

research snapshot

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Anti-racism Is an Important Approach for Social Workers to Use with Members of Diverse Ethnoracial Communities

What is this research about?

Knowledge about cultural diversity is an important skill to have in social work. It involves understanding the ethnic and racial diversity of your clients. However, many social workers focus only on a client's culture without examining the effects of racism on their lives. Understanding these effects is important because racism impacts the lives of clients in different ways. Ignoring it can have negative consequences when intervening in their lives. Families would bear the costs of failing to receive adequate services they need.

What did the researcher do?

First, the researcher compared two methods that can be used in social work: cultural competency, and anti-racism. Cultural competency can result in social workers viewing the issues of their clients being the consequence of their culture and ethnicity. Thus interventions focus on their cultural practices. However, cultural competency fails to look at the different systems of oppression impacting client lives. Often, these effects are not obvious.

The researcher then examined the main principles of anti-racism, which highlights that:

- Race has no biological ground, but that it still has social effects.

What you need to know:

Anti-racism is a helpful tool that may be used to improve services for ethnoracial communities. It allows social workers to assess and intervene in their clients' lives more effectively. This involves looking at the way racism affects them in areas like: employment, housing, and education. Social workers can also avoid generalizing about their clients' cultures. This includes understanding that their life experiences are complex.

- There is an invisible privilege that comes with being white. This affects people from ethnoracial communities because the barriers and struggles in their lives are largely unnoticed or ignored.
- The knowledge and experiences of clients from diverse backgrounds are not valued.
- Social services like education and social work can create and re-make social inequalities.
- Many social workers assume that the problems of ethnoracial youth are a result of their family and home situation.

Finally, the author applied these two frameworks on a case study. This was done to show the effects on assessment and intervention in social work. The case study involved a South Asian family of five, made up of a mother, father, and three children- the oldest one

a 13 year old daughter. Child Protection Services (CPS) were working with the family after an incident where the father had hit the daughter. It happened after a conversation escalated when the daughter lied about skipping school and being out late in the evening. The family had just recently moved outside the city and thus had lost their support network.

The father was working late hours in the evening to support his family. The daughter felt that she had no freedom to go out, and was afraid that her father's anger would become physical.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that cultural competency was not enough for social workers to understand the context of the case study.

Social workers would be able to conduct a more in-depth analysis if they applied an anti-racist framework to the case. An anti-racist framework would highlight the following:

- The different effects of peer pressure on children from an immigrant family.
- Tensions between the parents' lives at home and experiencing racism in a homogeneous, largely white community.
- The family's fear of the police.
- The family's fear of jeopardizing their immigration status.

However, a cultural competency framework fell short of noticing these factors. It caused social workers to oversimplify their understanding of the family's South Asian culture. The relationship between families and their cultures can easily be generalized if using a cultural competency approach. Also, social workers assumed that they were themselves "culture free". They forgot to assess how their own culture affected how they interpreted their clients' culture. As a result, they assumed the family's culture was lacking, and that they were not yet well versed in the norms of the

society because they were "newcomers".

Using cultural competency alone can prevent social workers in assessing and intervening fully in this case. They would be swayed by their own biases regarding cultures and thus fail to understand the context of the case.

How can you use this research?

This research would be relevant to individuals working with diverse communities. Services like health, social work, education, and other forms of community work can use this research. This work also contributes to understanding in cross-cultural environments in both public and private sectors.

About the Researcher

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