenges are more negative than positive.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The trajectory of this review of literature is designed to give the reader an insight into how black males in social services are perceived – from black males in general to black male Social Workers. Although the focus of this research project is to look at the challenges and experiences faced by black male Social Workers, it is important to look at the challenges and experiences faced by black male service users as well and examine any similarities or differences between the two groups. This comparison will provide any indication as to whether black males on either side of social services – as service users and as Social Workers – experience the same challenges and experiences or if black male Social Workers are held to a higher regard. In reaching this conclusion, the academic writings of four authors will be dissected in detail and then compared at the end to determine if there are any recurring themes or issues. These themes or issues will then be contrasted with the actual lived experiences of the black male Social Workers and personal advisers who were interviewed as part of this research project.

### **Hall (2010)**

The first piece of academic literature to be examined is by Ronald E. Hall whose journal entry in the Children and Youth Services Review is entitled 'The feminization of social services: Implications for black male youth'. This article focuses on how the concept and practice of social services, the makeup and interventions are mostly delivered by, for and on behalf of females with them being the target audience and focus. Men are regarded as something to be protected from and a problem which needs to be monitored and managed – more so for black males.

The article suggests that there is a bias within the world of social services on how black males are perceived, researched and written about and not much is written or researched about the challenges or experiences of black male Social Workers. Instead what is contained in numerous academic discourses about black men is the assumption that they are aggressors in relation to women who are the victims. Quite often the black male is said to be from broken and single parent households where the parents are of a low educational standing, work menial jobs and are caught up in a cycle of debt and poverty. Hall (2010) maintains that young black men, just like their parents or guardians, are judged to lacking any real educational achievement and thus turn to a life of crime involving drugs, violence and gangs to prove their worth and their masculinity as opposed to progressing through educational achievement. Further, as the article states, these black men are absent of any positive role models in their lives or any positive male figures to look up to and without anyone to steer them

in the right direction, a life of crime leads to them being known to the criminal justice system and being incarcerated.

This politically driven hyper-incarceration of black males (Wordes et al, 1994) has been the subject of many academic writings if only to paint black males in a negative light and not to offer any solutions on how to incorporate any interventions such as peer mentoring and life skills training. One only has to peruse the works of Stout (1991), Mincy (2006), and Nebitt (2009) to see the extent of this negative portrayal of black young men. This, as Hall (2010) says is exacerbated by the fact that social services are a mainly white and female dominated profession. Information obtained through a Freedom of Information request to the HCPC (Appendix G) shows that in the United Kingdom, over 80% of registered Social Workers are female. While the HCPC did not provide any statistical information on the ethnic breakdown of these registered Social Workers, it has always been known that black Social Workers are a scarcity and females remain the dominant gender in social work.

As a result, Hall (2010) contends that the interactions used within social services derive from a feminist-based approach and the issues and challenges of black males are largely ignored. He states that white female Social Workers do not understand black males who access their services and thus are not prepared or equipped to deal with the issues and challenges they present. Therefore, they are then either perceived as aggressive perpetrators and less as victims of their circumstances, surroundings and influences and are not adequately given the interventions that they need. On the other hand, black males are often reluctant to even access interventions within social services as they are not representative of their needs and in most cases not in their best interests. Further, black males see the white female Social Workers as representatives of a larger system that is designed to keep them relegated to the bottom of the social and ethnic ladder and this creates a trust barrier between the two entities. The below quote from the article sums it up best:

*“Since black male youth can be easily identified by their appearance, their ability to access social services within a Euro-American, female dominated institution may be complicated for otherwise unnecessary reasons. Thus, to the degree that social services and who has access is actually a culturally constructed phenomenon, black male youth suffer unnecessarily via a unique set of circumstances given their existence within a female service environment.”*

Hall (2010) writes that a way to breakdown this trust, and prevention barrier is for the feminist models of interventions within social services to be changed or adapted to be more holistic and inclusive. Not only this but there are even calls for white Social Workers to be trained on how to recognize the needs and challenges faced by black males and to be sensitives to these concerns and issues. One is left to wonder about who will be facilitating and delivering the training and if this approach will make any difference. The article states that the black male after facing direct and indirect racism and previously

accepting the status quo of being culturally and racially stereotyped, Social Workers who aim to work with these black males must be informed and aware of their current and historical struggles and difficulties especially in how social services operates. Simply proclaiming that one has been trained to understand is not enough. Hall (2010) argues that there must be an element of oneness and sameness in the interventions and look of social services. This will give black male service users positive role models to aspire to emulate.

Whilst the article makes a call for more black male Social Workers to be recruited and trained, it is only a passing mention as the author seems to be focusing on the negativity surrounding black males in social services both as service users and as Social Workers. To illustrate this point, Hall (2010) quotes Kosberg (2002) in highlighting the fact that:

*“...males are portrayed in social work literature as ‘gay’ or in an otherwise negative context.”*

Even with the positive aspects of having more black males as Social Workers, they are still hindered by the fact that they are looked at and perceived negatively. In some quarters as seen above they are gay and some other quarters they are sexual predators with a dark ulterior motive in becoming Social Workers (Gillingham, 2006). Is it any wonder why black males and males in general lack the desire or motivation to work in social services? Not only is the social services and its interventions feminized and have implications for black males, but black males working in social services are also feminized and that comes with its own set of implications as well.

#### **Warde (2009)**

In agreeing with Hall (2010), Warde (2009) in his research article entitled ‘Male Social Workers in Child Welfare: A Qualitative Analysis’, echoes that there is a growing call for more male Social Workers to be recruited. The study done by the author included 14 black males out of a total of 17 participants so it can be safely assumed that that call for more male Social Workers includes a call for more black male Social Workers as well. According to the interviews done for this research project, these male Social Workers and especially black male Social Workers can act as and be positive role models for the black male and female service users that they work with. They can be an inspiration to young black men and encourage them to think about pursuing a career in social services and help to challenge and break the notion that safeguarding the welfare of a child is women’s work. One of the participants in Warde’s research stated that in his opinion and experiences he does not:

*‘...think this had anything to do with gender...men are just as capable as women when it comes to caring and showing compassion.’*

Warde (2009) also argues that black male Social Workers can be an example to other black men who are fathers on how to care for their children. Another of the black male Social Worker who took part in Warde's research study had this to say about being a positive role model to the black youth community he works in:

*'Another important contribution has been that of role model for all these young black children who are in the system. Over the years I have worked with hundreds of black children and I know I have been a role model for many of them, particularly the boys. They got to see a black man who cared and was doing positive things. I think this is why I have always been able to work effectively with even the most difficult young people.'*

Being a black male social worker can also serve as a conduit in getting service users to open up and talk about what is happening in their lives and what they would like to see change according to Warde (2009) who quoted one of his research participants as saying:

*'The young people tell me all the time that because I am black they feel comfortable talking to me. I would have to say that this has been one of the most important contributions to child welfare, especially because there are so few positive black male models for many young of the young people we work with'(page 127).*

That last quote is especially poignant to this study as will be further discussed in the findings and analysis of the research done for this project on the experiences and challenges of black male Social Workers.

There is always some level of negativity and suspicion about males working in social services and as Social Workers and this is also highlighted by Warde (2009). He writes that the narrative surrounding men in social work portrays them as effeminate or gay, sexual predators, aggressive and pose a direct and indirect threat and danger to children (Gillingham, 2006). This is extremely worrying to young men who may be thinking about a career in Social Work and may decide against such a career as they would not want to be stereotyped and viewed in such a negative manner. Furthermore, to be deemed as a failure and eccentric just because one decides to become a Social Worker is not only demoralizing to anyone but also a disappointment that academics Cameron (2001) and Lupton (2006) continue to push that agenda in their discourses. Warde (2009) contends that men in social work who are conscious of that fact that these stereotypes and assumptions are made about them have become sensitized to it and as such have had to wrestle with reconciling masculinity within the context of a female dominated profession. These men have also had to develop and work on effective strategies to guard and protect themselves against any allegations that may be levelled at them.

It is these distractions and fears of allegations made against them that Warde (2009) quotes Hicks (2001) and Hood (2001) in stating that males in social work sometimes enter into the profession to achieve some level of fulfillment not possible in socially accepted male professions. Further, these

same authors also argue that males in social services aspire more quickly to reach levels of career progression and management so that they do not have to interact and work with children and families. I quite disagree with this way of thinking as what it does is portray men in social work to be less about caring and safeguarding children and more about monetary gain in regards to higher pay advantages than women and changes nothing about men being at a disadvantage than females in the female dominated profession of Social Work (Lupton, 2006).

#### **Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015)**

While also agreeing that there is a gap in Social Work for more black male Social Workers, Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015) in their journal entry captioned 'We have to Work Harder: Testing Assumptions about the Challenges for Black and Minority Ethnic Social Workers in a Multicultural Society', is of the view that BAME Social Workers are often times not recruited for their skills, professionalism and knowledge but because they are assumed to be best suited to deal with problematic service users and their issues within a multicultural society (Carter, 2007). The authors continue by saying that this recruitment factor causes the black male Social Worker to struggle and become insecure about their capabilities because their management is expecting them to take 'responsibility for tackling oppression on the people within the system who are being oppressed' and not understanding that these same black Social Workers face the same types of oppression as the service users they are trying to help.

The black male Social Workers who were interviewed by Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015) highlighted the fact that they have been stereotyped and assumptions made about them by their white managers and fellow colleagues. They believe that because of a shared ethnicity, BAME Social Workers understand and can relate to the dynamics of cultural and traditions then their white contemporaries. These Social Workers are treated differently than their white counterparts and as a result experience levels of racism within the workplace. One Social Worker when interviewed had this to say:

*'...you get a sense that you're treated differently...so that can be challenging because it can impact on your confidence and your motivation as well.'*

Furthermore, BAME Social Worker feel that they do not get the amount of support as their white colleagues and this is partly down to the fact that they are no black managers within their departments and Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015) argues that this is one aspect of institutionalized racism where the atmosphere and environment is not culturally diverse to match the workforce (Young, 1990).

However, racist attitudes and unrealistic expectations of BAME Social Workers does not only come from within the workplace but also from the services users that they interact with. BAME service users usually expect the BAME Social Workers to understand their issues and problems and side with them in any decisions or interventions. BAME service users also have an expectation that BAME Social Workers be that metaphorical bridge between themselves and the white oppressive and racist institutions that social services and Social Workers belong to. Some BAME service users even go as far as to accuse the BAME Social Workers of being agents of oppressive practice against them and in service to the white establishments. An example of this is where one of the Social Workers interviewed by Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015) for their journal article stated that in expecting preferential acceptance and justification, a service user said to him:

*'You know how we do things in our Asian culture, you should understand. It is acceptable for a man to beat his wife!'*

The authors contend that once the BAME Social Worker challenges what the service user says then it can lead to a conflict of loyalties and a breakdown in the trust and relationship the service user had begun to develop with the Social Worker. The conflict of loyalties experienced by the BAME Social Worker can also lead to a struggle between the power that they have as Social Workers and how inferior they are made to feel by the treatment and attitudes of not just the service user but the mechanisms of the organization they represent and are a part of. One Social Worker sums it up best when he said that:

*'We have to work harder as a black worker to prove ourselves and our ability.'*

As can be seen from the examination of the relevant literature, black Social Workers and especially black male Social Workers are on the one hand celebrated and sought after and on the other hand they are portrayed in a negative light. All the academic writings and publications perused all agree that there is a growing need for black male Social Workers as they can be positive role models and service users, especially other young black males, will be able to relate to them and aspire to be like them. Black male Social Workers can also pose a direct challenge to the view that black men need to continue to embrace the hyper-masculinity of social norms and engage in activities that are illegal and could land them in prison. These same young black men can simultaneously contend with their masculinity and still be able to perform in a female dominated sector without having to compromise and without having their masculinity questioned or their sexuality assumed.

The literature review also shows that there is a need for the social services sector to become more inclusive and for the valuable contribution of male Social Workers to be recognized. The intervention models need to be less geared towards females and males should also be seen as victims where

appropriate. Academic in this field of writing should be weary of the fact that the more they continue to portray males as aggressive perpetrators and male Social Workers as sexual deviants, the less there is a chance of more males and especially more black males becoming Social Workers. There is not much literature written surrounding the challenges faced by black male Social Workers and this can be an area that is addressed holistically rather than one-sided.

Finally, there is a need for social services as a whole to be more culturally diverse from the top echelon of management down to the workers on the front line. Black Social Workers need to feel represented and with that representation be offered the support that they are currently lacking from within the profession. Overall, the profession as it stands needs to be sensitized to the experiences and challenges of black male Social Workers based off of their lived experiences and not based on assumptions, attitudes and biased stereotypes.

## **METHODOLOGY & ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

In gathering the relevant data for this research project, it was most comprehensive and viable to adapt a mixed methodology approach utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. According to Creswell (2011), this approach is the most suitable for interpreting and measuring data derived from statistics on one hand while on the other hand considering not only the opinions of the public but also lived experiences of those interviewed. The author further states that while quantitative research looks at survey results, graphs and statistics as measurable data, qualitative research relies on collecting and analysing data based on applying the humanistic aspects of behaviour, feelings and informed opinions. In using mixed methodologies in pursuing research, there are bound to be some disadvantages and advantages depending on which research method is used. These will be examined in detail subsequently in addition to ways in which any limitations encountered can be minimised or overcome.

Another thing to consider when conducting any kind of research project is that of ethics. Ethical consideration is important in research as it may have an impact on the validity, reliability, transferability and authenticity of the findings (SRA, 2003). Further, it may pose implications on the researcher's behaviour and how the sample population was treated. Only after these ethical issues and concerns are addressed that the data and those involved in its collection be credible within the profession and sector of choice.

### **Surveys**

One of the methods of data collection used was a free writing and multiple-choice survey which was made available to the public on the Survey Monkey online platform and publicised through the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat and LinkedIn. The survey was done in place of a planned focus group due to the difficulties faced in getting the participants to meet at the same time. This survey was done to gauge the public's opinion, feelings and attitudes towards black male social workers, their suitability for the role and whether they are celebrated or discriminated against. The answers were then collated, analysed, presented and discussed as part of this research project. The seven questions that were asked on the survey and the results can be found in Appendix H.

The results of surveys can be challenged on ethics as the participants may not have been as honest and forthcoming with their answers and one would hope. They may simply have chosen an answer which seemed the most popular or answered how they think the researchers would want them to answer. This limitation was mitigated by ensuring that the survey was totally anonymous and no details personal to the participants were required to take part. What this then allowed is for the participants to hopefully then be free to answer the questions as factually as possible without the possibility of their identity being known and their personal opinions and views on the topic made public and attributed to them.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

Another method of data gathering used in during this research project were semi-structured interviews with black male Social Workers and Personal Advisors from a specific London Borough. While the identity of the interviewees was known to the researcher, each one was allocated a pseudonym to protect and conceal their identity. Access to these Social Workers and Personal Advisors were by permission of the Team Manager and Practice Educator. The interviews were all audio recorded and a couple transcribed into word documents. All recorded interviews were streamed into Nvivo where they were played back and analysed for any experiences and themes of commonality.

The Social Workers interviewed and their alias' are as follows:

- Alex – Social Worker and Personal Advisor
- Bob – Student Social Worker and former Youth Offending Service Worker
- JohnJay – Social Worker (just completed the ASYE)
- Joseph – Social Worker
- Bill – Social Worker, Youth Counsellor and Youth Mentor
- Clive – Senior Social Worker and Practice Educator

All interviewees along with the interviewer signed an informed consent form which detailed what the research was all about and who would have access to the data recorded and collected. It also explained the choices that they had and that they were free to either stop the interview and withdraw at any time and request that their answers not be used. This also served to protect the interviewer from any allegations of misrepresentation and misconduct during data collection and when the findings were published. Silverman (2016) argues that semi-structured interviews is perhaps one of

the most suitable ways in information and data collection as it provides for the information to be collated in a free-flowing conversation in a relaxed atmosphere.

### **Free of Information Request**

The HCPC was contacted via email through a Freedom of Information request (Appendix J) to provide data on the number of registered Social Workers in the United Kingdom categorised by their age, gender and self-declared ethnicity. This information was asked for to determine the ratio of female to male Social Workers and to determine how many of the males were of Black African or Black Caribbean ethnicities. The age of the Social Workers was mainly to see the average age of both male and female Social Workers and the age bracket which had the most registered Social Workers.

While the HCPC provided an answer to the Freedom of Information request, the information received only listed the number of registered Social Workers by location within the United Kingdom, their ages and their gender. In supplying an explanation as to why they were no information on the ethnicity of the registered Social Workers, the HCPC stated:

*“We are unable to provide ethnicity data as the HCPC does not hold any statistically significant ethnicity data on any of the professions. The ethnicity data we hold is not linked to individual registrants.”*

While the decision of the HCPC in not providing the data on the ethnicity of registered Social Workers is questionable and the reasons given accepted, it must be noted that there is an Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form on their official website which applicants are asked to complete albeit voluntary. What the HCPC does with this information is not known since they have stated that they do not hold such significant information on ethnicity.

### **Reflection**

In preparing for this research project early in the final placement of the MA Social Work programme, a situation happened which brought to the forefront the stereotypical and institutionalised racism that exists within society against black males. While shadowing a colleague from the Care Planning team at a sitting of Youth Court and sitting in the waiting area with her and a Foster Carer, a court clerk approached the waiting area, walked up to where I was sitting and asked me what time my court hearing was and if my legal representative was there with me. At first it did not dawn on me that she meant but just as I was about to defer to my work colleague to say what case we were here to provide

reports on, it clicked that she thought I was a defendant there to have my case heard. I also realised that she made that assumption based on the colour of my skin as I was the only black male there in the waiting room sitting next to a white female colleague and a mixed-race Foster Carer. And even though I had my work identification badge around my neck showing that I was a Student Social Worker with a London Council, that was ignored and only the colour of my skin was noticed by her. Reflecting on this it makes me wonder if other black male social workers attending court on behalf of their young people are stereotyped in this way as well.

This personal experience which contributed to the analysing of data along with the other methods of collecting relevant data allowed me to further build upon my skills in conducting ethical and professional interviews and research. Each method selected has less disadvantages and more advantages which if not bounded by time and word count restriction could have been explored more. In my career and possible future research projects, the experience and skills learnt in using the research methods discussed above would be more effectively and efficiently used and adapted.

## **FINDINGS & ANALYSIS**

The data from the six interviews done with young black male Social Workers and the general survey on Survey Monkey, added to the information received through a Freedom of Information request from the HCPC, provides an insight into the lived experiences of these black male Social Workers and some of the challenges they face. Interestingly enough, these said challenges as per the interviewees can be both positive and negative while the experiences can be either rewarding or distressing. The common themes emerging from all three data collection methods will explore the argument that while the young black male Social Workers all experienced some of the same challenges and had some of the same experiences, their interpretation of, and how they responded to, these challenges and experiences vary from person to person. Lastly, the results from the survey conducted will give an idea of the public's perception of and feelings towards black male Social Workers and whether they are discriminated against or celebrated.

In analysing and coding the emerging themes from the interviews, a number of issues and concerns were highlighted and some observations made on the plight of young black male Social Workers (Appendix F). While each point can be dissected and discussed in length, this research project will only focus on four main elements as follows:

- Assumptions, Stereotypes & Typecasting – this section will look at what the interviewees and survey respondents say and feel about the many assumptions made about black male Social Workers and this would include assumptions on their perceived sexuality and motives for entering the profession and their abilities, stereotypes about young black males in general which includes black male Social Workers and the typecasting of black male Social Workers on the cases they are allocated and the extent of their capabilities and abilities.
- Careers Progression, Support & Respect – in this section and from the interviewees point of view, the opportunities or lack thereof of progression routes for black male Social Workers, the varying and intermittent level of support given and the lack of respect they receive from service users, colleagues and other professionals will be discussed.
- Celebrated or Discriminated – according to the black male Social Workers interviewed, their challenges and experiences have shown them that while there is a need for them and other black males in Social Work, in some quarters of the profession they are still subjected to racism and discrimination and this section will explore those views and arguments.
- Recommendations & Testimonials – the final section will look at if after all the challenges and experiences faced by these black male Social Workers they would recommend or dissuade other black males from joining the profession.

However, before the above elements are discussed in detail, it is important that the reasons why the young black male Social Workers have decided on a career in Social Work be examined. Doing so will not only help us to understand their journey in Social Work thus far, but will also provide a bit of context on whether they would encourage other young black males to become Social Workers or if, based on their own personal experiences and challenges, they would dissuade them from joining the profession.

Out of the six young black male Social Workers who were interviewed, only one entered into the Social Work profession as a direct result of having previous experience working with young people, albeit in the criminal justice system as a Youth Offending Service officer. Three others got into Social Work based on the inequalities they perceived as happening in the black and ethnic minority communities and their desire to help and make a difference if they could. Another one's journey into Social Work began when he was told that there is a shortage of and need for more black young men in Social Work and that he would almost certainly be guaranteed a job upon qualifying as a Social Worker. The last young man's progression into Social Work, apart from wanting to support and help people to facilitate change in their lives, was primarily attributed to his mum and other family members already working in Social Services and thus in his opinion it was a natural route to follow. He also mentioned that his younger sister is currently studying and training to become a Social Worker. Regardless of the routes each took towards becoming a young black male Social Worker, they all faced common challenges and experiences.

### **Assumptions, Stereotypes & Typecasting**

According to Billson (2018), young black men are stereotyped on a constant basis and this added with the negative portrayal and assumptions about them creates a problematic and challenging journey from youth to adulthood and even throughout their careers and professional lives. This difficult journey not only limit their development and growth but also affects their own self-belief, determination and morale. This argument is echoed by all of the black male social workers who were interviewed for this research project. In fact, one of them who has been allocated the moniker of Alex, had this to say:

*"In all walks of life black men are stereotyped and judged so it's obvious that even at work this will continue."*

This view was a repeat occurrence throughout the interviews as the black male Social Workers spoke on the many assumptions and stereotypes being made about them by service users, colleagues and

professionals in the industry. They argued that due to the fact that they were black and male it was assumed that they would be best suited to work with families and young people who are involved in gang culture, drugs and aspects of crime and criminal activity. This also feeds into the narrative where black young men are stereotyped as deviant in addition to being more susceptible to crime – both as victim and perpetrator - than anyone else (Piquero, 2015). According to the interviewees, even the service users they work with or the parents of the young people allocated, viewed them in this negative manner and as a result were resistant to engaging with them and some even went as far as requesting a different Social Worker. Social Worker JohnJay gave an example where a young person who had gotten into trouble for being involved with smoking and selling drugs where the young person assumed that because he was a young black male that he indulged in that activity and pastime. JohnJay recollected that the young person:

*“...looked at me side eye as if to say c’mon you’ve done this before haven’t you? “*

JohnJay surmises that this is another factor where some service users assume that because you are of the same gender and ethnicity as them and also close in age, you will be more accepting of their behaviour and as a result be more lenient in intervening. Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015) made mention of this in their research and argued that service users sharing the same culture, ethnicity and background of a Social Worker sometimes have an expectation of preferential justification and acceptance.

On the other hand, interviewee Clive has a different view and approach to dealing with service users who think that because he is a young black male similar to them that he would somehow be lenient and more accepting their behaviour. Clive says that tells them that even though he understands what they are going through as he has faced some of the same hurdles as them, ultimately he is there to do his job and to do it well.

*“I’m also going through the same struggles and have to jump through the same hurdles that you do”  
BUT “I’m here to do a job but don’t take me for a fool...”*

Interviewee Bill also supports Clive’s stance in showing understanding to the service user’s situation while at the same time setting boundaries and remaining professional so that the assumptions that the service user makes are proven wrong. Bill remarks that when you show understanding and still stick your principles:

*“...the young people not only respect you more but are now more willing to talk to you and take advice. They even start seeing you as a positive role model.”*

Even though the young black male Social Workers are seen as positive role models, there remains an assumption about their motives for entering the profession and also about their sexuality. While none

of the Social Workers who were interviewed disclosed anything about having their sexuality and motives questioned, they however were aware of the stigma surrounding the sexuality of male social workers in general. Interviewees JohnJay, Bill, Joseph and Clive all agreed that assumptions about the sexuality of male Social Workers and being perceived as gay prevents more males, especially black males, from joining the profession. Further, it raises further questions about the reason men become Social Workers. Kosberg (2002) argues that Social Work literature often portrays men in Social Work as being gay while Hall (2010) states that men in general are seen as sexual predators, dangerous to children and portrayed as having sexual ulterior motives in becoming social workers. Here is what the Social Workers interviewed had to say:

*"It's been something said that many young men that enter Social Work are gay because Social Work historically has been a female profession" and "...men that go into it tend to be gay." (Clive)*

*"It's sad that there is still that stereotype and assumption that male Social Workers are gay as it stops more young black men from becoming Social Workers as black men care more about being called gay than others." (Bill)*

*"Yea that's what everyone says that male Social Workers are gay and that's just stupid." (Joseph)*

Due to these assumptions about male Social Workers being gay or sexual predators (Gillingham, 2006), interviewee JohnJay says that he has had to develop ways in which to guard himself against any allegations or complaints of sexual inappropriateness such as leaving doors open when speaking with young female service users or side hugging them or not hugging them at all. Warde (2009) in supporting what JohnJay says, contends that male social workers have had to develop strategies in their day to day practice and interventions to guard against allegations and complaints.

However, interviewee Clive also countered by stating there is:

*"...a big change now because you've got a lot of males who are heterosexual and are actually going into the job because that is what they really want to do."*

### **Career Progression, Support & Respect**

Brown & Jones (2004) argue that as a direct result of the assumptions on the sexuality of male Social Workers, those who enter the profession do so with the sole aim of advancing quickly into the upper echelons of management and this is to avoid any allegations of misconduct or inappropriate sexual impropriety. Lupton (2006) further stated that when male Social Workers ascend to positions of management they do so more rapidly than their female counterpart and according to Lewis (2004) this is in keeping with the social gender norms of men being in positions of power and management.

Interviewee Clive thinks that while this may be true for men in general, as a black man in Social Work this is not same. Clive says:

*“Men may get to the top quicker but black men for some reason don’t. There are no black male team managers.....as you go higher up it becomes whiter.”*

Then when asked if there is enough of a progress route for black male Social Workers Clive had this to say:

*“I don’t think there’s an effective path for black males to make their way through the Social Work system and progress quickly enough. A black male progressing in the world is a threat. Not all white people have that view but white people in general don’t want to see black people progress. And I feel a black man at the top will shatter the reality of what is out there in the streets. And that’s why I’m so driven in wanting to break through that glass ceiling.”*

Further on in the interview when Clive was asked about the most challenging thing he has faced about being a young black male Social Worker he replied that:

*“Progression has been a challenge to some degree....I know a lot of individuals who make decisions about me based on the fact I’m a young black male and haven’t got the life experience for progression.”*

The challenges associated with progression is not the only challenge that the young black male Social Workers interviewed have to deal with as they also mentioned the fact that they are not supported or even respected among their peers and among service users. Alex says there is a lack of respect for him as a black male social worker and his abilities are sometimes second-guessed and questioned. Bob thinks that there is a lack of training and support for him as a black male social worker especially in how to handle cases where domestic violence is an issue and a concern. He articulates that:

*“I remember having to deal with a service user who was a victim of DV and I had no support or anything. I didn’t know what to say to how to go about showing empathy. A male Social Worker was probably the last person she wanted to see at that moment”*

Not only is there no support but there is also a lack of respect and according to interviewee Bill it sometimes comes from his peers and although most times it is unspoken, it is obvious to see from their actions and reactions.

*“My gosh you get to see the politics and when you’re in the staff room you see the different clicks...and they look at me like look there’s the black guy and he’s got a mohawk...they may not be saying it out loud but I feel the energy and the vibe...”*

Revans (2003) argues that once black and minority Social Workers are recruited then they are left to feel like they are unsupported and many don’t receive adequate or additional training and thus are unable to respond to the needs of service users and intervene appropriately on their behalf. Goldstein (2002) agrees and added that black and minority Social Workers feel disrespected when they have their abilities and capabilities questioned and the service and interventions they carry out with service

users scrutinized by white counterparts and managers as this is a form of covert racism (Brockmann et al, 2001).

### **Celebrated or Discriminated?**

Even though the black and minority Social Workers have their work closely monitored and assessed (Goldstein, 2002), according to research done by Mbarushimana & Robbins (2015), black and minority Social Workers still feel that they have to work twice as hard just to feel appreciated and worthwhile. McLaughlin (2012) argues that there is a level of institutionalised racism existing in Social Services affecting black and minority social workers where white workers and management is the dominant social group. This is exacerbated by the fact that some black and minority Social Workers are recruited simply to deal with and work with families and service users deemed as problematic (Singh, 1992). Two of the Social Workers interviewed for this research project shares this view that an element of indirect racism towards them existed in the cases they were allocated, the way they were treated by colleagues and management and the atmosphere and environment of the office. Interviewee JohnJay queried that he:

*“...kept thinking why was I only getting cases with black service users who were either difficult to work with or live in black areas? I mean at least give me another type of case to see what I am capable of and not restrict me to just black cases and black service users.”*

When asked of his gender and ethnicity plays a role in the types of cases and services users he was allocated, interviewee Clive was quite clear in his response when he said:

*“It does because initially when I first started my local authority role, all the gang cases I got being a young, black and male....you fit that stereotype and that’s why (they’re) always giving them to you...”*

The racial bias and stereotypes do not only relate to the office but also relates to other professionals and services that black male Social Workers work in partnership with and this in turn creates a hostile and tense situation (Storry & Childs, 2002). Social Worker Clive recalls an incident with the police below:

*“Even outside of work I get stopped by the police. I might be doing a home visit and police will be wondering what I’m doing until I show them the badge. Stereotypes are still apparent whether I wear a badge of a Social Worker or not. It’s something I have to deal with. Those barriers whether in the professional world or personal are always going to be there.”*

Clive also said that racist attitudes and behaviours can also come from black service users towards black Social Workers as he explains some service users sees him as a:

*"...black man being used by a white system. You are in other words a coconut (black on the outside, white on the inside) because... you are working for the system and against us."*

Fortunately, it is not at all times that black male Social Worker or black Social Workers in general are discriminated against or endure racism but are celebrated and appreciated as according to Chand (2008), black service users see black Social Workers as bridging the gap between them and the white establishments. According to interviewees JohnJay and Clive, black service users identify with them on a level that they don't experience with other service users and thus they are able to not just build relationships but also implement successful interventions.

*"The client group, the young people take to me very well. I think being a young black male helps because I can identify with them on the same level....I do talk slang with them, I speak on the same level. Then they understand that he's kinda like me then...that's how I break through the barrier with them." (Clive)*

*"Most service users are happy when they see someone like them working on their behalf you know, it makes them feel represented and that they would be listened to..."*

#### **Recommendations & Testimonials**

Notwithstanding all the negative challenges and experiences the young black male Social Workers interviewed face, all six of them stated that they would still give a positive testimonial and recommend that other young black men become Social Workers. They all spoke of the fact that there are not enough male Social Workers especially black male Social Workers and thus the profession is not as diverse and representative as it should be. Interestingly though, in the literature that was read and perused for the purpose of this research project, nothing is written about whether or not black male Social Workers or Social Workers in general would recommend to their peers that they become Social Workers. The only thing that is written is that there is a need for more males and more black males to enter the profession (Hall, 2010, Warde, 2009 and Mbarushimana & Robbin, 2015).

*"I would because I think there is a shortage of black men in the profession. There aren't enough of us. We have a lot of black women but not enough black men and I think black men are the key to helping change. I think when you're dealing with complexities and families, issues with poverty and drugs, you need black men who understand and work actively in this field."*

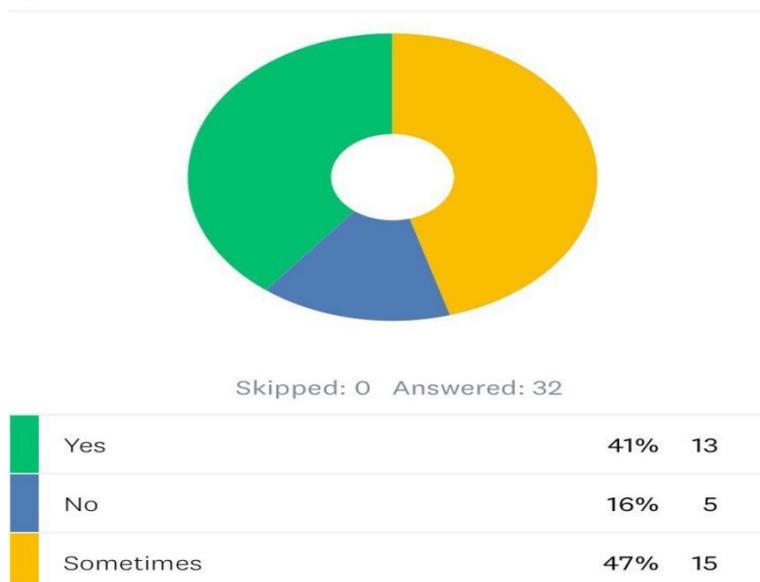
#### **Public's Perception**

In addition to the semi-structured interviews done with the young black male Social Workers, a focus group with them was also planned but this idea was abandoned in favour of a short survey to gauge

what the public's opinions and perceptions of black male Social Worker was. Although this survey was not part of the original research proposal submitted to the university's ethics board, care was taken to ensure that all ethical concerns were considered as detailed in a previous chapter. The questions were tailored so that the respondents would be comfortable in submitting their responses completely anonymously.

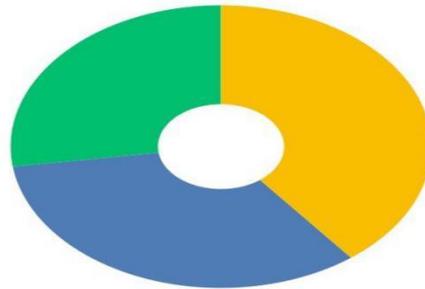
The full results of the survey when analysed (Appendix H) shows that the public more or less agreed with the information gathered from the interviews and from the literature perused. The majority believed that black male social workers are judged simply on their gender, ethnicity or both. There were 32 total responses with 41% saying they are judged and 47% saying that that judgement only happens sometimes. Only 16% were of the opinion that black male social workers are not judged due to their gender and ethnicity.

**2. Do you think young black male social workers are pre-judged based on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or both?**



On the issue of the assumptions made about the sexuality of young black male Social Workers entering a female dominated profession, the public in its collective responses said that there is or sometimes is an assumption made. In retrospect, a further question on what that assumption is but that can be a point to include for further research on this particular topic.

**6. In a predominantly female dominated profession, do you think there is an assumption on the sexuality of a young black male social worker?**

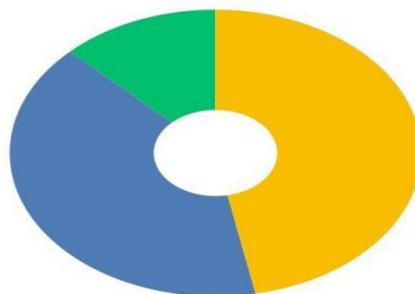


Skipped: 0 Answered: 32

<span style="color: green;">■</span>	Yes	28%	9
<span style="color: blue;">■</span>	No	34%	11
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	Sometimes	41%	13

The final question asked of the public that needs to be highlighted from the full results is whether in their opinion they think that black male Social Workers are discriminated against or celebrated. A very small percentage think that they are celebrated while the majority stated that they have no opinion whatsoever on this issue while 41% disclosed that they think black male Social Workers are discriminated against.

**7. Overall and in your opinion, are young black male social workers celebrated or discriminated against?**



Skipped: 0 Answered: 32

<span style="color: green;">■</span>	Celebrated	12%	4
<span style="color: blue;">■</span>	Discriminated against	41%	13
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	No opinion	47%	15

With the analysed responses above, it would have been interesting to find out if the respondents had prior experience dealing with black male Social Workers or some aspect of Social Services in general or if they had any family member or peer who is a Social Worker or work in Social Services. However,

as the integrity of this survey rested on the fact that it was anonymous, such information were specifically not asked but would be considered if further research on this particular topic was initiated or commissioned.

### Further Discussion

The data and information gathered from the semi-structured interviews, the literature research and the public survey all point to the fact that there is an inherent culture of direct and indirect racism within Social Services and this is felt especially by black and minority Social Workers (Carter, 2007). Black males especially, as they were the ones targeted through this research, have expressed that they feel less supported and respected by their managers, peers, colleagues and even service users. Coincidentally these same service users are black and of minority ethnic backgrounds themselves and have also experienced racism in their lives (Goldstein, 2002). However, to them a black social Worker is seen as someone who have sold themselves out to their own race and have aligned themselves with the white establishments and institutions that serve to oppress and discriminate against them in the first place (Wainwright, 2009). One of the Social Workers who was interviewed for this research project had this to say:

*“Some young black males have the view that young black males in employment as Social Workers may be sell outs. In the sense that they feel that the lifestyle they’ve chosen we can’t identify with them and they feel we are working for the government.” (Clive)*

This idea of seeing black male Social Workers as ‘sell outs’ can be attributed to the fact that, according to the Social Workers interviewed, the majority of the black male service users that they work with have never had any positive influence in their lives – whether it be male or female. This can be a good opportunity for the young black male Social Workers to engage and work with these young black male service users – and even black female service users – and develop a rapport with them with the view to showing them that there a positives outcomes possible for them if they strive to achieve. Social Worker Clive stated that the reason why these young black service users do not have positive role models in their lives is because:

*“...a lot of the client group I’m working with their fathers aren’t around just as an example, and they haven’t got positive male role models who they aspire to. A lot of the young black male service users, although not all of them, aspire very much to be part of that road life so to speak. So to find a young black Social Worker who is coming from maybe a different walk of life, it can be something that is new to them.”*

In addition to being seen as positive role models for young black males, black male Social Workers can also use Social Work as a platform to effect change and influence outcomes and intervention methods which are predominantly seen as written from a feminist point of view and most often targeted at women. Black male Social Workers have a unique perspective and a cultural understanding of the black service users that they work with and as such can use their positions to challenge stereotypes and help other young black males break the cycle of criminality. As Social Workers, black males are in a position of power over the service users they work with but can feel conflicted by that power especially if they've experienced some of the same challenges and incidents of racism as their service users (Simmonds, 1997). Interviewee Clive states that he has decided and will use the platform of being a Social Worker to make the changes that he thinks will positively impact the lives of the black service users that he works with.

*"I think other times, as a young black male, I see a lot of the challenges that are out there for many people of ethnic backgrounds. Social Work is my platform to be able to change that and going to the top will help me change that. It can be personal experience or your own personal drive."*

One would assume that with all the literature being written about the need for more males, especially more black males to enter the Social Work profession that the HCPC would have continuously monitored and recorded data on the number of black and minority ethnic Social Workers - both male and female - who register. However, a Freedom of Information request to them elicited a reply that whilst they record the number of registered Social Workers across the United Kingdom, they do not hold any relevant data in the ethnicity of these Social Workers. This admission is particularly confusing since a part of the application to be registered with the HCPC is a voluntary form for one to complete which specifically ask for one's ethnicity. What the HCPC does with this information is a mystery.

The information received from the HCPC (Appendix G) includes a table with the number of Social Workers registered in the various regions of the United Kingdom, their age bracket and their gender. Across the entire United Kingdom as at November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 there were a total of 98,452 registered Social Workers with 22,784 of those identifying as being male. This represents a mere 23% of all registered Social Workers. In London where this research project is based and where the interviewed young black Social Workers are employed, there is a total of 15,051 registered Social Workers of which 2,933 are listed as being male. That's an approximate 20% of registered Social Workers in the London area.

The figures and percentages above confirms that Social Work is indeed a female dominated profession and that there is a need for more men to be recruited so as to be more representative of the service user population and also to be more balanced in regards to interventions. As already stated above it would have been a good addition to this research project if the HCPC had included the ethnicity of the

Social Workers who filled in the Equality & Diversity monitoring form as part of their registration application. This data would have been analyzed to give a more accurate representation of the ethnic breakdown of registered Social Workers within the United Kingdom and more specifically in the London area.

## **SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the process of researching for and carrying out this research project, a number of areas for improvement in regards to the challenges and experiences faced by black male Social Workers were identified through discussions with the Social Workers interviewed. These areas include the recruitment of black male Social Workers, the types of cases and service users they were allocated (Singh, 1992), the lack of adequate training and support given (Revan, 2003) and the scarcity of opportunities for black male Social Workers to progress into senior positions including that of management. Combined with the scrutiny faced by these black male Social Workers, and black Social Workers in general, the added challenges and experiences mentioned above can be demoralising to some and drive some to question their ability and interventions (Orme & Shemmings, 2010). The recommendations listed below, if considered and implemented, hopes to achieve some level of comfort and confidence from black male Social Workers and black Social Workers in general that their contribution to the profession is not only appreciated but valued.

The first recommendation would be in the area of how black male and other male Social Workers are recruited. Even though there is a need for more male Social Workers to be recruited to the profession (Hall, 2010), the main focus should be on their ability, experience, skill and knowledge and not their gender. In the case of black male Social Workers, rather than recruit them simply to deal with problematic and difficulty service users as suggested by Singh (1992), or to give them all the cases involving gangs and black families (Clive, Appendix E), black social workers – males in particular – should be recruited on merit and potential and not based on skin colour, gender and assumptions. Further, they should be given an array of cases covering a wide scope so that they are able to display and demonstrate their ability to work across the spectrum of Social Work and Social Services. Even if positive discrimination – tailoring the recruitment and hiring process to favour a particular group previously discriminated against - is used in recruiting black male social workers, it should be as a means of diversifying the service and have a greater representation of men within the profession.

Another recommendation suggested is for the Local Authorities to do more in regards to providing the relevant and adequate training and support that the black male Social Workers interviewed stated is missing within their roles and workplaces. Kim & Stoner (2008) argues that the high turnover of staff in Social Work and Social Services are not only due to stress, burnout and anxiety but also due to a lack of support shown and training given to staff by team leaders and managers. Part of this training should also include sensitising other Social Workers, who are not black or of ethnic minority background, on the lived experiences, challenges and commonalities of black social workers in

general. This can serve as a tool to incorporate more cultural understanding and competence as current Social Work educational teachings falls short of preparing Social Workers with the right tools and knowledge – theoretical and practical – to meet the cultural and ethnic needs of particular service users (Barn, 2007).

Non-black and non-ethnic minority Social Workers should understand that even though as Social Workers there is a degree of professional power held over the service user, for black and ethnic minority service users, this power works in parallel to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority (Simmonds, 1997). Quite often thus is due to the fact that black and ethnic minority Social Workers have gone through the same experiences and challenges as the service users they are expected to work with and advocate on behalf of (Young, 1990).

The final recommendation is for black male Social Workers to be given the same opportunities for progression as their white counterparts. Social Worker and interviewee Clive stated that within his Local Authority and within his department, there is an absence of black males in leadership and management roles and the higher up the management ladder one travels the whiter it becomes (Appendix E). However, while attempts have been made to recruit more male Social Workers, especially black male Social Workers, and there is an assumption that men enter the Social Work profession to aspire to leadership and management positions (Hood, 2001 in Warde, 2009), Akinyela & Aldridge (2003) argues that Social Work and Social Services have been in the past unwilling to add more black males in management positions to the profession despite overwhelming evidence to support that they are a necessity. On the other hand, it has been argued that some black and ethnic minority employees don't even apply for management posts as there is the underlying assumption that they won't be successful or even considered (Barak, 2016).

If Local Authorities and by extension other Social Work recruiters and employers consider and perhaps implement the recommendations suggested above, perhaps they won't be accused of not doing enough to recruit, retain, support and train black Social Workers in all relevant areas. Further, by broadening the cases allocated to black male Social Workers, the Local Authorities and other Social Work employers will hopefully no longer be seen as stereotyping and typecasting black male Social Workers into the types of cases they are presumably equipped to deal with.

## CONCLUSION

It can be a defeating feeling in the workplace when one does not feel supported by their colleagues and superiors, especially when they are not given the right tools and adequate training to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively, and sadly this is the situation that many young black male Social Workers find themselves in. The Social Workers interviewed for this research project talk about the unfair expectations placed on them to work primarily with families and other service users who are deemed as troubled, difficult and hard to engage with. They are also expected to have the fortitude and resolve to deal with black families, service users involved in drugs and gangs or young men known to the criminal justice system as perpetrators. Added to these expectations, these black male Social Workers face a level of scrutiny that their fellow colleagues do not have to endure. As a result, these Social Workers feel as if their professionalism, knowledge and abilities are continuously questioned and this fosters feelings of inadequacy and incompetence.

The feelings of inadequacy and incompetence are also combined with accusations of betrayal of race, culture and ethnicity from the Social Workers' interactions with the service users they work with. The black male Social Workers are sometimes accused of turning their backs on their 'own people' by working for an establishment that has a history of discrimination and oppression against black and ethnic minority cultural groups (Storry & Childs, 2002 and McLaughlin, 2012). This is because the establishment – Social Work and Social Services – is made up of predominantly white workers (Perry & Cree, 2012) who do not have the cultural competence required to be able to work with and implement effective and suitably appropriate interventions for black and ethnic minorities. Therefore, when black male Social Worker and black Social Workers in general try and intervene within families, they are looked on as agents of the system sent to perpetuate more oppression and discrimination. As a result, the Social Workers have to prove to the service users that although they have a duty of care to provide, they also can relate to the struggles, challenges and experiences faced by the service users.

Quite often the struggles, experiences and challenges faced by both black service users and black male Social Workers stem from the prejudices and stereotypes that society has placed on them. Due to men being seen as aggressive and lacking a naturally caring nature, and because Social Work and Social Services is dominated by females, black male Social Workers and male Social Workers in general are assumed to either have an ulterior motive in entering the profession or there are assumptions made about their sexuality (Kosberg, 2002 and Hall, 2010). On one hand it is said that they are sexual predators who use the guise of being a Social Worker to prey on children and young adults within the service or on the other hand they are gay and use the service to hide their sexuality and fit into a role

which allegedly suits the assumed characteristics of being gay (Gillingham, 2006). While the Social Workers interviewed all agreed that assumptions about the sexuality of male Social Workers are rife within the profession, it should not distract from the fact that black male Social Workers enter the profession out of a genuine passion to help others – especially the others who share the same race, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds as them.

However, having the same cultural background, race and ethnicity as the service users they work with has resulted in some black male Social Workers being typecast into a particular role and with specific cases with no opportunities to progress or prove that they can work with a whole range of service users. The research found that even though some men get into Social Work simply to aspire for position of management, for the vast majority of black male Social Workers, there are little to no opportunities for progression. They feel that and are aware of the fact that the hierarchy of Social Work leadership is white and there is a sense that efforts are made to keep it that way. One Social Worker who was interviewed for this research project has indicated that within the Local Authority and the team that he works in, it is predominantly white women in leadership positions and as such he has made it his ambition and drive to elevate himself into a leadership position. This he said is not only about breaking that glass ceiling but also ensuring that black and ethnic minority Social Workers are equally represented and have a voice in the decision making process. This will include making sure the grievances, challenges and experiences of young black male Social Workers are heard and addressed, they are recruited based on their abilities and that they are given the same opportunities as everyone else.

Even with all the negative challenges and experiences faced by young black male Social Workers, this research project has shown that they are outweighed by the positive interventions and outcomes that these Social Workers facilitated. They have been able to get the service users to relate to them in a way that they would not relate to Social Workers of a different ethnicity and thus their interventions have been successful. The black male Social Workers have been able to see and position themselves as role models for these young service users to look up and aspire to and thus possibly change the downward trajectory their futures were heading. The black male Social Workers also see themselves as the bridge between the white Social Work establishment and the black and ethnic minority community they work in and help them to understand the duty of care the Local Authority has to provide to them. Even though they feel that they are under intense pressure to perform and their practice is unfairly scrutinised more than others, these black male Social Workers still persevere due to the passion that they have for making a difference in the lives of the service users they work with.

Further, and as this research project has uncovered, even though the young black male Social Workers have to work twice as hard to be recognised and taken seriously within the profession, they all have indicated that they still would willingly and actively encourage other young black males to think about becoming Social Workers. This, according to them, is because young black males are a necessity with Social Work and Social Services as they would better be able to reach and relate to other black male service users and make a positive contribution to their lives and influence their future. Overall and in conclusion, the challenges and experiences faced by young black male Social Workers pale in comparison to the satisfaction and sense of achievement and accomplishment that they receive from being a Social Worker.

As a young black male myself, who is about to enter into the Social Work profession as a newly qualified Social Worker, completing this research project has not only prepared me for the challenges and experiences ahead, but has also made me begin to develop strategies on how I can and will overcome these challenges and experiences when they present themselves – if they ever present themselves. Further, in interviewing the black male Social Workers for this research project, I have realised that there is a gap in the market for a platform or network where black and BAME Social Workers in general, can encourage and learn from each other in addition to building a network of support, advice and guidance.

As a result of this realisation, I am driven to initiate and create such a platform and network for black and BAME Social Workers, so that we can have a space to openly discuss and offer solutions or interventions, in regards to dealing with the challenges and experiences many of us face or will face in our practice. Not only that, but this platform and network will aim to be a forum where best practices are shared and developed, and where black and BAME Social Workers can access training and support towards their continued professional and personal development.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethics Approval



Social Work & Mental Health Sub-Committee

The Burroughs  
Hendon  
London NW4 4BT

Main

Switchboard: 0208 411 5000 22/11/2018

**APPLICATION NUMBER:** 4715

Dear Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams

**Re your application title:** Young Black Males in Social Work

**Supervisor:** Diane Apeah-Kubi

**Co-investigators/collaborators:**

Thank you for submitting your application. I can confirm that your application has been given approval from the date of this letter by the Social Work & Mental Health Sub-Committee.

Although your application has been approved, the reviewers of your application may have made some useful comments on your application. Please look at your online application again to check whether the reviewers have added any comments for you to look at.

Also, please note the following:

1. Please ensure that you contact your supervisor/research ethics committee (REC) if any changes are made to the research project which could affect your ethics approval. There is an Amendment sub-form on MORE that can be completed and submitted to your REC for further review.
2. You must notify your supervisor/REC if there is a breach in data protection management or any issues that arise that may lead to a health and safety concern or conflict of interests.
3. If you require more time to complete your research, i.e., beyond the date specified in your application, please complete the Extension sub-form on MORE and submit it your REC for review.

4. Please quote the application number in any correspondence.
5. It is important that you retain this document as evidence of research ethics approval, as it may be required for submission to external bodies (e.g., NHS, grant awarding bodies) or as part of your research report, dissemination (e.g., journal articles) and data management plan.
6. Also, please forward any other information that would be helpful in enhancing our application form and procedures - please contact MOREsupport@mdx.ac.uk to provide feedback.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'B. Twumasi', is positioned above the typed name.

Chair - Mr Bismark Twumasi

Social Work & Mental Health Sub-Committee



**DAB021018**

Participant Identification Number:

## CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project: Black Men in Social Work**

**Name of Researcher: Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams**

**initial box**

**Please**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 02/10/18 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.

4. I agree that my non-identifiable research data may be stored in National Archives and be used anonymously by others for future research. I am assured that the confidentiality of my data will be upheld through the removal of any personal identifiers.

5. I understand that my interview may be taped and subsequently transcribed.

6. I agree to take part in the above study.

6

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant                      \_\_\_\_\_  
Date    Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent                      \_\_\_\_\_  
(if different from researcher)                      Date    Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher    \_\_\_\_\_  
Date    Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher;

‘Completion of this questionnaire is deemed to be your consent to take part in this research.’

**DAB021018 / October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018**

**MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY**  
**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)**

**1. Study title**

The Black Male Effect: Perceptions, Assumptions and Stereotypes of Black Male Social Workers.

**2. Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

**3. What is the purpose of the study?**

The social work profession has evolved over time from being a predominantly female dominated profession to being represented more and more by males in good measure. There have been calls and campaigns to get more male social workers across the spectrum and this has resulted in a growing number of young black males making a career in social work their passion. This research project will look at the challenges young black social workers face in undertaking interventions with families and if there are any assumptions or perceptions about their career choice. Further examination will also be done to determine if ethnicity and gender, and the stereotypes around young black men, have a role to play in cases allocated to young black male social workers.

For additional information and analyses, an examination of the families young black male social workers are allocated to work with will shed some light on whether or not there is a justifiable need to use gender, ethnicity, and cultural background and shared social assumptions in seeking desired outcomes and interventions. This research will begin in November 2018 and conclude in May 2019.

#### **4. Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen due to the fact that not only do you meet the required participant demographics of the research project, I feel that the length of time you have worked as a social worker, and the experiences and possible challenges you have faced as a young black male social worker, would make you an ideal candidate to take part in this unique research project. There will be approximately 50 social workers in total taking part in this research.

#### **5. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw before the focus group and the interviews have taken place or up to 14 days after without giving a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be invited to take part in a short survey and / or a focus group with some of the other participants. This focus group is expected to last for up to 2 hours and the survey no longer than 10 minutes. Before the focus group, each participant will be assigned a code name and be referred to this code name for the duration of the focus group and in the analysis and writing up of the report based on the information collected from the focus group.

After the information in the focus group has been analysed and collated, a few of you will then be invited for a one to one semi – structured interview which will last for no more than 45 minutes.

During the focus group and interview, you are expected to remain within the boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity. Please also remember that this research project is about your experiences and challenges faced as a young black male social worker and not about your clients or allocated cases.

I intend to use the following research methods:-

#### Focus Group:

In the focus group, I aim to collect information to answer the research question through the use of semi-structured base questions, discussion topics and testimonials.

#### Semi-Structured Interviews:

Based on what is discussed in the focus group, a few of you will be selected to be interviewed further about your experiences as a young black male social worker. The interview will consist of me asking you a number of base questions and follow up questions where elaboration is needed. There will be no questions regarding your clients or allocated cases.

#### Anonymous Survey

The survey will be done on the survey monkey platform and questions will be asked about your experiences and challenges as a black social worker especially as it relates to your race and gender.

## **7. What do I have to do?**

As a participant, all you have to do is talk openly about your experiences and challenges faced as a young black male social worker. Further, if you are selected for a one to one semi-structured interview, it is only to elaborate and provide some context to the experiences and challenges already discussed during the focus group.

There will only be one focus group for you to attend and one interview if selected.

## **8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no known risk in participating in this research project and the only disadvantage is that I am taking time away from you that could have been spent dealing with your service clients and allocated cases.

## **9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We hope that participating in this research project would help you in your future practice and interventions with your clients and allocated cases. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we get from this research project may help shape or influence policies relating to equality and diversity within the workplace and beyond.

## **10. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information that is collected about you and from you during the course of the research project will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you and from you which is used will only bear your code name so that you cannot be recognised from it.

The data collected will be kept on the university's OneFile drive and only be accessible by myself and my university dissertation supervisor.

The University has a Safeguarding policy and the research team members are guided by professional codes of conduct which requires to us to report any information to the appropriate authority where a person may be at risk of serious harm. We will always endeavour to discuss this with you first.

## **11. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this research proposal will be published as part of a postgraduate dissertation in May 2019. You are free to request a copy of the published results from me at that time or in advance. As stated above, you will not be identified in any report/publication.

## **12. Who has reviewed the study?**

This study will be reviewed by Middlesex University, School of Health and Education, Health and Social Care Ethics Sub-committee

## **13. Contact for further information**

You can contact the following for further information:

Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams

[Aleski.brandy-williams@brent.gov.uk](mailto:Aleski.brandy-williams@brent.gov.uk) / [db1031@live.mdx.ac.uk](mailto:db1031@live.mdx.ac.uk)

0208 937 3345 / 0758 427 0668

Diane Apeah-Kubi

[d.apeah-kubi@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:d.apeah-kubi@mdx.ac.uk)

Many thanks for your consideration in taking part in this study!



To: Debonico Aleski Brandy-Williams  
Middlesex University

Date: 08.10.2018

This letter is confirmation of permission for the above named Middlesex University Student to access this organisation in order to undertake a research study Titled: The Black Male Effect: Perceptions, Assumptions and Stereotypes of Black Male Social Workers within the Social Work Department – Children & Families and interview staff and run a focus group. The study may proceed subject to approval from the Middlesex University Ethics Sub-committee.

Signed:

Manager or Leader Name and role/title: Diana Adigbli, Team Manager

Address: Brent Council

3rd Floor, Civic Centre

Engineers' Way

Wembley

London HA9 0FJ

Telephone: 0208 937 4471

Email: [diana.adigbli@brent.gov.uk](mailto:diana.adigbli@brent.gov.uk)

## Appendix E: Dissertation Interview – Clive

**A - Good afternoon, today is the 18th of February 2018. I'm here with Clive who is a senior social worker and he is helping me with my dissertation interview and it's on the challenges and experiences of black male social workers - especially young black male social workers. Clive, as a young black man, what made you decide on a career in social work?**

C - I think for me...I've always been a person where I've always wanted to support and help people and facilitate change. That's one of the driving forces of me becoming a social worker. Prior to qualifying, I was a young person advocate for my local authority and I worked closely with children, young people and families, particularly young people. I took on an advocate / mentor role and I felt I could do the role in a social work capacity.

**A- So your background even from a young age has been in some sort of unofficial social work role?**

C- Yes

**A- And you decided to go Uni and make it official?**

C- Yeah

**A- Were there any positive or negative reactions from your family and friends when you made the decision?**

C – No because my mum's also working within social work and my sister's currently completing a social work degree as well. So social work is kind of in my blood, it's in my family. I also have extended family members who are social workers as well. So for me it was more like an add-on. A lot of people could see I had the skills and knowledge and the capacity to be able to be a good social worker in terms of my own personality and being able to bring about positive change to the lives of so many people.

**A - How long have you been a social worker?**

C - Since July 2014. That's when I qualified. So that's almost 5 years now.

**A - Have you encountered any challenges or experiences, whether negative or positive, based on you being a black male?**

C – Is that within the workforce?

**A - Within the workforce and also from service users.**

C - With regards to the workforce I've got to be honest and say I haven't because the local authority that I'm in and the area I work in is predominantly a black area so I feel it's been positive for me because I've been able to identify with many of my colleagues who come from or whether they are African or Caribbean background wise. So I've been able to have an identity towards them. In terms of, friends and family because people know the kind of person I am, most have seen it as a good thing.

In regards to the client group, they have taken to me well but that may be a result of how fellow professionals view me, particularly in the early stages of my career where you know as a young black male, freshly qualified what will he bring to the table?

The client group, the young people take to me very well. I think being a young black male helps because I can identify with them on the same level.

***A - Because you identify with them, do you think it's a positive thing for black male social workers to be paired black male service users?***

C - I'd say it is. The reason being is because with a lot of the client group I'm working with either their fathers aren't around just as an example, and they haven't got positive male role models who they aspire to. A lot of the young black male service users, although not all of them, aspire very much to be part of that 'road life' so to speak. So to find a young black social worker who is coming from maybe a different walk of life, it can be something that is new to them. To show that as a young black male I can go through the education system, get a good job and still work and identify with you.

There are other times whereby pairing up may have obstacles. Some young black males have a view that young black males in employment as social workers may be 'sell outs'. In the sense that they feel that the lifestyle they've chosen we can't identify with them and they feel we are working for the government.

(Example)

I'm a young black male coming from the streets and you're a young black male coming with your shirt, chinos and shoes and you work in an office how can you identify with me?

So there's clashes in lifestyle in terms of the world we're coming from so that can be the negative but the positive is that actually a young black social worker like myself can identify with a black male from the streets and say although we come from different walks of life, I'm also going through the same struggles and have to jump through the same hurdles that you do so that can be positive as well. So generally it's a bit of both.

***A - How do you deal with those challenges of the young black male services users seeing you as part of the system as opposed to being there to help them? How do you deal with that challenge?***

C - Well to be honest with you when I work with a lot of young black males one of the things I do in my job (and I know sometimes they say you shouldn't) but being a social worker means you have to not always be PC (politically correct) sometimes you're going to have to level with these young people. That is the barrier for me. So I do talk slang with them, I do speak on the same level. Then they understand that 'he's kinda like me then'. And I explain just because I go to uni and I do my job well doesn't mean I don't know the streets. If they talk to me about music, rap music, grime I listen to that as well. So they understand 'ok he's part of the system but he knows the streets as well'. That's how I break through the barrier with them. There's no beating around the bush. I keep it 100 with them and keep it level with them for them to understand that even though I'm here to do a job but don't take me for a fool that I don't know the streets.

***A - As a young black male do you think your gender and ethnicity plays a role in the cases you're allocated?***

C - It does because initially when I first started my local authority role, all the gang cases I got being a young black and male. So part of it can be seen in two ways. 'You're young you can identify with these young people so you're more likely to get through to them than someone who's older because you come from different time zones'. The second way is it because you fit that stereotype and that's why we're always giving them to you?

When I first started my local authority role, all my managers were black and they said you are young and black. Keep it 100 with them. You know what to do. They knew exactly what they were talking about. My white manager who I've got right now she would say you know what to do, she may be

aware of stereotypes but she's not a black woman. Whereas the black female managers who may have sons who are my age can understand so there's a certain level of protection. I can identify with them culturally in a way I can't with my white manager.

**A - Do you think as a young black social worker, you are stereotyped the same way as the typical normal young black me out there in society?**

C - Yes. Even outside of work I get stopped by the police. I might be doing a home visit and police will be wondering what I'm doing until I show them the badge. Stereotypes are still apparent whether I wear the badge of a social worker or not. It's something I have to deal with. Those barriers whether in the professional world or personal are always still going to be there.

**A - I've worked with you for almost a year or so. I remember going on a joint visit with you where we had to ring reception to get into the property and we were stopped by a black male and a black female security guards, do you think that even black members of the public stereotype you as a black male social worker?**

C - Of course. And I find when you are working with black families and you go into their home they tend to stereotype you in the sense that you are working for the system and against us. So working with a black family means they feel they take a bit more of a priority because in their mind 'you're black and I'm black so you should do more for me'. They see it as you're a black man being used by a white system. You are in other words 'a coconut' because you should be supporting me more than anything because we go through the same struggles. That is a stereotype you can find.

**A - Can you explain what a coconut is?**

C - Black on the outside, white on the inside.

**A - Because social work is predominantly female and white female at that - stats from the HCPC confirms this - do you think there's an assumption about the intentions of young black males choosing to become social workers? For example, other research I've read says that black males who enter into social work as a social worker do so because they've experienced some traumatic experience in their lives. So do you think there's an assumption about the intentions of young black males choosing to become social workers?**

C - I'd say some young black males have had bad experiences and they become social workers because they want to use their own experiences to make changes in a particular area. For example, if you have a young black male who was in a gang and they decide that life is not for me and they decide to go on to mentor young people to come out of that cycle. So you have some young black males who were known to use the service. They aren't about that life anymore and they go into social work and they want to go into YOT. So it can be that. I think other times, as young black male, I see a lot of the challenges that are out there for many people of ethnic backgrounds. Social work is my platform to be able to change that and going to the top will help me to change that. It can be personal experience or your own personal drive.

**A - Do you feel there is an assumption about the sexuality of young men in general who enter into the social work profession?**

C - It's been something said that many of the young men that enter social work are gay because social work historically has been a female profession. The view is that women are maternal, motherly, are care givers so they will be a lot more holistic in terms of attachment and children. Whereas men who go into it tend to be gay. I think you are seeing a big change now because you've got a lot of males

who are heterosexual and are actually going into the job because that is what they really want to do. But the assumption is most men who go into it are gay because it's a more maternal profession. Like a male nurse.

***A - What do you think has been the driving force between more men and more black men going into social work?***

C - I think the driving force is the fact that people are aware that there are some cases that women cannot deal with and need the perspective of a man to have a handle on it. There are a lot of women who have gang cases within the team I work with and they can't manage those young people whereas young black males as myself and the service user may have or take a different view towards me. So it's likely they thought 'we need some men in the field'. Positive male role models to actually go in and make some changes. Sometimes even female service users, particularly teenagers, may respond better to a male who is young than a female social worker who is older or the same age - as they may clash.

***A - Do you think that there is enough progression or opportunities for progression for young black men in the social work area?***

C - No. I don't think there is enough. As you go further up the hierarchy you find more female managers and so forth. Men may get to the top quicker but black men for some reason don't. There are no black male team managers. There's only one black male service manager who I know. I don't think there's enough progression and even within my local authority as you go higher up it becomes whiter. The locality I work in is the blackest area in Brent with a lot of ethnic minority groups. The CEO has only visited the office a couple of times and she said when she made her way to the office she saw a lot of interesting people. What she really wanted to see is that there are a lot of black people, a lot of drugs etc and for me how does a CEO coming from a white middle class background have the insight into what's going on the ground with black families? She's not going to be able to.

With someone like me if I make my way up to the top I will have a greater understanding of what is actually going on with the families that we are working with. A lot of these managers who are white are unable to identify with these families because they come from different worlds. Black managers can and will have a bit more of an understanding culturally.

I don't think there's an effective path for black males to make their way through the social work system and progress quickly enough. A black male progressing in the world is a threat. Not all white people have that view but white people in general don't want to see black people progress. And I feel a black man at the top will shatter the reality of what is out there in the streets. And that's why I'm so driven in wanting to break through that glass ceiling.

Our CEO doesn't visit and if you are tracking these cases particularly with young black males, shouldn't you be coming to the area to see what is going on? Progression isn't the only issue. It's about getting them to be aware that there actually is a problem. Either they are too busy or not looking. Black males need to be given the opportunity to get up there and make changes or we are still going to have the same situation we have had for a very long time. I've progressed very quickly but I know it's going to get harder for me to break through the glass ceiling but I'm determined to break that. Black female managers are more than happy to promote their black males up there because they know that as a female they can only go so high but they are happy to give the black male social workers who are good the equipment they need to make their way up.

***A - So you're saying more black representation on the upper echelons of management would make a difference?***

C - I think it would make a difference. It's about equal opportunity. It's not about sticking a black male in Management just to make him a token. It's not to tick a box. It's about taking a holistic approach and seeing young black male social workers who are doing well and doing great work and saying let's give them the opportunity to progress. The only threat I pose as a young black male higher up is I don't look like everyone around the table. On the frontlines, everyone looks like me. I feel the threat is that I'm going to bring up more individuals that look like me and less like you. Maybe it's the time to have changes. I don't see how you can have a predominantly black or ethnic minority local authority but have a white person right at the top. Unless a vested interest is taken to diversity as a white manager to actively employ black people you won't have the tools necessary to do the job well.

***A - So you think more black social workers will be able to better help the non-black social workers understand and identify issues within the black community they can't help with?***

C - 100%. The best way to learn about a culture is to have someone within the culture to give you an understanding but a person at the top who has no understanding or doesn't have a competent guide is not going to understand. If I spoke to the CEO about gangs she would be able to give an overview but going to the crux of the problem about young black males with no fathers who turn to the streets what are you going to do about it? She wouldn't know what to do. In the world she's from she doesn't have to deal with that. So why has she not got another black person to give her insight into what's actually going on within our community? You need a black male or black person in general who has the necessary experience to show her that these are the challenges that the black communities within these areas are facing.

***A - What is the most challenging experience you've had as a young black male social worker?***

C - A lot of it has been to do with a lot of the court cases that I've had. Having a high caseload as well. Luckily I've had a lot of support. Progression has been a challenge to a degree but I've had people behind me. I know a lot of individuals who may make decisions about me based on the fact I'm a young black male and haven't got the life experience for progression. I think they need to see that rather as an asset. As someone on the ground who can give them a lot more insight than they probably already know or give them a re-education. So caseloads, court work and progression.

***A - What has been the most rewarding experience?***

C - Having my work being recognised. I feel a lot of the work I do is being recognised and I think it's good that I'm being put forward for things like additional training to help me get to the next level of practice consultant. So I see that the individuals around me have my interests at hand. Families I work with also say I'm a good social worker.

***A - Final question. Would you encourage other black males to join the profession and why?***

C - I would because I think there is a shortage of black men in the profession. There aren't enough of us. We have a lot of black women but not enough black men and I think black men are the key to helping change. I think when you're dealing with complexities and families, issues with poverty and drugs and you need black men who understand and work actively within the field.

***A - Thank you so much Clive. You've been very informative. If I have any follow up questions I'll be sure to get back to you.***

C - Thank you.

## Appendix F: Interview Recordings Bullet Points

### Alex

- Trying to help people reason why became social worker. Relate to other males and becoming a role model. Prior experience
- Being a black male social worker has a direct impact on black male service users and the service as a whole
- Males Social Workers' sexuality questioned
- Not enough males in the profession
- Abilities questioned
- Local authorities need to do more to attract more males to the profession
- Lack of respect as a male social worker - abilities questioned
- Lack of support from LA
- Black male service users relate more to black male social workers
- Would encourage more black males to become social workers

### Bob

- A career in Social Work happened due to prior experience in Youth Offending Services
- Motivated to help others
- Not enough black males in the profession
- Not sure if more black male social workers would make a difference but they are needed
- Black male social workers work better with some difficult families
- Black male social workers share the same challenges and difficulties as black service users and black families
- Black male social workers are typecast in to the type of cases they are allocated
- Not enough range or opportunities to show progression
- Black service users relate more to black male social workers due to a commonality in culture, race and background
- Gender and colour bias in allocating cases to social workers can be a good thing
- Some black service users see white social workers as being able to get more results than black social workers
- It's inevitable that black male social workers are judged based on their gender and colour
- Assumptions about the sexuality of male social workers entering the profession
- Gay social workers add to the diversity of the profession and relate to other service users who are gay themselves
- Lack of training and support as a black male social worker especially on issues of DV and showing empathy
- Being an ambassador for your race is a challenge both positive and negative
- Building barriers and being aware of actions to prevent allegations or transference
- Being able to navigate the system has been a positive experience and being able to help and signpost clients
- Being an advocate for service users
- Would encourage other black males to enter the Social Work profession through various routes

## JohnJay

- Became a Social Worker because was told there is a lack of young black men in Social Work and that it would be easier to get a job. Also, was told that as a black male social worker he would be able to relate more to other black male service users
- Direct route into Social Work purely on his gender as a male and ethnicity as black
- Family and friends were quite supportive of his decision to become a Social Worker
- Males needed for going on visits and connecting with males known to social services
- Experience as a Social Worker has been challenging thus far. Parents can be challenging and takes a lot of energy. Working with professionals who are not able to understand his views.
- Positive experience in being able to help others, relate to them and get them to work for the betterment of themselves
- Negative experience is that being young, older service users not willing to listen to his opinions and may think that he is too young to be telling them what to do
- Lack of respect from service users due to age, gender and ethnicity
- Black male social workers needed in areas where the service user population is predominantly black as they can act as role models and influencers
- Black male social workers must be mindful on how their actions, words and interventions can be seen to others and this is not so with white counterparts
- Black male social workers are more prone to allegations, stigma, bias and sometimes violence
- Black male social workers are stereotyped more than other social workers - regarding cultural deviance
- Black male social workers are judged and thought of in the same way as black service users
- Black male social workers can relate to black service users due to commonality in culture, age, race and background
- Black male social workers can be positive role models for young black service users
- Black service users listen more and take advice from black male social workers especially on their future
- Black male social workers are typecast into the cases they are allocated and sometimes gets put into a box in terms of ability. Black male social workers are only known to be able to deal with cases involving gangs, drugs, violence and criminality.
- Black male social workers can ask questions of black service users that their white counterparts may not be able to ask due to a deeper understanding of the culture etc
- White social workers are protected more regarding the cases they are allocated. Managers tend to allocate all black cases to black social workers
- Assumptions about the sexuality of male social workers because social work is more of a woman's role
- Social work can open men to being more emotional and more caring so men entering social work is a good and positive thing
- Assumptions about the sexuality of male social workers are preventing more men from joining the profession
- Traumatic experiences in the lives of black men can play a role in them becoming social workers as they use their work to heal and prevent others from going through experiences like what they went through
- Most challenging experience involves lack of support, lack of training and not enough advance information when dealing with service users or having a case allocated

- Most challenging experience involves being sent out to the most difficult cases due to gender and race
- Expected to operate outside the scope of their abilities and training
- Would encourage other black males to enter the profession and says that even female social workers want more black males to enter the profession to deal with the diverse service user population

#### Joseph

- Entered social work as a black male so that he can represent the service users who were like him and to be a voice for the minority who were not being represented.
- There are challenges and resistance in social work regarding male social workers as the demographics says that it is a female profession. Male social workers are not respected by service users as much as female social workers are respected
- Service users discriminate against black male social workers
- Black male social workers have more allegations against them than other social worker
- There is an element of racism within social work towards black male social workers
- Black male social workers are stereotyped and judged negatively by service users and professionals alike
- Most rewarding thing is achieving the interventions within and for the families working on behalf of
- Best thing is that the service is becoming more diverse as more service users are open to working with social workers who are black and male
- Assumptions about the sexuality of males entering the Social Work profession as not a lot of males are interested in joining what is seen as a female profession
- A bit of challenge for a male to be taken seriously in a female dominated profession
- Black male social workers are seen to not know anything from the service users' point of view
- Female professionals tend to undermine black male social workers
- Easier to achieve goals as a black male social worker
- Allocating cases on bases of gender or ethnicity should not be happening unless a service user specifically request it
- Service users see social workers of their own ethnicity as being able to understand them more and help them more
- The profession needs more black male social workers especially in the upper echelons of management
- More advocacy and support for black male social workers needed to get more men into the profession

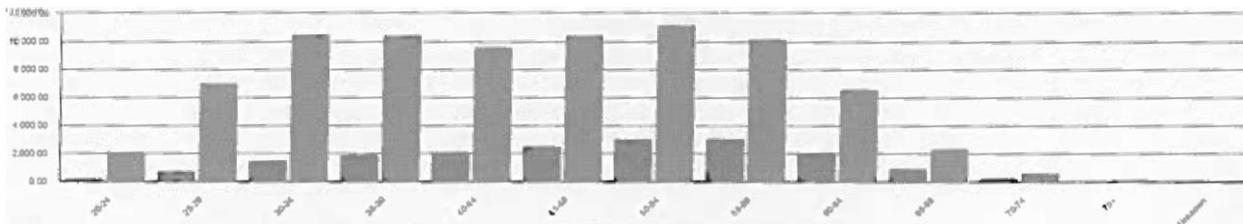
#### Bill

- Got into Social Work after someone recognised his skill and talents working with young people. Studied to become a Youth Mentor first and then went on to study Social Work.
- Challenging at first as he was shocked by the behaviour of the young people and the lack of respect they had for adults. One young person swore at him on his first day.
- Background in media helped him understand the street culture and slang that is used by the young people and thus he is better able to relate to them on their level.
- Getting the right balance has been the most challenging thing about being a Social Worker especially in building relationships with young people. Setting boundaries, building rapport

and gaining their trust versus being someone they can relate to and understand due to the commonality of race and gender.

- Making the right decisions have also been a challenge but has also been one of the most rewarding thing about being a Social Worker.
- Finds that young black men relate better to a black male Social Worker.
- Thinks that black male Social Workers are allocated cases and clients based off of ethnicity and thinks that this can be a good thing and also a bad thing.
- Black service users identify with black male Social Workers and see them as a father figure, big brother or positive role model.
- Even white service users relate better to black male Social Workers as the white service users have adapted the black culture and slang.
- Black male Social Workers can be seen as positive role models for other black male service users.
- Thinks that black male Social Workers are judged and stereotyped unfairly from the start due to their gender and ethnicity.
- Black male Social Workers are typecast into the kinds of cases they get allocated and it is mostly cases involving black male service users, drugs, gang violence and criminality.
- Black male Social Workers are also judged and stereotype by their peers and other professionals based on the jargon and slang the use and how they present themselves especially in regards to hairstyles and dress.
- Managers and peers think that black male social workers are best equipped to work with black and troubled families solely based on their gender and ethnicity.
- Argues that the profession is still largely female dominated and thus more male especially black male Social Workers are needed.
- There is an assumption on the sexuality of black male social workers and male social workers in general.
- Some black male Social Workers enter the profession as a result of a traumatic experience in their lives.
- Social Work can be a tool to teach young black men that it is okay to show their emotions and to have empathy.

## Appendix G – Freedom of Information Request Data



	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59					Unknown	Total
	37	1,094	1,68	1,476	1,162	914	776	669	299	116	36			8,253
	16	102	269	279	278	286	242	200	103	47				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>1,186</b>	<b>1,841</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>1,199</b>	<b>1,016</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>44</b>		<b>to.07</b>
Argyll and Clyde														

	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+	Unknown	Total
Argyll and Clyde														
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	75	216		363	322		388	368	262	95	16			2,807
		17			46	82	100		76	36				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>488</b>		<b>368</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>24</b>			<b>3,373</b>
Bedfordshire		162		307	269	324		267	178	88	25			2,196
Hertfordshire		13	36	44	62	68	68	74	68	22				449
	<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>30</b>			<b>2,846</b>
Birmingham and the Black Country		340	481	423		468	501	498	292	87	12			3,667
	12	40	62			123	124	121	94	41				795
	<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>686</b>		<b>386</b>	<b>128</b>				<b>4,462</b>
Essex														
														10
Cheshire & Merseyside	61	288		396	376	488	483	492	363	92	26			3,461
		23	68	61	71	99	150	169						780







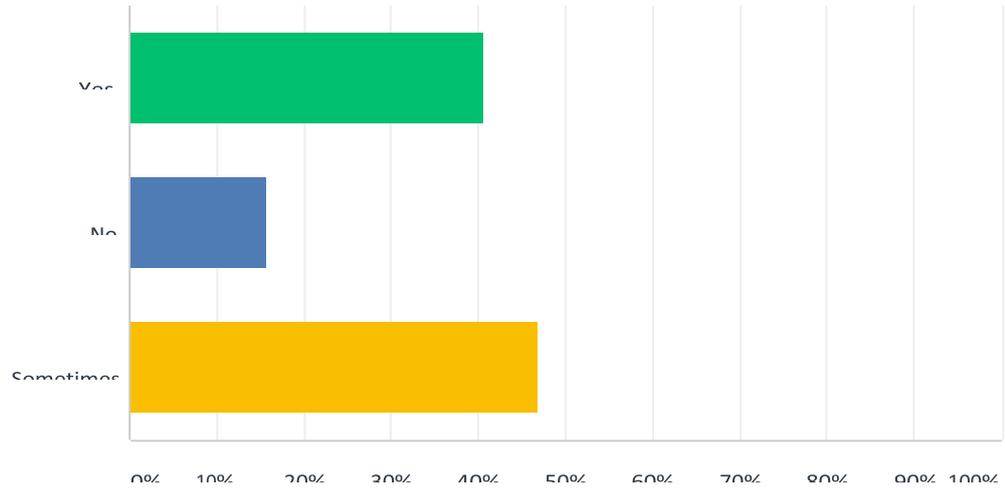
		20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+	Unknow	Total
South West Peninsula	U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	38	103	225	253	268	368	395	390	298	134	27	7	0	2,494
South Yorkshire	F	70	215	268	257	203	267	270	259	159	42	12	2	0	2,012
	M	6	20	36	45	39	53	69	79	51	24	8	1	0	430
	Total	75	235	302	302	242	310	339	338	210	66	20	3	0	2,442
Surrey and Sussex	F	82	214	384	428	397	449	451	397	350	113	37	8	0	3,308
	M	10	24	58	71	81	118	124	117	100	45	10	2	0	780
	U	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	92	238	442	497	478	568	575	514	450	158	47	10	0	4,089
Tayside	F	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	6
	M	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	7
Thames Valley	F	57	163	274	313	314	319	350	328	231	88	36	5	0	2,478
	M	2	15	40	66	80	79	74	76	55	34	10	2	0	533
	Total	59	178	314	379	394	398	424	402	286	122	46	7	0	3,009
Trent	F	111	305	383	445	401	481	528	519	303	97	15	4	1	3,573
	M	4	23	50	81	71	102	141	152	101	38	11	0	0	752
	Total	115	328	413	508	472	583	669	671	404	133	26	4	1	4,325
Unknown	F	6	20	22	41	13	14	20	11	5	3	0	0	0	158
	M	0	0	7	3	3	4	9	1	0	1	0	0	0	28

		20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+	Unknow	Total
Unknown	Total	6	20	29	44	18	18	29	12	5	4	0	0	0	183
Wales Q99	F	8	33	48	30	35	45	61	63	47	15	2	1	0	388
	M	0	1	7	9	13	24	21	22	21	9	2	0	0	129
	Total	8	34	53	39	48	69	82	85	68	24	4	1	0	515
West Northern Ireland	F	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	6
	M	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Total	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	8
West Yorkshire	F	154	337	470	446	399	403	429	403	223	70	8	3	0	3,345
	M	8	34	52	67	72	81	134	109	76	37	4	2	0	685
	Total	162	371	522	513	471	484	563	512	299	107	12	5	0	4,031
Western Isles	F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,199</b>	<b>7,680</b>	<b>11,927</b>	<b>12,247</b>	<b>11,601</b>	<b>12,871</b>	<b>14,131</b>	<b>13,127</b>	<b>8,677</b>	<b>3,208</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>98,452</b>

Appendix H: Survey Data

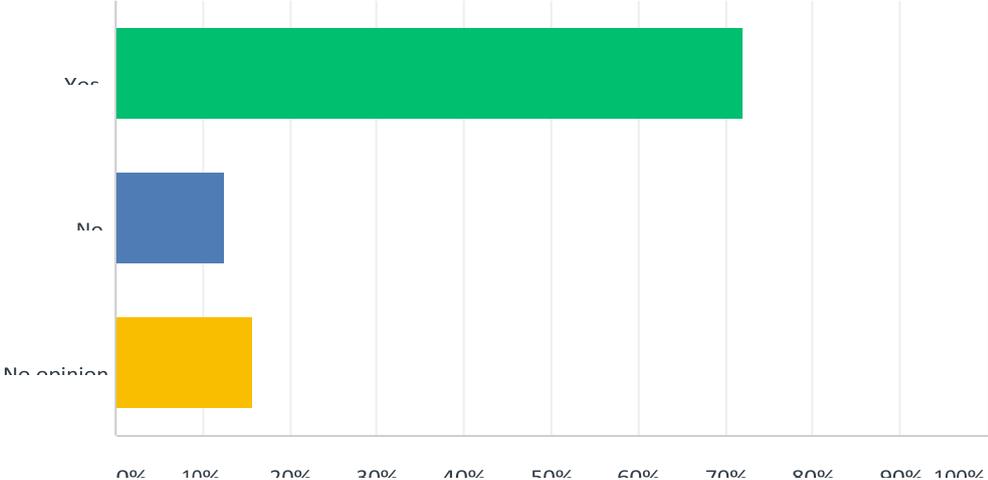
Q2 Do you think young black male social workers are pre-judged based on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or both?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0



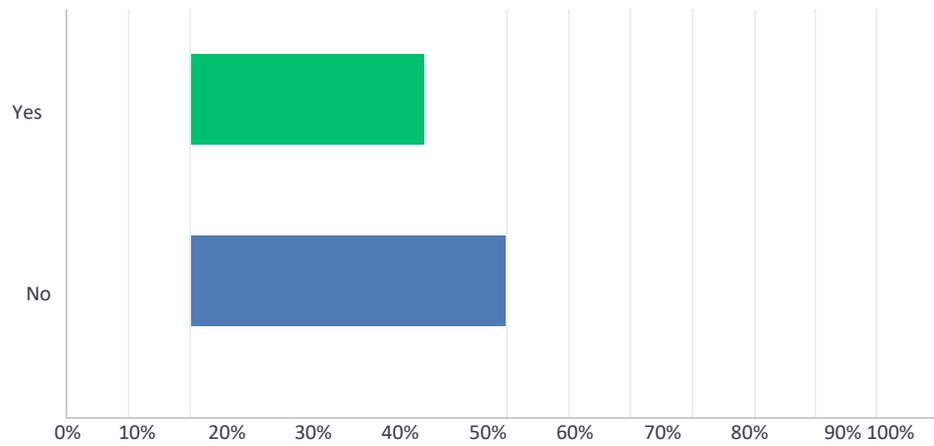
### Q3 In your opinion, is Social Work with Children and Families a viable career choice for young black males?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0



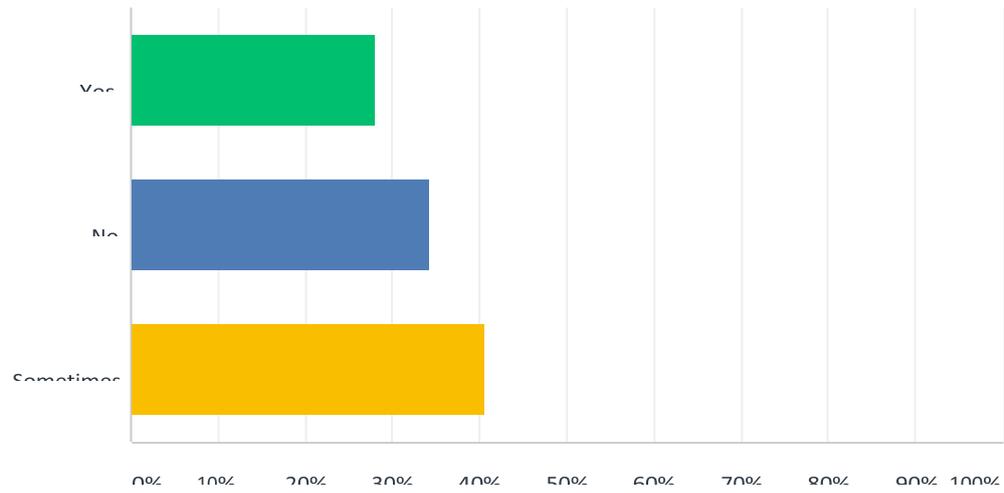
# Q4 Do you think there is an assumption about the intentions of a young black male choosing a career in social work?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0



Q6 In a predominantly female dominated profession, do you think there is an assumption on the sexuality of a young black male social worker?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0



# Q7 Overall and in your opinion, are young black male social workers celebrated or discriminated against?

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

