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'*I do not know if I will have the energy to come to placement tomorrow*': Fast-Tracking Racially Minoritised Students to Failure in Social Work Education

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Abstract

We build upon previous work that explored the evidence base of 'failure to fail' on practice placements across professions. We found a lack of convincing evidence of 'fail to fail' within assessed practice learning placements and could not ascertain the extent of this issue. The literature was stronger about why it 'might' or 'could' be difficult to fail students on placement. We concluded that if there was a reluctance to fail students, that hesitancy was not shown when failing racially minoritised students. Using critical race theory, we noted instead, fast tacking to failure. Data were re-examined from two previous studies that focused on the experiences of Black African social work students in England. We identified two ways in which practice educators operationalised fast tracking to failure. Firstly, the speed at which negative judgments were made about students' abilities, and related to this, asking personal and insensitive questions, and secondly, the speed of decision about placement failure. We argue that the debate needs to move away from fail to fail and instead, focus on who is being fast tracked to failure, and how racism and other discrimination is addressed forcefully in social work policy, practice and education.

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Introduction

We build on a previous article (Finch and Tedam, 2023) which explored the robustness of the 'fail to fail' narrative, in social work practice placements. We could not find convincing evidence of 'fail to fail' nor ascertain the extent of this issue. The literature was stronger; however, about why it 'might' be difficult to fail a student on placement. This initial exploration raised a concern, which deserved analysis in its own right, because if there was at best, a reluctance to fail students, this appeared not to be the case for racially minoritised students. As such, we re-analysed data from two previous studies, which explored the experiences of Black African, non-international, social work students on placements in England (Tedam, 2015, 2021). Both studies used a critical race theoretical (CRT) lens to identify how individual and structural racism sustains inequalities for racially minoritised students in higher education. Indeed, there is significant evidence of racism in higher education, both UK and internationally (see, example.g. Harris, 2017; Tate and Page, 2018; Wong *et al.*, 2021).

Our re-analysis focused on fast tracking to failure, and if present, how it was operationalised. We argue that fast tracking to failure, is reflective of the way in which social work practice, in the UK and other jurisdictions, fast-tracks racially minoritised service users into the controlling aspects of social work intervention, for example, the over representation of black men within involuntarily mental health services (Walker, 2020) and over medication (Devonport *et al.*, 2022) and the over representation of racially minoritised children in the care system (Bywaters *et al.*, 2016).

We also note the over representation of racially minoritised social work students taking longer to complete their placement, fail, or be subject to fitness to practice (FTP) processes within universities (Bernard *et al.*, 2011; Sangha, 2022). Racially minoritised practitioners are also overrepresented in regulatory body FTP processes (Finch and Corrie, 2023). Given the underpinning value base of social work, possible racism experienced by student social workers raises significant concern in itself, but also has implications for racially minoritised practitioners and people who use social work services. Using CRT as a theoretical framework, can thus assist in identifying racism, and exploring responses to it.

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Terminology

Like others, we reject the term BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) as it homogenises large groups of people (Bunglawala, 2020) and has been imposed on a diverse group of non-White people by state institutions (Gunaratnum, 2003). We utilise two terms in this article, racialised minorities and Black African. Racialised minorities signifies an acknowledgement that some people have been minoritised based on constructions of race (Tedam, 2021) and will have been subject to racism in their lives. The descriptor Black African is used deliberately, as the data focused on this self-defining group.

Fast-tracking to failure

In our previous exploration (Finch and Tedam, 2023), we found that if there was at best, a reluctance to fail students, this reluctance did not appear to be present when failing racially minoritised students. Tedam and Mano (2022) in research that explored motivations of social workers to become practice educators and the subsequent impact on students, identified 'fast-tracking to failure' as a significant concern. They describe this phenomenon as the:

> unwarranted speed with which some practice educators instigate facilitative processes or fitness-to-practice procedures in relation to Black African students (Tedam and Mano, 2022, p. 250).

We develop this further, by identifying the concerning speed in which negative assumptions are made by PEs about a student's abilities and motivations, which then rapidly lead to concerns or failure processes being enacted.

Social work education in the UK

The Care Standards Act (2000) brought about significant changes to social work in the UK. Social work become a protected title, care councils were established in each UK country, the introduction of a degree in social work, and an increase in placement days, from 130 to 200 (Finch, 2017). In 2013, this changed to 170 days, with thirty skills training being provided within universities (Finch, 2017). Students usually undertake two placements which are required to be in different settings, with at least one being statutory. The first placement is usually of shorter length than the final placement and typically, though not always, would take place within the voluntary sector. There have been some criticisms that 'non-traditional placements' do not adequately prepare students for

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either the final statutory placement, or indeed qualified practice (see, e.g. Narey, 2014). Scholar (2014) has argued, however, that non-traditional placements can offer important learning opportunities for social work students.

Social work students on placement in the UK, must evidence how they meet certain requirements, a competency-based system of assessment in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, based on national occupational standards and a capability model in England, the Professional Capability Framework (Finch *et al.*, 2021). Students are required to be assessed by a qualified social worker, who is working towards or has a postgraduate qualification in practice education. There are a variety of terms in use to describe this role in the UK, that is, Practice Assessor, Practice Teacher and Practice Educator (PE) (Finch, 2017). In other countries, field educator is used (Finch *et al.*, 2021).

Since the introduction of the degree, there is a requirement to involve people with lived experience of social work in course design, assessment and delivery. Universities were also required to develop their FTP processes (Finch and Corrie, 2023). Social Work England (SWE 2021), for example, in their standards of teaching and learning, requires that universities 'Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health'. (5 March 2021).

All universities have placement procedures, not least, when concerns arise. Concerns processes can be instigated by the student, PE or the social work tutor and the aim is for all parties to meet, explore the concerns and develop an action plan (Finch, 2017). Students, however, despite the intervention outlined above, may nonetheless be assessed as having failed the placement. It is important to note that universities policies and practices may differ, as some universities assessment regulations may allow an automatic right to repeat a failed placement, others do not.

In terms of potential contextual differences in the data sets (2015 and 2021), it should be noted that in December 2019, the social work regulatory body in England changed from the Health Care and Professions Council to SWE so it could be the case the participants in the 2015 study were required to undertake 200 days of assessed practice, rather than 170. Other major developments applicable to participants in the later study was the introduction in England of The Teaching Partnerships, a government funded scheme to create partnerships between local authorities, universities, the NHS and private and voluntary organisations. Amongst other things the Teaching Partnerships aimed to 'transform the quality of education and experience received by social work students and practitioners' (Department of Education, 2020, p. 11).

The range of placements available is important to acknowledge, as the placement experience will be different for each student, depending on

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the type of placement, the skills of the practice educator and what students bring in terms of skills and knowledge. Some placements may also be more 'fast paced' than others. This makes practice education complicated in terms of fairness of assessment, central to the discussion here.

Literature review

Racism on social work programmes

The research in the UK and internationally, has identified, that racially minoritised social work students, including Black African students, have been subject to racism on their programmes as well as on practice placements. Moriarty *et al.* (2009) and Fairtlough *et al.* (2014) found evidence in England that Black African students were at particular risk of failing social work courses, as well as students with disabilities and men from all ethnic backgrounds. Further, both studies noted that racially minoritised students took longer to complete their programmes, because of repeating modules or taking periods of leave. This was also seen in a study of Scottish study of social work students, and they noted the overrepresentation of racially minoritised students in placement fails (Hillen and Levy, 2015). Tedam (2014, 2015) found evidence in England of significant racism experienced by Black African students on social work practice placements.

In Australia, Zuchowski *et al.* (2013) identified racism experienced by Aboriginal and Strait Island social work students on placement. Gair *et al.* (2014), Harrison and Ip (2013) and Bennett and Gates (2019), all identified poor experiences faced by students from racially minoritised groups in Australia. The situation was similar in the United States of America, with Johnson *et al.* (2021), concluding that racially minoritised social work students were subject to covert and overt racism. They argued that failing to address racism in social work placements was detrimental to the profession, something we drew attention to, at the outset of this article, and that 'cultural awareness' training for placement supervisors was insufficient to change practice. Writing from Canada, Razack (2001) found that practice educators adopted colour-blind approaches to working with students, that is, treating all students the same, without due regard or acknowledgement of differences. Srikanthan (2019) also found evidence of the reproduction of racial categories and hierarchies within the placement settings in Canada. Such experiences are noted across all academic subjects within Higher Education internationally (Zewolde, 2021), and in the UK context, concern remains about differentials in progression rates, outcomes and Eurocentric practices which disadvantage and other racially minoritised students (Arday *et al.*, 2022).

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Fitness to practice

FTP procedures, within universities and regulatory bodies, have been shown to disproportionately impact racially minoritised people. For example, Bernard *et al.* (2011) and Sangha (2022) noted the disproportionate numbers and a former social work regulatory body in England, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) found that of the 4,118 referrals for misconduct between 2004 and 2012, 16.2 per cent were Black social workers despite representing 10.8 per cent of social work registrants. Black social workers therefore were 1.7 times more likely than White social workers to be referred to FTP (GSCC, 2012).

Comparator professions

Comparator professions have raised similiar concerns, for example, nursing, (2009), Hill and Albert (2021), and in physiotherapy, Williams *et al.* (2015). In terms of FTP at regulatory body level, Wise (2019) found that between 2012 and 2017, 0.5 per cent of White doctors were referred to the UK General Medical Council compared to 1.1 per cent of racially minoritised doctors. For those who qualified overseas, and were from racially minoritised groups, the figure was higher, at 1.2 per cent. The same concern is identified in UK nursing, in terms of FTP referrals. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) reported that there were disproportionate numbers of Black African nurses appearing at tribunals (12 per cent) whilst accounting for 7 per cent on the NMC register (NMC, 2019). West *et al.* (2017) also found that older nurses, racially minoritised men and registrants trained in Asia or Africa were disproportionately represented at FTP nursing tribunals.

Methodology and methods

The original studies were qualitative, and utilised narrative methodology. In the first study, eight social work students who identified as Black African, kept reflective diaries whilst they were on placement and subsequently interviewed (Tedam, 2014). The second study (Tedam, 2021) explored the experiences of ten Black African students' experiences of placements in England during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. We acknowledge the potential methodological limitations in utilising two data sets, gathered with an eight-year gap but used them nonetheless, because they explore the experiences of one particular demographic group of students on placement in England, albeit one group in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of merging and reanalysing data, both authors have utilised this technique in previous

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studies (see, e.g. Finch and Poletti, 2014; Finch *et al.*, 2014; Tedam and Mano, 2022), although as highlighted by Moore (2007) the boundaries between re-analysing and re-using data sets, collected by oneself or unknown others, are debated and pose distinct methodological challenges as well as opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic, prompted the UK Government to institute a lockdown in March 2020 and universities, whilst not required, chose to suspend placements. Decisions were subsequently made about shortening the placement length if it was felt a student would still be able to evidence meeting the requirements, and online and hybrid working arrangements began to be implemented (Sarbu and Unwin, 2021).

The participants

Both studies invited participants who self-defined as Black African and who were current social work students in England. Seventeen of the eighteen participants were female and one was male. Participants were required to have completed at least one previous placement. The 2021 study aimed to explore the additional impact of COVID-19 and required students to have had experience of placement during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants came from all parts of England. All of the participants, bar one, had a pattern of seventy and then 100-day placements, with one doing seventy and then 130. Two of the participants (one in each study) had failed a placement.

Data analysis

In terms of data analysis, we utilised thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). We did not exclude any of the original data. The authors undertook separate re-analysis of the data and then compared themes to ensure robustness in the analytical process. Critical Race Theory was subsequently employed to frame the findings, as the theory focuses on the causes, conditions and structures that continue to produce inequalities, alongside identifying multiple oppressions. Indeed, CRT as an analytical framework, has a 'natural fit for social work' (Constance-Huggins, 2012, p. 9). CRT has also been used successfully to examine the educational experiences of racially minoritised people, not least poorer outcomes (Savas, 2014) something that has been consistently identified in the literature within social work. The main tenets of CRT[1] are that:

1. Racism is a daily occurrence for racially minoritised people
2. Intersectionality is important

1 For a more in-depth account of CRT, we recommend Delgardo and Stefancic (2023).

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3. The promotion of voices of the marginalised.
4. Interest convergence—namely that the majority group are only interested in the minority group when there is gain for the majority group.
5. Race is a social construct.
6. Challenges the idea that everything is based on merit and that racism often plays a role in outcomes for black and racially minoritised people.
7. Whiteness is a tool that confers material and social benefits to those who possess it and to punish those who do not.

This last tenet is often criticised for not adequately representing ethnic minorities who are 'visibly' white, but still experience discrimination, however given the focus of this piece is on Black African students, it remains relevant.

Ethics

For the original studies, the usual norms of undertaking ethical research were considered, namely, anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and the avoidance of harm. Approval to undertake the original research was sought from university research committees where the author of the original studies worked. Given the sensitivity of the research, additional measures were put in place to support the participants in both studies, namely a debriefing protocol with sources of support provided if required. This was important given the distressing stories of racism the participants revealed. All names used here are pseudonyms.

The 2015 doctoral study on completion was embargoed for an initial period of three years because of ethical concerns, which centred on the rare possibility, that despite extreme caution being undertaken to maintain anonymity and privacy of the respondents, they might be identifiable within the thesis, and so employment opportunities could be impacted as students were likely to apply for jobs in the local authorities where they had their placements. The embargo, however, was not removed until 2021 due to an administrative error.

In undertaking this re-analysis, we considered the ethical issues further, not least the length of retention of data and consent for anonymised data to be shared for further analysis. We felt overall that the potential harms in our re-analysis were significantly outweighed by the urgent need to address concerns in social work education.

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Findings

We identified two ways in which 'fast tracking to failure' was present; preconceptions about student's abilities coupled with fast tracking to personal and insensitive questions and fast tracking to concerns and/or placement failure procedures.

Fast tracking of perception of abilities

Participants identified the speed at which PEs made assumptions about their academic abilities, which often centred on the quality of their literacy skills but were not based on evidence. Jane for example commented:

> *She [The PE] asked me many times where I learnt my English and I know that is her way of reminding me that English is not my first language.*

Similarly, Ama commented:

> *What happens is that some PEs, for instance the very first one I had, although she has had contact with other black Africans, the first thing she said was that 'where are you coming from, oh you're from Africa, do you have a problem with your writing?' That was the very first statement she made….*

Tolu reported that her PE made comments about her English being 'too academic'. She stated:

> *Our problem from the onset of the placement was that my English was too academic. … I carried out the direct observation, I used the word encompass and I used the word debt consolidation… I was doing a financial assessment, and I was telling the family that assessment encompasses. Debt consolidation is not my word, it is a word that people in the financial service use. And I don't think it's in my rights to patronise my service users…*

Tolu reported further that she felt her written work was over scrutinised, she commented:

> *It's probably because I am BME. I've [been]…. picked up on things I thought were not necessary. I wrote in one of the analyses, I said this child is yet to start schooling, it was crossed off and it was written as, this child is yet to start school. So basic, schooling is not grammatically wrong.*

Linked to a feeling that some PEs began their work with a poor perception of the students' written skills, some respondents also felt that PEs, and university tutors, had low expectations of Black African

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students more generally, and noticed differences in their treatment compared with their white counterparts. Mavis, for example commented:

> *I think it's a lack of expectation, it's like having a low expectation that a black person can achieve or can be competent in anything. It's put down rather than realising that I can achieve. How can I be helped to achieve? I have the potential to achieve.*

Similarly, Tolu commented:

> *You have to prove yourself. You have to work extra hard to erase or remove all those biases…. I think there is a general belief that as long as you belong to the BME category, there is a stereotype in terms of what has she got to offer; in terms of oh they can't speak good English; in terms of they can't write well; in terms of oh they shout; oh they are loud. So sometimes there isn't that openness to see what this person has got what she's got to offer in placement.*

Vicky also felt judged very quickly by her PEs.

> *I think they should instead of having a preconceived judgement of a person, they should take a person as they are, than to think just because I'm black, I won't be able to do this they are the only one that can do this. Which I think is very wrong.*

Linked to this concern that PEs made non-evidenced judgments about students pre-existing skills and knowledge, were concerns about the speed at which personal and insensitive questions occurred at the beginning of the placement. For example, at Mavis's initial placement interview in the work canteen, the PE asked the student about her medical history, including details of medication (which had all been provided previously in the placement application form). For Mavis this felt unnecessary, not least being in a public space, and felt negative assumptions were already being made about her abilities to manage a placement, linked not only to disability but also her ethnicity.

Mavis later reported further inappropriate, intrusive and insensitive questions from the same PE. She commented:

> *My first supervision was just awful. My PE asked, where have come from, why are you in this country, why did you come here? Are you a migrant or refugee? I felt frustrated. I felt that it was irrelevant what I was being asked. Why did you choose social work, are there social workers in Kenya? What are they doing? Theres a lot of FGM [female genital mutilation] in Kenya? I said yes, then she asked 'are you a victim? I sat there thinking, really? I must say I was very upset by that, actually it really hurt.*

We argue that this can be categorised as intersectional racism, as it would be unlikely that a male student or a white female student from Keyna would be asked about their experiences of FGM.

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Similarly, Bunmi, on placement during the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced questioning that she perceived as intrusive and insensitive, in relation to constant questions about family members and friends who may have contracted COVID-19. She commented:

> *'I didn't see that she was asking other students, just me'. It was not until another Black student told me he was experiencing the same and that it might have been because so many Black people were getting covid.*

Bunmi felt these questions to her, and another Black male student were disproportionate and may not have been coming from a place of concern but rather, were racialised microaggressions. It may have been useful for the PE to invite self-disclosure about their family COVID-19 situations from all students, especially as, according to Bunmi, the White students were not being asked these questions.

This example, and others evidenced an absence of sensitivity and cultural knowledge, as seen in the experience of Mavis, as well as assumptions about students' skills, experiences and the direct connection made to the student's countries of origin. This we feel is beyond microaggression, and evidences key tenets of CRT, namely that racism is a daily occurrence for racially minoritised people, that fair assessment of students is unlikely when such negative assumptions have been made by PEs in such a short time, rendering ideas of fairness, transparency and meritocracy baseless, and that racially minoritised students are othered and 'punished'.

Fast tracking to concerns processes and failing the course

We noted examples of where PEs and indeed social work tutors would raise very early the possibility that social work 'was not the right course' for the students. Mavis for example commented:

> *She (my tutor) said to me if I was fit to practice because of my disability. She did. She asked me if this was the right course for me.*

This is clearly evidence of ableism, but Mavis felt the white students with visible disabilities were not questioned about whether this was the right course for them. We note here again, the relevance to CRT of terms of the importance of intersectionality (in this case gender, race and disability) and the daily occurrence of racism.

A number of the participants felt that placement failure was noted as a possibility very early in the placement, without there being sufficient evidence of concern. Vicky for example, described her learning agreement meeting:

> *On the fourth day, we had a placement learning agreement meeting with my tutor and the PE. I was shocked that the PE already had concerns*

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> *about me. She cited my alleged 'lack of motivation'. Her opinion was based on the fact I kept asking questions, have childcare commitments and do not drive but all this was on my application form.*

We see again in this example, evidence of preconceived ideas about students' behaviour and circumstances, and the subsequent speed (day 4) at which these assumptions lead to the use of '*concern*'. Linked to this, was the subsequent speed at which the possibility of placement failure emerged, with the 'fail' word being used injudiciously. In her reflective log during her placement for example, Vicky had written.

> *Today was the first of my supervision meetings with my practice educator. I was 35 minutes late because I had attended a parenting meeting with another manager. When I entered the room, I could tell my PE was not happy. I apologised and tried to explain, shockingly my PE said this behaviour will lead me to failing my placement. I kept apologising and tried to explain my lateness but I could still sense her disapproval.*

Similarly, Sonia shared that her onsite supervisor 'took immediate dislike' to her and consequently failed her at mid-point, Sonia commented:

> *she failed me and told my PE that I don't take instructions. Even my PE was torn and confused*

For Vicky, her PE's use of supervision to consistently talk about her perceived failings, rather than what would be expected as a matter of course, namely a supportive, fair, transparent and facilitative approach, was of concern. Vicky wrote in her reflective diary:

> *Throughout my supervision, the PE kept mentioning about me failing the placement. I am deeply troubled by this.*

Another instance of fast-tracking to failure can be seen in Corrina's reflection, where she refers to the PE's continuous critical comments and the possibility of 'failing' which left her feeling despondent and uncomfortable. She wrote:

> *It has already been a difficult week and today is not different. My practice educator spent the time telling me off for my writing, my reflective logs, my case notes- everything. She keeps talking about failing and I don't know why. It's made me very uncomfortable about approaching her for support. Maybe that is what she wants, so that I will not come to her… …. I feel down. I do not know if I will have the energy to come to placement tomorrow. She won't care, she won't bother. She will be happier without me here.*

Such a narrative, mirrors findings by de Bie *et al.* (2020) who concluded that Black and racially minoritised students spend their time fending off racism and oppression, alongside the physical and emotional toll this takes on individuals. Mimi experienced fast tracking to failure when she reported that:

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> *from the beginning I was written off' …. It did not feel like she wanted me to pass.*

She stated further that she felt '*the PE preached fail*' throughout the placement and in relation to how she experienced placement colleagues' attitude towards her during the placement. What we understand to mean 'preached fail', meant an atmosphere that focused on the perceived shortcomings of the student, rather than supporting the student to develop.

Bola, who failed the placement during the COVID-19 pandemic, commented:

> *'I don't believe I failed this placement' I felt discriminated against by my PE. She says that at this midpoint meeting, I am beginning to demonstrate skills and knowledge required at the start of placement, and there is no more time for me to improve. My university tutor danced to the tune of this PE and now with corona there is no where I can take this- I felt there was a bit of a conspiracy*

What we see evidenced here and in other accounts, are normal placement procedures and policies not being followed—we would normally expect informal developmental feedback, part of the PE role, that concerns are addressed with students as soon as they arise, and in situations where concerns have been raised, a formal process followed, including action plans and review processes put in place. We sadly saw other evidence of this in the data, as well as significant delays and confusion about which processes were being used, if any.

Discussion

We would argue that the evidence presented here, seen in all the participants interviews, is perceived and felt by those individuals as racist occurrences, which range from microaggressions to more overt forms of racism. We argue that fast tracking to failure is a significant and concerning issue and also noted how those issues were then downplayed, or written off as the norm, by placement teams, heads of department and lecturers. Jane, for example, felt her tutor ignored concerns about racial and disability discrimination, and then felt 'persecuted' by the university department head for making formal complaints. Similarly, Zee, when her placement was terminated during COVID-19, commented:

> *my university tutor did not get back to me for many weeks after that. I was left in pieces.*

Other examples included, tutors not recognising behaviours exhibited by PEs as microaggression or overt racism, instead offering benign explanations, or seemingly unconcerned about black students not being

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accepted for placements. The links here to CRT are relevant, not least the operationalisation of interest convergence, which, as Lilly *et al.* (2022) documents, can leave racially minoritised students feeling that a learning environment characterised by racism was tolerated by university staff. Indeed, this emerged powerfully in the data, and deserves further exploration.

The fast tracking to failure phenomenon so acutely and painfully observed in the data, can only be explained as intersectional racism. It was clear that learning opportunities within placements were not equally distributed and that successful outcomes for students were not always obtained by meritocratic criteria, again, of relevance to CRT. Racism, therefore, serves as a strong barrier to racially minoritised social work students' achievements, as does other aspects of diversity such as LGBTQIA (Fairtlough *et al.*, 2014; de Bie *et al.*, 2020), men (Schaub, 2015), younger students (Holmström, 2011) and students with disabilities (de Bie *et al.*, 2020), which, whilst not explored here are important nethertheless.

We would argue that the fast tracking to failure observed in students' placement experiences, alongside the taught and practice elements of the social work programmes are replicated in practice where social workers may knowingly or unconsciously progress individuals and families much more swiftly through the more controlled and punitive areas of provision, as documented earlier. We also noted the intersectional experiences which often left students confused and unsure about which area of their diversity made them vulnerable to fast tracking, indeed considerable evidence of disablism was noted in some of the accounts. We also note the research literature which identified other characteristics that may contribute to oppression, for example, neurodiversity, gender or sexuality. We advocate that PEs, and all involved in the social work student journey develop race consciousness and avoid race evasiveness as proposed by Tedam and Cane (2022) which will enable them to identify, challenge and disrupt all forms of racism on social work placements. CRT is also a useful explanatory framework, which can aid in moving from being in a position of denial about the existence and the manifestation of racism, to acceptance and then challenge. CRT thus powerfully asserts the existence of daily experiences of racism and the need to go beyond having to 'prove', or demonstrate unequivocally, an act or behaviour is racist. The theory also offers a powerful account of why change may be disappointingly slow, namely interest convergence.

Limitations

In terms of the limitations of this discussion, we acknowledge the potential of circular reasoning, that is, finding evidence to support our contention of fast-tracking phenomenon for some students. We also acknowledge that

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we are missing the PEs' and universities perspectives. Other limitations identified include; the need to have gathered more information on the placement type to see if this had any influence on the findings, as well as further consideration of the student demographics of the university, although the participants were reluctant to disclose the name and precise geographical location of the university or placement provider. We noted however, that students experienced racism in geographical locations that had significant diversity in population as well as those that remained monocultural. The single male participant presents a limitation, although we acknowledge that the profession is female dominated.

Despite these limitations, the reanalysis identifies that racially minoritised students continue to remain at significant risk at being subject to racism on their social work programmes, not least because research by Cane and Tedam (2023) found that new graduates felt unsure and unconfident about how to challenge racism.

Conclusion

The profession of social work has a long history of working with marginalised and disenfranchised individuals, families, groups and communities. The profession purports to be supportive of the principles of fairness, social justice, equality and non-discrimination, yet the evidence is clear that certain demographic groups, particularly racially minoritised people continue to be served badly by social work in all areas of practice, and service users, students and social workers remain subject to continued oppression. This is the first study that we are aware of that has focused in detail of the phenomena of fast-tracking to failure and identifies how such phenomena is operationalised in attitudes and practices. It is incumbent on all involved in social work to firstly acknowledge the insidious way in which racism operates and second, take visible and active steps to challenge such practices and behaviours. The fact that racism remains prevalent within social work education, as evidenced here, is of great concern and needs urgent attention, not least the continuing negative impact on service users, particularly those from racially minoritised groups, using social work services. The impact of inclusive anti-racist-practice-education, underpinned by CRT, therefore, has the potential to move social work away from a position of contributing to oppression, to proactively challenging and addressing racism in all its forms—something that can only benefit all users of social work services.

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