

Social Work Online Team Training (SWOTT) toolkit: FACILITATOR NOTES - MICHAEL

Child Welfare Inequalities: Ethnicity & Deprivation

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATORS IS:

- To encourage the social workers to share their thoughts about the case study.
- To facilitate discussion to identify the opportunities and challenges of this scenario.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS TO ASK THE GROUP:

Question: What are your initial reflections on this referral in relation to your own practice?

Answer: There are several areas of concern where individual, institutional, and structural racism may have shaped Michael's referral and its narrative. For example, Mr. James' interpretation of Michael's after-school activities with 'gangs'; how do we know this is not based on the headteacher's prejudice interpretation, especially if Michael is friends with other teenagers with Black ethnic heritage? What about the interpretation that Michael was 'starting' the fights, or that his parents were 'angry and aggressive'? Institutionally, we might question how police stop-and-search policies might have disproportionately targeted Michael for criminalisation for something many teenagers his age do.

Structurally, we might think critically about how Black women are often represented in culture as 'angry', and whether we can trust the headteacher's interpretation. Or, we might think about the cultural representations of young Black men as criminal. We might also consider whether structural racism and disadvantage played a part in Michael's mother's placement in care and whether her having been in care might have influenced the escalation of the referral.

Question: How could thinking about individual, institutional, and structural racism help us critically reflect on how Michael's referral emerged and ended up escalating to an assessment (give examples)?

Answer: We can see using the incidence rate ratio table (in Learning Objective 1 - online learning) that rates of Mixed Heritage (Other) children on child protection plans in low deprivation areas are 4.7 higher than rates for White children in the same areas, but they are not significantly more likely to be 'in Need' (because this rate is not in bold).

Question: How might the combination of socioeconomic factors (deprivation and affluence) and factors associated with 'race' and racism shape Michael's referral?

Answer: We might want to critically question whether we think these concerns would have raised a referral to children's services and escalation to assessment if Michael lived in a more deprived area. For example, is it as likely that Michael would have been stopped by police if he lived in a more deprived area with a higher non-White population? Would behaviour that was 'concerning' raise this much suspicion if he lived in a deprived neighbourhood and went to a more deprived school, or would it have been seen as normal? Do White children engage in similar behaviours which get interpreted differently?



Question: How might Michael's experience and referral have been different if there was a challenge to anything noted that might constitute racism?

Answer: If the police stop-and-search on Michael was challenged, would his behaviour have been more likely to be considered normal teenage behaviour rather than criminalised? Was any challenge made to whether the school's exclusion policies are more punitive for non-White students? Should Mr. James' interpretation of Michael's after-school associates as members of a 'gang' be challenged in case notes (or even excluded) until it can be confirmed that his perception was not based on racist stereotypes?

Question: How could social work departments routinely identify and act on these reflections to create change?

Answer: Some suggestions might be: Greater education and more complex thinking about how institutions and individuals interpret things through the lens of 'race' and 'class'. More joined-up thinking about how institutionalised racism and class prejudice might spread from one institution (e.g. education) to another (e.g. social work), and how to identify and stop it by asking explicit questions about procedures, policies and referrals. Greater community engagement and reflection to understand how racism, class prejudice, and material resources shape routes into intervention in local areas. Strategies to promote diversity and lived experience at all levels of the social work workforce, especially where senior leadership is responsible for supervision. More awareness of how poverty might be inappropriately interpreted as neglect in some instances, but as a 'norm' in others (based on racist narratives that normalise poverty in Black and Mixed Heritage populations). Even if this referral is closed with no further action, should children's services have a responsibility to work with the school to implement anti-racist policies and anti-racist education (including for their educators?)