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First-year Practice Experiences of Statutory Children's Social Workers from Ethnic Minority Groups

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First-year Practice Experiences of Statutory Children's Social Workers from Ethnic Minority Groups.

Sipho Sibanda

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2026

Candidate Declaration

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2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

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Abstract

This Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), qualitative research study explores the first-year social work practice experiences of statutory children and family social workers from Ethnic Minority Groups (EMGs) in England. Most studies explore the first-year practice experiences of all newly qualified social workers (NQSWs), but not specifically the first-year experiences of NQSWs, or Internationally Qualified Social Workers (IQSWs) from EMGs, leaving a gap in knowledge. To gain an understanding on why certain experiences may have occurred, some policies associated with social work have been analysed.

The study explores the experiences of support, managing the workload, and reasons why some social workers may exit their roles. Seven participants were interviewed, (five qualified in England, two abroad) (main-study) and three participants (phase-two) which was a focus-group of experts (social work managers) who validated the themes from the main study.

Findings indicate that a small number of participants received effective formal support. However, most NQSW-participants felt forced to depend on ad hoc peer support due to insufficient formal supervision from their managers. IQSW-participants felt supported, but lack of a formal adaptation programme rendered that support unhelpful. A gap in law has been identified as having led to the unavailability of a formal support programme for IQSWs. Therefore, a new policy is needed to formulate formal support for IQSWs.

Participants expressed that they would have not been able to manage their workloads, if they had not donated their resting time and worked out of hours. Additionally, unmanageable workloads have been found to cause stress and burnout, leading to forced long absences for some participants, with others seeking refuge in locums or exiting their roles in promotion of their wellbeing. While the majority of this study's findings suggest that black social workers particularly males, may be the least accepted ethnic minority group within statutory children services in England. Other findings provide a counterbalance, suggesting that some can experience acceptance and inclusion.

Key-Words: Critical Race Theory, NQSWs, IQSWs, ASYE, IPA, BME social workers.

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Chapter-One.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims and objectives of this study and provides the rationale of the inquiry. It uncovers significant historical events faced by statutory social workers leading to the changes introduced because of those notable events. Additionally, the chapter will detail a brief history of social work, how social work developed in England, and how it has changed over the years. Furthermore, a brief history of BME social workers in England, will be presented.

1.2 Researcher's Journey

After having completed high school, lack of funds for school fees meant my flame for further education gradually diminished. However, that passion was revived when I was working as a care assistant for children and young people, after having recently arrived in England; this was encouraged by the education opportunities presented in the country. Therefore, I completed the Access to Higher Education Course. This programme proved to be decisive as it channelled me towards obtaining a degree in university. Hence, I enrolled and completed a degree in Child and Adolescent Studies at a university in England. While completing the degree, I read one of the early societal studies by the former French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1897); this study which focused on understanding why people committed suicide, initiated my interest of conducting similar societal research.

My first degree encouraged me to develop a strong desire to understand children more and support them as a professional. Therefore, I enrolled on the MSc in social work programme, at a university in England. After having qualified as a social worker, I obtained a job as a children and family social worker at a local authority in England. My first-year mixed experiences prompted me to share them with fellow BME former university peers who also shared related experiences. These experiences encouraged me to conduct this study and address some of the concerns which may be faced by BME social workers. Having read about the subject, the scantiness of literature in the area enabled me to identify that there was a gap in knowledge. Thereafter, I applied to study for a PhD and was subsequently accepted at the Sheffield Hallam University.

1.3 Style of writing

This thesis has been largely written from a third person's perspective, to remove the subjective elements presented in the first-person writing. However, some sections particularly reflexivity and ideographic accounts of participants do include first-person presentations.

1.4 The running commentary

A running commentary style of writing has been adopted, described as "*a written ethnography in that, it is a qualitative approach*" to active observation which focuses on events, actions and different contexts (Day, 1990, in Engin 2015 p. 258). According to Engin (2015), the running commentary style of writing acts as a guide and an active reflection reminder, as the researcher can actively identify specific themes or reactions from the research and analyse them immediately. Additionally, Greetham (2001) insists that the running commentary style of writing encourages succinctness in written essays. However, Heard (2016) suggests that using the running commentary style on a doctorate thesis may limit the discussion, leading to shallow analysis. In consideration of that critique, a discussion chapter has been added to promote deeper analysis.

1.5 Acronyms

Early in the PhD journey, the researcher and the supervisory team debated whether to apply the term Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) to this study. Although having been previously used on government documents in the UK, the acronym has raised a debate as some argue that it classified distinctly different social groups under the same umbrella (DaCosta et al., 2021). Therefore, it was replaced by more fitting and perhaps, less contested terms, "Social Workers (SWs) from Ethnic Minority Groups (EMGs)". However, other less contested terms including Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Social Workers of colour, and people of colour, will be used in the thesis where relevant. This will be done to make the research easily accessible when searching with different acronyms and to improve the reader's experience. While the term social workers of colour or people of colour have been predominantly used to describe all non-white people in the United States of America (US), the term blackness or black people has been applied to describe non-white people in the United Kingdom (UK) (Crenshaw et al., 2024).

Therefore, these terms will be used interchangeably to describe non-white social workers in this study.

Table 1. Acronyms

Acronym	**Full Meaning**
LAs	Local Authorities
NQSWs	Newly Qualified Social Workers
IQSWs	Internationally Qualified Social Workers
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment
BME	Black and Ethnic Minority
EMG	Ethnic Minority Groups
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
DfE	Department for Education
DfH	Department for Health
CRT	Critical Race Theory
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
NHS	National Health Service
WRES	Workforce Race Equality Standard
SC-WRES	Social Care Workforce Equality Standard
SWE	Social Work England
GSCC	General Social Care Council
TAPUPAS	Transparency, Accuracy, Purposivity, Utility, Propriety, Accessibility, and Specificity
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
LGA	Local Government Association
AMPH	Adult Mental Health Professional
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

1.6 The rationale

The limited body of literature addressing the first-year experiences of BME statutory children and family social workers in England, highlights a significant gap in social work research. This underrepresentation may, in part, be contextualised through the broader discourse on anti-racist social work, which offers critical insights into the structural and ideological barriers that have historically marginalised these voices (Bell, 2007).

Anti-racist social work has been extensively theorised, with Dominelli (2017, p. 10) defining it as "*a form of practice that takes its starting point from racialised social relations that depict 'black' people as inferior*." This framework compels practitioners to interrogate and dismantle racist structures within social work practice and institutions. Given the global nature of social work, a comparative lens, particularly between the UK and US, is instructive. Both nations share legacies of colonialism and the transatlantic Slave Trade, which continue to shape contemporary racial dynamics (Dominelli, 2017). In the US, systemic and institutional racism has historically oppressed communities of colour (Johannes et al., 2021), influencing both policy and practice.

Bell (2007) underscores the pivotal role of Black social workers in global social justice movements, noting their contributions to the establishment of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) frameworks. She recounts a significant moment of resistance when 400 Black social workers staged a walkout at a US conference in 1968, demanding parity with their white counterparts, a powerful act of collective agency. Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. (2025)'s oral historical UK study shared similar themes as participants in that study recounted experiences of identity conflict, systemic inequality, and advocacy for Black children marginalised within the UK care system. These accounts included efforts to normalise cultural practices such as hair braiding for Black boys, and to influence legislative change, notably the inclusion of race, culture, religion, identity, and language in the Children Act 1989. Despite these efforts, many participants in that study expressed a persistent sense of invisibility and marginalisation, echoing Parker's (2023) critique of the erasure of Black contributions to movements such as the US Settlement House Movement.

Black (2024) acknowledges the role of social work activism in promoting inclusion but highlights the complicity of some community leaders, including political and religious figures, in perpetuating racial injustice. She argues that white supremacist ideologies have become so deeply embedded that they are often normalised across ideological and institutional domains (See chapter 9.5, for further discussion about white supremacy). Singh and Masocha (2020) similarly contend that while anti-racist social work originated in Europe, particularly the UK, its uptake in the US remains limited to a small cohort of committed practitioners and scholars. They, along with Black (2024), point to the enduring influence of white supremacy, exemplified by political efforts to dismantle EDI initiatives, such as those pursued during the Trump administration (Michelle et al., 2025).

In the UK, Wainwright (2009 p.9) highlights initiatives such as the development of the "*Black Practice Teacher"* role, designed to support and integrate Black social workers and reduce professional exclusion. However, Ahmed (2002) critiques the superficial embrace of anti-racist discourse, arguing that institutional commitments often mask deeper, unspoken desires to maintain existing power structures. This is exemplified by the then London Mayor, Boris Johnson's (2013) assertion that social inequality was a necessary driver of economic growth (Watt, 2013). A statement that, while not explicitly racialised, implicitly encompasses racialised groups and undermines efforts toward genuine inclusion. Such political rhetoric reflects Gramsci's (1929) concept of hegemony, wherein dominant groups secure consent for their ideological positions not solely applying coercion but also using their cultural and ideological leadership positions. Within this framework, the persistent systematic invisibility of Black social workers despite their activism and contributions can be understood as a consequence of hegemonic forces that devalue their experiences and knowledge. Obasi (2022, p. 233) reinforces this point, asserting that Black social workers remain "*invisible"* within UK practice. This study seeks to address this epistemic and practical gap by foregrounding the voices of BME social workers in their formative professional year. It aims to generate actionable recommendations for a wide range of stakeholders, including Social Work England, academic institutions, local authorities, government departments, and others not explicitly named herein.

1.7 Inclusion of social workers, within children and family statutory services.

Literature on experiences of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) highlight the first-year of social work practice as essential for helping NQSWs build their confidence, emotional resilience, mental strength, adapt to newly acquired professional roles and apply their recently learned theoretical knowledge into social work practice (Collins, 2016; Newberry-Koroluk, 2014; Gallop, 2018). Additionally, Burns, (2011) states that NQSWs are very vulnerable in their first-year of social work practice as some may be forced to quit the social work profession, especially if they did not feel supported when faced with unprecedented challenges within practice. Fouche et al. (2014) stressed that Internationally Qualified Social Workers (IQSWs) were as equally vulnerable as NQSWs in their first-year of practice. Therefore, BME IQSWs have been included in this study.

Research suggests that there is a high staff turnover and poor retention for children and family social workers in the frontline statutory practice in the UK (Cauvan, 2010; Antolopoulou et al. ,2017). Local Authorities (LAs) are frequently forced to depend on agency social workers (Carey, 2008). Many social workers are reportedly stressed by their roles and therefore forced to stay off work (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018). According to Berry-Loud and Rowe (2013), NQSWs in statutory adult services felt confident and supported during their first-year in practice, most highlighting the easy and slow nurturing they received while those in children services expressed exactly the opposite experiences. It is this assertion that encouraged this study to focus on the experiences of those in statutory children services where there is more pressure. This research does not intend to analyse the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme, which is a mandatory programme used by LAs in the first-year of practice for NQSWs in England (DfE, 2019a). However, it scrutinises the minoritised social workers' perspectives and their statutory social work practice episodes.

1.8 Inclusion of first-year Social Workers from Ethnic Minority Groups.

Carter (2021) reports that the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has raised concerns regarding the disproportionate challenges faced by NQSWs from Ethnic Minority Groups (EMGs) in successfully completing the ASYE programme. The publication highlights a

troubling pattern in which a significant proportion of EMG NQSWs are either informed that their ASYE has been suspended or that they are unlikely to pass, leading many to withdraw prematurely. Sheridan (2021) further asserts that EMG NQSWs are subjected to heightened scrutiny by ASYE assessors compared to their white counterparts, suggesting the presence of implicit bias within assessment practices.

Data from Skills for Care (2021) reinforces these concerns. While EMG NQSWs constituted 26% of the registered cohort, they accounted for 53% of ASYE failures in statutory children's services between 2020 and 2021. In contrast, white British NQSWs who made up 74% of the cohort, experienced significantly lower failure rates. These figures underscore a stark disproportionality and raise critical questions about equity, support, and institutional bias within the ASYE framework. The presence of a substantial number of EMG NQSWs in the workforce further amplifies the urgency of this research, as it seeks to illuminate the systemic barriers that may hinder their professional progression (GOV.UK, 2025).

Earlier studies similarly found that social work students from EMGs were more likely to fail qualifying programmes at university than their white peers (Hussein et al., 2008; Fairtlough et al., 2014). This raises an important question about the experiences of those EMG students who do succeed in qualifying and subsequently enter the ASYE programme. Moreover, Hanley (2019) and the Department for Education (DfE, 2016) emphasised the importance of recruiting the most capable candidates into children's services, given the sector's complexity and pace. If EMG NQSWs who enter the profession have already demonstrated exceptional resilience and competence, it becomes imperative to understand their lived-experiences within the ASYE and early practice contexts.

This research is therefore not only timely but essential. By centring the voices of EMG NQSWs, it aims to contribute to the knowledge base and inform policy and practice reforms. The findings will be used to challenge existing educational and professional frameworks where necessary, with the goal of fostering greater inclusion, equity, and retention within the social work profession. Ultimately, more inclusive policies and practices will enhance the quality-of-service delivery and ensure that the workforce more accurately reflects and serves the diverse communities of the UK. In parallel, the experiences of IQSWs also warrant critical examination.

Koutsounia (2023) notes that IQSWs often encounter significant challenges during their first-year of practice in the UK, particularly in navigating unfamiliar professional standards and expectations. In response, experienced BME IQSWs established the Social Care Empowering Training and Consultancy (SCETC) to provide peer-led support and advocacy. UNISON (2024) further reports that some IQSWs face exploitative employment practices, including restrictive contracts that limit their mobility and expose them to poor working conditions. This study will also explore the intersectional experiences of IQSWs from EMGs, with a view to identifying gaps in institutional support and advocating for policy changes that promote fairer and more sustainable integration into the UK social work system. By addressing both domestic and international dimensions of EMG social workers' experiences, the research seeks to offer a comprehensive and actionable contribution to the field.

1.9 Historical Context

The emergence of BME social workers in the UK can be traced to the 1980s (Wainwright, 2009), although earlier instances of activism and resistance are evident. Stevenson and Morrison (2021) highlight the case of Paul Stevenson, a youth worker who led the 1963 Bristol Bus Boycott in protest against discriminatory hiring practices by the city council run buses, the Bristol Omnibus Company (Mansour, 2014). The boycott, inspired by Rosa Parks' 1956 defiance in Montgomery, US, catalysed the enactment of the Race Relations Act 1965 in the UK (Jones, 2022). The employment of BME social workers was perhaps hampered by the contradictions within British immigration policy, epitomised by Enoch Powell, the then shadow secretary of State Defence, who initially supported the recruitment of BME professionals (Hickson, 2018). However, his infamous "*Rivers of Blood Speech"* in 1968 reversed this stance, invoking apocalyptic imagery to warn of racial conflict (Whipple, 2009, p.719). The speech polarised public opinion and incited a surge in racist violence, ultimately leading to Powell's dismissal from the Conservative shadow cabinet (Crines et al., 2016).

Despite the Race Relations Act (1965) and the Equality Act (2010), BME social workers continue to face marginalisation within the profession. Obasi (2022) introduces the concepts of invisibility and hypervisibility, wherein BME social workers are either overlooked or excessively scrutinised, both of which can generate anxiety and undermine their sense of

belonging within the profession. This historical and sociopolitical context is essential for understanding the contemporary challenges faced by BME social workers in England. It provides a foundation for interrogating the structural inequalities that persist within social work education, practice, and policy.

The global resurgence of anti-racist activism in 2020, following the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by police officers in the US, catalysed widespread protests under the Black Lives Matter movement, prompting public reckoning with Britain's colonial legacy (Johannes et al., 2021). One of the most symbolic acts of protest occurred in Bristol, where demonstrators removed the statue of Edward Colston, a prominent 17th-century Slave Trader, whose philanthropic contributions had long obscured his role in the transatlantic Slave Trade (Branscome, 2021). In the aftermath, proposals emerged to replace Colston's statue with that of Paul Stevenson, a civil rights activist known for leading the 1963 Bristol Bus Boycott (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2020), prompting renewed public interest in the contributions of Black British figures to social justice.

In the context of social work, BME practitioners have been formally recognised and celebrated during Black History Month in the UK since its inception in 1987 (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2020). Activists such as Linda Bellos, a BME Labour Party councillor, challenged exclusionary practices by advocating for the employment of people of colour in professional roles, including within local government (Walker et al., 2017). Bellos' political influence facilitated the launch of Black History Month in Britain in 1987, exemplifying Bourdieu's (1992) theory of relational power, where strategic positioning within institutional structures enables marginalised voices to effect change. This annual observance serves to acknowledge the contributions of BME social workers and to promote visibility within the profession (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al., 2024). However, some scholars have critiqued Black History Month for its potential to historicise racism, thereby implying that racial injustice is a relic of the past rather than a persistent structural reality (Van De Mieroop, 2016). Such critiques caution against symbolic recognition that may inadvertently obscure ongoing inequalities. Nevertheless, the celebration of BME social workers can serve as a source of empowerment, fostering professional pride and reinforcing positive identity formation.

To critically examine the multifaceted dimensions of deprivation experienced by BME social workers, this study adopts the intersectionality framework, conceptualised by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a prominent Black feminist scholar and critical race theorist (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Crenshaw's foundational critique of anti-discrimination law and mainstream feminist discourse in the US highlighted their tendency to treat identity categories such as race and gender as discrete and mutually exclusive. This approach, she argued, rendered Black women invisible within legal and political frameworks, as their experiences of overlapping oppression were inadequately addressed. Intersectionality posits that social identities such as race, gender, class, and migration status interact in complex and interdependent ways, producing unique configurations of disadvantage and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). It reveals how systemic power operates through the convergence of multiple axes of inequality, thereby exposing forms of oppression that are often obscured when identity is considered in isolation. In this context, intersectionality provides a critical lens through which to understand the compounded barriers faced by BME individuals, particularly within institutional settings such as social work. By applying this framework, the study seeks to illuminate the structural and relational dynamics that contribute to the marginalisation of BME social workers, offering a nuanced understanding of how intersecting identities shape lived-experiences and professional trajectories. However, critics argue that intersectionality may be seen as only advocating for heterosexual black women, leaving other groups including gay and lesbian women and black men who have similar challenges sidelined (Collins, 1998; Gines, 2011). Nevertheless, Intersectionality has been widely accepted and applied within academia (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017).

1.10 History of Social Work in England

Social work in England emerged as a special charity from the Poor Laws Act 1834, which was developed following a severe economic depression that left many people unemployed (Brundage, 2002). Parishes or Local Authorities were created during this era with the aim of ensuring that the poor received the support they needed (Parker, 2010). The beginning of what is known as the welfare system (Gocmen, 2013), meant social work further developed following the introduction of the Children Act 1948, which emphasised foster care for children who could not be cared for by their families (Payne, 2005). Despite that, the social work

profession was still seen as singular since it wholly provided support to all members of the society (Pierson, 2011).

According to Dickens (2011), concerns about levels of crimes committed by children and young people, and the need for effective family services for children from deprived backgrounds led to the Seebohm Enquiry. The subsequent Seebohm report (1968) specified different strands of social work. These included Adults Social Care, Mental Health, Childcare and Welfare Together, forming different social care departments that exist today (Payne, 2005). However, these specialisms created a contested debate; some assert that, through specialisation, social workers have been enabled to access specialised training, allowing them to develop an understanding of issues affecting service users in their departments and therefore develop necessary skills to provide reliable support (Emilsson, 2005). Yet, critics argue that the attempt to provide reliable support has resulted in fragmentation, which spoils professional identities and generates uncertainty when that goal has not been achieved, creating superficial relations between social workers and service users (Carey, 2008). Nevertheless, specialisation has progressed social work, as social workers can focus on strengthening their knowledge on specialised fields. Despite the different strands in social work practice, social workers in England are trained generically to gain skills to work across all social work departments (Parker, 2021). However, final year students can apply to have their last placement in their preferred departments, although there is no guarantee that they would always get their final placement in their preferred specialism (SWE, 2021b).

1.11 Support for NQSWs

The deaths of Victoria Climbié, (2003) and Peter Connelly (Baby P, 2007) both of whom had prior contact with social services prompted widespread public and political scrutiny of child protection systems. The Laming Report (2009) recommended urgent reform, leading to the establishment of the Social Work Task Force (SWTF). The SWTF (2009) identified excessive bureaucratic demands and high caseloads as barriers to effective practice, particularly for NQSWs. It emphasised the critical role of frontline managers in enhancing support structures and called for clearer standards around supervision and workload management. The events prompted the UK government to commission a study on the effectiveness of a three-year

support programme for NQSWs in England, implemented between 2008 and 2011 (Carpenter et al., 2012). The programme was designed to ensure that NQSWs received consistent, high-quality support and that supervisors were adequately equipped to guide their development. The evaluation revealed significant implementation challenges, particularly in the initial year. Programme coordinators reported a *"decline in both NQSWs' engagement and managerial support over time*" (Carpenter et al., 2012, p. vii). Nevertheless, senior managers expressed overall satisfaction with the programme's delivery, citing improvements in retention, job satisfaction, and supervisory capacity. NQSWs identified structured reflective supervision, reduced caseloads, and peer support groups as the most beneficial aspects of the programme.

One of the SWTF's key recommendations was the replacement of the existing support programme with a "*formalised ASYE programme",* envisioned as the final stage in qualifying as a practising social worker (SWTF, 2009, p. 7). This recommendation led to the formation of the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) in 2009, tasked with implementing systemic changes to social work education and practice. These reforms were endorsed by both the outgoing Labour government and the incoming Coalition government in 2010, facilitating their enactment (Carpenter et al., 2012).

Munro (2011), building on the SWTF's recommendations, further critiqued the state of children's social care and contributed to the development of the ASYE programme. The ASYE formalised key elements of support such as reflective supervision, reduced caseloads, and structured learning opportunities deemed essential for developing the confidence and competence of NQSWs during their transition into professional practice (Munro, 2011).

The Laming Report (2009, p. 32) underscored the importance of supervision, recommending that the SWTF establish guidelines for "*guaranteed supervision time*", tailored to practitioners' levels of experience. This was intended to ensure consistent access to protected supervision time across the profession, thereby strengthening the quality of practice and safeguarding outcomes.

1.12 The Social Work Role

Weber (1925/1979, p.79) introduced the concepts of status and party, defining status as the "*social honour an individual is afforded by society.*" He argued that educational qualifications, special recognition, and party membership can elevate an individual's status. Weber viewed party formation as a mechanism of power, influencing societal perspectives and enhancing members' status. In this context, professional registration with Social Work England can be considered analogous to party membership, as social workers share common values and goals (SWE, 2021). Consequently, social workers may gain societal recognition through their qualifications and professional affiliation, positioning them as positive social actors; However, the social work role remains contested. Gramsci (1929, p.126) described hegemony as the "*subtle dominance*" of one group over others, which applies to social workers' influence over families and children. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1992, p.124) concept of "*symbolic domination",* where dominant groups impose cultural norms on subordinate groups, perpetuating inequality. Social workers' professional status and expertise enable them to influence judicial decisions, particularly in child protection cases, where they may advocate for removing children from parental care.

Foucault (1975, p.196) argue that the state exercised "*surveillance"* over families through social services, reflecting a lack of trust in familial autonomy. Similarly, Donzelot (1977) contends that social workers used their knowledge and authority to regulate and reshape family life, while Rose (1987) suggest that such interventions undermined private freedoms and moral autonomy. Although families have legal representation in child protection proceedings, social workers often wield greater influence by presenting evidence to secure care orders (O'Mahony et al., 2016).

Gramsci (1929) further argued that interventions may reproduce inequalities by weakening family structures, while Donzelot (1977, p.99) characterised social work as "*policing families"* through professional surveillance. This perspective frames social workers as agents of state control, maintaining social order under the guise of welfare.
However, statistical evidence challenges this critique. Office for National Statistics (2019) reported that 7.6% of adults in England and Wales, (approximately 3.1 million

people) experienced abuse before age 16, with parents identified as the primary perpetrators. Additionally, 83,840 children were looked after by local authorities in England, 49,900 were on child protection plans, and 2,960 were adopted between 2023 and 2024 (GOV.UK, 2024). These figures suggest that social work interventions often protect children from harm, countering claims that families are unjustly policed. Nonetheless, the next section suggest that social work have failed to protect some children.

1.13 The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment.

The public perception of social work has shifted over the years, influenced by several child atrocities including the death of Victoria Climbie, following abuse by her aunt and her partner in the year 2000 (Garrett, 2006). Although the UK government subsequently introduced the Every Child Matters policy in 2003 followed by the Children Act 2004, child atrocities amongst children who recently had contact or intense support from social services, continued to persist in England. Historically, social work was seen as supporting an escape route from poverty and social isolation; it was the first profession to address individuals suffering mental health and those in poverty (Payne, 2005). The sudden death of Baby P at the hands of his parents in 2007 forced the Department for Education (DfE) to task Munro (2011) to carry out a review of social services in England and compile a report suggesting how social services could improve the skills of individual social workers to best promote the welfare of the children (Parker, 2021). One radical change in social work practice was the introduction of the ASYE programme (Warner, 2013). The introduction of this programme was to ensure that NQSWs were supported to gain essential practical social work skills including, the ability to observe, assess risk and prevent situations like the adverse experience of Baby P (Warner, 2014). Prior to the introduction of the ASYE programme, NQSWs could go straight into statutory employment and be assessed directly by organisations (Warner, 2013). The ASYE programme which is wholly funded by the DfE enables LAs to support NQSWs using guidance and learning manuals provided by Skills for Care (DfE, 2019). The ASYE programme includes three assessment points for NQSWs, at the three, six, and twelve-month periods; additionally, there is an optional assessment point at nine months if needed (Parker, 2021). The year-long ASYE Programme is split between hours of practice and hours of training and supervision which are used to support NQSWs (Burton, 2020). Supervision allows the NQSW and the supervisor to reflect on the

NQSW's recent practice activities and significant events in the NQSW's personal life, and to identify and discuss progress, feelings, and areas of further development (Burton ,2020).

NQSWs are assessed through the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers (KSS) and the Professional Capability Framework (PCF), hosted by BASW, but designed by the College of Social Work (TSCW, 2012). The PCF includes nine domains with different learning guides (Parker, 2021). Each domain details an area of learning such as Professionalism (Domain 1) and Ethics and Values (Domain 2) (Bogg and Challis, 2016). Skills assessed include the ability to observe and assess, including writing skills such as compiling full child and family assessments, for example, writing for different audiences such as children and families or courts. Each NQSW must be allocated a protected caseload; that means their caseload will be limited initially, however, the caseloads must increase gradually with their experience but remain protected (Taylor, 2017). Additionally, each NQSW must be allocated an ASYE coordinator, this is a supervisor who provides NQSWs with support while also closely monitoring and assessing their progress (DfE, 2019). Each NQSW would have supervision sessions from their team manager as well as from the ASYE coordinator. Furthermore, each NQSW must maintain a portfolio where their learning activities and assessments are recorded and presented as evidence of practice ready for review at each assessment point (DfE, 2019a). At the final assessment point, each NQSW must submit their completed portfolio, signed by their manager in the team and themselves, to a panel that assesses each portfolio against KSS criteria to ascertain if the NQSW has passed or failed the programme (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014).

Despite the changes to social work training introduced through the Munro review (2011), the Croisdale-Appleby, (2014) report on social work education and the House of Commons Education Committee (2016) report on social work reform, child atrocities amongst children who had recent contact or sometimes intense support from social services, have continued in England. These include Baby Star Hobson who despite having an allocated social worker died at the hands of her mother's partner (Community Care, 2021), and Baby Logan Mwangi who, despite having been recently removed from child protection, was murdered by her mother and stepfather who later reported her as missing (Duffy, 2022). The recent deaths of Baby Star Hobson and Logan Mwangi cast more pressure on statutory children social work services as

social workers failed to observe any signs that either child was at risk of harm while living with their parents. These atrocities happened after the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) had identified that social workers lacked training and therefore recommended more training and reflection to prevent adversities. Perhaps, high workloads, pressure, high staff turnover and burnout as highlighted by Johnson et al. (2021) contributed to the failure to intervene at an appropriate point to prevent atrocities as they happened to the above-named children. This research is relevant to child protection as it will explore the first-year experiences of BME social workers in children services. Findings will be used to identify any gaps in law or policy with the aim of promoting integration of BME social workers who would best achieve for children and families, if they felt included.

1.14 The Research Question, Aims and Objectives of this study

Based on this initial review of literature, the following research question, aim and objectives have been devised for this study.

- First-year practice experiences of statutory children's social workers from ethnic minority groups.

The aim of the study.

- To explore, investigate and discover the first-year statutory children and family social work practice experiences of social workers from Ethnic Minority Groups in England.

Objectives of this study

- To explore the first-year social work practice experiences of support for Statutory Children Social Workers from Ethnic Minority Groups employed in statutory children services.
- To explore the first-year social work practice experiences of managing workload for Statutory Children and Family Social Workers from Ethnic Minority Groups employed in statutory children services.
- To explore reasons why some social workers might consider leaving the social work profession early in their careers and what might influence them to remain in practice.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter has identified a gap in knowledge, concerning the lived-experiences of BME social workers and has outlined the rationale for this study. By situating the research within a broader social work history and political context, it has demonstrated the enduring relevance of race, activism, and policy in shaping the professional realities of BME practitioners. The parallels between historical and contemporary struggles for racial justice reinforce the urgency of this research and its potential to inform more equitable and inclusive social work practices. The chapter offered an overview of the study as well as the research problem, aim, objectives, and questions.

1.16 The structure of this study

This research includes themes from seven participants who voluntary opted into the study and shared their social work practice experiences. Additionally, three more participants will be included as part of evaluating the themes from the initial seven participants. Following this introductory chapter, the thesis will be presented using the following structure.

Chapter Two

This chapter presents a synthesis of literature relevant to this study's research questions.

Chapter Three

This chapter introduces the philosophical underpinnings of this research.

Chapter Four

This chapter details the methodology, research methods, data collection tools and methods of data analysis applied in this study.

Chapter Five

This chapter discusses the Study Design. This begins with the planning stage and follows on to focus on the ethics approval of the study, data storage, confidentiality, the recruitment process, inclusion and exclusion criteria and the pilot study.

Chapter Six

This chapter presents results in the form of ideographic accounts from seven participants. Each individual participant account will be aided by analysis from a group of experts. The chapter will end by presenting the four themes identified from the data.

Chapter Seven

Building upon individual findings from chapter six, this chapter focuses on cross-case analysis; the chapter examines the four main themes which will be further deconstructed into smaller themes to avail better understanding of issues discussed.

Chapter Eight

This chapter discusses selected key findings from this study.

Chapter Nine

This chapter analyses findings in relation to a review of policies. Additionally, the chapter will examine the role of the state using the CRT tenet, Neo-Marxism.

Chapter Ten

This chapter details the limitations and strengths of this research, before providing concluding thoughts and recommendations.

Chapter-2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter launches a literature review perspective applied in this study. It discusses the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in identifying literature, before focusing on the methods of critical appraisal.

A systematic-narrative hybrid-literature review was applied in this study. Azevedo et al. (2024) define the systematic-narrative review as a method which combines two or more approaches to literature review. Additionally, Turnbull et al. (2023 p.2) identified six key elements of the systematic-narrative hybrid-review which lead to a comprehensive identification of literature led by explicit search strategies (see Figure 1).

Figure-1 Systematic-narrative hybrid literature review



Overall, the consideration of all six steps as seen below will lead to a comprehensive narrative analysis.

1. The research question, which gave direction on studies to either include or exclude.
2. Search parameters, which limits the geographical boundaries of the literature to be included or excluded.
3. Data cleaning, which involves clearing all unrelated studies.
4. Information synthesis, which includes putting all remaining studies together to decide which ones to include or exclude.
5. Justification, involving analysing the remaining studies and identifying their strengths, limitations and possible outcomes if different approaches had been applied (see Appendix D).
6. Using the selected critical appraisal tool and Scopus to identify the number of citations before selecting the final and qualifying studies (See Appendix A) for selected and excluded studies.

Initially, the mixed-method research synthesis was considered. However, it was later replaced as it focuses on both the quantitative and the qualitative nature of studies (Aveyard, 2014). A systematic-narrative hybrid literature-review was selected as this study is interested in the qualitative components of the literature rather than the quantitative elements. This approach combines a systematic search undertaken within a systematic review, with a narrative synthesis of selected literature (Turnbull et al., 2023).

A Systematic Review has been defined as systematic, explicit, comprehensive and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners (Fink, 2020). The procedure is based on primary research from various professions including business, health and social care, education, social services, law, government policy documents and finance (Aveyard, 2014). The technique must be rigorous in adhering to a methodological approach giving a detailed explanation of the processes undertaken to identify, evaluate and synthesize literature (Okoli, 2015).

A systematic review allows researchers to explore the knowledge created by others, learn from that knowledge as a way of devising new research questions, positioning their own work and understanding where their contribution to that knowledge fits (Whittaker, 2012). Additionally, literature review enables each researcher to understand their intellectual heritage (Aveyard, 2014); this ensures that researchers understand concepts, theories, measures, perceptions, clashes of evidence if any, methods applied or presented in those studies, key contributors to that knowledge, how the researcher used their thinking and establish a link between methods of data collection and findings (Bryman, 2012). It is essential to understand these issues as the researcher will be expected to locate their work within a particular paradigm and establish studies which formulated the primary distinctions that they will be drawing on.

The researcher believes the most important aspect of literature review is the quality of selected studies and their ability to engage with other people's findings. Hence, studies in this research have been selected based on their coverage of the topic area, methods applied, their citations and the impact to knowledge made by cited philosophers or studies (see Appendices A-C). This has enabled the researcher to articulate their own contribution to knowledge distinguishing their findings from those of earlier studies. Critics argue that focusing on more frequently cited studies could lead to the ignorance of the less referenced articles which may be more relevant (Mallet et al., 2012). Hence, the researcher ensured all possible criteria including how each study related to the research question was considered.

Raiff (2022) notes that combining different review approaches can introduce complexity, making it challenging to articulate similarities and differences across methods. Nevertheless, the systematic–narrative hybrid review was selected for this study because it supports a more comprehensive synthesis of literature, balancing methodological rigor with interpretive depth.

2.2 Literature-Inclusion criteria

One of the six key elements of the systematic–narrative hybrid review is the establishment of search parameters, which define the boundaries of the search design (Turnbull, 2023). The selection and exclusion of articles in this study were guided by these parameters, as detailed below: -

1. **Experiences of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs).**
   Research articles examining the experiences, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes of NQSWs during their first-year in statutory children's social work practice were included, as these directly relate to the research questions.
2. **Perspectives of Social Work Managers.**
   Studies exploring the views and perceptions of social work managers regarding NQSWs and their first-year in statutory children's services were selected due to their relevance to the research focus.
3. **Geographical Scope.**
   Research articles and policy documents from Western countries were prioritised. This decision was informed by the shared characteristics of welfare systems across Western nations (Giddens, 2013), which enhance the applicability of findings to the English context in which this study is situated.
4. **Internationally Qualified Social Workers (IQSWs).**
   Articles addressing the experiences of IQSWs working in statutory children's services in the UK were included, reflecting the presence of social workers who qualified abroad within the study population.

All selected articles were required to meet specific criteria to ensure relevance and quality. They had to be peer-reviewed publications and conducted between 2007 and the present. The year 2007 was chosen as the starting point to capture literature from five years prior to the introduction of the ASYE programme in 2012, ensuring that the review reflects developments leading up to and following this significant policy change.

2.3 literature-Exclusion criteria

Although studies conducted outside Western contexts may contain valuable insights, significant differences in welfare systems, cultural norms, values, and policy frameworks (Giddens, 2013) necessitated their exclusion from this review. While some studies particularly from South Africa, where certain participants originally qualified as social workers could offer useful perspectives, the search parameters were aligned with the research question, which focuses on experiences within England. This approach ensures consistency in working conditions and contextual relevance.

Including non-Western studies could introduce analytical challenges due to divergent cultural and professional contexts, making it difficult to interpret findings meaningfully. Furthermore, this research does not aim to conduct a comparative analysis between English practice and practices in other countries where participants may have qualified. However, participants will be asked to provide brief contextual details about social work practice in their country of qualification. These insights will support interpretation by highlighting differences that may influence their experiences. Additional exclusion criteria were applied to ensure methodological rigor and relevance. Studies published before 2007 were excluded because earlier data may not accurately reflect current practice and policy developments. Similarly, non-English language publications were omitted due to language limitations and the risk of misinterpretation. Grey literature was also excluded, despite its potential to offer alternative perspectives. This decision was based on concerns regarding transparency and methodological rigor, particularly the absence of ethical approval processes, which would prevent such sources from meeting the critical appraisal standards adopted in this study (Aveyard, 2014).

2.4 Literature-search strategy

The following electronic databases were applied to search for pertinent literature.

- Social Services abstracts.
- Social Care Online (SCIE).
- Scopus
- Google Scholar

These databases were selected to provide maximum coverage as indicated on table 2. Key search terms and limiters are also indicated, aiming to identify studies based on their relevance to social work practice, alignment to the research question, and the applicability to the participant sample in this study.

2.5 Search terms/words/ phrases used.

The search terms included combinations of the search strings seen in table 2. The search terms were split, and the inverted commas were either added or removed to improve the results. The Boolean Operator phrases "AND" and "OR" was used to combine the search terms. The recent, relevant, and commonly cited articles were considered. All identified articles were entered onto Scopus, where a tool showing the number of citations is available. That tool was used to identify the number of citations before any consideration of selecting each study could be made. However, critics argue that selecting studies on the basis of the number of citations renders less cited but relevant studies inadequate (Raiff, 2022). Therefore, some less cited studies were synthesised and associated with the research question. Issues discussed in these articles were rigorously analysed and compared to the information needed to address the research question of this study. This ensured that essential data which would address the research question was identified. The review incorporated leading journals including The British Journal of Social Work, The European Journal of Social Work, Social Work Education and many others. The content presented in Table 2 was selected based on its relevance to social work practice, its alignment with the research question, and its applicability to the participant sample in this study.

Table-2 Search Strategy

Database name:	Key Phrases/ words used: Search limits:	Number of results:
Social Services Abstracts **The database mainly focuses on current social work research, human services research including social policy and social welfare. (122) useful Content: 12**	Newly Qualified Social/ASYE social Workers/experiences/views/feelings /attitudes/readiness to practice/for practice preparedness for practice Social work education/practice Transition.	Articles in English language Year 2007 onwards.
Social Care Online (SCIE) **The database offers information and research on all aspects of social care including social work, mental health, nursing, social policy etc. (99) useful content: 11**	Newly Qualified Social Workers/experiences/views/feelings /attitudes/readiness to practice/for practice preparedness for practice Social work education/practice Transition.	Articles in English language Year 2007 onwards.
Scopus **A comprehensive multi-disciplinary database which contains information on citations 14. Useful content (3).**	Newly Qualified Social Workers/experiences/views/feelings /attitudes/readiness to practice/for practice preparedness for practice Social work education/practice Transition.	Articles in English language Year 2007 onwards.
Google Scholar **The database covers the scholarly literature including peer reviews journal articles 49. Useful content: (11)**	Newly Qualified Social Workers/experiences/views/feelings /attitudes/readiness to practice/for practice preparedness for practice Social work education/practice Transition	Articles in English language Year 2007 onwards.

2.6 Methods of Critical Appraisal.

Critical appraisal is a rigorous process that enables researchers to systematically evaluate research literature to identify studies that are both relevant and of high quality (Aveyard, 2014). Appraisal tools provide validated questions designed to scrutinise all aspects of an article, including its title, methodology, and findings, thereby supporting the selection of robust evidence (Burls, 2009).

During the search for an appropriate appraisal tool, the Practitioner Appraisal of Local Service Evaluations (PALSE) was initially considered because of its emphasis on questioning alternative conclusions within studies. However, this tool is primarily applied in clinical trials (Satherley et al., 2007) and was therefore deemed unsuitable for the current research. Instead, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Systematic Review Checklist was adopted. CASP has been widely used in health and social care research since its introduction by the NHS in 1993 and offers a well-established framework for evaluating methodological rigor (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014).

To strengthen the appraisal process, CASP was applied alongside the Transparency, Accuracy, Purposivity, Utility, Propriety, Accessibility, and Specificity (TAPUPAS) framework, which similarly intends to promote deeper analysis like Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Pawson et al., 2002). Both TAPUPAS and IPA emphasise validity and appropriateness of findings while acknowledging that interpretation is inherently subjective rather than representing an absolute truth (Smith et al., 2009).

All ten CASP questions were used in the initial appraisal, followed by three selected TAPUPAS questions focusing on whether each article was open to scrutiny, fit for purpose, and clear regarding its legal status. These were incorporated as questions 11, 12, and 13 in the analysis framework (see Appendix B). Combining CASP and TAPUPAS has been recognised as a robust approach, producing effective and credible analysis in social work research (Sargeant and O'Connor, 2020).

2.7 Analysis of literature.

A narrative analysis was chosen as it focuses more on understanding and explaining the main themes from the stories shared by the participants within the selected studies. According to Gilbert (2008 p. 127) narrative analysis is used to explore the different ways in which both the production and analysis of qualitative data can be understood as processes whereby different groups of people engage in "*storytelling,"* and in doing so produce narrative accounts of their lives. This enables the researcher to scrutinise the findings of each article and have a broader understanding of the issues discussed. The narrative enquiry enables "*one to learn about the general from the particular*" (Rissman, 1993 p. 70). Additionally, Popay et al. (2006) insist that combining systematic reviews with narrative synthesis is vital as it enables researchers to consider other methods which would have been applied on selected studies; that way, narrative synthesis strengthens the rigor of systematic reviews. However, Pellico and Chin (2007) argue that the Narrative Enquiry lacks transparency, as the researcher may lose focus, meaning they may fail to engage or grasp the main issues detailed in a study.

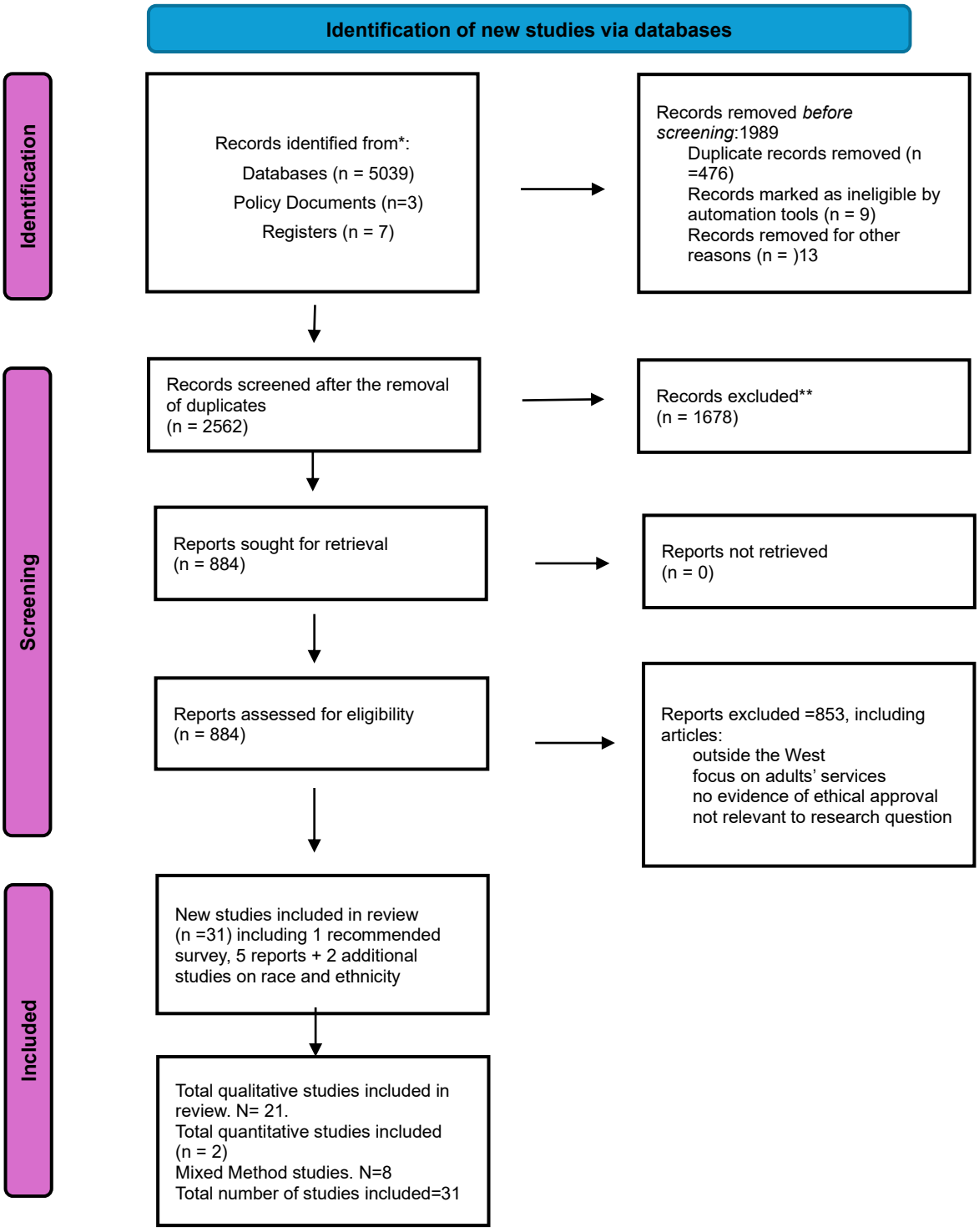
To address concerns regarding the potential lack of transparency in narrative enquiry, specific measures were implemented to maintain focus throughout the analysis. First, the research questions served as a constant reference point, guiding the interpretation of themes and ensuring alignment with the study's objectives (Aveyard, 2014). Second, a structured coding framework was developed to organise emerging themes systematically, reducing the risk of digression (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Third, iterative comparison was applied, whereby findings from each study were continuously cross-checked against the inclusion criteria and the conceptual framework (Bryman, 2012). Finally, reflective memos were maintained during the synthesis process to document analytical decisions and enhance transparency (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These strategies collectively ensured that the narrative enquiry remained rigorous, coherent, and firmly anchored to the research aims.

2. 8 Selected studies.

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to select articles closely aligned with the research question (Bryman, 2012). The initial search yielded 5049 articles. This number was significantly reduced following the removal of duplicates and the application of peer-review

criteria, leaving 54 articles directly related to social work. Further screening against the research question narrowed the selection to 34 relevant studies. A rigorous appraisal of these remaining studies resulted in the exclusion of five additional articles, bringing the number of studies included in the review to 31 (see Appendix B for CASP results), with the inclusion of three studies. All the qualifying studies, policy documents and reports were analysed alongside their association with the research question. That means, studies which only discussed experiences of all NQSWs (i.e) in adults services or private organisations, but not specifically in statutory children services were eliminated since their association with the research question was limited. However, that rigorous process has a limitation as it may result in studies with essential data being left out if they did not meet the rigorous process. These studies have been tabulated as shown in appendix A-D. Figure 2 on the next page shows the Prisma flow chart endorsed by Moher et al, (2015), in Page et al. (2020 p.17), the Prisma Group; they argue that it entails a detailed account of studies identified.

Figure-2 Prisma flow chart (adapted from the Prisma 2020 statement).



2.9 Narrative Review Findings

The following section presents the main findings organised under distinct themes derived from the selected studies. Table 3 summarises eight key themes identified through the literature review.

Table-3 Summary of themes

1.	Preparedness for Practice
2.	Transition and the Development of Professional Identity
3.	Resilience, Working Conditions, Stress and Burnout
4.	Recruitment, Retention and Intention to Leave
5.	Invisibility/Hypervisibility of Black social workers
6.	The Overrepresentation on Misconduct Issues and the ASYE failure
7.	BME Social Workers' association with ASYE Programme failure
8.	Culture Shock for Internationally Qualified Social Workers

2. 9. 1 Preparedness for practice.

The notion of preparedness or readiness to practise comes out quite frequently in many studies in this review. However, most studies focused on the experiences of social work students and their educators. Findings of those studies are still relevant as many NQSWs would have just completed their studies. These studies include Beddoe et al. (2018), Grant et al. (2017), Joubert (2017) who all applied a mixed-methodology and Jansen (2018), a qualitative design.

Beddoe et al. (2018) interviewed 27 social work educators and 35 social work students in New Zealand. The stated reasons behind this study were the recent high-profile incidents in children's social work, which led to many in the media and public questioning whether NQSWs were ready for practice. Therefore, the study aimed to explore the experiences of students and educators to address the challenges. Findings of this study overwhelmingly indicated that many educators and students felt ready for practice, though, a smaller number of educators indicated uncertainty.

Grant et al. (2017) interviewed 205 NQSWs across Scotland, with readiness for practice forming part of the aim of the study. The findings were congruent with Beddoe et al. (2018) as participants had mixed feelings regarding their readiness for practice. Some responded

positively saying they were ready because they believed the university had prepared them well while others were unsure, a small number disagreed.

Joubert's (2017) study in England involved 74 participants (quantitative strand-phase one) and eight participants (qualitative strand-phase two) with the aim being to explore their readiness for practice and the participants' views on the mandatory social work skill days in two universities. According to Joubert (2021 p.676) the mandatory skills days in social work practice were introduced to provide a new platform for students, practice educators and tutors to discuss readiness to practice and "*eventually to practise and work closely with others including service users to improve services".* Participants considered the development of resilience as an integral skill to succeed in what they referred to as a "*stressful"* profession (p.677). They identified the need to have the space and time to develop into their profession as essential to readying them for the challenges of the social work profession.

Jansen (2018) conducted a qualitative study and interviewed eight NQSWs in Norway, asking them to describe their workday experiences with the aim being to explore their preparedness to practice. Themes derived from the study included complexity, multiplicity, uncertainty, divergence and emotional strain. This study differs from the previous three studies as it is a qualitative study focusing on NQSWs and not students. Although some participants neither denied nor acknowledged that they were ready, they did share that they believed they had learned a lot during their short time as NQSWs. They related the issues of complexities to complex issues and multiplicity to multiple tasks they were asked to do in a workday. Studies in the section appear to only associate preparedness to practice with reflection, self-awareness, resilience and managing empathy. However, none of them mentions the psychological preparation, which this study argues that it is integral to preparedness to practice, since it may divert students from stress while promoting retention, hence it required attention (see 10.3.3).

Despite having been conducted in different countries using different methods and focusing on slightly different social groups, evidence from these studies suggest that there is uncertainty of

readiness to practice among NQSWs and educators. This indicates that there may be a gap between their expectations or their roles as students compared to NQSWs' roles.

2.9.2 Transition and the development of professional identity.

Some studies' aims and objectives revolved around what they referred to as a period of transition and the development of professional identity. These include one Australian study Moorhead (2021), Tham and Lynch (2019)'s Swedish study and one UK qualitative research study (Walker (2014).

Moorhead (2021) used qualitative methods to explore the experiences of 17 NQSWs in Australia. Most participants considered their first-year of practice as a transitional period filled with a lot of anxiety and emotions. Some described their expectations and the reality they found in practice to be quite different. While others credited their good placements for preparing them for practice, some identified staying within the same organisation where they had completed their placements as helpful, since they would have already adapted to the organisational culture.

Tham and Lynch (2019)'s longitudinal qualitative research study followed 12 social work graduates over a period of four years in Sweden. This resulted in similar outcomes as participants expressed being filled with anxiety caused by uncertainty of their future as they struggled to deal with challenging practice dilemmas. While some expressed being well prepared through education, others doubted and questioned the exposure afforded by their placements.

Walker (2014)'s qualitative research comprised eight participants in England focused on the transition of student social workers to their roles as NQSWs. This study identified reflective supervision as essential during the transition stage, as social workers would be able to reflect on their recent practice and discuss the approaches they applied, state their feelings and discuss areas of strength and development. However, some participants argued that supervision was largely case-oriented, meaning, there was less emphasis on reflective practice and professional development. Overall, all these studies highlight the transitional stage as essential to developing resilience and the professional identity of social workers.

2.9.3 Resilience, working conditions, stress and burnout.

Several studies have focused on resilience, working conditions, burnout and stress in children's services. These include Ravalier et al. (2021), Cleveland et al. (2019), Antonopoulou et al. (2017), Jack and Donellan (2010), and Bates et a l. (2010).

Ravalier et al. (2021), a mixed-method UK wide study aimed at understanding the working conditions of social workers in statutory children and family roles, included 676 (quantitative-strand) and 19 (qualitative-strand) participants. Findings suggest that the social work environment may be "*toxic"* (p.1113) for social workers as they are often exposed to poor working conditions since children and family social workers work more hours than they are contracted to across England. According to this study, social work stress is linked to countrywide issues involving recruitment, retention, and high staff turnover, which often results in the additional and unmanageable workloads, leading to stress and burnout for the remaining social workers, especially if they must take cases allocated to the absent social workers.

While 28.7% of the sample stated that they were exposed to negative and sometime derogatory service users, 37% expressed their willingness to leave LAs, citing poor working conditions including high and unmanageable workloads as one of the major reasons. Furthermore, 26% expressed the desire to exit the profession altogether, citing the derogatory treatment they received from service uses. However, timely communication was found to be essential as it encouraged some managers to involve social workers in discussions about their potential of managing additional cases. Overall, the study suggests that working conditions have improved when compared with the findings of their previous study (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018), where participants had reported worse working conditions.

Cleveland et al. (2019)'s study in England focused on resilience as perceived by NQSWs. This qualitative study included fourteen UK social workers who all worked in statutory social services. Findings identified formal supervision as fundamental to resilience and the development of professional identity. This finding was also shared by Joubert (2021) whose study linked resilience to success in the profession. Participants also highlighted peer support as essential in enabling them to settle in their roles and gain more experience. However,

participants had mixed feelings about group supervision, while others felt it was beneficial, some described it as emotion evoking, promoted by constant disagreements. Overall, there is no clarity on the formalities and structure of these group supervisions as researchers did not provide more details.

Antonopoulou et al. (2017)'s study focused on the levels of stress and anxiety among statutory children and family social workers in England; this quantitative study was comprised of 193 children and family social workers including 32 managers. Findings suggest that participants struggled with issues of organisational culture, workload management, and a lack of supervisory support which affects the development of professional decision-making, among early career social workers (Parker, 2021). Unlike Scholar et al. (2025) who clearly distinguished the social work culture from the rest of the organisational culture, researchers in this study did not make that call, hence, it remains unclear if the organisational culture they were describing was only social work based or a wider organisational culture involving the whole organisation. However, the discussion of workloads suggest that they were describing the social work culture within organisations.

Jack and Donellan's (2010) mixed-method study which included 22 NQSWs and 13 managers in England, highlighted workload and time management as essential issues which caused participants to feel challenged. Additionally, like Ravalier et al. (2021), the study identified time constraints caused by the high staff turnover as burdening the remaining social workers as they would have to take up the cases of the absent social workers. Some participants in this study expected social work to be smooth, however, once in practice, they described their early experiences as having a "*reality shock"* (p. 314). The focus of the study is purely on NQSWs, and their experiences of social work practice. Hence, there is no discussion of wider issues including the budget cuts introduced through the austerity measures which may lead to high staff turnover within social work practice.

Bates et al. (2010)'s article describes a longitudinal mixed-method study comprising of 22 NQSWs and their managers in West English LAs. The study focused on the effectiveness of a social work degree programme in preparing NQSWs for practice. Some participants compared their early career experiences to a "*baptism of fire" (*p.152). Managers expressed that NQSWs

struggled with paperwork while most participants felt it would have been better if they had been trained in report writing and record keeping. It remains unclear if participants in this study believed there was a difference between paperwork, report writing and record keeping. However, clarity may be gained from some, who expressed having no knowledge of working in statutory children services as their placements had been in private sectors. Therefore, what they considered as paperwork may be issues related to readiness to work in statutory children services. Despite all the above studies having been carried out in different geographical locations and times, they all agree that NQSWs face challenges as they struggle to manage their workloads, lack support and therefore find it harder to settle in roles, or develop their professional identities.

2.9.4 Recruitment, Retention and Intention to leave.

Several studies have focused on retention of social workers particularly in statutory children and families. These include Burns (2011), Cauvain (2010), Carpenter et al. (2012), Johnson et al. (2019-2023) and Scourfield et al. (2021).

Burns (2011)'s qualitative research study (Republic of Ireland) based on 44 participants explored the issue of retention. Findings suggest that there were three types of social workers within children's services. These include "*career-oriented"* who like the profession and therefore were determined to succeed, "*the transients",* which are those doing social work to get to other professions or roles, and the "*converts"* (p.525) which are those who are unsure of where they want to go but end up being converted to either love the profession and stay, or dislike the profession and leave it altogether. Practice challenges including high workloads, high staff turnover and lack of supervision were among issues causing social workers to consider either changing their roles or leave social work altogether.

Cauvain (2010)'s study into challenges faced in recruiting and retaining of social workers in statutory children services across England used document analysis, a systematic process of evaluating and reviewing the already available documents either electronically or on printed documents (Silverman, 2020). Findings suggested that there was a need to create better communication relations between frontline social workers and senior managers.

Carpenter et al. (2012) evaluated the NQSW programme between 2008 and 2011, through a large survey comprised of NQSWs, social work managers and programme developers. Findings suggest that NQSWs who received full supervision had "*significantly higher extrinsic job satisfaction than those receiving only a partial entitlement,"* (p.95); therefore, associating supervision with greater self-efficacy and role clarity. The survey also suggests that each organisation's wider approach to supervision may indicate how NQSWs would receive supervision. Ultimately, they found that the most significant benefit of supervision may be to reduce work-related "*stress"* feelings (p.95). Additionally, they identified that *"low self-efficacy was associated with stress and low extrinsic job satisfaction"* among NQSWs (p.67). This study concurs with Burns (2011) as they also identified that workloads were increasing, making it harder for social workers and managers. Overall, this study is crucial as it identified the first-year of social work practice as pivotal in the professional development of NQSWs, and this forms the basis of this current research.

Johnson et al. (2019-2023)'s longitudinal study on statutory children and family social workers across England applied a mixed-method. The aim of the study was to explore the views of child and family social workers on their relationship with their line manager and about their working environment. The research was based on two phases for a period of five years and participants were interviewed twice on each phase, named wave 1 and 2. It included 5581 participants on wave one and 3302 respondents on wave-two. Wave 2 identified 63% of NQSWs interviewed on wave-two of the interviews felt stressed by their jobs, with 27% identifying excessive paperwork as an issue, while 14% highlighted high workloads, as problematic, and 17% raised lack of supervision among issues which could force them to reconsider their roles as children and family social workers (Johnson et al., 2020). It remains unclear how paperwork was distinguished from the workload in this study as there is no explanation provided on how participants differentiated these two. However, there were positives as 75% of NQSWs expressed being satisfied by their jobs in wave-one (Johnson et al., 2019), although the same group later reported that they had lost confidence in wave-two. This shows that NQSWs started with raised confidence levels as wave one of the interviews was conducted soon after they had started their first-year in practice, but their experiences worsened as they reported losing confidence later towards the end of their first-year in practice. However, if the 17% who raised

lack of supervision on wave two had received similar support as they did on wave one, they would have likely continued to feel confident. Perhaps managers had purposely reduced the levels of support later in confidence that NQSWs had matured in their roles and therefore were more autonomous and confident. On another positive note, the study stresses that 79% of NQSWs on wave-two of the research expressed a desire to continue working in statutory children services. While this is encouraging, it suggests that nearly one fifth of NQSWs were considering leaving their roles by the end of their first-year with many opting to join agencies for various reasons including the ability to exit their roles earlier if stressed.

Overall, Johnson et al. (2022)'s key findings revealed that 78% of NQSWs including agency workers were prepared to remain in statutory children and family employment. Although this is positive, stress levels among NQSWs had increased when compared with earlier waves, as more NQSWs expressed that they planned to find roles outside LAs. Ultimately, Johnson et al. (2023) suggests that social workers were less loyal to their employers as 66% expressed loyalty in wave five as opposed to 71% in wave 1. However, Johnson et al., (2021 p.11) identified that "pay," was another motivating factor as 7% of participants who were interviewed in wave 1 had moved to agency roles for better pay while others cited the working culture to have forced them to move to another LA. Additionally, at 67% job satisfaction remained high in wave 5, however, this had decreased from 75% in wave 1. This suggests a decline in the desire to work for LAs with challenges of high workloads and the number of hours spent on each case also having increased in wave 5 of the study (Johnson et al., 2023). This confirms Ravalier et al., (2023)'s claim that statutory children social work had become toxic in the UK.

Scourfield et al. (2021)'s longitudinal study applied mixed-methods to focus on the success rates of the social work Step-up programmes, aiming to investigate longer term employment outcomes for those who qualified via Step-up programmes in England. Findings suggest that many felt forced by lack of support and high workloads to quit their roles early in the profession, with 22% of the participants no longer considering themselves as social workers only after 6 months of qualification and registration. Therefore, LAs struggled to retain social workers for more than three-years post qualification. However, figures released by DfE (2024) indicate a rise in retention of permanent statutory children's social workers as vacancies were down by 6.9% from the previous year, while the number of agency social workers have fallen by 9.2%.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) (2024) attributes the improved retention levels and the decreased numbers of agency social workers to the DfE (2024) guidance on agency social workers. The guidance stipulates that social workers must have a five-year experience of working in statutory children services before they could move to agencies. Despite the improved retention levels, figures reveal that the number of absences due to illness have increased by 3.2% from the previous year. While it is encouraging that retention levels have increased, it is worrying that the number of absences due to illnesses has increased, as they have been associated with work-related stress (see 10.3.2).

2.9.5 Invisibility/Hypervisibility of Black social workers

Many studies in the UK focus on experiences of black student social workers (Bartoli, 2011; Battaglia and Flynn, 2020). However, little is known about the experiences of social work students or social workers from other EMGs including Asians who make up 6.9% of the UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The scarcity of literature on the social work practice experiences of NQSWs from EMGs meant some of those studies which focused on experienced social workers had to be considered, although not quite as relevant. Despite the scarcity, there seems to be a broader discussion of race and ethnicity, which may have not been picked up in research studies. Studies highlighted include Brandy-Williams (2018), Obasi (2022) and Dytham et al. (2024).

Brandy-Williams (2018) conducted a study based on a mixed-method approach on the experiences of black male social workers in children's services in the UK. Findings suggested that Western societies often associated black men with aggression and being the likely absent fathers who had less care for their families. Additionally, it argues that black men are portrayed as "*gays"* (p.33)" or "*sexual predators*", in literature, see (Kosberg, 2002 and Gillingham 2006). Additionally, some participants in that study claimed the dominant class (white managers) were unwilling to allow those from EMGs, particularly males, to progress through social work. Hence black social workers, particularly males, must work extra hard to be accepted or to be given more progression opportunities within social work practice. That invokes what Du Bois (1897) termed "*double consciousness",* meaning a set of oppositions, in this case the clash of one's internal feelings about their abilities to succeed and how those potential abilities are perceived by managers, in (Bruce, 1992 p.302). The concept relates to the fact that black professionals

must work harder to gain progression opportunities, due to systematic prejudices and expectations. While BME social workers may feel ready for promotion, the management may perceive BME social workers as incapable of handling high profile positions and therefore deny them those opportunities.

Obasi (2022p .482) used an *"Africanist sisterhood in Britain",* as the theoretical framework in her qualitative research study where she interviewed six qualified female black social workers in England. Findings suggest that black social workers may either be invisible or hypervisible, meaning they may not be noticed or overly noticed. Additionally, the study highlights issues of marginalisation and racism caused by the "*race-taboo",* as manifesting in England social work. Furthermore, it argues that issues of marginalisation and racism were common among professionals including social workers in England.

Dytham et al. (2024) conducted a study on the experiences of black social workers and student experiences in England. The aim of the research was to understand and improve the experiences of black social workers and students. This qualitative study comprised ten experienced black social workers, four NQSWs and six student social workers, drawn from a wide range of organisations, including charities, LAs with both adults and children's teams. Findings suggest that there were racial disparities as participants did not have spaces to discuss some aspects which are specifically related to their races. Some participants did not disclose their struggles due to the stereotypes and microaggressions often levelled towards them by white colleagues. Perhaps, they feared being labelled as lazy, since Brandy-Williams (2018) states that black social workers must work extra hard before they could be recognised for promotion. While some participants felt "*hypervisible*" by being isolated within a team of white colleagues, others felt *"invisible"* as they were at times ignored (p.5). This finding concurs with Obasi (2022) who equally found that some black social workers often felt overly visible or invisible due to their lack of acceptance for the same reasons described above. Dytham et al. (2024) suggests that issues of recognising diversity were normative to black social workers, insinuating that there was lack of cultural competence among white colleagues, and this may be the reason for misunderstanding black social workers. However, issues of cultural competence have been critiqued as suggesting that it can be fully achieved (Malat, 2013); this will be explored further in the next sections. Overall, lack of inclusive culture became the main

theme from this study, as participants felt they were either misunderstood or sidelined. The inclusive culture would have encouraged white colleagues to have empathy and consider how being black and just few among white social workers may make black social workers feel. This would have led to a better recognition of black social workers.

2.9.6 The overrepresentation on misconduct Issues and the ASYE failure

The General Social Care Council UK (GSCC) (2012)'s report of the demographic profile of its registrants' states that black social workers were seven times more likely to be reported for misconduct issues compared to their white counterparts. However, black social workers accounted for only 10.2% of social workers registered with GSCC; this was an over representation of black social workers on misconduct issues.

Social Work England (2023b)'s anti-racism survey where some open questions allowed participants to discuss their experiences more openly, concurred with the GSCC (2012)'s findings. Black social workers, particularly males were overrepresented on misconduct issues. BME social workers felt stressed by their experiences of racism and the inequality of promotion and progression opportunities within the profession. Although the studies have highlighted the experiences, they have not explored why such experiences occurred.

Skills for Care (2024) carried out a survey of the pass rates from the ASYE Programme in England. Findings suggests that failure rates had fallen between the 2023 and 2024 periods. However, the report stresses that racial disparities still existed as BME social workers were three times as likely to fail the ASYE programme than their white colleagues. Additionally, the study argues that BME female social workers were more likely to pass the ASYE programme than their BME male counterparts. This resonates with SWE (2023b) where black males were overrepresented on misconduct issues.

2.9.7 Culture Shock for Internationally Qualified Social Workers

Several studies on the experiences of IQSWs focused on transition. These studies included Fouche et al. (2014), (Tinarwo (2011), Chogugudza (2017) and Roche (2015). Culture shock became the main theme among these studies as participants were shocked about levels of differences in culture between their countries and their new resident states.

Fouche et al. (2014)'s mixed-method study comprised of 294 participants in a survey and an additional 18 participants who were interviewed as part of the qualitative strand. The focus of the study was on migrant social workers' perceptions of their roles. Findings indicated that most migrant social workers were shocked as they felt that all the knowledge, they had gained in their countries was not considered by local social work managers who treated them as new graduates. Despite that, some acknowledged that there were several factors which affected their transition into their professional roles after having migrated to New Zealand. These included different practice standards, societal norms, values and policies applied in New Zealand compared to their native countries. Additionally, others felt social workers were voiceless when it comes to challenging the political nature of the profession, they felt social workers needed to do more and advocate for service users by challenging the politics which affected service delivery. Although this study has been acknowledged, it focused on New Zealand where social work was described as still developing. McNabb (2019) posits that Indigenous People's Rights Movement advocated for the decolonisation of social work as they argued that the profession did not represent the values of local people in New Zealand. Therefore, there was a major policy restructuring leading to the formation of "*the Kaupapa Māori Approach,"* which promotes Māori values, beliefs and practices (McNabb, 2019 p. 11). Despite social work having been practiced for many years, mandatory registration for social workers was only introduced in 2021 across New Zealand (Parosanu et al., 2025), and there was no mandatory requirement to register as a social worker at the time of this study in 2014; therefore, UK studies may come to different findings.

Tinarwo (2011)'s mixed-method study comprised 24 social workers focused on factors influencing non-white Zimbabwean qualified social workers who migrated to England. The findings suggested that participants struggled to settle in England as lack of a supportive family or friend network meant they felt isolated; that meant they had to form or join Zimbabwean networks based in the UK. Although the participants expressed being happy with the financial gains after having migrated to England, they cited having struggled to adapt to the English social work practice standards as they highlighted different culture, policy structure and values as having affected them during their transition.

Chogugudza (2017)'s qualitative study consisted of thirty statutory children and family social workers who similar to the Tinarwo (2011) study, had all qualified in Zimbabwe. The aim of the study was to explore the transferability of skills with participants expressing having a high level of transferable skills. However, different practice approaches based on unfamiliar local policies, culture and values meant the IQSWs experienced what Fouche et al. (2014 p.87) termed, "*culture shock",* as they struggled to adapt to the English practice standards. Despite different approaches to research and unrelated research questions, findings of the three studies above had a lot in common, culture shock during transition became the main theme.

Roche (2015) explored the experiences of IQSWs in Ireland. The study found that social workers who qualified outside Ireland, including those from the UK, struggled to practice in Ireland as cultural differences meant they needed to adapt to the Irish practice guidance, norms and values. The Irish social work system differs from the UK as for over 100 years the political and legal systems, cultural differences and the dominance of a Catholic clergy in the welfare system likely influenced practice (Fahey, 1992); this probably explains the differences identified in the study.

If the UK trained social workers could face challenges in adapting to working in their close neighbours Ireland, how would those who qualified outside the West adapt to the English practice standards and expectations; this research will explore those experiences and attempt to provide answers to that question.

2.9.8 Race and Ethnicity Literature

To ensure that essential data was not missed, race and ethnicity studies were considered. Woo et al. (2018) used content analysis to conduct a literature review on race and ethnicity in social work practice. Their review identified 634 studies conducted between 2005 and 2015. However, despite mentioning or discussing race and ethnicity, Woo et al. (2018 p. 82) argue that they were only discussed as "*variables rather than core constructs*". In contrast, Pollock et al. (2024) reported on phase-4 of their earlier study, (Johnson et al., 2022), which focused on race and ethnicity experiences, identifying the following three themes: (1) participants stated that ethnicity impacted their social work practice experiences, (2) lack of diversity within social work practice, (3) working with families and intersectionality. One participant (assistant team manager) argued that they believed they should work "*three times harder than a white*

colleague" to gain promotion (p.258); this mirrors Brandy-Williams (2018)'s finding which suggested that white managers were unwilling to allow black males to progress in the profession. Lack of diversity meant some participants did not feel comfortable supporting BME families, hence they would redirect such families to somebody who had lived in London, a diverse city (Raco, 2018). Participants admitted having intersecting experiences of race and class within families. However, some, felt "*the recent renewed interest in anti-racism was positive* (p. 260)", especially in shaping how families recognised racial or cultural heritage. Despite having discussed race-related experiences of BME social workers, Pollock et al. (2024 p. 257)'s review was inclusive of "*white"* social workers, as reflected on their original study, Johnson et al. (2022), suggesting a lack of emphasis on experiences as they relate to BME social workers.

2.9.9 Originality and Addition to Body of Knowledge.

Some studies in this review, for example, the two-government commissioned large-scale surveys (Carpenter et al.,2012; Johnson et al., 2019-2023), conducted over a period of three and five-years respectively, did explore ethnicity and race-related experiences. However, scholars in both studies examined these experiences inclusively. It would have been more helpful if a section of one of these studies particularly (Johnson et al., 2022) where such experiences were explored in greater depth, was exclusively focused on these experiences as they relate to BME social workers and the first-year in social work practice. This lack of specificity reinforces Woo et al. (2018 p. 82)'s argument that ethnicity and race-related experiences were often discussed as "*variables rather than core constructs*", suggesting a gap in knowledge. However, this study challenges that narrative as it exclusively focuses on BME social workers' experiences, promoting analytical depth, and therefore filling that gap in knowledge.

Other studies highlighted the experiences of all NQSWs while some either focused on black social workers or BME social work students. Additionally, some detailed the experiences of IQSWs but did not specifically focus on the first-year of those in statutory children services, this highlights a gap in knowledge as the first-year experiences of all BME social workers remain unclear. Therefore, this study contributes to knowledge by adding new knowledge which will attempt to fill the identified gap.

Chapter-3 Philosophical underpinnings

3.1 Introduction

This section details the philosophical underpinnings of this study, including a critical discussion of the research paradigm, phenomenology and relevant theories. Views of influential philosophers who contributed to phenomenology, subsequently encouraging its application ahead of other perspectives will be discussed. Additionally, Neo-Marxist perspective will be applied to critically analyse the state. This will shed light on how the state may be perceived in relation to social work practice and society.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

According to Scotland (2012), the history of social research is fundamentally rooted to a research paradigm, which he explained as a certain model to be followed when conducting research. Additionally, Crotty (1998) states that a paradigm consists of two essential components namely, Ontology and Epistemology, as vital in formulating the methodologies and then research methods. However, Pretorius (2024) argues that the research paradigm consists of more than ontology and epistemology as it also includes methodology, a system of approaches and principles of conducting research, and axiology, a philosophical study of value, and how researchers may designate value to research. However, she argues that designating value to the research may lead to bias as the researcher may prioritise what they value while overlooking other essential issues which may be relevant. To ensure that issues of value and potential bias were managed appropriately, the researcher maintained a *"reflexive notebook"* throughout the research process (Smith et al., 2009 p.77). This served as an audit trail for recording decisions and identifying factors that could obscure analytic clarity. Regular cross-checking against the notebook ensured that interpretations were grounded in evidence from the literature and participants' accounts, rather than influenced by the researcher's professional background, personal values, or positionality as a person of colour with historical associations to colonial narratives. This practice supported methodological rigour and transparency in decision-making.

This research adopts Crotty's (1998) perspective that ontology and epistemology are foundational paradigms informing methodology and methods, while deliberately avoiding bias associated with axiology. Ontology concerns the nature of reality, whereas epistemology addresses the nature and scope of knowledge (Crotty, 1998).

Al-Saad (2014) describes ontology as the philosophical study of the nature of reality, comprising three key positions. First, singular reality, which assumes one objective truth for each phenomenon (Goertz & Mahony, 2012). This view aligns with positivism, a scientific paradigm that applies mathematical methods to measure, verify, and explain reality, typically through quantitative research (Crotty, 1998). Second, multiple realities, which recognise that reality is socially constructed and interpreted by individuals (Scotland, 2012). This perspective underpins constructivism, associated with qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, feminism, and humanistic theories (Brophy & McDermott, 2012). Third, negotiated realities, which acknowledge that truth can be reached through the most effective scientific tools (Goertz & Mahony, 2012). This position aligns with pragmatism, defined by Bryant (2017) as a philosophy concerned with identifying what works best in answering research questions, often through mixed-methods combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Epistemology refers to the nature and scope of knowledge and provides *"a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how it can be ensured they are both adequate and legitimate*" (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Like ontology, epistemology encompasses three key orientations. First, positivism, which assumes that knowledge can be measured and verified using scientific tools, typically through quantitative methods (Bryant, 2017). Second, constructivism, which views knowledge as interpretive and socially constructed, supporting qualitative approaches (Goertz & Mahony, 2012). Third, pragmatism, which holds that knowledge can be examined using the most effective tools for answering research questions, often through mixed-methods (Scotland, 2012).

Ontology and epistemology underpin research design and inform the choice of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches. Both paradigms also guide the use of deductive and inductive reasoning. Bryman (2012) defines induction as the process of generating understanding from data without prior theoretical assumptions, whereas deduction involves

testing hypotheses derived from theory. Within positivism, researchers typically adopt a deductive approach, formulating hypotheses and testing them to identify causes, measurements, or outcomes (Crotty, 1998). These hypotheses may be confirmed or rejected, leading to generalisations. Conversely, naturalistic or constructivist paradigms favour induction, emphasising the development of meaning through participants' experiences (Farghaly, 2018).

This study does not seek to test any theory or hypothesis; rather, it adopts an inductive approach, enabling participants to share their experiences, which are then analysed to develop meaningful insights. Therefore, a constructivist epistemology underpins this approach, supporting the use of qualitative methods to explore lived-experiences and generate new knowledge. Early in the research process, a clear alignment between phenomenology and the research questions was identified. The following section examines this paradigm in detail.

3.3 Phenomenology philosophy

Phenomenology originated with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), widely regarded as its founding figure (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl defined phenomenology as "*the science of consciousness,"* advocating for rigorous, objective thinking alongside ethical principles, which he believed had been neglected in research (Husserl, 1927 p. 101). He introduced the concept of the "*lifeworld",* referring to the "world of immediate experience," in (Zahavi, 2025, p.192), and argued that everyday reality is often taken for granted. His aim was to investigate the "*fundamental conditions shaping human experience*" (Smith et al., 2009, p.39). Husserl emphasised exploring the "*bedrock"* of daily life actions, emotions, and relationships where authentic understanding emerges (MacLeod, 2001, p.36).

Husserl's ideas evolved from Franz Brentano's descriptive psychology, which prioritised first-person experience (Franchette & Taieb, 2023). Central to Husserl's approach was bracketing, a process of suspending prior assumptions to access pure, unmediated experience (Husserl, 1927). Borrowed from mathematics and earlier discussed by *"Kant*", bracketing requires researchers to set aside preconceptions to achieve direct knowledge of phenomena" (Anstey, 2011, p.79).

In contrast, Heidegger (1889-1976), Husserl's student, rejected bracketing, arguing that researchers cannot detach themselves from their context, their experiences and assumptions inevitably shaped interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). His approach, known as hermeneutic phenomenology, emphasises interpretation rather than description, asserting that understanding arises through the interplay of researcher and phenomenon (Heidegger ,1962). He introduced hermeneutics, originally the study of biblical interpretation, as a philosophical framework for analysing meaning, which significantly advanced phenomenological inquiry (Paley, 1997).

Phenomenology has evolved through the contributions of philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), among others. Merleau-Ponty (1935) introduced existential themes of the *lifeworld* through his work on *"The Self as Embodied Subjectivity,"* emphasising that the physical body is integral to subjective experience, in (Toadvine, 2025, p.15). This challenged rationalist and empiricist traditions that associated reasoning solely with mental perception, excluding the influence of the body (Hornstein, 2005). Merleau-Ponty argued that cognitive processes cannot function independently of physical well-being, a perspective with practical implications for professional practice.

Sartre (1943, p.67) advanced phenomenology through his work *Existentialism and Humanism*, introducing the concept of "*nothingness,"* which asserts that what is unknown is as significant as what is known. This notion encourages researchers to identify gaps in knowledge and pursue further inquiry. However, Tuckett (2014, p.18) contends that phenomenology promotes "*pseudoscience,"* by claiming to be rooted in science when it has no scientific basis. Nevertheless, phenomenology remains valuable for research that prioritises lived-experience. This study draws on phenomenological principles to centre participants' experiences and employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), discussed in the next chapter, to provide rich, nuanced descriptions of individual perspectives.

3.4 Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) defines a theoretical perspective as the lens used to develop methodologies in research. This entails knowledge and a particular understanding of what is involved in knowing;

that is how do humans know what they know. Different theories used in similar studies were explored to identify suitable methodologies for this research. Most of these studies were shaped by constructivism where constructivist theories including feminism and Critical Race Theory (CRT), in which qualitative research methodologies were applied (Quinn and Grumbach 2015; Draftary, 2018; Woodford et al., 2017). There was a consideration to apply Feminism and other humanistic approaches; however, these perspectives have been rejected by members of EMGs who insisted that those theories only promoted colour-blindness, thereby ignoring needs which may be specifically related to race (Hartlep, 2009). Although Black feminism could have provided a relevant lens for this study, it was not adopted as critics argue that it only advocates for heterosexual black women, leaving other groups sidelined (Gines, 2011). In contrast, CRT offers a more inclusive framework through intersectionality (Draftary, 2018). For this reason, CRT was selected as the guiding lens for this research.

3.5 Critical Race Theory

Delgado and Stefancic (2017, p.3) define CRT as an approach developed by "*a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power*." CRT emerged in the mid-1970s when legal scholars and activists began challenging liberalism's emphasis on colour-blindness and universal solutions, arguing that such approaches perpetuated systemic inequities (Hartlep, 2009). These scholars contended that educational and professional policies privileged white individuals while marginalising ethnic minority groups (Cole, 2016). In response, radical feminists and activists advocated for a new framework that addressed race and culture explicitly. People of colour in the US expressed dissatisfaction with mainstream feminism, which they perceived as favouring white women (Cole, 2009). Consequently, CRT was proposed as a perspective to challenge hegemonic structures and prioritise the lived-realities of marginalised communities (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

CRT aligns closely with this study's research question, as it foregrounds experiences shaped by race and culture. Five hallmark themes of CRT (see Table-4) guided data analysis: Idealism, Realism, Material Determinants, Interest Convergence, and Marxist/Neo-Marxist perspectives (Cole, 2016). These themes collectively examine how physical characteristics, such as skin

colour, and cultural identity influence social positioning (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Additionally, Marxist and Neo-Marxist principles were applied to explore the role of the state in shaping social services.

Table- 4 Overview of Critical Race Theory.

Hallmark Themes	Beliefs
1. Idealism	Believe racism stems from attitude, thinking and mental categorisation (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017).
2. Realism	A way by which a society allocates status and privileges (Cole, 2016).
3. Materiel Determinants	Believe the change of circumstances enable groups to topple or exploit each other leading to the subordination of minorities (Bell and Delgado, 2021).
4. Interest Convergence	Believe racism stood as a permanent phenomenon in Western societies (Bell, 1992).
5. Marxist/Neo Marxist Perspective	A combination of Marxism and Neo-Marxism, compiled by more recent theorists, building on Marx's contribution. The updated version believes social class is founded on capitalism which relies on workers' labour while paying them very little in wages to continue making excessive profits (Cole, 2009).

(Adapted from Cole, 2016)

3.6 Marxism/Neo-Marxism

Karl Marx (1818–1883), a German philosopher, founded Marxism by arguing that social class was rooted in capitalism, which exploited workers' labour while providing minimal wages to maximise profit (Marx, 1848). Cole (2016, p.8) introduces Neo-Marxism as an extension of Marxist thought incorporating new theoretical developments. He identifies two distinct strands: humanist, which emphasises "*the power of human will"* to challenge capitalist structures, and structuralist, which underscores the enduring influence of social and economic structures. Cole (2016) also introduces the concept of interpellation, whereby media, capitalists, or politicians claim to represent the interests of the majority while advancing their own agendas. For example, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's statement, "*British Jobs for British Workers,"* was presented as advocacy for British citizens, yet it was internalised as reality and used by striking workers to justify exclusionary practices, an example of racialising labour

(Summers, 2009 p.9). Cole (2016) stresses that Neo-Marxism does not replace Marxism but updates it. Marx and Engels' original ideas highlight the exploitation of workers under capitalism (Giddens, 2013), whereas Althusser's Neo-Marxist perspective views workers as operating within legal frameworks defined by contractual agreements (Cole, 2009).

However, Neo-Marxism is contested, Gramsci (1929, p.65) challenged Althusser's concept of interpellation through his theory of "*cultural hegemony",* which refers to the dominance of one social group over others. Gramsci argued that dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion but also by using institutions such as media, education, and religion to transmit their values and norms to subordinate groups. Once internalised, these values are perceived as natural and accepted by the dominated groups. This perspective suggests that Prime Minister Gordon Brown's statement, "*British Jobs for British Workers,"* exemplifies cultural hegemony, as it utilised a political platform to normalise exclusionary views among the public.

3.7 Neo-Marxists' view of the State.

In Marxism, terms "the Bourgeoisies and the Capitalists", are used interchangeably to refer to "*the middle class, those who own the means of production including businesses, land and who hire the proletariat (the working class) as paid labourers*" (Barrow, 1993 p. 65). While the Oxford Dictionary (2024) defines the state as a politically organised group of leaders under one government, Althusser (2014/1949 p.70) identifies the state as "a *repressive machine that enables the dominant classes to ensure their domination over the working class in order to subject it to the process of extorting surplus value (that is to capitalist exploitation)".* Locke (1688) had argued that law and order was needed for peace and stability of the society, in Shapiro, (2003). He insisted that if all people lived in a lawless society, others would be exploited as the liberty of one person may be a threat to another, creating anarchy as those with less power to defend themselves may be enslaved, in Heywood (2003). However, Marx (2012/1844) challenged Locke's view when he argued that the state was an instrument of the ruling class since they enforce and guarantee the stability of the class structure. Therefore, when there is anarchy in societies, the state intervenes to promote stability and peace needed by the Bourgeoisies who would rather take their businesses elsewhere than invest in unstable climates.

Despite acknowledging that the state does have some autonomy, Neo-Marxists argue that the state's autonomy is used to create policies supporting the Bourgeoisies' profit-making ideas (Cole, 2016). Without the investment from the Bourgeoisies who contribute a lot of money to the state through taxes from their businesses, and further tax contributions through their employees; the state would not be able to perform their normal duties, since the working class would not have jobs to pay taxes if they were not hired by the Bourgeoisies, and the economy would be severely affected (Jessop, 1982).

The Bourgeoisies have major influences on the operation of LAs, since an increase of public spending may result in more borrowing which may affect the growth of the economy, meaning less profits for the Bourgeoisies (Gramsci, 1929). This was seen with the Coalition government led by the Conservatives in 2010 where major cuts on public spending were announced (DfE, 2012). Therefore, the Bourgeoises have the financial power to role the state into free markets.

Jessop (1982 p.16) insists that the "*state power is capitalist to a certain degree since it creates, maintains, or restores the condition required for capital accumulation*". When the economy is growing, the state can easily make revenues with little resistance from either the public or capitalists (Lenin, 1915/2011). However, when the economy is declining, the state would struggle to generate enough revenues to sustain its financial power and duties (Poulantzas, 1980). Therefore, the state is under pressure to get more investment which would largely come from capitalists, but the Bourgeoises may decide against investing in any country if they felt policies in that country did not support their investments. Ultimately, the state remains powerless to implement policies not aligned to the growth of the economy, which may be affected if the Bourgeoises decided to invest elsewhere, Bridges (1973), in (Barrow, 1993). On the contrary, liberals including Shapiro (2003) argue that the state promotes the interests of the public who willingly elect the government of their choice via a democratic process, making it responsible for creating jobs and ensuring the growth and stability of the economy. Nevertheless, the evidence provided by the Equality Trust (2025) shows that the (Bourgeoisies) billionaires' wealth has increased by 1000% from 1990 to 2025 in the UK. Consequently, Poverty (2025)'s statistics reveal that the number of poor families have increased by 21%, while at 31% children remain the most affected. Additionally, Fleck (2022) suggests that the sudden

increase in the wealth of billionaires is linked to government policies which promote the economy, allowing the Bourgeoisies to make excessive profits while the working class continue to earn less. Overall, the evidence above shows that it is the Bourgeoises who have been benefiting from government policy as their wealth has increased while the working class have deepened into poverty.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the philosophical underpinnings of the study. Overall, phenomenology was selected as the guiding paradigm because it places lived-experience at the centre of inquiry, enabling participants to articulate and interpret the personal and professional significance of their experiences. This aligns with the study's aim to explore and understand these experiences in depth.

Chapter-4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details methodologies applied in this study. It starts by briefly discussing phenomenology before identifying Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the main methodology in a multi-methods approach which will be applied in this research. This will include the discussion of other qualitative research methods which could have been applied in this study. The section will conclude by focusing on the framework of data analysis chosen for this research.

4.2 Methodologies

There are several methodologies in qualitative research, these include grounded theory, ethnography, case studies and phenomenology (Bryman, 2012), as outlined in table 5, which raised interests for this study. Byrne, (2001) stresses that phenomenology involves the understanding of life, and their reality that the truth can emerge direct from people's lived-experiences. Additionally, Mapp (2013) describes phenomenology as a reflective study which searches for meanings and essence of lived-experiences, through one-to-one interviews, seeking to gain data direct from participants.

4.3 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This study is based on a constructivist epistemology rooted in inductive approach which allows participants to deeply express their experiences (Crotty, 1998). Building from the phenomenological philosophers named in the previous chapter, this research will apply IPA as the methodological framework. IPA was developed by Smith et al. (1999), who were informed by a lot of ideas from Husserl, Heidegger, and other philosophers within phenomenology. IPA uses descriptive questions such as how, and what does this mean to you, as opposed to how much, or how many, which would be asked in quantitative studies. Initially, IPA was applied in clinical research trials, however, IPA has become more popular as it has been applied in other areas of research including social work (Larkin et al., 2006; Walker 2014).

Frenchette et al. (2020) identified IPA as a suitable qualitative research methodology when seeking to explore lived-experiences. They described IPA as best placed to capture lived-experiences which can be better understood by what they mean to the participant. Additionally,

Wagstaff et al. (2014 p. 4) stress that IPA as a methodology is based on "*phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography*". Heidegger, (1962 p.79) argued that the concept of hermeneutics, was *"a possibility of human existence itself, and indeed a possibility that aims at our explication of ourselves in our very existence*". IPA assumes a worldview in which "*the individual is not a passive recipient but an active interpreter of his or her subjective world"* (Wagstaff et al., 2014 p.7). Hence, participants can express what their experiences meant to them. IPA applies Heideggerian-hermeneutics, which is a method of interpretation, promoting in-depth interviews while encouraging participants to feel free sharing their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). However, it must be acknowledged that some participants may struggle to say what their experiences meant to them. Hence, through "*double hermeneutics"*, the researcher may use body language to analyse the experiences and meanings (Heidegger, 1962 p.11). The researcher's positionality aligning with participants meant he was better placed to understand and interpret any gestures or body language associated with culture.

"*In terms of devising a data collection method, IPA is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences",* (Smith et al., 2009 p.56). Therefore, IPA applies qualitative method designs including semi-structured interviews. However, critics argue that IPA only focuses on experiences but fails to establish why the experiences occurred (Davidsen, 2013; Tuffour, 2017). Therefore, CRT and the analysis of some policies will be used to objectively respond to those critics by identifying why some experiences may have happened to participants and fill that gap in IPA.

4.4 Qualitative Research Approaches

Qualitative research designs had to be selected since the research philosophy is based on the constructivist epistemology concept, that knowledge needs to be interpreted or explained. This is in line with CRT and phenomenology where qualitative research approaches are encouraged (Hartlep, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). Bryman (2012) states that qualitative approaches are very effective in assisting researchers to gain knowledge from the participants' experiences, therefore they give priority to gaining and analysing textual data. Unlike the quantitative research methods, which uses figures including statistical data to verify the truth or measure occurrences, qualitative research is concerned with reasons behind the development of a certain phenomenon and how the affected persons feel or make of the phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, qualitative research methods employ participants with experiences associated with the research question. However, critiques argue that qualitative approaches' excessive flexibility has created a false dichotomy that quantitative or qualitative research alone, cannot produce adequate results, forcing many researchers to apply mixed-methods (Hennink et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this research applied qualitative designs as they were best placed to address the research question, since they allow participants to structurally express their episodes in line with the research question (see table-5 for a summary of qualitative research designs).

Table-5. Qualitative Research Methodologies (Adapted from (Holosko, 2010).

Qualitative Research main Methodologies	Succinct Meaning
1. Phenomenology	Based on description and understanding of human experiences.
2. Narration	Examines narrative stories of humans, situations, themes, life stories, accounts, and their meanings from the participant's perspectives.
3. Case Study	Details and analyses individual, families, group, communities, interventions, or cultures presented as examples of actual experiences.
4. Ethnography	Cultural, societal or group studies to enable the understanding of interactions between groups, individuals, languages and how they view the world around them. Ethnography also includes participant observation where personal relationships may be used to observe human interactions, activities, events, humans, meaning and how they view the world around them.
5. Action participatory research	The observation of human interactions, activities, events, humans, meaning and how they view the world around them.
6. Grounded Theory	The systematic creation of data/knowledge using a theory to construct explanations, concepts, hypothesis, meanings, typologies, or descriptions of a phenomenon
7. Practice and Programme Evaluation studies	The application of naturalistic inquiry methods to analyse and understand objectives, programme goals and outcomes.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

There are various approaches to data collection within qualitative research, including interviews and participant observations (Crotty, 1998). While ethnography could have provided valuable insights into the culture of social work within organisations, it presented significant challenges. Following formal consultations with several LAs, the decision was made not to conduct the study within LAs using ethnography or any other method. All LAs indicated that

obtaining ethical approval would require a minimum of six months, which was incompatible with the time constraints of a PhD study. Moreover, ethnography typically involves prolonged immersion in the organisational culture, either as a participant or non-participant observer (Bryman, 2012), further exacerbating these time limitations. Additionally, concerns about reputational risk may have influenced participation. LAs might have encouraged only staff with positive experiences to take part, potentially concealing poor standards and practices. This risk of selective participation posed a threat to the integrity and comprehensiveness of the data.

A focus group was initially considered as a primary data collection method for this study. This approach can encourage participants to share experiences openly within a group setting (Silverman, 2020). However, Janis (1982) highlights significant limitations associated with group dynamics. He argues that "*loyalty requires each member to avoid controversial issues*" (p.12) and warns that groups can produce both positive and negative outcomes. According to Janis's symptoms of Groupthink, power imbalances may emerge, with some members feeling vulnerable and reluctant to speak, while others dominate discussions. This dynamic can lead to "*self-censorship*" (p.37) and collective rationalisation, where participants endorse shared ideas rather than express dissenting views to avoid tension. Janis (1982) further argues that each member should act as both a critical evaluator of group decisions and a "*devil's advocate*" (p.39) to challenge consensus. He emphasises the importance of an impartial leader who refrains from expressing personal preferences. These requirements have direct implications for the researcher as a moderator, since their leadership style adopted can significantly influence the direction and openness of discussions.

While some scholars acknowledge Groupthink as a useful lens for examining group decision-making (Mitchell and Eckstein,2009), critics contend that it undermines individual autonomy by implying that people in groups cannot think independently (Baron, 2005; Rose, 2011). Nevertheless, the theory suggests that participants may seek harmony within a group, avoiding conflict and aligning their views with those already expressed (Janis, 1982). These dynamics risk producing a consensus rather than authentic individual accounts. Additionally, group-based approaches could expose participants' private and potentially sensitive experiences to others, raising ethical and practical concerns. To mitigate these challenges, semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection method for Phase One of the study.

4.6 Semi-structured Interviews

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) define semi-structured interviews as a consultation between researchers and participants. Unlike structured interviews, this approach avoids closed questions, instead prioritising open-ended questions that enable deeper exploration. Such flexibility allows researchers to probe further by posing evaluative or narrative questions in response to participants' initial answers (Silverman, 2020).

Kakila (2021, p.1) argues that semi-structured interviews enable researchers to identify "*superficial responses,"* and decide whether to probe further or disregard them before drawing "*multi-layered"* conclusions. Similarly, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) emphasise that researchers can follow up on both verbal and non-verbal cues to uncover essential information that may be critical for thematic analysis. Deterding and Waters (2018, p.11) highlight the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, noting that this approach can "*inspire participants*" to reflect and explore their experiences in greater depth. Galletta (2013) further suggests that semi-structured interviews foster rapport between researchers and participants, helping to alleviate potential anxiety on either side.

Karatsareas (2022) introduces an additional dimension, arguing that semi-structured interviews support skill development among novice researchers, preparing them for future publication processes. Overall, the capacity for in-depth questioning and probing into feelings, opinions, and expectations is recognised as a major strength of semi-structured interviews, aligning closely with the principles of IPA and CRT (Mapp, 2013). However, Saks and Allsop (2013) caution that responses may be time-specific, noting that participants could provide

different answers if asked similar questions later. Nevertheless, the strengths of semi-structured interviews justified their use as the primary data collection method in this research.

IPA was employed to encourage participants to explore their experiences in depth. This was achieved through open-ended questions that allowed initial responses to be expanded upon, followed by probing evaluative or narrative questions. A structured set of questions was developed to address the overarching research aim and the three specific objectives, ensuring alignment between the research questions and data collection methods, as advocated by Silverman (2020). Examples of prompts included: *"How do you feel about the experiences you have just shared?"*, *"Could you elaborate further?"*, and *"What does that mean to you?"*. Such questions are consistent with IPA's emphasis on eliciting rich, meaningful accounts (Frechette et al., 2020).

Each interview was anticipated to last between 40 and 60 minutes. Participants retained the right to decline answering any question; however, the researcher ensured that all questions were presented to maintain consistency across interviews.

4.7 Interview schedule

Smith et al. (2009) highlights the vitality of constructing a schedule for semi-structured interviews in IPA studies. They identified the schedule as a guide which promotes the best way of phrasing the questions and ensures the collection of necessary and appropriate data to address the research question. However, it is essential for a practical questioner to always keep an open mind and use any form of response to create a new line of questioning which would yield clarity or different understanding; this is a component of the Socratic thinking, questioning, and getting the best possible answers (Britton, 2022). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), the description of the phenomena is more important than analysis, in (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews were based on the Socratic way of questioning, thinking, and reasoning, which is also mirrored in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009)'s interviewing skills. Therefore, each dialogue was approached from a dispassionate position which discourages turning the interview into a counselling session. This promoted the identification of clues, significant patterns, or sources of more information that would yield clarity. Hence, questions that enabled participants to describe what was happening during their experiences by giving

examples where they felt possible, were created. That schedule was designed together with the participant information sheet, which detailed all essential information in relation to the research as elaborated on the approved ethics form.

4.8 Focus Group

Sousa (2014) critiques IPA for lacking credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness, primarily because it does not typically incorporate triangulation, investigator checks, or peer debriefing. He argues that these strategies would strengthen phenomenological research. In response to this critique, Phase Two of this study employed a focus group of stakeholders to validate and enrich the findings from Phase One. Wilkinson (2011) defines a focus group as a qualitative data collection method involving a small group of participants, typically six to ten, who share similar characteristics or experiences. For this study, a minimum of three participants was sought to ensure depth of discussion while avoiding excessive data that could detract from IPA's idiographic focus.

Silverman (2020) notes that the role of the moderator in a focus group is not to ask specific questions but to facilitate discussion and ensure equitable participation. However, as previously discussed, Janis's (1972) Groupthink theory suggests that participants may avoid conflict and conform to dominant views, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives. Antoft and Petersen (2014) emphasise that focus groups are rarely used as standalone methods; rather, they are often integrated into multi-method designs to clarify or validate findings. Accordingly, the focus group in this study served as a supplementary method to enhance credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness.

Participants were invited to comment on the themes derived from the interviews. Their feedback provided additional data that either supported existing themes or offered alternative interpretations. This process aligns with Sousa's (2014) argument that theme validation strengthens the depth and quality of IPA findings. The researcher facilitated the session to ensure balanced participation. However, Doody et al. (2013) caution that focus group analysis can be time-consuming and may generate data beyond the study's aims. To address this, the focus group data were transcribed but analysed only in relation to the themes under validation.

Any data unrelated to these themes were excluded, as they did not align with the research question.

4.9 Bracketing

Husserl (1913) argued that the most effective way to understand a phenomenon is to suspend prior knowledge, making bracketing or reduction essential in phenomenological research to minimise bias, in (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). In contrast, Heidegger (1962) maintained that the researcher is inherently part of the research process; therefore, their experiences cannot be fully separated, rendering complete bracketing unnecessary. Gadamer (2013) supports this view, asserting that prior assumptions and knowledge are integral to interpretation and cannot be entirely set aside. Furthermore, others argue that bracketing may be necessary at different stages of the research, (LeVasseur, 2003; Chan 2013), making it both challenging and context dependent.

4.10 Open-Minded bracketing

Bracketing was deemed necessary at the start of each interview but less relevant during later stages and analysis. Consequently, this study adopted what it terms, ***"open-minded bracketing."*** Initially, bracketing was applied to suspend the researcher's assumptions and prior knowledge, consistent with Husserl (1927)'s principle of achieving pure understanding. However, the "***open-minded"*** aspect reflects the researcher's engagement during interviews, listening, observing, and reflecting where prior experiences and knowledge were occasionally drawn upon to formulate follow-up questions and deepen understanding. This approach aligns with Heideggerian phenomenology, which emphasises openness (Heidegger, 1962; Watson, 2024) and allows for the creative extension of phenomenological practice. It also resonates with the concept of "*eidetic reduction,"* whereby researchers use imaginative variation and prior experience to explore alternative interpretations and actions after each interview (Smith et al., 2009, p.97). While Husserl's notion of bracketing informed the initial suspension of assumptions, Heidegger's interpretive stance guided subsequent questioning and analysis, enabling richer insights, leading to the identification of ***"open-minded bracketing."***

Phenomenology does not prescribe a fixed reflective framework; therefore, an appropriate model was required. Several cycles were considered, including Gibbs' (1988) reflective framework, which was ultimately deemed less relevant. Instead, Schön's (1991) reflective cycle described by Gould and Taylor (2017) as essential in social work research was adopted. Its structure and guiding questions supported the researcher's learning and focus during and after interviews. Adapted questions (see Figure-3) shaped the researcher's reasoning about applying prior knowledge and experience before, during, and after each interview. The first question whether the researcher knew anything about participants' experiences was consistently answered in the negative, as no prior knowledge existed until participants began sharing. Subsequent data either enabled or constrained the researcher's ability to draw on prior experience for interpretation and further questioning.

Figure-3 Schon's 1991 Reflective Model

Knowledge in Action

- Do I already know something about the situation?
- If yes, does that information help or hinder the research?
- Do I expect to receive specific information?
- The answer to that question is no, as that expectation would encourage bias.

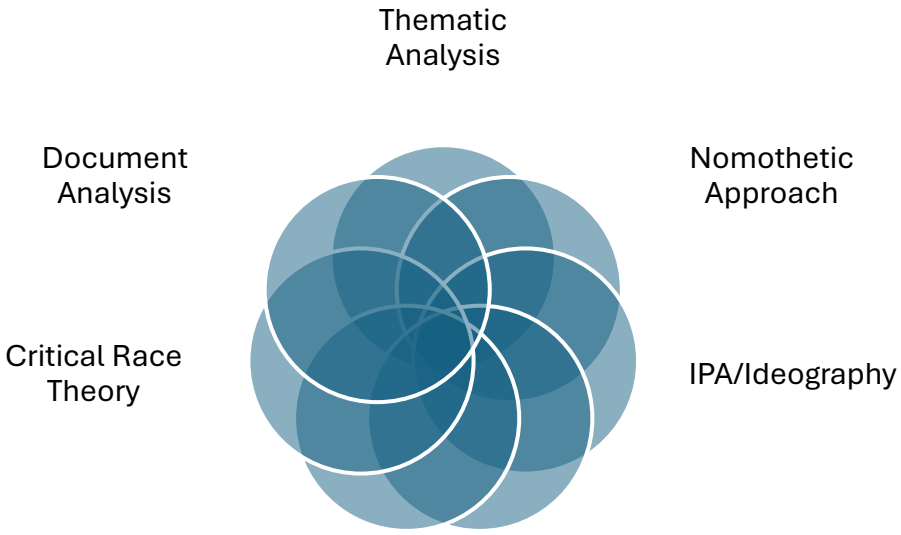
Reflection IN Action

- What is happening?
- What is the participant feeling?
- What other factors are involved?
- How does the participant feel about the experience they are sharing (check body language, facial expressions) before proceeding.
- What other questions can I ask to clarify the meaning/reaction and or expression.
- What does the participant make of their shared experiences?

Reflection ON Action

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- How can we deal with this situation in future?
- Is there any new information gained from the experience?
- What do I, the researcher make of the shared information (identifying and naming themes, analysis).

Figure (4) Overview of the Data Analysis Framework.



4.11 Thematic Analysis

To promote the best possible outcomes, researchers who employ qualitative research designs have been encouraged to consider utilising a variety of tools (as shown on figure-4) rather than one (Miles and Huberman, 2013). Hence, a range of techniques including thematic analysis (TA), document analysis (DA), IPA, Ideography, CRT, and a small part of the nomothetic (cross-case analysis) approach as part of a framework to analyse data were applied in this research. Stuckey (2014) suggests that it is important for the researcher to transcribe the data as this will enable them to familiarise with main concepts, making it easier to analyse the data at a later stage. Therefore, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

IPA enabled the exploration of each experience, teasing out certain issues and exploring how they possibly affected each participant, social work practice or children and families. However, thematic analysis was selected after noting that IPA and various schools of thought within phenomenology, including Giorgi (2009) were yet to develop a step-by-step guidance for data analysis, although they agree on the identification of themes. The six stages of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) were adopted in the process of

analysing the data (see Appendix-C). That meant the researcher had to start from phase one which is based on familiarisation with the data. IPA supports deep analysis and the re-reading of transcripts to gain a better understanding (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, the researcher repeatedly played the recorded videos while writing down (transcribing) what was said by both the interviewee and the interviewer. Notes were recorded for initial thoughts/ feelings, emotions, and biases. This led to the development of codes, which have been defined as descriptive words/phrases enabling the identification of overarching ideas or patterns emerging from the data, these have been referred to as "*themes*", (Braun and Clarke, 2014 p.34). Simultaneously, the researcher sought themes validation from the group of experts before rounding off with overall data analyses. Overall, the support offered meant the director of studies and other supervisors checked if themes identified were congruent with the data from participants.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis uses inductive analysis which is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it with a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. Additionally, Labra et al. (2019) insist that it promotes the identification of common patterns and themes which include verbatim data from participants; this discourages biases and promotes reliability. However, Braun and Clarke (2014) argue that focusing on common themes may lead to the exclusion of less common but essential data. In acknowledgement, ideography which has been credited for promoting case studies through the application of individual experiences was applied in chapter six, before introducing a cross-case analysis in chapter seven (Wagstaff et al., 2014). Generally, the idiographic approach was applied to aid the understanding of individual data before a group analysis. Bryman (2012) states that findings from this small-scale study (7 participants) are neither generalisable nor representative of the population. However, he agrees that they can be used to understand deep issues, leading to recommendations for larger and generalisable studies; hence, findings from this study will be used for those purposes.

4.12 Reflexive process

Husserl (1927) emphasised that "*focusing our experiencing gaze on our own psychic life necessarily takes place as reflection,"* in (Smith et al., 2009, p.12), introducing what he termed

the reflexive process. This process enables researchers to attend to values, emotions, and non-verbal cues during data collection. Similarly, Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic approach extends analysis beyond spoken words to include participants' body language. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) further argue that revisiting facial expressions through recorded interviews can reveal underlying characteristics embedded in non-verbal communication.

While Parker (2014) notes that traditionalists often view online interviews as a convenience rather than a rigorous method, this study adopted online interviews for practical reasons, including participant preference and the mutual agreement to avoid travel. To maintain depth, the researcher repeatedly reviewed recorded interviews, allowing the reflexive process to unfold (Smith et al., 2009). Notes were taken using Schön's (1991) reflective cycle, capturing significant observations that may have been overlooked during live interviews.

Coding began with initial ideas and impressions, followed by grouping related data segments to identify patterns. In Phase Three, the researcher revisited these codes, assessing connections and developing vignettes and case studies using recurring words and concepts. This iterative process facilitated theme identification, incorporating both verbatim extracts and interpretative statements presented as mini-statements, sentences, and short phrases. Similar concepts were grouped manually: transcripts were printed, colour-coded to highlight emotions and meanings, and physically cut out, and arranged to cluster related ideas. This line-by-line approach ensured thorough coding and theme development. Although qualitative software such as NVivo was initially considered (Wong, 2008), manual coding proved more efficient and allowed closer engagement with the data. This hands-on process supported the interpretative depth required by the study's phenomenological approach.

4.13 Identification of Themes

The six phases of thematic analysis were followed rigorously (see Appendix-C). At the fifth stage, themes were validated by an expert group, a process considered essential for enhancing the credibility of qualitative research (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Additionally, individual experiences were compared across participants, with commonalities and divergences identified prior to detailed analysis; however, this was only commenced at the end of chapter six, where superordinate themes were identified, leading to a more comprehensive cross-case analysis in chapter seven.

4.14 Document Analysis

Once themes were validated, Document Analysis (DA) was employed to critically examine selected policy documents. Prior (2003) defines DA as a systematic research tool for identifying, reviewing, and analysing existing documents or texts, making it a useful complement to other methods such as interviews. Dalglish et al. (2020, p.1426) emphasise that DA is essential for understanding the goals of policy documents and propose a structured process known as *READ,* meaning, *"ready materials, extract data, and distil findings."* This approach ensures that researchers identify relevant materials, extract key information, and synthesise findings concisely (Bowen, 2009).

When conducting DA, attention must be paid to specific aspects such as policy chapters, language, and the meanings conveyed by word choices (Rapley, 2009). Morgan (2022) notes that DA reduces ethical concerns because the documents analysed are publicly available; however, he cautions that DA results are inherently subjective, as different researchers may interpret the same documents differently. Although Thematic Analysis could have been applied to analyse documents, Morgan (2022) argues that this approach is often time-consuming due to its multiple stages. Therefore, DA was selected to complement interview findings and to raise critical questions about policy effectiveness in relation to this study and existing literature.

4.15 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approaches adopted in this research. The study was underpinned by a constructivist epistemology, which informed the use of qualitative methods. These methods align closely with phenomenology and IPA, as participants were

encouraged to articulate their lived-experiences in response to the research questions, a principle central to Husserl's focus on first-person experience (Frechette and Taieb, 2023). CRT also shaped the methodological choices, (as identified on chapter-3.5) enabling participants to explore race-related experiences directly linked to the study's aims.

This PhD study with limited time to complete, meant time-constraints played a role in the decision to conduct interviews away from LAs who would have required a longer period to process ethical approval. Although this may appear as a limitation, it enabled participants to share sensitive data which they would have not felt comfortable to disclose if the interviews had been conducted within their organisations. Additionally, conducting interviews privately also promoted voluntary participation, since participants had to use their own time rather than in organisations where the interview time would have been conducted during their working hours. Furthermore, LAs would have likely selected participants with positive experiences, leaving inappropriate practices concealed. Overall, the shared emphasis of phenomenology and IPA on lived-experience justified the selection of IPA as the primary analytical approach, ensuring alignment with the research questions. The next chapter details the research design.

Chapter-5. Study Design.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the practicalities in the design of this research which includes two phases. Phase one focuses on the main participants while phase two is based on a group of experts validating themes from the research. Ethics approval and the researcher's reflections on factors influencing the design and conduct of the study preparations have been included.

5.2 Phase one

The study design was developed to explore themes emerging from the first-year experiences of statutory children and family NQSWs and IQSWs from EMGs within England. The approach aimed to provide participants with an opportunity to share their experiences in a single semi-structured interview. This aligns with IPA, which advocates for in-depth interviews that enable the researcher to explore how participants feel about their experiences and the meanings they attribute to them (Smith et al., 2009). To ensure accuracy of the data, each participant was invited to review or discuss their transcripts at a later stage. However, none of the participants requested access to their transcripts, citing the demanding schedules within statutory children's services as the primary barrier. Table-6 outlines the researcher's actions during the planning and data collection phases.

Table-6. Planning Stage

Planning Stage	Data Collection
▪ Ethics Approval for the main study granted by the university ethics team. ▪ Searched for pilot study participants. ▪ Pilot study begins. ▪ Advertised the research on Community Care. ▪ Responded to early contacts from potential participants. ▪ Briefed participants ▪ Shared the Participant information sheet and the consent form with potential participants who had expressed an interest. ▪ Gave participants time to read the information, reflect before being able to say if they would like to continue. ▪ Encouraged those interested to identify an hour slot on their diaries where they could fit the interview. ▪ Encouraged potential participants to sign and return the signed consent. ▪ Sent a Zoom link for the interview once a signed consent form had been received. ▪ Post approval Ethics application for experts to review the themes from the research.	▪ Semi-structured interviews for the pilot study. ▪ Transcribing the data collected from the pilot study. ▪ Pilot study analysis/Thematic analyses applied. ▪ Writing a reflection from the pilot study. ▪ Conducted interviews via zoom. ▪ Recorded interviews and saved data on the university secure drive (Q-drive). ▪ Transcribed interviews ▪ Post approval ethical approval granted. ▪ Analysed the data on transcripts. ▪ Writing of thesis.

5.3 Ethics Approval

According to Silverman (2020), research ethics provide a framework of instructions that guide the researcher's conduct during and after the study. Consequently, ethical approval is mandatory for all research involving human participants and must be obtained prior to any contact with potential participants (Watson & Gelling, 2012). Whittaker (2012) further argues that all parties involved in research are vulnerable and therefore require protection, emphasising the importance of securing ethical approval before commencing data collection.

In line with these principles, this study obtained ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee. The application process, managed through the Converis system, included submission and approval of the Data Management Plan, Participant Information Sheet, Risk Assessment, Consent Form, Interview Schedule, Invitation to Participate, and briefing procedures for participants before and after the research. Ethical considerations addressed participants' rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018), including the right to withdraw, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and procedures for recording, transcribing, storing, and using data. These measures were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee.

5.4 Storage of Data and Confidentiality

All participants received a Participant Information Sheet that outlined the purpose of the study, the procedures for data handling, and compliance with the (GDPR, 2018), and relevant University policies. Master copies of all participant data were securely stored within the University's networked Research Store. To ensure confidentiality, identifiable information within transcripts such as the names of employing organisation were removed. However, selected verbatim quotations have been retained to preserve the authenticity and precision of participants' contributions. Following dissemination of the findings, only the participant who provided the data and the researcher will be able to identify the source of any verbatim extracts. However, individuals who participated in the focus group may recognise contributions made by others within that group.

5.5 Participant Population

Participants in this study included BME NQSWs and IQSWs. The King's Fund (2023) highlights that BME individuals consistently report poorer experiences of health service provision compared to White populations in the UK. These disparities extend to clinical outcomes, with EMGs exhibiting higher mortality rates from conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as well as elevated rates of stillbirth and infant mortality.

Socioeconomic deprivation has been identified as a key determinant contributing to these inequalities with the Health Foundation (2025) noting social isolation often resulting from

limited access to family and community networks as exacerbating vulnerability, increasing the risk of mental health conditions such as stress and depression, which may influence professional functioning. The Health Foundation (2025, p.2) asserts that "*social determinants of health, health-related behaviours and the impact of discrimination and racism all interact*" to compound these disadvantages. Therefore, this study takes a position that despite being qualified professionals, participants in this research are all vulnerable, since they emerge from a vulnerable population. Recognising this vulnerability is critical for the research design, particularly in relation to ethical considerations, recruitment strategies, and interpretation of findings. The study therefore adopts an approach that foregrounds equity and sensitivity, ensuring that data collection and analysis processes acknowledge the intersection of professional identity and systemic disadvantage.

5.6 Contingent Purposive Sampling.

Silverman (2020) defines sampling as a selection of a small number of units/objects or individuals from a population of interest. The contingent purposive sampling which enables researchers to select participants with relevant experiences was applied in this research (Bryman ,2012). This approach promotes flexibility in representation as it evolves throughout the research process as opposed to *a priori* approach which starts with fixed participants (Emmel, 2014). The first participant's data including ethnicity, gender and place of birth was used to determine the next target sample's geographical location within the selected population. Therefore, the sampling strategy shifted as questions in the interview multiplied or changed. Additionally, this approach availed the flexibility to fill gaps caused by failed access to certain participants and allowed their replacement. Furthermore, this approach allowed the researcher to use the already shared data to select the next target sample. For example, after a few interviews, there was commonality in the data shared by female participants. Therefore, the next target sample shifted to males who shared different information. However, this approach may have restricted some potential participants, especially if they did not fit into the next target sample. Seven participants in line with IPA's in-depth analysis were interviewed (Smith et al., 2009). Had the recruitment required a larger sample, recruitment strategies would have been adapted accordingly, however, saturation was achieved as no new themes emerged after having interviewed seven participants

5.7 Researcher Positionality and Recruitment Dynamics

The researcher's positionality mirroring that of the participants likely influenced recruitments. Some potential participants appeared to perceive the researcher as an outsider due to his pursuit of a doctoral degree, which may have discouraged participation. Conversely, shared professional identity appeared to foster trust among others, encouraging engagement. In certain cases, potential participants expressed aspirations to pursue doctoral studies themselves, which may have shaped their decision-making. These dynamics illustrate the nuanced role of positionality in qualitative research and will be further examined in the reflexivity section. Additionally, the demanding nature of statutory social work (Ravalier et al., 2021) likely constrained participation, as involvement required sacrificing personal time rather than organisational hours.

IPA typically employs small, purposive samples of approximately six to ten participants to enable in-depth exploration (Smith et al., 2009). In line with this guidance, recruitment commenced through an advert placed on the Community Care website, a UK-based platform for social care and social work professionals (Community Care, 2024). This approach generated initial interest from 55 potential participants. However, a substantial proportion subsequently withdrew, often without explanation. Some cited time constraints within statutory children's social work as a barrier to participation, while others expressed concerns regarding confidentiality and potential repercussions should their identities be inferred from shared data. For example, one individual withdrew at the final stage, fearing that disclosure of practice experiences might compromise job security. Although withdrawal may have protected this individual, it raises concerns about the treatment of BME social workers in statutory children services. Such concerns underscore the sensitivity of the topic and suggest that organisational cultures may inhibit open dialogue among BME social workers.

Although withdrawal may have protected participants from perceived risks, it also highlights the possibility that problematic practices remain unreported. Despite these challenges, the researcher shared the leaflet with other social workers recommended to him by friends. Interested individuals were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form and given adequate time to reflect before deciding whether to participate. Ultimately, more participants consented to take part making the total number of participants seven. While this

number may appear modest relative to initial interest, it reflects both the methodological emphasis on depth and the contextual constraints affecting participation (Smith et al., 2009). Overall, having only seven participants out of a possible 55 meant, it was not easy to convince people to participate, hence it required the researcher to be creative and adaptive, in identifying different tools to encourage participation; this revealed some of the hardships of conducting a PhD study. However, it would have been even harder to select a maximum of 10 participants if all 55 respondents had opted into the study. This would have left 45 potential participants disappointed, and the researcher would have had to justify to them, providing sensible reasons why they were excluded. That had a potential to discourage them from future involvement. Thus, having a few participants could be seen as positive, since none of potential participants were left disappointed by their non-participation.

5.8 Financial Incentives

Incentives are widely recognised as an ethically acceptable means of encouraging participation in social research, provided they do not exert undue influence (Gross & Bettencourt, 2019). In this study, the initial recruitment phase revealed that workload pressures within statutory children's services posed a significant barrier to participation. One potential participant explicitly stated that they could not justify allocating time to research without receiving some form of incentive. Following consultation with the supervisory team, the researcher applied for and obtained approval to offer shopping vouchers valued at £30 per participant. At this stage, a few participants had already been interviewed; therefore, vouchers were retrospectively distributed to those participants. It was anticipated that the introduction of incentives would enhance recruitment; however, the impact was minimal, since it only attracted one additional participant who had previously suggested the use of incentives. This experience underscores the complexity of recruiting BME social workers whose participation may be constrained by organisational pressures, confidentiality concerns, and competing priorities. The limited effect of incentives suggests that structural and contextual factors, rather than financial considerations, were the primary determinants of participation. Table 7 represents the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table-7 Participant-Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
All participants must have started their first-year in social work practice and have qualified from 2014 onwards.	NQSWs from EMGs who did not undertake their first year of social work in statutory children services.
NQSW participants must have started or completed the ASYE programme in statutory children social work practice in England.	NQSWs from EMGs who started their first year in social work practice before the year 2014. NQSWs from EMGs who are employed in private settings.
All participants must be from BME groups.	All white British qualified social workers are excluded.
All NQSWs from EMGs are included regardless of any other potential characteristic as defined under the Equality Act 2010.	All NQSWs from EMGs s who did or who are doing their first-year of social work practice in adult teams are excluded.
All social workers from EMGs who qualified outside the UK but started working in the UK from 2014 onwards have been included.	
All NQSWs from EMGs who did their ASYE program in statutory children services but moved to adult services on completion of the programme.	

5.9 Consent and Pre-Interview Briefing

Following initial contact, each potential participant was provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, allowing sufficient time for review before deciding whether to opt into or out of the study. In some cases, participants requested an oral briefing to clarify aspects of the research prior to deciding. These briefings were conducted via telephone, after which participants who agreed to take part signed and returned their consent forms.

All potential participants were asked to record their personal information including age, ethnicity, gender, geographical location, location where social work education was obtained, place and country of birth, years since qualified as social workers and years since living in England. However, some did not feel comfortable detailing their personal data.

5.10 Online interviews

All interviews were conducted via Zoom, with the researcher located either at home or in a private university room. This approach was selected for its efficiency and flexibility, enabling participants and the researcher to schedule interviews without the logistical constraints of travel (Opara et al., 2021). Virtual interviewing also facilitated broader access to participants, which would have been more challenging during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it allowed participants to engage from locations of their choice, outside their workplaces and at times convenient to them (de Villiers et al., 2021). Overall, the use of Zoom proved effective in supporting the research process, offering both practical and methodological advantages.

Critics may argue that face-to-face interviews offer more advantages over virtual platforms, particularly in enabling the establishment of rapport with participants. Tickle (2017) emphasises that rapport is essential for fostering open communication and encouraging disclosure, which can reduce response bias by allowing participants to share authentic experiences rather than those they believe the researcher wishes to hear. Rapport is especially critical when working with vulnerable populations who may fear that sharing sensitive information could lead to adverse consequences, such as job insecurity (Kitamura, 2017). However, Schmid et al. (2024) caution that rapport can introduce ethical tensions if boundaries are not clearly maintained. Excessive familiarity may lead participants to perceive the researcher as a friend, potentially encouraging informal behaviour or inhibiting disclosure of essential data (Tickle, 2017). To mitigate these risks, professional boundaries were explicitly discussed during oral briefings, and participants agreed to these terms prior to participation.

Despite the perceived benefits of face-to-face interviews, de Villiers et al. (2021) argue that body language can be misinterpreted and, if interviews were not recorded, cannot be revisited for verification. In contrast, recorded virtual interviews allow researchers to review visual and

verbal cues repeatedly, enhancing interpretative accuracy. Furthermore, de Villiers et al. (2021) contend that rapport can be successfully established in virtual settings, as social, relational, and cultural factors often facilitate meaningful researcher-participant connections online.

While traditionalists may perceive virtual platforms as less credible (Parker, 2014; de Villiers et al., 2021), practical considerations strongly favoured online interviews in this study. All participants indicated that time constraints and travel requirements would have prevented their involvement in face-to-face interviews. Consequently, Zoom was adopted as the most viable option, balancing methodological integrity with accessibility and participant convenience.

5.11 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary investigation designed to test the feasibility of the research design, including its methods, theoretical framework, and core concepts, prior to the main study (Ismail et al., 2018). It enables researchers to refine research questions and identify any necessary adjustments before full implementation. In this study, three experienced social workers participated in the pilot phase. They were identified by the supervisory team and provided with all relevant documentation, including the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, which they signed prior to participation.

The pilot interviews employed the same semi-structured questions intended for the main study, allowing the researcher to assess their clarity and relevance. This process provided an opportunity to evaluate the interview schedule, test the data collection procedures, and ensure alignment with the IPA methodology applied in this study. Additionally, the pilot phase enabled the researcher to develop interviewing skills, thereby enhancing confidence and preparedness for the main data collection.

5.12 Pilot - Study reflections

At the start of each pilot interview, I was nervous as this was my first time to face participants in a research interview. These interviews provided me with the awareness of difficulties associated with qualitative research methods. Initially, I presumed that it would be easy to get people to share their experiences answering the research question. However, despite having spent almost half an hour on the first question alone, shared experiences hardly addressed the

research question on the first pilot interview. Additionally, an IT issue that forced me to end the first interview prematurely, enabled me to ensure that I had logged onto the appropriate Zoom account for the main interviews. Therefore, the pilot interviews improved my preparation.

Despite the earlier nervous tension which had affected me, my confidence levels improved with time. However, at times, it felt as if I had given participants plenty of time to speak, diverting the control of the interview from myself to the participants. Hence, I used that experience to ensure that clarity was improved, and the experiences shared addressed the research questions. Overall, the pilot study was invaluable in preparing me for the main interviews, both by identifying procedural weaknesses and by fostering reflexivity regarding my role and influence within the interview process. Zahavi (2015) stresses that sharing emotional experiences can make participants emotional or excited, leading them to provide detailed information which may not address the research questions. Therefore, I ensured that I listened carefully and diverted the discussions towards the research questions where I felt they were not addressed.

Findings from the pilot interviews informed several refinements to the research design. Participant responses indicated that some questions required restructuring to be more direct, thereby improving clarity and facilitating the collection of data aligned with the research objectives. This adjustment ensured that subsequent interviews were more focused and productive.

The pilot study also highlighted practical challenges associated with qualitative interviewing. Some interviews were lengthy yet yielded minimal data relevant to the research question, underscoring the importance of maintaining control over the interview process and employing effective probing techniques. Additionally, memory recall emerged as a limitation; certain participants struggled to remember events that had occurred more than fifteen years earlier. To mitigate this issue, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were revised to prioritise participants who had either qualified within the last ten years or commenced practice in England within the same timeframe if they had qualified abroad. This change enhanced the likelihood of obtaining rich, accurate, and contextually relevant accounts. Overall, the pilot study was instrumental in refining the interview schedule and participant selection criteria, thereby strengthening the methodological rigor and ensuring alignment with the study's IPA methodology.

5.13 Phase Two: Focus Group

Phase Two involved a focus group comprising experienced social work managers, whose role was to validate themes generated from Phase One. Data obtained from the focus group were analysed alongside the initial themes to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the findings.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, selecting participants based on their expertise and professional knowledge. As with Phase One, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Sheffield Hallam University Ethics Committee. Recruitment followed a similar process: a leaflet was placed on the *Community Care* website, attracting eight potential participants who contacted the researcher for further information. Telephone briefings were provided to those requesting clarification. Ultimately, three participants consented to take part, while others opted out. Given the small sample size in Phase One (seven-participants), three participants were deemed sufficient for the focus group, as it allowed for deeper engagement and richer contributions. ``````````````````````````````

To enhance validity, the composition of the focus group reflected the diversity of Phase One participants. For example, because two Phase One participants had qualified overseas, one focus group member with similar experience was included to mirror these perspectives. The remaining two participants had qualified in England, enabling them to critically review themes derived from participants with similar backgrounds. However, all participants were free to comment on any theme regardless of their qualification context.

Participants were given two weeks to request transcripts or withdraw their data. No requests for transcript review or withdrawal were received within this timeframe, and all contributions were retained for analysis.

5.14 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves recognising and critically examining the researcher's influence on the research process and outcomes (Haynes, 2012). Merriam et al. (2010) highlight insider/outsider dynamics, noting how factors such as power, positionality, social class, and socio-economic status shape access to information and participant engagement. In this study, the researcher's

identity as a BME social worker, researching other BME social workers introduced complex positionality considerations.

During recruitment, a pattern of last-minute withdrawals emerged, particularly among African male social workers. While initial interest was strong, conversations often shifted toward personal questions about the researcher's career plans post-PhD and advice on pursuing doctoral studies. Despite engaging in these discussions to build rapport, many individuals subsequently disengaged. This experience suggests that shared ethnicity and professional identity did not uniformly facilitate trust; in some cases, it may have introduced competitive or sceptical dynamics. The researcher reflects on whether these withdrawals might have occurred had they been of a different racial background, underscoring the nuanced interplay between positionality, perceived motives, and participant decision-making.

Khapoya (2012) argues that shared historical experiences of colonisation foster solidarity among Black communities, a notion echoed in Obasi's (2022, p.482) concept of *"Africanist sisterhood"* in studies of Black social workers in Britain. While shared identity appeared to encourage participation for some, it may also have generated unintended tensions, with others perceiving the researcher's involvement as self-serving. These dynamics illustrate how insider status can both enable and constrain research processes, shaping recruitment, rapport, and interpretation of findings. Acknowledging these influences is critical for transparency and ethical practice, as the researcher's presence was not neutral but an active element within the research context.

At the outset of the main interviews, the researcher encountered challenges in controlling the flow of discussion. The first participant was highly passionate, sharing extensive narratives beyond the research questions. While demanding for the researcher, this experience informed strategies for subsequent interviews, ensuring greater focus and alignment with research objectives.

The focus group presented distinct challenges. Unlike individual interviews, participants were required to take turns contributing. However, following the guidance by Silverman (2020) who insist that the moderator must ensure that all participants are given a fair amount of time to speak. It was ensured that each theme was addressed by the participant with relevant knowledge and expertise. Occasionally, participants digressed, requiring intervention to redirect focus. Group dynamics also revealed a tendency toward consensus, with participants supporting rather than challenging each other's views, consistent with Janis's (1982, p.12) observation that "*loyalty requires each member to avoid controversial issues*." While this promotes harmony (Rose, 2011), it limits the expression of individual experiences, contrasting with the depth achieved in one-to-one interviews and highlighting a limitation of focus groups in research.

The UK Research and Innovation (2025) asserts that issues of anonymity and confidentiality must be always maintained, hence, researchers must describe the nature of benefits and risks to potential participants and detail how the identified risks would be mitigated. This process was conducted; however, some potential participants may have felt that the risks outweighed the benefits and therefore decided to withdraw. While some may have genuinely feared being identified through their data, others may have feared that their experiences might be used extractively to benefit the researcher's career, or to promote Western narratives but not providing any advantages to participants (Adams, 2014).

Research suggest that black people offer the lowest opportunities of engagement in research, clinical trials and blood donation (Godden et al., 2010; Hilario et al., 2023, Jackson-Cole, 2019; Vindrolla-Padros et al., 2025). Woolf et al. (2021 assert that large numbers of potential participants usually appear among the black community following a research advertisement. However, many of those who initially express an interest would withdraw often without any reason given, as seen in this study. Vindrolla-Padros et al. (2025) insist that the strict ethical procedures including having to sign consent forms is seen as a subtle way of legitimising the breach of confidentiality, forcing many to abstain.

According to Eizadirad et al. (2022) it has become a norm for scholars to apply Western narratives of colonialism in associating black people with inferiority, vulnerability, oppression,

suffering and pain. However, Afro-centric studies (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Tusasiirwe, 2022, Smith, 2022; Gray et al., 2016, Tinarwo, 2011; Ifeakandu and Omonigho , 2025) argue that the history of colonialism should not be used to continuously associate black people with anguish and misery, since many black people occupy high leadership roles in society. Perhaps, this association made them feel as if I was representing a Western narrative, using them as a means to an end, for my career advancement, hence, discouraged them from engagement.

5.15 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the study design and described the two phases of data collection, which were later integrated during theme validation. While recruiting only seven participants from an initial pool of 55 may appear to be a limitation, it aligns with the targeted sample size of six to ten participants recommended for IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). Although a larger sample might have offered broader perspectives, it could also have introduced practical and ethical challenges, such as selecting a subset and managing participant expectations. Conversely, the limited number of participants suggests that some individuals may have perceived the research topic as sensitive, prompting withdrawal as illustrated by some potential participants who expressed concerns about potential repercussions if identified. Nevertheless, the initial response from 55 individuals demonstrates the effectiveness of the recruitment strategy and the reach of the Community Care platform, indicating continued interest in the study's outcomes among those who did not participate. Although withdrawal may have protected potential participants from perceived risks, it also highlights the possibility that problematic practices, particularly in relation to the treatment of black social workers, remain concealed.

Overall, the researcher's shared positionality with participants may have discouraged and equally encouraged participation. Those who withdrew in the last minute may have perceived the researcher as somebody who wanted to use them to advance his career as they asked personal questions on the researcher's next steps if he succeeded in the PhD programme. However, the shared colonial history may have encouraged some participants to perceive the researcher as one of them (Khapoya, 2012, hence felt encouraged to support him. The next chapter presents participants' individual descriptive accounts of their lived-experiences.

Chapter-6. Results-Descriptive Idiographic Accounts

6.1. Introduction

This chapter includes two phases; phase one presents results in the form of ideographic accounts from seven participants. However, context is given to supervision which plays an integral role in this research, before the start of phases one and two where participants are introduced. The running commentary's style of writing, perceived as an active observation which promoted immediate focus on events (Day, 1990) in (Engin 2015), meant literature analysis on supervision was deliberately positioned here, so it could act as an instant guide/reminder for the reader on what may be expected in supervision. This will provide a better understanding of events during the interviews.

6.2 The Functions of Supervision

Social Work England (2023a) defines supervision as the structured support provided by managers, mentors, or peers to social workers. This encompasses case discussions, reflective learning, promoting wellbeing, reviewing interventions, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring decisions align with legal and statutory requirements.

According to Carpenter et al. (2012, p.89), supervision is "*one of the core components"* of NQSWs' programmes and serves three essential functions. The first involves case management, including the quality of decision-making and the ability to handle allocated caseloads. This typically requires reviewing intervention plans and evaluating the skills applied in risk assessments (Weiss-Dagan et al., 2018). The second function is reflective, encouraging social workers to critically examine their decisions and actions (Carpenter et al., 2012). The third function integrates the previous two, focusing on professional development through ongoing reflection and experiential learning (Choi, 2017). Overall, Laming (2009, p.32) identifies supervision as a "*cornerstone"* of effective social work practice, emphasizing critical thinking to improve outcomes for service users.

6.3. Literature Review on supervision

Ravalier et al. (2023) conducted a rapid review of the literature on reflective supervision in social work, identifying twenty-seven relevant studies, with several UK-based articles forming the

basis of this discussion. Wilson (2013) emphasises the supervisor–supervisee relationship as fundamental to effective reflection. However, McPherson et al. (2016) argue that while this relationship is important, it must remain professional, grounded in mutual respect and confidentiality. Similarly, Pitt et al. (2021 p. 112) highlight the value of an "*open-door"* policy, which enables supervisees to access needs-based supervision beyond scheduled sessions. Yet, practical constraints such as staff shortages in children's services often limit the feasibility of such approaches (Hair, 2013).

Group case discussions have also been identified as a mechanism for promoting reflexivity, allowing social workers to learn from peers and critically examine their own practice (Bingle & Middleton, 2019). Nevertheless, Patterson (2017 p.480) notes that managerial workloads necessitate adapting supervisory functions to accommodate these roles, stressing the need for "*space and structure to process the emotional, intellectual and practical challenges of their work"*. Lawlor (2013) further advocates for regular supervisor training, reporting that reflective practice training enhances the quality of supervision. Despite these benefits, Webb and Carpenter (2012) caution that high staff turnover and time pressures often hinder the implementation of group supervision alongside traditional sessions. Reduced funding exacerbates these challenges, leading to unmanageable workloads and limiting opportunities for regular reflective sessions (Pitt et al., 2021).

Frequent regulatory changes have also shifted supervision towards administrative and task-oriented approaches, reducing time for direct work with children and prioritising accountability over professional development (Wilson, 2013). In contrast, Ravalier et al. (2023 p. 1955) identify regular supervision and recognition of social worker autonomy as "*key enablers of reflexivity*". Sporadic or case-focused supervision, however, restricts opportunities for practitioners to process emotions and experiences, diminishing the therapeutic benefits of reflective practice (Gregory, 2024).

Shulman and Safyer (2006 p.16) warn that if supervision's developmental purpose is undermined, it risks becoming "*case management and gatekeeping",* with supervisors adopting controlling behaviours that stifle reflection and professional growth. Consequently, regardless

of the selected model, systemic issues such as high staff turnover often compel managers to modify their supervisory approach (Ravalier et al., 2021).

6.4 Supervision Models

Viscu and Rad (2024) conducted a literature review on supervision models applied within social work practice, which highlighted a range of models, including the three identified below. The first model is the Social Role Model of Supervision which conceptualizes supervision through defined roles, tasks, and processes, alongside its core functions such as monitoring caseloads, reviewing decisions, and ensuring effective intervention strategies (Basa, 2017; Weiss-Dagan et al., 2018). While Becker and Bradley (2022) emphasise the importance of training and the supervisor–supervisee relationship for successful implementation, they caution that power imbalances can hinder relationship-building.

The second model identified is Bernard (1979)'s Discrimination Model that integrates educational and relational dimensions. It emphasises developing competence in core skills such as "*reflection, probing, restatement, summarisation, and interpretation*" (p.61). A key feature of the model is its focus on "*training supervisors"* to equip them with the necessary skills to deliver high-quality supervision (p.63). However, Barden and Crunk (2024) argue that the model's effectiveness is contingent upon trust within the supervisory relationship. This aligns with McPherson et al.'s (2016 p. 72) assertion that supervision must create a "*point of safety,"* requiring supervisors to engage in deep listening and atonement to the supervisee. Despite these challenges, this model remains widely applied in social work and psychotherapy contexts (Basa, 2017).

The third model identified is the Integrative Model, which seeks to facilitate both adaptation and ongoing development of social workers (Basa, 2017). Central to this framework is the establishment of a strong professional relationship between supervisor and supervisee, ensuring adequate support for role adjustment while fostering continuous growth (Viscu & Rad, 2024). As noted by Viscu and Rad (2024), "*supervision is a tool for maintaining professional lucidity"* (p.368), underscoring the model's emphasis on professional development, a theme recognised in the literature (Basa, 2017; McPherson et al., 2016). However, Becker and Bradley (2022) argue that despite supervisory support, supervisees may fail to acquire essential practice skills. Despite these limitations, this model is widely applied in social work supervision (Basa, 2017).

6. 5 The Participants

All participants signed the consent forms and voluntarily opted into the study after their initial questions on how the data would be used had been answered. Participants have been renamed as **Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Foxtrot, Eco, and Golf**, using the phonetic alphabet for anonymity reasons. However, they do not specifically follow the alphabetic order of their names. The first five participants, (as displayed on table 8) **Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta** and **Foxtrot** qualified in England while the last two, **Eco** and **Golf** qualified overseas. Phase-two (as displayed on table 9) is comprised of three participants named **Hotel, India** and **Juliet.** Each participant (phase-one) will be discussed individually to address the three research questions of this study. These three (supervision and support, workload management, and social workers leaving) are presented as subheadings. IQSW-participants have an additional question related to their arrival experiences. However, each participant's data will be aided by analyses from phase-two, presented as the conclusion of each participant's account. Notwithstanding that, all the individual participant findings will be discussed collectively in chapter seven where a cross-case analysis will be initiated.

Table-8 Essential participant and Interview details

Participant name	Gender	Interview duration	Video-clip availability	Audio-clip availability
Alpha	Female	36 minutes	Accidentally deleted	available
Bravo	Female	50 minutes	available	available
Charlie	Female	47 minutes	available	available
Delta	Male	39 minutes	available	available
Foxtrot	Male	51 minutes	available	available
Eco	Male	49 minutes	available	available
Golf	Female	57 minutes	available	available

Table-9 Theme-Validation Focus Group Details

Participant name	Expertise	Gender	Discussion-duration.	Video-Clip availability	Audio-clip availability
Hotel	Exp SW, Practice educator, AMHP, manager, lecturer.	Male	02h15 minutes	available	available
India	Exp/SW/Practice educator/manager	Male	02h15 minutes	available	available
Juliet	Ex IQWS/ manager/ lecturer.	Female	O2h 15 minutes	available	available

6.5.1 Participant Alpha.

Vignette: Female of African origin, qualified in England within the last five years.

6.5.2 Supervision and support

Alpha: '*I hit the ground running, when I started, most people were off, there was that crisis, and I was sent out as the lead social worker with an adolescent practitioner, and I needed to manage it as a social worker" (V. 08:38)*. The use of the phrase, "*hit the ground running",* suggests that the participant was highly **Code;** driven and motivated by the fast start and remained eager to withstand any challenges. **(Emergent-theme):** *the power of optimism and self-confidence***.** That way, she was able to bring the best out of conditions that would have been easily considered unacceptable.

Induction:

"I didn't get an induction." (V. 09:20). **(emergent-theme)** *Induction undermined. "I had 3 days where I had to do LCS training which enabled me to use the local authority system, and the next day I got cases" (V. 09:20).* ***Alpha:*** *"I was sat there as a lead social worker" (V.08: 35).* **Codes:** anxiety, confusion. The participant had to chair a meeting as a lead social worker after having completed only a three-day mandatory training to access the system. She neither had shadowing experience nor exposure to the children social worker's role since her last placement as a student was in adult teams.

Alpha: *"at times I would go on joint visits with experienced colleagues where I felt I needed that support" (V. 8:10).* The participant took the initiative to ask for support from senior staff. She was **(codes):** *driven*, *reflective*. **(emergent-theme):** *The power of critical reflection***.** A less reflective individual would have probably not sought support but complained that the LA did not offer support; such an individual may have likely failed to learn more practice skills from experienced colleagues. The participant was **(Codes):** *shocked, frustrated,* but remained motivated to continue. Such factors could influence non-resilient or immature NQSWs to consider quitting their roles, citing lack of support as the main reason. She recognised the need

for reflection with experienced colleagues particularly her manager through supervision **(Code):** *resilience.* She represents some individuals who can learn in difficult times and overturn negative experiences into positive periods as the participant later passed the ASYE programme and took her career to the next level.

Feelings related to support:

Alpha: *'I didn't have a lot of support. I just felt overwhelmed because most of the time I would go in blindly and do what I thought was right and never got enough opportunity to explore my feelings, we just spoke about cases predominantly", (V. 00:58)*. Going in blindly, suggests that the participant remained (**code):** *anxious* but *driven and hopeful* that she would provide appropriate support despite being unsure. Additionally, diving in and doing what she thought was appropriate also suggests that **Alpha** may have been led by her intuition, rather than logic reasoning, which may lead to the inappropriate provision of services to children. Therefore, by not offering her the formal managerial support she needed, the organisation may have compromised the wellbeing of the children they were supposedly supporting.

Alpha: "*I definitely know that I got a lot of support from my ASYE supervisor, we would sit for hours to talk about cases and to talk about the impact on my emotions and how I was feeling, thinking about why I reacted the way I did, why did I approach the case like that instead of that way*" (V. 05:02). (**emergent-theme):** the *ASYE coordinator was more helpful than her manager.*

Case-oriented supervision:

"We just spoke about cases' **(emergent-theme):** *Case-centred supervision sessions***.** This suggests that reflective support was only offered by the ASYE coordinator who only visited periodically, meaning the participant did not have regular opportunities to explore her feelings. **Alpha** looked disappointed in the lack of emotional support from her manager; however, she expressed empathy for her manager. *"She was an amazing human being. Even when I wasn't well, she would always say to me take time off, don't worry about it and things like that, so you could go to her like that if you had a crisis*". Despite that, the participant acknowledged that her manager was very busy as she had a lot of children and teams to manage. She expressed understanding by saying, "*I do appreciate it must have been difficult for her to meet everyone's needs in terms of supervision because she just got so much going on" (V.06:29)* ***(emergent-***

theme) Using empathy to understand colleagues. "*I think now they have recruited another two managers".* **(emergent-theme): *Alpha's*** *manager likely to have been overworked"*. Therefore, the participant, (**code)**: *accepted* the situation and relied on support from peers and the ASYE coordinator.

Sporadic Supervision sessions:

*"I was expected to write my own supervision records, and she would just sign; it was almost like a tick box exercise" (V.03:55). (**emergent- theme)** creation of supervision notes.*

The participant was happy to pass her first-year in social work practice. She argued that she had to write (falsely-present) her supervision records and send them to the manager for her signature; that could be seen as fraudulent since the participant made it clear that the supervision sessions were sporadic, meaning she was forced to present them as completed before getting them signed by the manager just to meet the requirements of the ASYE programme. The participant's body language suggested that the "*tick-box exercise"* clashed with her professional and personal values. However, she is likely to have felt **(code):** *obligated* to comply since she was powerless to disagree or argue with the manager who had power to influence her ASYE programme result.

Although **Alpha** expressed dissatisfaction with the process of having to detail supervision notes before getting them signed, she remained **(emergent-theme):** *critically reflective* on her own learning needs and did what she had been told to do with the belief that she would pass, and she did. Overall, **Alpha** expressed that her challenging first-year experiences of support encouraged her to develop empathy for NQSWs; hence she has ensured that they are supported, since assuming a leadership role in the same organisation.

6.5.3 Workload management.

Alpha: "*I thought I managed well. I'm a thorough person when I'm doing something, I want to do it well, so, I would always make sure that I am managing time frames" (V. 15:29).* ***(Codes):*** *responsibility, organisation***.** This statement suggests that the participant had to be strict about her job and take responsibility of her caseload.

Prolonged hours

Alpha expressed that at times she had to work prolonged hours to ensure that deadlines on her cases were met. However, she was unable to reclaim TOIL since cases would pile up on return; this indicates that she remained resilient as she withstood all the challenges until she succeeded **(Code:** *commitment*. (**emergent-theme):** *forced to donate resting time to successfully manage workloads*. **Alpha** prioritised cases based on the urgency of needs. **Emergent theme:** *Organisation and prioritisation key to successful workload management*. However, **Alpha** was happy with her protected and gradually increasing caseload, which made it easier for her to manage it.

6.5.4 Social workers leaving

Reasons for social workers exiting roles:

"I think the first one is the pressure of the workload on the worker, managing the demands of different aspects of the job. Managing timeframes and a case where you need to show results can put pressure where the worker is working prolonged hours, causing burnout and end up being sick and off work for a while or just giving up altogether" (V.22:52). (**emergent-theme):** *Unmanageable workloads and insufficient support may lead to burnout which may eventually force social workers to quit their roles*.

Transition from university:

"I think it was a huge-transition from the theoretical aspect to doing what you had been learning, of course I did my placement which was in adult teams" (V.13:40). Although she expressed having theoretical knowledge; her choice of words *"huge-transition,"* suggests that she found social work practice harder than expected. After having completed her last placement in an adults' team, **Alpha** was not expected to find the transition from university to practice in the fast-paced statutory children services easy. Despite that, her maturity and desire to succeed motivated her to remain resilient and continue. (**emergent-theme):** *The effective use of self*.

Racism -related experiences:

"I think it's a personal issue, not personal, you know there are some people who are extra sensitive and there are some people who just let things go, so probably it has happened" (V.31:10). Although she diverted and said 'not personal' after having said it was personal, it was

felt she perceived racism as personal and did not want to say the word personal but accidentally uttered it before immediately withdrawing it and giving a different meaning, worried about what she would be asked next if she had maintained that racism was a personal issue. Additionally, her body language suggested that she did not feel comfortable when talking about racism; therefore, her initial response was also considered.

6.5.5 Themes validation

Apart from questioning the creation of supervision notes, the expert group validated all themes from the participant account. However, **Hotel** indirectly endorsed that idea when he said, *"supervision can be parked out, so the manager would come and provide a three-month supervision in one sitting"* (V.24:13). If a NQSW can work for three months with no formal supervision, or have a formal supervision session of three months in one sitting, how would the supervision help their professional development, and how would they evidence that on the ASYE portfolio? **Alpha** did that by presenting the falsely created monthly supervision notes, if not, she may likely have failed the ASYE programme**.** Overall, lack of a formal induction and adequate formal supervision sessions meant **Alpha's** experiences were largely challenging during her first-year of social work practice. However, a gradually increasing protected caseload means there was a consideration that she was newly qualified who needed support.

6.6.1 Participant Bravo

Vignette: Younger Female of Asian origin. Participant qualified in England in the last five years.

6.6.2 Supervision and support.

Bravo: "*the first three months I had a brilliant manager, she was a practice educator, so she fully understood what she needed to do regarding supervision", (V. 01:46)*. **Codes** *motivation*. However, her joy was short-lived when her supportive manager left their role after those few months. **Code:** *disappointed*.

Bravo: "*the last six months of the ASYE I barely had a supervision, they just left me to it. If you say too much, they say you aren't resilient enough, so you feel like you could not necessarily admit that this upset me", (V. 10:05). So, I would just confide in colleagues than managers because managers you get nothing back", (V.10:29).* ***(Emergent-theme):*** *silenced by the organisational culture*.

Bravo appeared to attribute the support she received on her first three-months to an individual manager rather than to the organisation. **(emergent-theme)**: *managerial changes affected her progress*. Despite lack of consistent formal supervision, **Bravo** remained steadfast as she effectively used self to ask colleagues for support; that highlights the importance of learning organisations. **(Emergent-theme):** *The effective use of self*.

Training:

Bravo: *"I was just thrown into the youth offending with no training specially related to that team". I mean I enjoyed it, and I prefer learning on a job that is difficult", (V. 20:10)*. **Emergent-theme:** *The power of pressure when learning*. Despite being frustrated by lack of training, **Bravo** enjoyed learning under pressure.

When asked to clarify lack of support**, Bravo said,** "*issues of racial disparity within youth offending and social services, the families we worked with, the things that I was seeing and issues that I was raising, they didn't really get acknowledged", (V. 0237). "There is a huge*

problem in youth offending just proportionality, as children from ethnic minorities are more likely to have a harsh sentence", (V. 04:43)". "So, my colleague is like there is no point in saying anything it won't change anything and I'm like no I will always fight", (V. 7:10). "I raised it with senior managers, and one African manager was looking at me and saying it's good that you are passionate, but you can't always change everything, I'm looking at her I'm like why you in this position are you can't help your own people, I don't get it" (V08: 44). This reaction from a BME manager was perhaps unexpected and therefore more concerning to the participant. (**Code):** *silenced*.

Bravo: *"I went to the practice manager the day after court, and I told them what happened, and they were like that's not appropriate".* At that stage **Bravo** was given hope as the practice manager listened, although they could not change the situation for children; this confirms her belief that managers were unable to challenge courts when advocating for BME youths in the justice system. (**Code):** *hope* (**emerging-theme):** *The power of optimism and affirmation of others*.

When prompted to talk about some positive experiences, **Bravo** said, **"***I was too afraid to talk about issues of racism because I thought no one was going to listen",* (V:35:00). (**Code)**; *silenced*. However, she detailed that she had one white manager who listened and gave her space as "amazing". **Emerging-theme**: *being given space to express experiences made her feel appreciated*.

When asked about her manager, she said, "*he was also overworked. We would plan to have supervision but sometimes push it back, but it wasn't monthly, I remember there is a time when two months went by, and I had barely spoken to him", (V13:10). (**Code):** empathy**.** "My ASYE was a shambles, I just kept going, I was like they are giving me too many cases, and I think this involves all local experiences of ASYE in my organisation regardless of your background", (V:11:35).* (**emergent-theme):** *The power of resilience and self-confidence*. This statement suggests that **Bravo** was not treated differently because of her race as others equally had similar experiences. However, she expressed being stressed by micromanaging managers.

Bravo: *"George Floyd passed away in 2020, that's when they think Black Lives Matter was developed, it wasn't, it was developed way before George Floyd passed away", (V. 16:38)*. The experience described impacted **Bravo's** feelings as she felt annoyed when white social workers repeatedly stated that the Black Lives Matter Movement began in 2020 when George Floyd died; this raises questions about the cultural competence of those social workers**.**

Racism experiences:

"I don't think I was racially abused, I felt I was treated equally, it was only when issues of race came up, I felt that they would almost panic or just say nothing (V. 17:40).

Bravo: "*My ASYE supervisor, I would meet him every few months, he would assess my portfolio, he would always say to my manager make sure she has a protected caseload", V.23:38)*. **Bravo** struggled for support as her ASYE supervisor only came periodically, to assess the portfolio, meaning she barely received support from him. Despite having a protected caseload (V23:24), **Bravo** believed she was over-burdened since many of the cases were complex, meaning they took a lot of her time. However, it must be appreciated that the manager considered that **Bravo** was newly qualified, hence needed a protected caseload.

When asked how her sporadic supervision sessions were recorded on her portfolio she said, "*they were recorded but I think the way they were recorded was like something like I'm hush nut about its just practice which is important for your portfolio and being a social worker and anti-discriminatory practice*", (V11:00); meaning they prioritised practice rather than supervision sessions which were later recorded as a tick-box exercise when they did not take place, this could be seen as fraudulent and unacceptable.

6.6.3 Managing workload.

Bravo: *"I had to work late, there were a few occasions where I worked until 4 or 5am to get like work, paperwork done".* **(emergent-theme)***: To pass the ASYE programme,* ***Bravo*** *had to work prolonged hours*. When asked if she was paid for prolonged hours she said*, "Oh no, even now I don't get paid for extra hours", (V:22:53)***;** if her workload was manageable, **Bravo** may not have worked prolonged hours.

Working late:

"That's a given; I don't know any social worker who doesn't work late". (V. 23:10). **(emergent-theme):** *complex and unmanageable workloads led to poor work-life balance for the participant*. **Bravo** expressed that she had to put up with the unmanageable workloads and stay in the LA because she knew she had to complete her ASYE programme there, but unmanageable workloads eventually forced her to leave after she had completed the ASYE programme.

Reflection on university learning:

"Frontline doesn't prepare you for work, they teach you theories and they teach you styles but that doesn't prepare you for the actual job, talking to families, going to court, (V. 20:30)". ***(Emergent-theme)****: the participant believed university fails to prepare students for social work practice.*

6.6.4. Social workers leaving.

Views on why social workers may exit roles:

"*Conflicting priorities, if you must drop everything because there is an emergency on your cases. All that work must be done at some point"* (V. 33:32). "*Social work is very toxic on you both physically and emotionally, I think if you don't have the right support or the job isn't what you wanted, I knew I would enjoy youth offending".* **Emergent-theme:** the toxic nature caused by unmanageable workloads and insufficient support could force many social workers to consider quitting their roles in promotion of their wellbeing.

Bravo argued that social workers needed to find something that would make them switch off and forget about social work when they are not working. **(emergent- theme):** *the importance of self-care skills for social workers.* However, at the end of her ASYE programme, **Bravo** felt she was at the burnout stage; hence she decided to take a break. **Emergent-theme:** the pressure of passing the ASYE programme may be associated with burnout. By taking a break, **Bravo** showed that she had self-care skills as this was a proactive step which meant she remained able to manage her wellbeing.

Bravo's views on agency work.

"I will do that, I just want to get my experience in my next job and I'm going to do it, in every team, I have been working with an agency social worker and I'm thinking you earning double my wages and you doing the same job as me", (V:38:00) **emergent-theme**: *frustration of wage inequality among social workers.*

6.6.5 Themes validation

The expert group validated all the themes from **Bravo's** experiences. However, the group appeared to question the tick-box exercise applied when **Bravo** was asked to create falsified supervision notes before getting them to be signed by her manager. Despite that, **Hotel** admitted that you could stay three months with no formal supervision in statutory children services (**Hotel:** V.24:13; this indirectly validates **Bravo's** claim. Overall, **Bravo** had both positive and challenging experiences during her first-year in social work practice, since she initially received great support before facing challenges at a later stage.

6. 7.1 Participant Charlie.

Vignette: Mature Female of African origin. Participant qualified in England within the last five years.

6.7.2 Supervision and support.

Charlie: "*When I started, they already had cases which they thought should go to me, they needed staff, oh a social worker is starting, we can give this case to them. The first case involved, section 20, which means we were accommodating this child, so that was my first case, accommodating a child, I had never done it before, I didn't know the process, so it was like we go and pick up this child from hospital and this case will be your case, I didn't shadow any visits. I was just guided on how and what to say on the visits," (V.06:55).* **Code:** worry. (**Emergent-theme).** *Induction undermined by* ***Charlie's*** *organisation.*

Training:

"I did some but not a lot of trainings, so a lot of the time because my cases were kicking off my manager would ask me to attend to them during break" (V. 08:30); **Code:** worry.

Supervision and Caseload:

"Supervision wasn't on a regular basis, and I didn't have a protected caseload." (V. 00: 30) ***code:*** *worry, shock. "In the beginning we were able to do it monthly or maybe twice or three times, and then after that it just drifted where I probably went two or three months without supervision", (V. 01:58).* ***Code:*** *anxiety.* She added that even when they did have supervision, they only discussed cases, and she argued that the sporadic supervision sessions were not addressing her professional development since her feelings or adaptation to social work practice was not discussed (V. 02:31). **Emergent-theme:** case-oriented supervision sessions.

Peer support:

"*The team was amazing, that's where I got the support from, the most" (V. 00:57).*

Views on the irregularity case-oriented supervision:

"I was the first for my manager to be doing the ASYE programme, she wasn't sure of what needed to be done to support me. She had to choose going through the process, let's say a lot

of the things we were doing as we go along" (V. 03:03). ***Emergent-theme:*** *manager unfamiliar with supporting NQSW.* This raises questions about suitability of the training of her manager. However, **Charlie** empathised with her former manager when she said, "*She was lovely, although we didn't have supervision regularly, she was still up to date on most of my cases*" (V.05:09).

6.7.3 Managing workload.

Reflecting on Managing the workload:

Charlie said, *"It was difficult, I'm not sure how I managed (V. 0922)"*. This statement indicates that **Charlie** was determined to face challenges associated with her workload management. (**Code):** *driven*. Additionally, **Charlie** identified "being organised" and communication with management as key to workload management.

Gradually increasing Caseload?

"No, it was just complex cases, my first four cases were all complex, it was all to accommodate teenagers, parents with mental health and just parents and teenagers who weren't engaging" (V. 11;03). Despite the challenges, **Charlie** remained **(Code)** *self-motivated*.

Caseload manageable?

"No*, it wasn't at all, there was a lot of driving, and I had a lot of visits", (V. 14:07),* **Code:** *overwhelmed*. She identified an issue of time spent driving for visits as adding to the difficulties of managing the workload as some of the families lived about an hour away from the office.

Working late:

Charlie had to regularly work until late to meet the deadlines on her cases**.** *"I barely claimed my late hours of work because there was just no time to do so" (V. 13:54).* ***(Emergent-theme)*** *ASYE success may be associated with donating resting time*. **Charlie** appreciated that the management acknowledged that she needed to take TOIL, but the pressure of the workload meant she could not do it as issues on her cases would pile up if she took time off.

Challenges faced by social workers:

"*It's very difficult to manage cases, manage yourself and it's the balance of your personal life and work life*, V. (18:50)". **Emergent-theme:** *unmanageable workloads meant prolonged hours of work causing poor work-life balance for* ***Charlie.*** This raises the importance of self-care skills in social work.

Micromanagement:

"I have experienced a lot of micromanaging where managers make decisions and they are not the ones that interact with the families, we are the ones that are in frontline, so, it is making sure that you are remembering that you are also the voice of the young person because you would have built a relationship with the young person and the family". (V. 19:11) ***Code****: frustrated, disempowered*. **Emergent-theme:** *Being micromanaged distressed* ***Charlie.***

6.7.4 Social workers leaving.

Views on why social workers may exit roles:

"*It's a lot of challenges, the caseloads are high, complex, support is not the same, me personally what happens is that when you got so much work there is no more balance, when they ask us what we do to release stress or what we do on our free time, for me was exercise, going to the gym" (V. 21:10)*. (**Code):** *anxiety.* However, it remains questionable if social workers do have time for exercise if they regularly work late nights and weekends**.**

Admin:

"I get stuck on the computer for two to three days and it defeats the purpose of working without this because for me that's why I enjoy working directly with the children and families rather than getting stuck on the admin work where I would be in the office the whole time" (V.22: 30) ***Code:*** *stressful.* **(Emergent-theme)** admin reduced **Charlie's** time with children.

Agency work:

"*Agencies pay more money; there is not much commitment. If you give your notice today you could leave next week, so people are encouraged by money and lower caseloads. Permanent is good because of the security but at the same time you are contracted*" (V.27:00). **(Emergent-**

themes) *more money and short-term contracts make agencies attractive.* When asked if she had thought of joining an agency, **Charlie** said, "*I'm an agency social worker now. I did my ASYE and then I stayed for another year and a half. I have decided to join agency since I have gained enough experience (V.28:55)".*

University preparation for practice:

"*There is nothing that university do, apart from placement they give you an idea of managing cases. In some cases, let's say theories they do try to encourage social workers to use theories when doing analysis and when working with children and families, but the practical side is missing" (V. 34:03).* **(Emergent- theme)** *university may not be doing enough to prepare students for practice.* Despite her argument that "*you cannot go to a family and say this is attachment theory I will use it to help you*" (V. 34:48). Perhaps, she could not reflect.

Racism experiences:

Charlie acknowledged that racism was everywhere, however, she personally did not experience it in social work practice. She gave credit to her diverse team of managers who had been supportive to her all her years since she qualified (V. 40:00). **(Emergent-theme)** *diversity in staff may discourage racism.* However, she noted a lack of safe space to confide sensitive experiences when she said, *"you can't trust anybody at work. I have not experienced a time where I had to say something personal or confidential because if it's something personal, it must be discussed with management (V. 38:47)*". She feared being judged by those in management positions who may deem her unfit for work, instead of offering her support. **(Emergent-theme)** *No confidentiality space for* ***Charlie*****. Charlie's** drive and love to support children and families encouraged her to withstand the stress of unmanageable workloads and remain in her role. Despite that, she was forced to take two months off soon after finishing the ASYE programme; associating the programme with stress and burnout.

6.7.5 Themes Validation.

The expert group validated all the themes from **Charlie's** experiences. It was agreed that lack of confidentiality spaces may force NQSWs to trust their close peers and share confidential stress-related experiences with them as opposed to managers in fear of being judged. However,

Hotel argued that there was a requirement for managers to share any information which could potentially affect practice (V.1:15). This must happen to initiate support for the NQSW who would have shared experiences of stress-related symptoms. **India** (V.1:18) insisted that some managers choose to apply what he referred to as a "water- down approach", meaning, they would blame the NQSWs who would have shared the information. Thereafter, the manager may take all cases off the NQSW, asking them to take time off to recover. Furthermore, the group agreed that some NQSWs build their skills post ASYE and then join agencies. **Juliet** added that more social workers closely associated with her have been emigrating to other Western nations including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It is her belief that statutory children's social work is not as stressful in these countries as it has become in England. Overall, **Charlie's** first-year experiences of social work practice were largely challenging since she neither received consistent formal supervision sessions nor a protected caseload, meaning she had to rely on ad hoc peer support.

6.8.1 Participant Delta.

Vignette: Mature male of African origin. Participant qualified in England within the last five-years.

6.8.2 Supervision and support.

Delta: "*I didn't get much support, you know being ASYE, I wanted some form of guidance on some things", (V. 00:05)*". It could be seen through his body language that he was frustrated when reflecting on his experiences. **Delta** described how manager turnover affected him: "*we had a manager, but it was like first somebody resigned, and a replacement who came in was temporary and immediately resigned as well, the absence of a substantive manager affected me*". (V.00:40) **(Codes):** *unsettled, ignored. (**Emergent-theme)** constant manager changes affected **Delta's** support*. **Delta** narrated peer support as unreliable*: "that was also inadequate because people were busy with their cases (V.02:42)"*; He said, "*There was an induction pack but there was no guidance on it, it was just go and log into the induction pack and take it from there,"(V. 06:08)*.(**Code):** *responsibility*. Despite the challenges, **Delta** continued with minimal peer support, (**Emergent-theme):** *effective use of self in challenging times*.

Training:

Delta stated that he was not afforded any training opportunities in children services, when asked why, he said, "*there were two issues on the children services, the employment was for one year, it wasn't a permanent role (V. 10:12)".* Although **Delta** was pleased to have secured the job, he felt unsupported, partly due to the temporary nature of his contract, which was only valid for a year. His discouraging experiences led him to apply for a permanent position in the adults' team and successfully secured it within the same organisation.

Reasons for switching:

"*Lack of support, I didn't want to start looking for another job or renew contracts* (V.09:12). (**Code):** *felt insecure.* He identified lack of support combined with the temporary nature of his role as key factors in his decision to move to the adults' team, where he later felt supported.

University learning helpful in practice?

"Yeah, for example, the systems theory, I could see how it was applied around a child and family, to see parents' behaviour could impact the life of a child, so I was able to link that and understand (V. 06:44)".

6.8.3 Managing workload.

Delta: "*I prioritised my cases based on who was at risk," (V.15:00)* Despite having struggled for support, **Delta** had a clear strategy of prioritising cases based on the urgency of needs. **Delta's** protected caseload meant there was a recognition that he was newly qualified, hence needed a few manageable cases which would allow him to be gradually eased into his role. **(Emergent theme);** *a protected and steadily rising caseload aided workload management for* ***Delta*****.** However, **Delta** left children services at an early-stage (3-months) meaning that, he did not have complex cases associated with stress and pressure to meet deadlines. Therefore, his experiences of managing the workload in statutory children services remain minimal.

6.8.4 Social workers leaving.

When asked what may prompt social workers to leave statutory children services, **Delta** said "*the pressure, the caseload, I had colleagues who complained about the caseload like I had two colleagues who left because of the high caseload and the pressure" (V. 18:00)*.

Delta clarified that one of these individuals left statutory children's services to join an agency while the other had a traumatic experience while practicing, requiring a few years to recover. Hence, traumatic practice experiences may affect social workers' personal feelings and wellbeing, forcing them to take extended leave to recover. **Delta** expressed that he was shocked by this experience as he said "*, it became real for me, so this is it (V.19:48)".* This expression suggests that **Delta** began to associate traumatic experiences with children services, before eventually moving to the adults' team. When asked what could be done to overcome the challenges in statutory children services, **Delta** said, "*the only way it can be overcome is having enough workers to tackle the cases, provide consistent supervision,*" (V.2501).

Race-related experiences:

Delta said, "*I had a situation where I was asking someone a question you know like we are talking now; I don't talk like them because I am not a British person, somebody felt I was harsh over the phone, maybe because of the way I sound, then the manager there didn't want to investigate but believed the client, so she warned me not to be harsh next time".* **Delta** believed the manager was being stereotypical of him, since they did not investigate what had happened but simply believed that **Delta** had been shouting while speaking to a service user. **(Emergent-theme):** ***Delta's*** *manager appears to have lacked cultural competence*. However, **Delta** insisted that the tone of his voice was normally loud but that did not mean it was associated with his feelings. Nonetheless, he understood that he needed to adapt his voice as he would often be misinterpreted as shouting.

Diversity

"I was the only person from my ethnic background". (V. 34:14). However, this did not make **Delta** feel isolated. Perhaps, **Delta's** manager had not been previously exposed to black African males, meaning, she may have misunderstood them.

Reasons for joining agencies:

"I think it's all down to payment and the agencies have less responsibility, their tenure can end, and they can go to another place" (V.38:36). He clarified that there was more flexibility when working for agencies as social workers can give short notices before being allowed to leave their roles. **(Emergent-theme):** more money and *short-term contracts may make locums more attractive*.

6.8.5 Themes validation

The expert group validated all the themes apart from the temporary nature of Delta's role where time constraints made it impossible. **Hotel** concurred that the consistency of formal supervision sessions between the children and adults' services was not the same. He argued that "*supervision can be parked out, so the manager would come and provide a three-month supervision in one sitting" (V.24:13)*. Potentially, **Delta** may have received formal supervision if he had stayed in children services beyond the three-month stage. Furthermore, **Hotel** insisted

that racism or stereotyping was more commonly encountered among professionals than service users. Overall, **Delta's** experiences in his temporary role within children services were largely negative.

6.9.1 Participant Foxtrot.

Vignette: Male of African origin, mature, qualified in England within the last eight years.

6.9.2 Supervision and support.

Foxtrot: "*my support was quite good, when I qualified, I joined a newly formed team, everything was tailored to work for a NQSW, we had support from the team manager and also from the two experienced social workers in the team", (V. 00:42)*. **Foxtrot** appeared pleased when reflecting on his experiences of support. **Code**: satisfaction. **(Emergent-theme):** *The power of consistency in supervision*.

When asked to explore deeper about supervision, **Foxtrot** said, "*we used to do it in two parts, the first part was looking at my personal circumstances, asking about my health, my family or any other general issues that were of concern or interest to myself and then from there, we would talk about general work environment and the workload, and then after that we would go into care supervision (V.03:24)*. **Foxtrot** believed managers provided him with a great foundation as he received consistent reflective supervision sessions tailored to his needs. Similarly, in commenting on peer support: "*the peer support was good, so we could go to experienced colleagues and ask them for support" (V. 04:58)*". **(Emergent-theme)**: *the power of effective support systems*. **Foxtrot** expressed that since progressing to practice educator role, he adapted some of the supervision approaches that were used by his former manager, to support his social work students.

Shadowing and training:

"I did some shadowing, going out with colleagues within the team, (V. 07:40)". He also noted that he had formal training opportunities. **Foxtrot** had a great supportive structure which meant he was steadily eased into the profession.

Meaning of great support:

Foxtrot: *"it gave me confidence in the profession, because obviously when you are a student, you are told that social work is very stressful and things are going to be difficult but when you get a high level of support in your first-year, it kind of gives you confidence that things are not as bad as it was portrayed, yeah it made me happy and confident and waking up with the feeling that yeah I need to go to work, I felt motivated to work, (V. 16:04)*". **Emergent-theme:** great formal supports can lead to confidence in the social work profession. Similarly, he received great support from the ASYE coordinator: **"***the ASYE coordinator would come and review your progress every so often, and she was available if we needed any additional support with regards to the ASYE", (V.20:30).* **(Emergent-theme):** *The power of effective support systems.*

University learning helpful in practice?

"*it was useful in terms of understanding the processes, obviously if you are in university you learn about theories such as attachment, but you don't see the impact of things like trauma in real life, but when you are working directly with children that's when you start to see the evidence of the importance of those theories learned from university, and also apply the legal framework as well, issues to do with responsibility, significant harm and things like that", (V 08:21).* **Foxtrot** clearly acknowledged the link between university and practice, identifying the knowledge he learned from university as essential in social work practice. **(Emerging-theme):** *knowledge gained from university empowered* ***Foxtrot.***

6.9.3 Managing workload.

Foxtrot expressed that it was not hard to manage the workload as he had a maximum of ten cases which were varied. " *We had a target of putting the case notes within 24 hours , so after a visit, you would still spend some time at home the following day, writing the case notes, if there is a significant event that is happening, you would make sure that soon after the visit you put a case note and alert the out of hours team that there is a child missing, in case the child is arrested or found overnight they know what to do", (V.21:38.* ***Emergent-theme****: working late to complete tasks.*

TOIL:

"*We had a system where if you worked overtime or late you claim toil, which we used to do, but I think the challenge that we had, you know when it's really busy it doesn't really help to take toil because by the time you come back the work would have piled up and then you would still have to work extra hard", (V. 23:18)*. Therefore, great support did not prevent **Foxtrot** from working prolonged hours, if not, he would have not been able to manage his workload, meaning he would have struggled to pass the ASYE Programme. Therefore, to pass the ASYE programme, **Foxtrot** had to donate what would have been his resting time and work prolonged hours.

Strategies used to manage workloads:

"*At the start of the week, I would have like a priority list that I wanted to do or deadlines that were coming up, or cases that were really complex" (V. 25:20)*. **Emergent-theme**: Planning, prioritisation and being organised were key to **Foxtrot's** successful workload management.

6.9.4 Social workers leaving.

Challenges that could force social workers to leave roles:

"*Social work can be emotionally demanding especially if you have demanding cases. When pressure is high on the whole team, people start taking sick leave and once a social worker goes on leave, it means those who would remain would have to pick-up their cases, so it increases the pressure, (V. 29:42)".* **Emergent-theme:** high staff turnover may put pressure on the available social workers as they may be asked to work on cases left by the unavailable staff.

Agency work:

"I am currently agency; I wanted a change to a different LA and the financial advantages because at agency you get paid more. If you are agency, you are allowed to just give two weeks' notice and you can move on but if you are permanent its more (V. 303:20)". **Emergent-theme:** financial gains and flexibility in contracts make agencies attractive.

Promotion of retention on permanent roles:

"I think the only way is to have more social workers to distribute the work evenly (V. 36:12)"; this raises questions on funding afforded to LAs

Race-related experiences:

"I have come across parents who had racist views about black people in general, (V:40:45)", *"I remember with that family, they didn't say it to me directly but they told a school-teacher to say they didn't want a black social worker, so the teacher informed me and I spoke to my manager, my manager spoke to the service manager, so the service manager went out to visit that family and challenged them about it. She was asked what her reason was for not wanting to work with a black social worker and she couldn't give any and the service manager came to me with an option to continue working with this family or leave, so I decided to stay and work with that family"* (V. 41;25). **(Emergent-theme):** *race may become a barrier to social work practice*.

Why continue:

"*Firstly, it was my way of challenging the situation, where I would not give in to people's prejudices*". (**emerging theme):** *The power of confidence in role*.

6.9.5 Themes validation

The expert group validated all the themes from **Foxtrot's** account. **Juliet** agreed that race does become a barrier to social work practice, especially if a social worker was not allowed to perform their duties because they belong to a particular ethnic group. On the other hand, **Hotel** and **India** concurred with **Foxtrot's** positive experiences of receiving appropriate and consistent supervision sessions; part of that could be because he started in a newly formed team with a limited caseload.

6.10.1 Participant Eco.

Vignette: mature male African, who qualified in South Africa. He arrived in the UK in the last five-years.

6.10.2 Settling in.

Eco: "*It was quite challenging to be honest, I expected to be collected from the airport by someone that I had been communicating with, but unfortunately that didn't happen." (**Codes)**: shock, disappointment". (V. 0137).* **Emerging-theme:** felt unappreciated.

Eco: *"I had a caseload waiting for me, and the system, as a social worker from Africa to here is totally different", they expected me to know what I'm doing as a qualified social worker who has about ten years of experience"* (V. 0250). **Emerging-theme:** high staff turnover appears to have forced managers to allocate cases to **Eco** (a newly arrived IQSW) before empowering him with the knowledge of the English system.

Reflection on training:

"It was helpful, but you know already I had this culture-shock in language like you said, some children would say, I don't understand how you speak, or when they are speaking fast, I would not understand," (V. 13:18). **(Emergent-theme):** shocked by the English culture.

6.10.3 Supervision and support.

*"I had a manager that I would check in or who would check on me and offer support. However, having a caseload already meant, I couldn't always ask, sometimes she would not be available, so that was a challenge" (V. 0810). (***Code):** *anxiety.*

Peer support:

"Everyone was busy minding their cases, they didn't have time for us, and we felt so unequipped to be dealing with clients (V. 0856)." **Emergent-theme:** lack of a formal adaptation programme made **Eco,** an experienced IQSW feel unequipped to practice in England.

Refection on the LA:

Despite the challenges, **Eco** remained empathetic of the LA as he said, "*they were not prepared for this, they were learning as we started working, we would tell them this is not working and having a caseload, I'm not coping I don't know what to do, so they ended up taking the caseload away from me" (V.15:00)*.

Felt supported?

" It's a yes or no because they put us on a performance plan where you had to get support but at the same time you had this high caseload that you had to perform well on, so it was stressful and the next meeting for them to review that you have achieved the targets (V. 22;28)."

Responding to lack of support:

Eco: *"we formed a group called BME for the minority, so that then we started supporting each other" (V. 0856)*.

South African social work versus the English social work:

"*South Africa have their own Children Act, and the Children Act here it's quite different" (V.12:46),* **(Codes):** shock, anxiety. Hence differences in statutory laws to support children exacerbated **Eco's** anxiety. **Eco** detailed how he supported a child using a South African approach and was challenged by the parent who argued that he would be exposing the child to harm, if he left him where he had planned to leave him. However, **Eco** disagreed with the parent and proceeded to leave the child at the same place, unintentionally exposing the child to harm.

Reflecting on the application of the South African approach:

"*I was frustrated, I felt what if something happened to the child overnight and then I would be accountable, so I felt like I can't do this anymore and I spoke to my manager that she needed to reallocate the case to someone who was more experienced, and I got more training*" (V.17:40). (**Emerging-theme)**: lack of a formal adaptation programme meant children in **Eco's** care, were exposed to harm.

University learning helpful in practice?

"*You know when you are now in the field working, some theories don't even come to mind, so they didn't even come to my mind" (V. 18:38)*.

6.10.4 Managing workload

*"I had to organise myself, make sure I put things on my calendar, reminders of what I needed to do". (**Code)**: organised (V. 24:46**) (**Emergent-theme)**: organisation and prioritisation were key to **Eco's** workload management*. **Eco** stated that he found supporting a child who would go missing quite challenging (V. 25:47). **Emerging-theme:** supporting children who would go missing, may be challenging.

Reflection on the caseload allocation:

"When I first arrived, I was given five cases, so later when they saw that I was struggling, those cases were taken away from me until I had adjusted and settled in, so I was given cases gradually, maybe two cases per week" (V. 27:42). **Emerging-theme**: the LA appear to have had no plan, hence learning along the way.

Caseload management:

"They were not manageable throughout the team because we all had high caseloads. It was a matter of trying to prioritise your work" (V. 28:34), **Emergent-theme**: **Eco's** LA appeared to have been struggling with retention, hence, their decision to hire social workers from abroad.

Direct work with children:

"*With high caseloads you don't get time to do direct work with children, it's just going there checking if they are okay, so we spend most of our time doing paperwork (V.30;27)".* **Emergent-theme:** unmanageable workloads reduced the time **Eco** could have spent doing direct work with children.

Working out of hours:

"I do even on Fridays I finish around ten, eleven pm" (V.31:16). **(Emergent-theme):** *Pressure to meet deadlines forced **Eco** to work prolonged hours.*

Reflecting upon working prolonged hours:

"*It's exhausting, but for me now since I'm an agency locum, so when I feel that I'm exhausted or drained emotionally, I leave. I go and apply somewhere else. If it's not working, I also leave again, so that's how I get along" (V.32:44).* **(Emergent-theme):** joining locums as a way of managing his wellbeing.

6.10.5 Social workers leaving.

Views on why social workers may exit roles

"*Caseloads are high and having to deal with families who are really difficult, some of them can be violent or abusive verbally, so if you don't have a supportive manager, it becomes too much for you then you stop coping" (V. 37:16).* "*Others decide to leave, I remember people that I came with some of them left, went back to Africa, said I cannot deal with the stress, the pressure is unbearable. I did take a break sometime two years ago, just for three months to breathe" (V.37: 52).* When prompted to explain what he meant by "breathe", he said, "*when you start dreaming about cases and stuff that you didn't do at work, that's when you realise that you are exhausted or you have a burnout, so that's the time when you need to take a step back to look after yourself" (V.38:35).* **Emergent-theme:** the importance of selfcare. **Eco** added that he fully understood why some social workers may decide to leave statutory children services or social work altogether, however, he warned that he would question those interested in joining and ask them if they understood what joining statutory children social work in England would entail (V. 39:10). **Emergent-theme:** experiences of unmanageable workloads led **Eco** to develop negative attitudes which may make him to discourage others from joining statutory children services in England.

Race-related experiences:

"Parents can say, go back to where you came from, if you are not giving into their demands, even young people that you are working with sometimes they can just be rude or nasty towards you and some are swearing because of colour, my race yeah" (V. 39: 38).

Refusal of support based on racial grounds:

"One requested that I should be changed, they wanted a different social worker" (V.41:07). (**Emergent-theme):** *race can become a barrier to social work practice.* His manager asked if he

wanted to continue supporting the family which had racially abused him; in his response, he said he told the management that he did not want to support people that were racially abusive to him.

Reflecting on the Black Lives Matter uprising in 2020: "*That's when our BME group became recognised, so it became open even for white colleagues*" (V.43:56).

6.10.6 Themes validation.

The expert group validated all the themes from **Eco's** account. **Juliet** agreed that IQSWs needed a formal adaptation mirroring the ASYE programme, as their lack of cultural knowledge and the social work practice standards could risk children receiving inappropriate support. Additionally, **Juliet** concurred that some IQSWs can feel overwhelmed by the pressure of unmanageable workloads, forcing them to promote their wellbeing by quitting roles in England and returning to their home countries where they would not face similar stress. Despite not disagreeing that social workers may use agencies to manage their wellbeing, **Hotel** insisted that money was the motivating factor, enticing social workers to join agencies. Perhaps, **Hotel** found it easier to adapt to practice since he qualified in England. The group agreed that race may become a barrier especially if the social worker is prevented from performing their duties because they belong to a specific ethnicity. Overall, **Eco's** first-year social work practice experiences in England were challenging. His significant error of applying a South African approach which left a child at risk of harm, emphasises the need for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs before allocation of cases.

6.11.1Participant Golf.

Vignette: female, mature, who qualified in the Republic of South Africa. The participant arrived in the UK in the last five years.

6.11.2 Settling in.

"The local authority that hired me when I left Africa was very supportive. Upon arrival at the airport, there was somebody there to fetch me, and they were carrying a board waving my name, so I was like wow this is cool. Yes, and then I was driven to a B and B accommodation which I chose before I left South Africa. I had an opportunity to buy my groceries online before leaving South Africa" (V. 00:52). **Golf** kept grinning when talking about her great arrival experiences. (**Code):** reassured.

6.11.3 Supervision and support

"The local authority that hired me used a strategy similar to an approach that they use for ASYE. We were allocated a group of practice consultants and then they took us through the UK practice and then we were given a protected caseload (V.4:17)". **(Emergent- theme):** *the power of effective support systems.* **Golf** expressed that the support plan meant they needed to get a protected caseload for six months.

Period when cases remained protected:

"May be even two months, it progressed quickly when they were struggling with retention, so people would leave and they didn't know who to allocate the cases to, so they ended up allocating the cases to us. At the six months stage, I was on 30 something cases which were complex; some social workers were struggling with mental health" (V. 0540). *"Senior social workers were leaving their jobs and then those complex cases were allocated to us, the support was still there but then I felt they were not abiding by our contractual agreements" (V. 06:19)*. **Emergent-theme:** challenges caused by the high staff turnover forced managers to breach contracts and allocate cases left by experienced social workers to the newly arrived IQSWs.

Reflection on formal supervision:

"We did get supervision, after every two weeks, the door was opened to have a conversation with the manager" (V.10:23).

Personal Support:

"*There was a well-being support in the LA". (V. 11:09)*. She explained that she felt free to discuss her personal experiences with a wellbeing support officer.

Complexity of feelings:

"*There were times when I felt supported but there were times when I did not feel supported" (V.27:34)*. When asked to explore more, she said, "*the fact that they were not listening to my practice consultant".* **Golf** confided to her practice consultant that she could not manage the workload and asked them to inform managers. However, managers continued to breach the contract by allocating more cases to **Golf**, ultimately forcing her to resign**.**

However, **Golf's** support was supplemented by a group. **Golf:** "*There was a BME group which had sessions for us African social workers with one of the ladies from Africa who was a practice consultant, so those were held I think it was once a week on a Friday" (V. 11:28)*. **(Emergent theme):** *The power of personal support networks*. "*I felt more supported in the BME group. The practice consultants had created a conducive atmosphere for us to be able to vent our experiences, most of the time I would pick up that they were similar themes coming from others after having listened to them vent out their struggles, their coping mechanisms" (V. 12:40)*.

University learning helpful in practice?

"*Yes, my study was embedded in the person-centred approach, so that made it easy for me and then we got strength-based approach, those can be applied anywhere in the world. (V. 17:26)"*.

6.11.4 Managing the workload

"I used my electronic calendar, so it was all about planning, ensuring that children are seen, visits are completed within timescales".

Business support*:*

"On a weekly basis they sent data, it would show you when your visits are about to come to red, they need to be done, so that data is helpful to social workers so you can see that I need to prioritise on this" (V. 24:24). **(Emergent-themes):** *business support helpful towards managing workloads**:** organisation and prioritisation may be key to successful workload management.*

She shared that she prioritised cases on urgency of needs but needed to communicate with her manager and the rest of the staff to support her in situations where she had to attend emergencies.

Working late:

"I found myself working in the evenings and on weekends, there was no life-work balance at all" (V. 32:40). "*I think social work, overall, it has a lot of admin, that's what I can say, the travelling takes a toll because some of the visits you find that they are an hour away" (V.2937).* It is her view that social work has a lot of admin work, which adds to the commitment of driving to and from visits and having to update the system. **(Emergent-theme)***: driving to and from visits may reduce the time social workers could spend with children.* **Golf***: "I struggled to even fall asleep without recording some case notes" (V. 46: 18)*. **(Code):** anxiety.

Reclaiming added hours of work:

Golf reiterated that it was unhelpful to take TOIL as cases would pile up, making it impossible to manage on return. **(Emergent-theme):** *the pressure to meet deadlines forced* ***Golf*** *to work prolonged hours.* **Golf** felt that social workers were not given space to say no, "*I have a lot of cases I cannot continue, you see, so once they keep on allocating you are given an option of either staying or leaving, you see they don't give us a choice".* **(Emergent-theme):** *Voice of the social worker must be promoted before a new case allocation*.

Manageable caseload?

"*All I can say is that the cases kept on coming until I decided to leave. I realised that if I didn't leave, I was going to struggle with mental health. I saw some of my international colleagues' struggle, I saw some of them going back home. There was one that I supported, she had panic attacks, she felt like driving onto oncoming traffic" (V. 33:03).* **(Codes):** overwhelmed, burnt-out. The term "driving onto oncoming traffic" suggests extreme distress. Therefore, unmanageable workloads could be a health hazard for some IQSWs.

6.11.5 Social workers leaving.

Views on why social workers may exit roles:

"High caseloads, lack of support, not listening to social workers. Sometimes I feel like social workers are not given that privilege to say that I have a lot of cases I cannot continue, you see, so once they keep on allocating you are given an option of either staying or leaving, you see they don't give us a choice" (V. 4510). **Golf** described the BME group as a "home away from home", enabling social workers to enquire about staffing and caseloads in other LAs before applying for jobs at different LAs. **(Emergent-theme)***: an initial investigation into workloads may be done before a job application*. She said, "*I can tell which LA supports well, it's not about money at the end of the day" (V. 34.01)*.

Race-related experiences:

"Microaggression from other professionals;" they would ask you where you qualified, do you do these things in your country. how can one question somebody's qualification?" (50:16).

Refusal of support based on racial grounds:

"*Some social workers were subjected to that, whereby parents would straightaway inform them that they cannot work with an African social worker* (V.51:18). (**Emergent-theme):** *race may become a barrier to social work practice*. However, she expressed that these issues were investigated by managers.

6.11.6 Themes validation

The focus group validated all the themes from **Golf's** account. **Juliet** agreed that IQSWs felt forced to accept a lot of cases. She identified stringent visa requirements which attach IQSWs with LAs who hired them from abroad, meaning their practice may be closely monitored alongside their work visas in England. Overall, **Golf's** initial great support reveals how easy it could have been for her as an IQSW to adapt to the English practice standards if that support had continued**.** However, her challenging experiences show how feeling ignored led to a pivotal crossroads where she felt forced to choose between her role and her wellbeing.

6.11.7 Emerging Superordinate Themes

Codes and mini-statements as presented on table 10 were used to generate superordinate themes, which are statements derived from the data to represent multiple factors in IPA studies (Smith et al, 2009).

Table -10 Results

Participant	Supervision	Workloads	SWs leaving	Racism
Alpha	Unreliable, benefited from peer support.	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Inability to cope with the pressure of unmanageable workloads	Not sure
Bravo	Unreliable, benefited from peer support.	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Unmanageable workloads and unreliable support.	Did not experience racism directed at her, but felt unable to express issues to do with race
Charlie	Unreliable, benefited from peer support.	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Unmanageable workloads and lack of support	No experience of racism.
Delta	Unreliable, benefited from peer support.	Protected caseload key to management	Unmanageable workloads and lack of support	Experienced stereotyping
Foxtrot	Great and reliable	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Unmanageable workload	Being black meant, he was barred from supporting children.
Eco	Reliable / unhelpful	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Unmanageable workload	Being black meant, he was barred from supporting children.
Golf	Reliable / unhelpful	worked late, because of unmanageable workloads.	Unmanageable workload	Experienced microaggressions, expressed that fellow black social workers were barred for being black.

Foxtrot expressed complete satisfaction with all support systems, leading to job satisfaction and confidence in the social work profession. Other participants **(Alpha, Bravo and Charlie)** expressed satisfaction with peer support. Additionally, **Eco** and **Golf** did share having moments where they felt the support systems in their organisations were great. However, they both expressed feeling more supported in the BME group.

Derived theme: 1. The Impacts of Unreliable Support Systems.

- This theme investigates how unreliable support system affected participants. Most participants expressed challenges associated with accessing formal managerial support.

Derived Theme: 2. The Consequences of Unmanageable Workloads.

- This theme explores how unmanageable workloads affected participants.

All participants apart from **Delta** who left statutory children services prematurely, expressed that, unmanageable workloads forced them to work prolonged hours, leading to a poor life-work balance.

Derived theme: 3. Race, a Barrier to Social Work Practice?

- This theme explores if race could be a barrier in social work practice.

Some participants expressed having been barred access to children by prejudiced parents who did not want their children to be supported by black social workers.

Derived theme: 4. The Power of Effective Support Systems.

- This theme explores the benefits of effective support systems in social work practice.

Some participants did share positive managerial support experiences.

Chapter seven will break down these superordinate themes into smaller themes or subthemes to aid deeper cross-case analysis in line with IPA. The researcher understands that there may be other plausible interpretations or themes derived from the data. However, he stresses that

the identified themes remain subjective as subjectivity plays a role in interpreting data (Smith et al., 2009). Table 7 shows how these superordinate themes were derived from the data of all participants.

Chapter-7. Cross-Case Analysis

7. 1 Introduction

This chapter is structured around four superordinate themes, each presented as a subheading, these overarching themes are further deconstructed into smaller themes and subthemes to facilitate a more nuanced and in-depth analysis promoted by IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Unlike the previous chapter, where focus group data was introduced only at the conclusion of each participant's narrative, selected excerpts from focus group participants will now be integrated alongside the main participants' accounts. This is intended to enrich and strengthen the analytical depth.

Each theme will be supported by illustrative quotations from participants, followed by an interpretative analysis that considers both collective patterns and individual nuances. The chapter adopts a running commentary style, allowing for analytical insights and minor recommendations to emerge organically within the discussion. This ensures that implications for practice are closely aligned with the data interpretation. While Chapter Six presented idiographic accounts, this chapter foregrounds group and essential individual findings that directly address the research question.

7.2 Identified superordinate themes

Building upon the thematic analysis presented in the preceding chapter, the following key superordinate themes will serve as the foundational subheadings for each section of this chapter. These themes have emerged as critical areas of concern within this research. Hence, they will be explored in depth to illuminate their implications:

1. The Impacts of Unreliable Support Systems.
2. The Consequences of Unmanageable Workloads.
3. Race, a Barrier to Social Work Practice?
4. The Power of Effective Support Systems.

7.3.1 Theme-1. The Impacts of Unreliable Support Systems

(For the support of NQSWs, please revisit chapter 1.12)

The data revealed a pervasive sense of disillusionment and emotional strain among participants, largely attributed to inconsistent and unreliable supervisory support.

Alpha recounted: *"I didn't have a lot of support, I just felt overwhelmed because most of the time I would go in blindly and do what I thought was right and never got enough opportunity to explore cases or my feelings."*

This extract illustrates the emotional toll of unsupported practice, where the absence of reflective supervision left **Alpha** navigating complex cases without adequate scaffolding. Her experience underscores the critical role of supervision in facilitating not only case management, but also emotional processing and professional identity formation (Ingram, 2013).

Charlie similarly highlighted the irregularity of supervision: "*The supervision wasn't on a regular basis, after that it just drifted where I probably went two or three months without supervision.*"

Such inconsistencies undermined the intended protective function of supervision, particularly during the formative ASYE period (Choi, 2017). The erosion of structured oversight appears to reflect broader systemic pressures, including high caseloads and workforce instability, which deprioritise developmental support in favour of immediate risk management (Ravalier et al., 2023).

Bravo's account further illustrates the consequences of this neglect: "*The last six months of the ASYE I barely had a supervision, they just left me to it. If you say too much, they say you aren't resilient enough. I would just confide in colleagues than managers because managers you get nothing back.*"

This narrative reveals a culture where seeking support is pathologised as a lack of resilience, thereby discouraging open dialogue and reinforcing a reliance on peer networks over formal managerial structures. The implication is a systemic failure to create psychologically safe environments for early-career practitioners (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

The extracts above share one commonality. Participants felt overwhelmed and ignored due to inconsistent formal support from their managers. **Alpha,** for example, described being sent to a meeting as a lead social worker when she had just completed her three-day mandatory training to access the LAs' system. She also detailed feeling overwhelmed and being forced to go in blindly and do what she thought was right. Lack of consistent formal supervision meant she had to rely on her experienced peers for support, if not, she would have struggled to pass the ASYE programme. Perhaps, the pressure caused by high staff turnover due to cuts on public spending forces LAs to prioritise children and the risk they may be facing (Ravalier et al., 2023). Therefore, sending NQSWs straight to practice could be a way of navigating the risk which may be faced by children. Overall, the data underscores the critical importance of reliable reflective supervision in the early stages of social work practice. The absence of such support systems not only compromises practitioner wellbeing but may also have downstream effects on service quality and child protection outcomes.

7.3.2 Temporary ASYE positions.

Delta: "*I did three months in children services before I left. You know being ASYE, so I wanted some form of guidance, and I wasn't getting much of it. The employment was for one year, it wasn't permanent".*

LAs are paid for providing training to each ASYE social worker, but some positions may be temporary (DfE, 2012). Despite having been paid for having **Delta** on a temporary role, the LA failed to provide him formal support. However, the same LA overturned his earlier struggles when they provided him with a full induction and formal support after he had moved into a permanent role in adults' team. Therefore, **Delta's** poor support may have been exacerbated by his temporary role; this associates effective support with a permanent role in **Delta's** organisation, **a key finding.** Failing to provide support for **Delta** despite receiving funds for having him as a NQSW (DfE,2012) could be seen as a breach of contract, **a key finding, though is more likely a consequence of the** challenges caused by the cuts of local budgets for social services (Ravalier et al., 2021). However, there is a likelihood that **Delta's** temporary role was going to be made permanent at a later stage when a permanent vacancy became available. Nevertheless, cuts to LA budgets could mean some NQSWs may be expected to compromise

on their support in order to get the job; this seems to disproportionately fall on BME social workers, since McLaughlin et al. (2025) states that some BME social workers struggle for recognition including being considered for promotions, and therefore feel forced to join agencies to get better pay.

It remains unclear if **Delta's** lack of support in children's services was linked to his race, since he was the only BME social worker in that team. Therefore, it is unclear whether ASYE temporary positions exacerbate race issues, or whether different levels of staffing and pressure could be the reason why **Delta** did not receive appropriate support in children services but got it in the adults' team. Strikingly, the temporary ASYE position did not promote stability for **Delta** as he remained anxious about his future beyond the ASYE temporary position, **key finding.** However, the limitation of these experiences is that they were shared by one participant, despite that, their implications may be shared by others in a similar role. Hence a more generalizable study is needed to either confirm or dispute these experiences.

7.3.3 Theory–Practice Divide

The relationship between academic learning and practice emerged as a complex and contested space for participants, with divergent experiences shaping their perceptions of the relevance and applicability of theoretical knowledge. While some participants articulated a clear connection between university-acquired knowledge and their practice, others expressed disillusionment, citing a lack of preparedness and limited opportunities for reflective integration of theory into practice.

Eco: *"You know when you are now in the field working, some theories don't even come to mind, so they didn't even come to my mind".*

Golf: *"Yes, for example, the systems theory has been helpful".*

Foxtrot: "*Yes, it was useful in terms of understanding the processes, obviously if you are in university you learn about theories, but when you are working directly with children, that's when you start to see the evidence of the importance of some of those theories".*

Delta: "*yeah, for example, the systems theory, I could see how it was applied around a child and family".*

Bravo: "*No, Frontline, (*a social work qualification programme) *doesn't prepare you for work, they teach you theories and they teach you styles but that doesn't prepare you for the actual job, talking to families, going to court".*

Charlie: "*In some cases, but the practical side is missing, you don't go for a visit and say this is attachment theory, I will use it to help you".*

Alpha: "*I think it was a huge transition from the theoretical aspect to practice. I did my placement which was in adult teams. It was also a learning curve for me, thinking about all that, I would learn about, for example legislation, children act, assessments, section 20, interim care order, I'm thinking oh my god what's this".*

The extracts above indicate that convergences and divergences were observed on how each participant's experiences of the link between theory and practice impacted them both emotionally and psychologically. **Alpha** expressed that she had to "dive in" and do what she thought was right. Having to dive in meant she could not reflect on the theories she learnt from university, which would have provided her structural guidance and steps on how to approach each practice situation. **Eco's** assertion that when faced with adversities in practice, reflection was limited, suggests that the pressures and immediacy of frontline practice may inhibit the cognitive space required for theoretical reflection. Similarly, **Alpha** described the transition from academic learning to practice as overwhelming, particularly when faced with unfamiliar legal frameworks and statutory procedures. Additionally, **Bravo** and **Charlie** passionately expressed their belief that the university did not prepare social work students for social work practice. However, **Charlie** gave a rather strange response stating th*at "you do not go to a family and say this is the attachment theory I will use it to help you"*, meaning she did not see any relevance of the teaching from universities. There was a commonality of speaking strongly and passionately about the expected support when joining practice, which never materialised. However, it was observed that the same participants spoke calmly with less enthusiasm when

providing rare examples of the support they received. Additionally, those who spoke passionately about struggling for support appeared to be less able to reflect on the learning from university when they were faced with difficulties in practice.

Therefore, this research argues that the frustration and anxiety caused by the unavailability of the expected support, likely inhibited some participants from being able to reflect on the knowledge they gained from university, **key finding.** Additionally, the inability to reflect on their learning means those participants may have not benefited from the knowledge they gained through education, **key finding.** Ultimately, it became transparent that negative beliefs about knowledge gained through education were associated with lack of reflection as none of the above participants could give an example of any theory they could have applied in practice. Perhaps, they got into social work positions too soon before being mentally/psychologically ready to make that transitional adaptation, which appears to have been a steep learning curve for them.

However, those who had expressed either having a protected caseload or consistent formal supervision revealed that they found the university learning helpful to reflect upon while in practice **(Golf, Delta, Foxtrot).** Additionally, they all spoke calmly about the support they received while clearly identifying theories they reflected on when in practice, further stressing that there was a link between the university learning and social work practice. It was observed that the impact of various social work qualifying routes did not influence participants' perceptions of their preparation since some, for example two who had qualified via Frontline had contrasting views. Therefore, positive perceptions were analogous with the effectiveness of the received support whereas negative views were linked to the unavailability or inconsistence of support in practice. Considering the two diverging views, those who believed they did not receive the expected support appeared to have extended their frustrations to universities. Therefore, the frustration caused by the unmanageable workloads coupled with inconsistent support appeared to deflect their minds into what this study will call, "***a victim-status mode",*** a syndromic like situation, where one has imbalanced feelings dominated by what they consider as their unjustifiable experiences. This potentially makes them feel victimised; once they feel like victims, they are likely to lose the capacity to reflect critically and therefore only think, reflect, or speak from a victim's standpoint. This perspective takes the

responsibility away from the perceived ***"victim"*** and place it on others who are then blamed for the perceived inflicted unjustifiable experiences. Therefore, it does not encourage the ***"victim"*** to reflect in-action, consider different or contrasting approaches and take a proactive responsibility of actively improving the circumstances they are faced with, in practice. While **Charlie's** bizarre response that "*you do not go to a family and say this is the attachment theory, I will use it to help you*", may sound dismissive, it reflects a broader misunderstanding of how theory may be operationalised in practice, not as a prescriptive tool, but as a conceptual lens through which to interpret and respond to complex social phenomena. The inability to make this connection may be symptomatic with the **"victim-status mode";** where some participants appear to have externalised responsibility for their struggles, attributing them solely to systemic failures, thereby limiting their capacity for adaptive learning and professional growth.

Clearly, the university does not expect students to go to families and detail theories they would use to support them (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013). **Alpha** also expressed struggling to understand the legal framework in support of children, yet all social work students must pass the legal framework exam and be ready to practice either in adults or children services across England (SWE, 2021b). Therefore, this study identifies "*the deflection to the victim status mode", as "self-destructive",* since it most likely encouraged participants in this study to feel victimised and once at that stage, they appear to have lost their critical reflection abilities, **key finding.** Despite that, teaching methods have been identified as influencing the cognitive abilities of learners, enabling them to remain alert, and always reflet (Taylor et al., 2023). Therefore, they may have also led to the inability to reflect for those who could not reflect.

Other studies equally found mixed responses on the links between the education gained in university and social work practice. While some participants in those studies insisted that universities prepared them well for social work practice, others felt university failed to prepare them (Grant et al., 2017; Hussein et al., 2013, Beddoe et al., 2018; Tham and Lynch, 2019). However, none of the studies explored reasons for these divergent participant views; this study addresses that gap.

Social work students must complete two organisational practice-based placements in England (Warner, 2013). They must evidence their practice learning through a portfolio, which gets marked at the end of each year, to determine if each student had been afforded enough

exposure to practice learning and passed (Parker, 2021). The first is a seventy-day placement followed by a one-hundred-day placement in which they are supported to link real practice issues to the theories learned from universities (SWE, 2021b). Additionally, they have thirty skills days where they must interact with service users to gain practical social work skills (Joubert, 2021). Therefore, it sounds unrealistic to suggest that the university did not prepare students for social work practice, considering the placements which expose social work students to practical social work. However, this study acknowledges Scholar et al. (2014)'s argument that some students may struggle for statutory based placements and therefore be forced to learn from private organisations where care duties or responsibilities would be reduced; such practitioners may be unfamiliar with the pressure and pace of statutory children social work and therefore struggle to cope.

SWE (2021a) emphasises the importance of registration after having gained a qualification as a social worker, since social work is a protected title with a duty to protect the public. Social work students are not permitted to handle cases as main key workers in statutory settings, since they can only register after qualification (Parker, 2021). However, they are authorised to conduct some tasks within cases allocated to registered social workers who would assume the key worker's role (Perry and Hughes, 2021). Ultimately, once they have qualified and registered with the regulator, they can handle cases as key workers (SWE, 2019). There seems to be a big step in responsibility presenting unforeseen challenges for NQSWs who, until that point, would have only experienced a less responsible supportive role. This suggests a gap in practical support for NQSWs in enabling social work students to practically adapt to their new roles, **key finding**. Perhaps, it may be helpful if NQSWs were gradually eased into the responsibility of being key workers rather than be thrusted with all the responsibilities when appointed to the new role. Although some participants claimed that university did not prepare them for practice, none were able to offer constructive suggestions for how universities, or placements, might improve. This absence of critical feedback further supports the notion that their dissatisfaction may stem more from emotional distress than from pedagogical shortcomings.

The **victim-status mode** is not merely a coping mechanism, but a significant barrier to the integration of theory and practice. It is exacerbated by the emotional toll of unsupported practice and the psychological strain of high-stakes environments. To emphasise, this study

does not suggest that participants chose to deflect to the victim status mode. Rather, it argues that **difficult practice conditions can lead to negative psychological perspectives**, which in turn inhibit reflective capacity. This highlights the need for universities to develop pedagogical strategies that not only teach theory but also prepare students to manage the emotional and psychological demands of practice. Creative approaches to embedding reflective resilience into the curriculum may help mitigate the onset of victim-status mode and support the transition from student to practitioner (see 10.3.3).

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by identifying the **emotional and structural conditions** under which the theory–practice divide becomes most pronounced. It argues that the inability to reflect is not a failure of education or pedagogical shortcomings *per se,* but a symptom of systemic neglect and emotional overload, **key finding.** Addressing this divide requires a dual focus on pedagogical innovation and organisational reform to ensure that practitioners are both intellectually and emotionally equipped for the realities of social work practice.

7.3.4 Task-Focused Organisational Norms

This theme explores how organisational norms within statutory social work settings prioritise task completion over emotional wellbeing, thereby creating environments in which NQSWs feel unable to express vulnerability or raise concerns particularly those related to race. While the primary focus here is on organisational culture, the intersection with diversity and race is acknowledged and will be further explored in the third theme.

Participants consistently described supervision sessions as being narrowly focused on case management, with little or no space for emotional reflection. **Alpha** succinctly noted: *"We just spoke about cases predominantly."* **Charlie** echoed this sentiment: *"It was more talking about cases".* These accounts suggest that the dominant organisational norm is one of **task-orientation**, where the primary function of supervision is to monitor case progression rather than support the emotional or developmental needs of practitioners. However, the absence of emotional safety within these interactions was a recurring concern. **Bravo** and **Charlie** both described a culture of surveillance and mistrust, where expressing emotional distress was

perceived as a weakness. **Bravo** stated: *"If you say too much, they say you aren't resilient enough… I was too afraid to talk about issues of racism because I thought no one was going to listen."*

Charlie added: *"You can't really trust anybody at work… there is never anything confidential*. "These reflections are incongruent with McPherson et al. (2016 p. 72) 's assertion that supervision must create a "*point of safety"*. Instead, participants perceived supervision and managers untrustworthy, pointing to a **toxic social work culture** in which emotional expression is pathologised and confidentiality is compromised (Ravalier et al., 2021). This suggests that the fear of being perceived as lacking resilience may silence first-year BME Social workers, who may already feel marginalised within predominantly white institutions (Obasi, 2022). **Bravo's** reluctance to raise issues of racism reflects a broader failure of the organisation to create psychologically safe spaces for dialogue about identity, discrimination, and wellbeing.

The emotional consequences of this culture were evident in **Charlie's** account of feeling "confused, overwhelmed, and stressed" due to the lack of meaningful support. The departure of a supportive manager further exacerbated **Bravo's** sense of abandonment, as the incoming manager failed to provide consistent supervision. This inconsistency may be attributed to structural pressures such as budget constraints and high caseloads, which may force managers to prioritise operational efficiency over staff development (Ravalier et al., 2021).

The experiences of **Brav**o and **Charlie** illustrate the consequences of failing to embed such values. Their inability to disclose emotional distress or racialised experiences without fear of judgement or reprisal, reflects a social work organisational culture that is not only emotionally unsafe but also structurally exclusionary. This study therefore argues that task-focused supervision models, when unaccompanied by reflective and inclusive practices, contribute to the silencing of emotional and racial discourse, **key finding.**

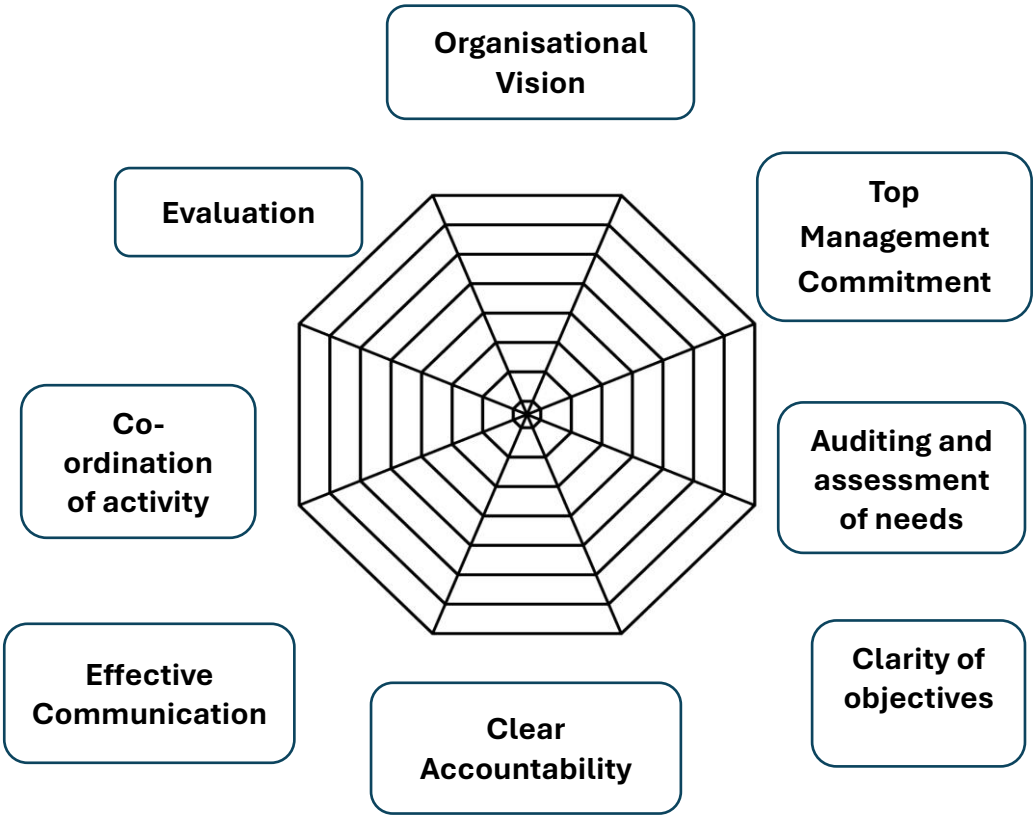
Literature supports the notion that formal supervision in social work has become increasingly rare and inconsistent (Grant et al., 2017; Ravalier et al., 2023). This study concurs, identifying sporadic supervision as a contributing factor to NQSWs' failure to produce sufficient evidence for their ASYE portfolios. According to Standard 5 of the Local Government Association (2020), NQSWs should receive weekly supervision during the first six weeks of the programme,

fortnightly for the next six months, and monthly thereafter. Failure to adhere to this schedule, particularly when supervision lapses for more than two months, can jeopardise a NQSW's ability to meet ASYE requirements. **Bravo** reported receiving no formal supervision during the final six months of her ASYE. Additionally, **Alpha** similarly expressed having irregular supervision sessions, but both participants still passed the ASYE programme. The study argues that such irregular supervision practices hindered the participants' **reflective** learning and professional growth, **key finding.** The data suggest that organisational norms which prioritised task completion over formal supervision created environments in which these participants felt unable to express vulnerability or seek help, **key finding**.

These findings align with Kandola and Fullerton's (1994) model of diversity management (Figure-5), which emphasises the centrality of organisational culture and environment in either enabling or inhibiting diversity. Unlike more recent models, such as that of Guillaume et al. (2014), which do not address race or skin colour, Kandola and Fullerton's framework explicitly acknowledge the historical and structural barriers faced by BME individuals in British public institutions (Ahmed & Swan, 2006; Johns & Jordan, 2006). According to Lorbiecki and Jack, (2000 p.19) the Kandola and Fullerton model has *"played a seminal role in shaping a British version of diversity management, since it was commended in the Management Consultancies Association's Book of the Year Award"*. Their model positions diversity not as a peripheral concern but as a core organisational value, arguing that inclusive cultures must actively support the expression of diverse experiences, including those related to race and emotional wellbeing.

Figure-5 A Model of Managing Diversity.

Kandola and Fullerton, (1994. P.77)



Contrary to previous participant experiences, **Foxtrot** shared that he remained happy to express his feelings, and he was pleased by the amount of support he received from within his organisation. Considering that he started in a newly formed social work team, the supportive social work culture in that new team allowed him to express his views, **key finding.** This research argues that if Kandola and Fullerton's (1994) model of managing diversity was applied in all organisations, the work environments and organisational cultures may improve, leading to enhanced social workers' experiences.

Bravo's experiences suggest there may be different reasons why two managers in the same organisation would regard supervision differently. Perhaps, the new manager felt overwhelmed since they had just started in a new team and therefore could not have time for consistent formal supervision. It could also be that managers may have different approaches to supervision, with the former prioritising them while the latter only believed they were just there

as tick-box exercise; hence they prioritised practice ahead of reflective supervision, **key finding.**

Charlie, Bravo and **Alpha's** experiences meant their organisations applied a task-focused approach to supervision which is at odds with the provision of reflective supervision, since it singularly promotes attention to the task at hand (Ravalier et l., 2023). Therefore, this study asserts that case-oriented supervision likely inhibited the reflective component, as the participants were only encouraged to discuss what to do next on cases, not reflect on their recent practice or their feelings, **key finding.** Ultimately, a task-focused approach to supervision could be a barrier to professional development as it does not promote reflection on self, **key finding**. Despite lack of emphasis on reflective supervision, it remains clear that time constraints were an issue which caused managers to provide sporadic supervision sessions; that may be evidenced in **Bravo** and **Alpha** when they said their managers were overworked.

Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, and **Delta** all admitted to relying on ad hoc peer support as opposed to formal supervision from their managers to pass their ASYE Programme, **key finding**. Their organisations appeared to be under pressure from the restrictions of the budgets' reductions, hence accepted ad hoc support as a method to bridge the gap caused by lack of staff including the manager's inability to have time for formal supervision sessions (Johnson et al., 2023). However, **Eco** and **Delta** expressed that they could not access peer support since colleagues were busy with their own cases. While **Delta** felt forced to move to the adult's team, **Eco** and **Golf** had to access support from the privately created BME group which was led by experienced practice consultants. This shows that peer support became more reliable than the formal support from managers, **key finding**. Additionally, **Bravo** felt discouraged by the judgemental nature of the organisational culture which meant anyone seeking support was seen as unable to cope in practice. Therefore, she avoided approaching her manager even when she felt she was struggling. This suggests that the organisational culture may either demotivate or motivate NQSWs to seek formal support at the time of need**, key finding.**

7.3.5 Power versus Powerlessness

This theme explores the complex interplay between power and powerlessness in the supervisory experiences of NQSWs, particularly during the ASYE programme. The data reveals how hierarchical dynamics, organisational pressures, and ethical ambiguities converged to shape the experiences of some participants, often placing them in morally and professionally precarious positions.

Bravo's account illustrates this tension: *"They [supervision sessions] were recorded but I think the way they were recorded was like something like I'm hush nut about, it's just practice which is important for your portfolio."*

Similarly, **Alpha** shared: "*I was expected to write my own supervision records, and she would just sign; it was almost like a tick-box exercise."*

Both participants described being instructed by their managers to draft their own supervision records, which were then signed off and submitted as evidence for their ASYE portfolios. While this practice enabled them to meet the formal requirements of the programme and progress in their careers, it raises significant ethical concerns. The delegation of supervisory documentation to NQSWs, particularly in the absence of actual reflective supervision, suggests a breakdown in professional standards and a potential breach of the SWE (2021a) professional framework and ethics, **key finding.** Therefore, organisational pressures, particularly those linked to high caseloads and workforce instability (Johnson et al., 2023), may compel managers to bypass ethical protocols, thereby compromising the integrity of professional supervision, **key finding.**

However, this practice may also be interpreted through a more nuanced lens. It is possible that managers intended to empower participants by encouraging them to take ownership of their reflective practice and documentation. From this perspective, the act of writing supervision notes could be seen as a developmental tool aimed at enhancing critical thinking and professional autonomy. This dual interpretation highlights the **ambivalence of power** in supervisory relationships, **key finding.**

The psychological impact of these dynamics may be profound. Drawing on Young (1990, p.56)'s concept of **"oppression of powerlessness"**, this study argues that NQSWs may experience emotional distress when they feel unable to challenge managerial practices that conflict with their professional or personal values. **Bravo** and **Alpha's** compliance with ethically questionable instructions reflects not only a desire to succeed in the ASYE programme, but also a recognition of their limited power within organisational hierarchies. As Tew (2006) and Joy (2019) suggest, sustained powerlessness can lead to burnout, anxiety, and other mental health challenges, particularly when individuals are unable to resist or report unethical practices.

This dilemma is further illuminated by Lyotard's (1983 p.10) concept of "*the differend"*, a conflict between two parties that cannot be resolved through a shared rule or framework. In this context, while both managers and NQSWs are bound by the same ethical standards, the asymmetry of power means that NQSWs are often unable to challenge managerial decisions without risking their professional progression. Managers, under pressure from senior management hierarchy, and austerity-driven service demands (Johnson et al., 2023), may rationalise their actions as necessary, even when they contravene best practice. Meanwhile, NQSWs, aware of the potential consequences of non-compliance, may feel compelled to acquiesce. This study identifies this **ethical impasse** as a **key** finding: Therefore, **the absence of a mutually applicable rule to govern supervisory conduct created a moral grey zone in which power was exercised without accountability**.

Alpha's emotional response to being asked to fabricate supervision records further illustrates the psychological toll of this power imbalance. Her discomfort suggests a conflict between her internalised professional values and the external demands of her role. This study argues that **the intersection of powerlessness and the desire to succeed created a dilemmatic space in which these participants felt forced to choose between ethical integrity and career advancement**, **key finding.**

Ultimately, the findings reveal that power dynamics in early career supervision of the participants were not merely hierarchical, but were shaped by broader organisational, ethical, and psychological forces. The concept of *the differend* provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding the irresolvable tensions that arise when ethical standards collide with structural constraints (Lyotard,1983). Addressing these issues requires not only clearer

guidance on supervisory responsibilities, but also systemic reform to ensure that NQSWs were supported in ways that uphold both their professional development and ethical integrity.

7.3.6 Themes Validation

The expert group confirmed all the themes apart from the temporary ASYE positions where time constraints made it impossible. However, despite having expressed that they had never encountered a situation where NQSWs were asked to falsely create supervision notes, **Hotel** indirectly endorsed that finding when he said, *"supervision can be parked out, so the manager would come and provide a three-month supervision in one sitting"*. His comments concurred with Hussein (2018), who attributed this to systemic pressures, including high staff turnover in statutory children services. If a NQSW can work for three months with no formal supervision, or have a formal supervision session of three months in one sitting, how would the supervision help their professional development, and how would they evidence that on the ASYE portfolio? Therefore, if proper protocols were followed, some participants would have failed to present acceptable evidence to meet the requirements of passing the ASYE programme. This study argues that high staff turnover and the pressure of unmanageable workloads may force some managers to hold three-months' supervision sessions in one sitting, **key finding.**

7.3.7 Conclusion

Unreliable support systems left most participants feeling stressed and uncertain about how to deliver effective practice. However, in contrast, the absence of formal support has, in some cases, motivated some participants to proactively seek ad hoc support from colleagues. This divergence highlights the varied coping mechanisms among participants applied when faced with organisational shortcomings. Overall, case management, emphasised through the Social Model of supervision, see (6.4) was evident as most supervision focused on case management. This may have been enforced by various issues including high staff turnover, forcing managers to only apply the case management function, leaving the reflective component aside (Ravailer et al.,2023).

7.4 Theme-2. The Consequences of Unmanageable Workloads.

7.4.1 Working Late

Bravo: *"I had to work late, there were a few occasions where I worked until 4 or 5am to get like work, paperwork done".*

Bravo: *"I think in any frontline or any emergency worker jobs, social work is toxic on you, kind of physical and emotional it can be. Other people might leave because they can't cope".*

Charlie: "*I get stuck on the computer for two to three days and it defeats the purpose of working without this because for me that's why I enjoy working directly with the children and families rather than getting stuck on the admin work where I would be in the office the whole time".*

Juliet: "*I think the work-life balance is almost non-existent in children social care, when you have a case in care proceedings your life is over, the work-life balance can never be achieved in children social care as long as staff shortages unfortunately".*

Juliet: "*during the day there are people calling me, there are professionals who want to talk to me, so when I want to write in those assessments, I can't even do it during the day, so I must do it at night or over the weekend".*

Foxtrot: *"we used to work out of our normal hours quite a lot, doing admin. We had a system where if you worked overtime or late you claim TOIL, which we used to do, but I think the challenge that we had, you know when it's really busy it doesn't really help to take TOIL because by the time you come back the work would have piled".*

A substantial body of literature confirms that social workers frequently work beyond contracted hours to meet case-related targets (Bates et al., 2010; Jack & Donellan, 2010; Walker, 2014;

Johnson et al., 2019–2023; Scourfield et al., 2021; Ravalier et al., 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2023). Walker (2014) suggests that some social workers voluntarily work overtime and refrain from reclaiming these hours. However, others (Scourfield et al., 2021; Ravalier et al., 2021) argue that the demands of the role compel social workers to work prolonged hours, often at the expense of their personal wellbeing.

This study concurs, as most participants described feeling compelled to sacrifice their personal time to ensure workloads were manageable and cases remained up to date. **Bravo,** for instance, recounted working until 4 or 5 a.m. to complete paperwork, describing social work as physically and emotionally "toxic." **Charlie** expressed frustration at spending multiple days on administrative tasks, which detracted from direct work with children and families. **Juliet** highlighted the impossibility of achieving work-life balance in children's social care, particularly during care proceedings, and described routinely working nights and weekends to complete assessments due to daytime interruptions.

Johnson et al. (2023 p.62)'s study found that 81% of participants confirmed using TOIL (Time Off In Lieu) while 16% of the participants expressed having been paid for overtime. In contrast, participants in this study expressed challenges as they noted that although a system for claiming TOIL existed, it was often impractical. The accumulation of work during absence made taking TOIL counterproductive. **Bravo, Foxtrot, Juliet**, and **Golf** collectively emphasised that prolonged hours were a necessity in statutory children's social work, and reclaiming time was rarely feasible. Therefore, all participants in this study experienced poor work-life balance due to the pressure to work extended hours without compensation, **key finding**. However, it is acknowledged that those with lower caseloads may manage their responsibilities within standard working hours. This was evidenced through **Golf** during her first two months when she still had a protected caseload, before feeling forced to change jobs due to high staff turnover and additional case allocations.

Some participants (**Foxtrot, Eco, and Golf)** described receiving support from business support staff who helped manage calendars and deadlines. **Eco** also relied on digital reminders to stay on top of urgent cases. Despite these supports, **Golf** and **Juliet** reported that their workloads necessitated daytime for visits while evening and weekends were selectively used for

administrative work. Without this additional effort, they risked falling behind, especially when new emergencies arose, **key finding.**

Bravo's experience illustrates the heightened vulnerability of NQSWs. She described working until 5 a.m. on occasion, driven by the pressure to pass the ASYE programme. Unlike experienced social workers who have the autonomy of leaving roles associated with unmanageable workloads (Johnson et al., 2023), participants often felt compelled to endure unhealthy working conditions to demonstrate competence. Failure to maintain up-to-date workloads may be interpreted by managers as an inability to cope, placing NQSWs at risk of failing the ASYE programme. This study argues that the pressure to pass the ASYE programme forced some NQSWs-participants in this current study, to work prolonged hours, contributing to poor work-life balance, **key finding**.

Ultimately, the study asserts that the difficulty of securing another ASYE position mid-programme may trap NQSWs in unhealthy working environments. The example of that is provided by **Bravo** and **Charlie** who both felt forced to leave their initial LAs after completing the ASYE, seeking more manageable workloads elsewhere. This aligns with findings by Johnson et al. (2023), who report that social workers frequently move between LAs in search of better working conditions. This study therefore argues that the structure of the ASYE programme may inadvertently contribute to workforce instability and practitioner burnout, **key finding**.

7.4.2 The Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work.

Some studies (Walker, 2014; Johnson et al., 2023) have suggested that many LAs in England could be benefitting from the goodwill of social workers who willingly donate their own time by working unpaid overtime to complete social work tasks. This study refutes those suggestions of "goodwill" by asserting that social workers are forced by what it refers to as, "*the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work Practice*", which could easily be mistaken for the normal pressures of social work. This is a strong force which compels social workers to normalise working prolonged hours, making them feel uneasy if they did not update their cases out of hours. That was seen in **Bravo, Juliet** and **Golf** who expressed having felt unsettled until they had used what would have been their resting time to update their cases. This shows that these participants found themselves unwittingly adhering to this hidden phenomenon by working prolonged hours with the aim of meeting targets on their cases, remaining up to date, as well as

keeping their jobs. Walker (2014)'s suggestion that some social workers may perceive their added hours as voluntary was refuted by participants in this study who expressed the inability to get their extra hours reimbursed. This study argues that there are no voluntary hours, the hidden phenomenon is coercive in nature as it secretly obliged participants to remain anxious until they had updated the system by working prolonged hours. Ravalier et al. (2021) insist that failure to update cases could lead to major consequences for staff including more unmanageable workloads, resulting in stress and burnout for social workers. Therefore, the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work caused poor work-life balance for participants leading to stress and potential burnout, before eventually forcing some of them to either take long breaks from practice, seek refuge in the "Safe Haven Spaces" provided by locums, or apply for similar roles in organisations where workloads were manageable, **key finding.**

This study asserts that failure to update the system could also have major consequences for service users, especially if emergencies happened when the system had not been updated, leading to misunderstandings for emergency duty social workers who may be forced to provide inappropriate support based on inaccurate information, **key finding.** Therefore, the participants in this study were powerless against the Coercive Nature of Social Work. However, this phenomenon may be less experienced where workloads are lower, less complex and manageable. Nevertheless, this study asserts that if social workers continued to work in the evenings and weekends on a recurrent basis, it could mean their contracted hours may be insufficient for them to conduct all their duties**, key finding**. On the contrary, if all participants had abstained from donating own time to complete tasks, their organisations would have likely struggled to meet targets on their cases. Overall, the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work encouraged the exploitation of participants in this study, as it covertly extended their working hours beyond their contracted hours, **key finding.** This is collaborated in Johnson et al. (2023) whose study found that, despite being contracted for 37 hours, NQSWs still worked an average of 43 hours each week.

Findings from this study have shown that limited practice experiences and the desire to learn meant NQSWs had to take advantage of any opportunity whatsoever and put themselves forward to learn. This has been evidenced in **Alpha** who reluctantly agreed to chairing a meeting as the main social worker after only three days of starting her role. Despite expressing to have

felt forced to work until 5am on occasion, **Bravo** stated that she appreciated such conditions as they motivated her to dig deeper and get support from peers. However, less motivated NQSWs in the same situation may find it difficult to cope and feel forced to quit their roles. Therefore, the successful completion of the ASYE programme for participants in this study may have been closely associated with the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work, as they all agreed to having felt forced to work late evenings and weekends, to ensure their cases remained up to date, **key finding.**

On a different note, **Charlie** expressed that her manager would ask her to attend to her cases during her breaktime while on a training day. While this may be accepted in crisis situations, it may not be good for the trainee as it would lead them to a divided attention preventing them from focusing on training. Therefore, this study argues that the pressure of unmanageable workloads coupled with the high staff turnover, likely forced **Charlie's** manager to make such a regrettable decision, **key finding.**

7.4.3 Self-care skills

Self-care has been defined in various ways across the literature. Lee and Miller (2013, p. 97) describe it simply as "*care for oneself,"* aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle and enhancing practitioners' responses to practice dilemmas. More recent scholarship positions self-care not only as beneficial but as an *ethical responsibility* (Griffins et al., 2019, p. 122; Demarchis et al., 2022). Lee and Miller (2013, p. 101) further argue that: *"Self-care is a means of empowering social workers to negotiate and offset some of the profound structural, organisational, and interpersonal challenges associated with social work practice."* Given this, it is essential that social workers are supported with self-care skills. Doing so may reduce stress-related absences, promote wellbeing, and improve retention.

Research highlights mindfulness and meditation programmes as helpful in reducing stress and burnout, while also building resilience for social workers (Crowder and Sears, 2017; Bryce et al., 2024). This study reinforces the importance of self-care. **Charlie** shared that exercise, particularly going to the gym, was a key strategy for managing stress. **Bravo** emphasised the need for social workers to engage in activities that would help divert their minds from the

pressures of practice. She also stressed the importance of recognising when wellbeing has been compromised, rather than continuing to work until reaching burnout. However, this study identifies a **key challenge**: the Coercive Nature of Social Work may restrict opportunities for self-care. The demands of the role often lead practitioners to prioritise work over wellbeing, leaving them unable to detect early signs of stress. As a result, some may only recognise the impact on their health at the point of burnout, necessitating extended absences to recover, **key finding**. This study therefore argues that social workers who struggle to implement self-care strategies are more vulnerable to burnout and may be more likely to take prolonged leave or exit the profession altogether, **key finding**.

7.4.4 Culture Shock for IQSWs

This study has identified that high and unmanageable workloads can have a profound impact on the wellbeing of IQSWs, often leading to serious mental health concerns and decisions to leave their roles or return to their countries of origin. **Eco** and **Golf** reflected on this reality:

Eco: "*I remember people that I came with some of them left, went back to Africa, others would take a break. I did take a break sometime two years ago, just for three months to breathe*".

Golf: "*At the six months stage, I was on thirty-something cases which were complex, social workers were coming and going, some social workers were struggling with mental health*".

Golf: "*I realised that if I don't leave, I was going to struggle with mental health. I saw some of my international colleagues' struggle, I saw some of them going back home, there was one that I supported, she had panic attacks, she felt like driving onto oncoming traffic*".

This study reveals that despite being aware of **Golf's** contractual agreement which included a protected caseload and structured support, managers breached these terms due to a sudden increase in staff resignations. Crucially, this breach occurred without any formal discussion or justification provided to **Golf.** Her repeated requests through her practice consultant to communicate her inability to cope were ignored, and she continued to receive additional cases until she ultimately resigned. However, communicating through her practice consultant suggest

that **Golf** did not have direct contact with her managers, hence, some social work managers may prefer to communicate via intermediates, than directly, with social workers, **key finding.** Her narrative illustrates the psychological toll of being unheard and unsupported, reinforcing the study's finding that **contractual breaches and managerial disregard significantly impacted the wellbeing of Golf and her compatriots, leading to premature exits from their roles**. Her decision was influenced by witnessing fellow colleagues abandoning their roles and returning to their countries in promotion of their wellbeing, with one having panic attacks and the feeling of driving onto oncoming traffic, symbolising suicidal ideation. This highlights a **key** finding: **toxic working conditions and unmanageable workloads have the potential to endanger lives**. The feelings of driving onto oncoming traffic poses danger to life, as the social worker may get themselves and unaware members of the public, injured or killed in a car crash. These accounts illustrate the severity of psychological distress faced by these IQSW-participants, whose vulnerability as described in chapter 5.6, appear to have been exacerbated by lack of a formal adaptation programme, **key finding**.

Eco: *"I was frustrated, I felt what if something happened to the child overnight and then I would be accountable, so I felt like I can't do this anymore and I spoke to my manager that she needed to re-allocate the case to someone who was more experienced, and that is what they did, then I got more training"*.

Instead of protecting the child, **Eco** unintentionally exposed the child to harm using a South African approach, after having ignored a parent who had warned him not to leave the child where he had planned to leave him. This **underscores** the need for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs.

Moreover, the study finds that managers appeared to exploit the limited knowledge IQSWs had about their rights in England. Rather than empowering them with information, such as how to join a union or assert their right to refuse additional case allocations, managers allocated cases in a manner that suggested refusal was not an option. **Golf's** reflection that social workers should be allowed to say "no" to new cases underscores the need for structural empowerment. While managers may have felt compelled to prioritise service users amid high staff turnover (Ravalier et al., 2021), **this study argues that IQSWs must be supported to understand their**

rights and be encouraged to join unions upon arrival, enabling them to seek redress when contractual breaches occur.

Despite having taken a long break from practice, **Eco** was eventually forced to quit her role and join an agency, while **Golf** similarly left her role and sought a new one where workloads were manageable. That happened while both **Eco** and **Golf** received support from their LAs and BME peer support group. Therefore, support may not be sufficient to retain staff if workloads remain unmanageable, a **key finding**. The BME group, described by **Golf** as a "*home away from home,"* provided emotional and practical support, including help during personal crises such as bereavement. Although the group was initially informal and independent of the LA, its value was eventually recognised, with white managers attending sessions and engaging in discussions. This study argues that such personal networks can significantly enhance social workers' experiences and contribute to retention, **key finding**.

Golf expressed that she and her compatriots used what Fine & Teram (2013 p. 1314) described as "*overt avoidance",* purposely avoiding organisations with high and unmanageable workloads when placing an application. In doing that, they used the BME group to gather information about caseloads in other LAs before applying for new roles. This study argues that LAs known for high and unmanageable workloads may receive fewer job applications, exacerbating staffing challenges and organisational instability, **key finding**.

While no generalisations can be made from this qualitative study, it is interesting to note that the most distressing mental health outcomes, such as panic attacks, were not commonly reported by those who qualified in England but were highlighted by IQSW-participants. This suggests that IQSWs may be more vulnerable to psychological harm due to the challenges of adapting to a new practice environment. In this context, Social Work in England may function as a "*psychological hazard"* (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018 p.8), for IQSWs, **key finding**.

The psychological strain experienced by **Golf** and her colleagues is attributed to the **oppression of powerlessness**, a recurring theme in this study. Had managers acknowledged and responded to the concerns raised, it is likely that these social workers would have remained in their roles. Instead, power dynamics rendered IQSWs unable to challenge managerial decisions, leaving resignation or repatriation as their only viable options. Given that these

workers had recently received full relocation packages, their premature departure resulted in significant financial losses for the LA, **key finding.**

This research identifies a concerning trend in which NQSWs and newly arrived IQSWs (participants in this study) were used as stopgaps to fill vacancies vacated by experienced staff. Participants including **Alpha, Charlie, Bravo, Eco,** and **Golf** described being rushed into practice roles without adequate induction, or knowledge of the English practice standards in this case IQSWs. This suggests that some LAs may prioritise service delivery over proper onboarding, exposing less experienced workers to undue stress, **key finding**.

In summary, this section identifies:

- **Unmanageable workloads** as a major driver of mental health strain and staff attrition among IQSWs.
- **Peer support networks**, such as the BME group, as valuable but insufficient without structural workload reform.
- **Overt avoidance** identified as key to managing wellbeing since it encouraged some participants to avoid organisations with unmanageable workloads.
- **Locum work** as a coping strategy that benefits individual wellbeing but contributes to organisational instability.
- **Greater vulnerability among IQSWs** compared to domestically trained social workers, highlighting the need for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs.

7.4.5 Locums as Safe Haven Spaces

This section explores the growing appeal of locum (agency) social work roles, particularly in the context of wellbeing management and workforce retention. Participant reflections, alongside existing literature (Johnson et al.,2023; McLaughlin et al., 2025) suggest that locum positions offer a unique combination of benefits that make them attractive to practitioners seeking relief from the pressures of statutory social work.

Charlie noted that agency roles offered higher pay and minimal contractual commitment, while **Eco** described using locum work as a strategy to manage emotional exhaustion:

"I'm an agency locum, so when I feel that I'm exhausted or drained emotionally, I leave. I go and apply somewhere else, if it's not working, I also leave again."

These insights align with findings from Johnson et al. (2023), who reported that 60% of agency social workers cited better pay as their primary motivation, followed by flexibility (53%), improved work-life balance (39%), and career progression opportunities (28%). Additional drivers noted by Johnson et al. (2023 p.31) for selecting agency work included taking "*short-term career breaks"* where greater flexibility was required, for example, medical or mental health conditions, study breaks, maternity or short-term childcare and other personal matters. McLaughlin et al. (2025 p.187) adds another layer when they argue that agency workers were likely to be "*older males"* of the BME group. This study confirmed those findings as many participants were already working for agencies while others were still developing their skills and confidence in preparation for joining agencies (see 8.4.3 & 8.44). This study places particular emphasis on the flexibility afforded by short-term contracts. **Eco's** account illustrates how locum work can serve as a mechanism for wellbeing management, allowing practitioners to exit stressful environments quickly and seek more manageable workloads elsewhere. While this insight is drawn from a single participant, its significance lies in the potential for broader applicability among agency social workers.

This study introduces the **"triple-joy combo benefit"** concept, associated with locum roles:

1. **Higher wages** compared to permanent positions.
2. **Contractual flexibility**, enabling early exit from stressful roles.
3. **Wellbeing management** through mobility across LAs.

Flexibility allows agency social workers to maintain better work-life balance and avoid prolonged exposure to toxic working conditions (Johnson et al., 2021). In contrast, permanent staff often face longer notice periods, limiting their ability to respond swiftly to stress (McLaughlin et al., 2025). Therefore, this study argues that agency social workers may be better positioned to manage their wellbeing than permanent colleagues, **key finding**.

Eco's narrative further suggests that some social workers may perceive locum roles as **"Safe Haven Spaces",** temporary refuges from the emotional toll of statutory practice. After experiencing burnout and taking three months off, **Eco** transitioned from a permanent role to

locum work, citing the difficulty of escaping stress within permanent contracts. This suggests that unmanageable workloads may make social workers feel as if they were at a pivotal crossroads, where they will be forced to choose between their jobs and wellbeing, compelling some to leave permanent roles in favour of locum positions, seeking environments that better support their wellbeing, or completely exit the profession, **key finding**.

However, while locum work may benefit practitioners, it can have adverse effects on service users, particularly Looked After Children. Frequent changes in social workers can disrupt attachment and emotional development, as children may perceive their social worker as a parental figure (Fallowfield, 2009). Constant movement among agency staff may leave children feeling distressed and confused, undermining the stability essential to their care (Hillman et al., 2020), **key finding.**

Recent policy developments reflect efforts to address these concerns. According to the Association of Directors for Children Services (ADCS) (2025), the number of agency social workers has declined for the first time in seven years, with one region reporting a low of 10.4%. This reduction is attributed to new DfE guidelines (2024 p. 10-22), which stipulate that:

- Agency social workers must have at least three years of post-qualifying experience.
- Notice periods must align with those of permanent staff.
- Social workers cannot be considered for agency roles within the same region if they left another LA within the past three months.

Further reinforcing this policy shift, McAlister (2022)'s report emphasised the empowerment of a highly skilled workforce, with their fourth recommendation being the proposal of the **Social Work Induction Programme (SWIP)**. Under SWIP, NQSWs must complete a two-year support programme before becoming eligible for agency work, extending the previous one-year ASYE model (DfE, 2025).

Research consistently links retention challenges in statutory children's services to budget cuts in LAs (Johnson et al., 2019–2023; Scourfield et al., 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2025; Burns, 2011; Ravalier et al., 2021). Despite acknowledging the current challenges caused by lack of funding for LAs, McAlister (2022 p.42) still recommended the "*double running system",* where the

government will fund the current and an additional system in helping families. Participants in this study expressed having felt forced by unmanageable workloads and high staff turnover to leave their initial LAs after passing their ASYE programme. This finding was collaborated by Scourfield et al., (2021) whose study found that NQSWs normally leave their initial LAs within three years of qualification. On that note, this study argues that the SWIP proposal of adding another year to the already challenging ASYE year before NQSWs can move to agencies will cause more unnecessary pain for some NQSWs, likely discouraging them from statutory children services, **key finding**.

Ravalier et al. (2021) argues that continued cuts to public spending meant the government was struggling to fund social services, leading to reduced LA budgets. Therefore, increasing financial responsibilities for the already struggling government will make things worse. However, a carefully chartered step-by-step approach of dealing with the current challenges first, would have yielded more immediate and sustainable improvements. Thus, the £253 million suggested by McAlister (2022), aimed at developing skills for the social work workforce, reallocated to increase LA budgets before any finances could be spent elsewhere.

The evolution of NQSW support programmes, from the three-year model (2008–2011) to the one-year ASYE (2012), and now the two-year SWIP, reflects ongoing attempts to address workforce instability (Carpenter et al., 2012; DfE, 2025). However, this study concurs with Jones (2025) who argues that the new programme may inadvertently divert NQSWs away from children's services and into adult services, where the one-year support model remains (DfE, 2025). This imbalance raises questions about the coherence of social work education and training, reigniting debates about whether children's and adult services should be split into distinct professional pathways.

Overall, these changes are expected to continue improving retention by limiting the flexibility that previously attracted social workers to agency roles. An increase in permanent posts will continue to reduce agency positions, therefore affecting the higher wages gained through those roles. Additionally, an increase in the notice periods for agency social workers will reduce the flexibility and limit the benefits of the "Safe Haven Spaces". Therefore, social workers who were either enjoying benefits associated with the "**triple-joy combo benefit",** or those who were looking to join agencies soon after completing their ASYE programme, will have to wait longer,

while waiting, agency roles will be similarly reduced. These changes will undoubtedly benefit service users, since Looked After Children will have the opportunity of bonding with their social workers if the social workers were in permanent roles. However, reduced flexibility will likely leave many social workers trapped in unhealthy working conditions, increasing sickness related absences, further placing organisations in turmoil, **key finding.**

Overall, all participants expressed that, to prevent social workers from leaving, LAs needed to hire more social workers to ensure that cases were shared and therefore kept lower and manageable. This finding reinforces the earlier argument that instead of funding the new system, diverting those funds to increase budgets for LAs would have yielded more immediate and sustainable improvements.

7.4.6 Travelling time

This study identifies travel time as a significant factor contributing to workload pressures and stress among statutory children and family social workers. Participants **Charlie** and **Golf** both described the burden of long-distance travel for home visits, which often consumed substantial portions of their working day. **Charlie** noted the difficulty of balancing visits and administrative responsibilities due to extensive driving, while **Golf** explained: *"I used to have visits that were an hour's drive, so going and coming back would take another hour while I would spend the other with children and families."* These accounts highlight how travel time can reduce the hours available for direct work with families and for updating case records. Participants expressed that the time spent driving often left them with no choice but to work out of hours to ensure their cases remained up to date, **key finding**. This study acknowledges the inherent ambiguities of travel, including traffic congestion and unpredictable delays, which further constrain practitioners' ability to manage their time effectively. While travel is an expected component of social work practice (Ferguson, 2010), this study argues that managers must remain cognisant of its impact and avoid placing unrealistic expectations on staff. Ideally, social workers should be supported to plan their schedules in a way that balances visit days with dedicated administrative time. However, this becomes increasingly difficult when workloads are excessive and unmanageable. Therefore, this study asserts that travel time, particularly in the context of high caseloads, has the potential to leave social workers feeling stressed, as it

reduces the time available for both direct support and essential administrative tasks, **key finding**.

Golf's experience also reveals an additional layer of complexity for IQSWs. She expressed greater frustration with travel demands compared to **Charlie,** who qualified in England. **Golf** noted that such long-distance driving was not part of her experience in South Africa, where public transport was more commonly used by social workers (Schenck et al., 2021). This suggests that IQSWs may face heightened stress due to unfamiliar road networks, driving expectations, and cultural differences in mobility. Consequently, **Golf's** IQSW account suggests that she was disproportionately affected by travel-related stress, particularly when transitioning into practice environments that require extensive driving, **key finding**.

7.4.7 Micromanagement

Ryan and Cross (2024) define **micromanagement** as a leadership approach that seeks to control employees by imposing managerial will over subordinate autonomy. This leadership style often leaves subordinates feeling demotivated, anxious, and disconnected from their managers. In contrast, **Laissez-Faire leadership**, originating from the economic philosophy of François Quesnay in the 18th century, allows a more autonomous framework, enabling all workers to operate independently (Lundmark et al., 2022). However, Lundmark et al. (2022) acknowledge potential challenges with Laissez-Faire leadership but argue that it can foster motivation and trust among social workers by granting them autonomy. This study supports the notion that Laissez-Faire leadership may promote healthier manager-worker relationships, in contrast to micromanagement, which can contribute to workplace stress for subordinates.

While Hoch et al. (2018) suggest that micromanagement may encourage ethical behaviour, this study concurs with Ryan and Cross (2024) who aligns it with stress. Participants **Charlie and Bravo** described feeling stressed and frustrated under micromanaging managers. **Hotel** further noted that micromanagement may be disproportionately applied to BME social workers, particularly when managers lacked confidence in their abilities.

This study introduces a critical concept: **the association of micromanagement with "fruitlessness",** a perception that certain social workers are incapable or unproductive. When BME social workers are deemed "fruitless," they may be subjected to micromanagement, which

in turn erodes their autonomy and foster feelings of "uselessness." This cycle of disempowerment may initiate what Merton (1948, p. 195) described as a "*self-fulfilling prophecy",* when he argued that "*false beliefs can lead to behaviours which confirm them*", leading to wrong rationalisation. Hence, once micromanaged, or have their skills questioned, BME social workers may feel useless, resulting in a tendency towards carelessness in practice, thereby reinforcing their managers' lack of faith on them, **key finding**. The resulting unintended deviant practice behaviours may lead to more BME social workers being reported for misconduct issues; this may partly explain the overrepresentation of Black social workers on misconduct issues (SWE, 2023). Conversely, those not micromanaged may be perceived as "fruitful" and "useful," which can enhance their motivation and professional development, preserving good practice, thereby reinforcing their managers' faith in them, **key finding**. Some managers may apply micromanagement universally (McLaughlin, 2015; Brown, 2020); however, this study argues that micromanagement can function as a form of racial profiling, disproportionately targeting BME practitioners, **key finding.** Furthermore, Bwalya (2024) links micromanagement to discriminatory practices and workplace bullying, which may perpetuate the exclusion of BME social workers who may already be feeling invisible within the UK social work practice system (Obasi, 2022), **key finding.**

This study argues that adopting a **Laissez-Faire leadership style**, which reflects trust in the skills of all social workers, may foster confidence and improve service delivery. Ravalier et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of autonomy in enabling reflexive practice, allowing social workers to reflect and improve their skills. IQSW-participants in this study reported that instead of receiving formal adaptation support, they were micromanaged, leading to stress and confusion. This study argues that managers used micromanagement to ensure that their organisations received maximum benefits for hiring social workers abroad, since they would have spent time and financial resources during the recruitment process, **key finding.**

Therefore, this study asserts that social workers, particularly BME NQSWs and IQSWs, may benefit from leadership styles that promote independence and trust. Laissez-Faire leadership, when applied appropriately, can empower practitioners, reduce stress, and enhance professional growth, **key finding**.

7.4.8 Themes Validation

The expert group validated all the themes in this section. They all agreed that there is more pressure in statutory children services than adults' services. **Hotel** argued that this pressure makes it harder for managers to provide consistent supervision sessions.

Another significant insight emerged from **Juliet**, who highlighted the strategic motivations behind recruiting IQSWs. She noted: *"they give social workers a five-year visa, so if they recruit thirty social workers for example and they put them on a five-year visa, that brings stability."*

This statement underscores a critical finding: while long-term visa sponsorship may offer organisational stability, it simultaneously creates vulnerability for IQSWs. Their visa status, tied to a specific employer, limits their mobility and ability to leave stressful or unsupportive work environments (Kharicha et al., 2023). This dependency may inadvertently enable exploitative practices, as organisations are aware that IQSWs cannot easily seek alternative employment; **this structural constraint is a key finding of the study**.

Juliet shared that her close friends have been migrating to Australia and Canada, stating that social work in those countries was not as toxic as it was in England. However, this is contrary to published research (Morehead, 2021; Beddoe et al., 2018, Cleveland et al., 2019), which suggests that social workers from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and England all face similar challenges. Future research may need to follow social workers who migrated from England to those countries and explore their experiences, providing a full picture of the English statutory children social work practice compared to those countries.

7.4.9 Section-conclusion

Findings from this section and the previous, has detailed how unmanageable workloads left participants at risk of stress, burnout and exhaustion due to a poor work-life balance. However, both sets of participants (NQSWs and IQSWs) appeared particularly susceptible to the psychological strain associated with powerlessness, especially when they felt unable to challenge managerial decisions or advocate for their own needs. This sense of disempowerment may hinder professional development and compromise the quality-of-service delivery. Additionally, LAs may incur significant financial losses when IQSWs

prematurely abandoned their roles and returned to their native countries after having received full relocation packages, **key finding**. This outcome suggests ***an urgent need*** for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs, which will promote retention and sustainability. Additionally, the Hidden Coercive Nature of social work encouraged the exploitation of participants as it forced them to work prolonged hours. Furthermore, unmanageable workloads, coupled with inadequate support, has led some participants in this study to a pivotal crossroads where they found themselves having to choose between their wellbeing and their jobs/careers. Therefore, those who decided to leave their roles or the profession altogether would be doing so to promote and protect their wellbeing.

7.5 Theme-3. Race, a Barrier to Social Work Practice?

The extracts below are examples where participants felt their race played a part or became a barrier preventing them from delivering desired social services. They are focused to both service user and organisational factors.

Access barriers:

Golf: "*some social workers were subjected to that, whereby parents would straightaway inform them that they cannot work with an African social worker".*

Foxtrot: "*I remember with that family, they didn't say it to me directly, but they told a schoolteacher to say they didn't want a black social worker, so the teacher informed me"*.

Eco: "*One requested that I should be changed, they wanted a different social worker; they asked me if that's what I wanted as well because I also said I cannot work with this person because he is racially abusive to me".*

Organisational barriers:

Delta: "*Having more people who are exposed to other ethnic groups is important because if you have not worked with someone with foreign mannerism, you begin to mistake personality based on your biased understanding".*

Bravo: *"I was too afraid to talk about issues of racism because I thought no one was going to listen".*

Golf: "*There was one [incident] in the local authority that I left. I thought that was microaggression that I was being subjected to, how can one question somebody's qualifications?"*

Foxtrot detailed how he was informed that the family did not want to be supported by a black social worker. However, his manager asked him if he still wanted to work with the family after that revelation. **Foxtrot** provided a well-considered and courageous response when he said he

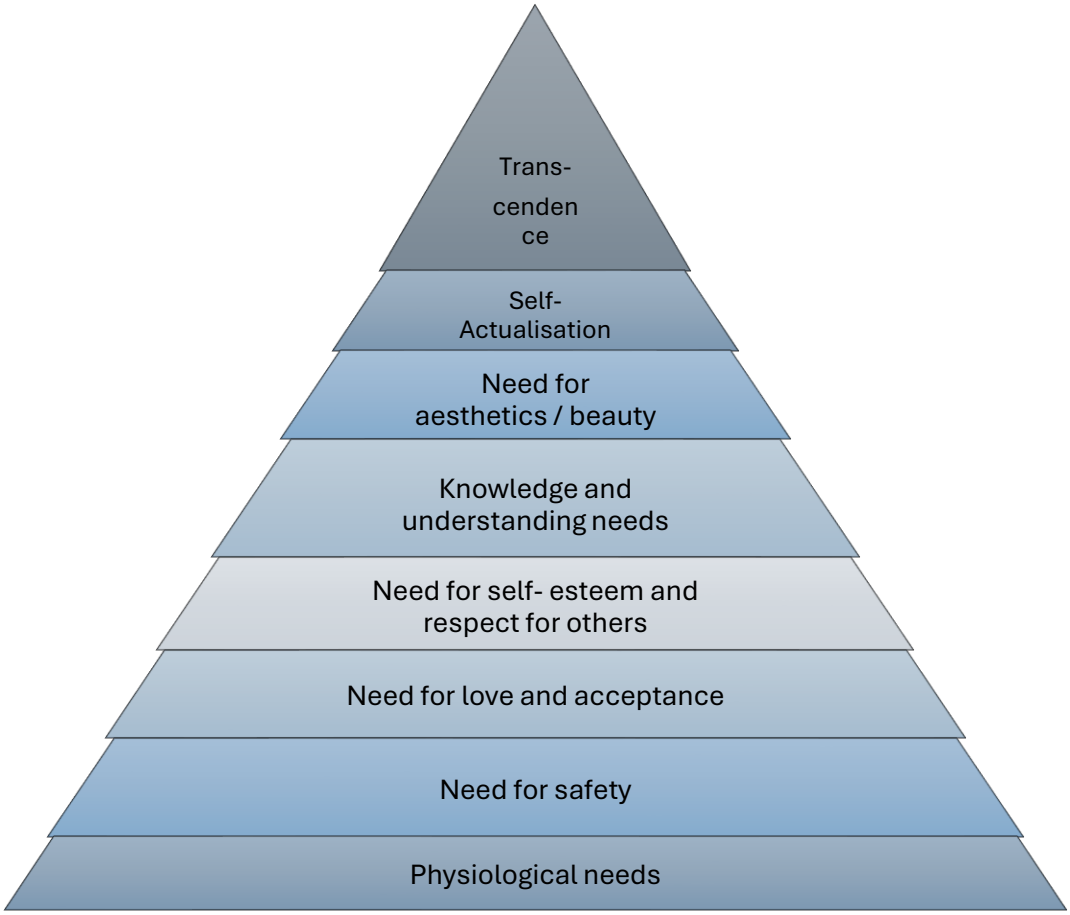
wanted to continue supporting the family so that he would be able to challenge such stereotypical views about black social workers. Unlike **Foxtrot**, **Eco** refused to continue supporting somebody who had been racially abusive to him. Perhaps, **Foxtrot's** feelings were not severely affected as the parent had not directly confronted him. Despite stating that she only experienced microaggressions personally, **Golf** expressed that her black colleagues were refused access to supporting children as parents expressed their disapproval of black social workers. These experiences illustrate the complex and poignant dilemmas faced by the participants. On one hand, they were professionally obligated to uphold the values of the social work profession and support vulnerable children (SWE, 2021b). On the other, racial stigma and discrimination prevented or delayed their abilities to fulfil these duties. This tension can result in prolonged neglect, especially if the same parents who refused support from Black social workers were abusive to their children, **key finding**. Simultaneously, BME practitioners may experience emotional distress and professional demoralisation when barred from performing their roles, **key finding**.

Delta emphasised the need for greater exposure to different ethnic groups, arguing that unfamiliarity can lead to misinterpretation of personality traits through a biased lens. **Charlie** highlighted the importance of diversity among managers, suggesting that leaders with lived-experience of racism may be better equipped to support BME staff. However, **Brav**o expressed the opposite experiences where a black manager who appeared to have normalised racism, questioned **Bravo** on why she was advocating for BME children within the Youth Justice System who she believed were facing systemic discrimination. These contrasting experiences reveal the complexities which may be associated with the attitudes and conceptualisation of racism in a variety of contexts.

Drawing on **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** (figure-6), particularly the updated model by Berman (2022 p.22), this study argues that racial discrimination can obstruct BME social workers from achieving **self-transcendence,** defined as a "*state of joy and connectedness with others",* associated with caring responsibilities and mental wellbeing (Hwang et al., 2018). When participants were prevented from applying their professional values due to racial stigma, they were left at heightened risks of depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Maddock, 2024). In severe cases, this would have likely led to extended absences from work for the barred participants, contributing to high staff turnover in LAs (Ravalier et al., 2021).

The emotional toll of exclusion may also prevent BME social workers from fulfilling their **need for love and belonging**, the third tier in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Therefore, feelings of detachment from society, children, and the profession coupled with the GSCC (2012) and SWE (2023a)'s findings which associated black social workers with misconduct issues, suggest that the continued progress and survival of black social workers in England remains threatened, **key finding.** Evidently, these experiences are only attributed to the participants in this small sample-size study which are not generalisable. Nonetheless, this study calls for a **pragmatic and proactive approach** to supporting BME social workers. Generally, when Black social workers are excluded, LAs are indirectly barred from fulfilling their statutory duties, as social workers represent LAs in practice (Johnson et al., 2019). Considering these findings, race can be a significant barrier to social work practice, especially if ***being black,*** prevents black social workers from conducting their duties and fulfilling their roles as social workers.

Figure-6 Maslow (1943), Hierarchy of Needs



Adapted from Berman, (2022 p. 22)

7.5.2 Race, Leadership, and Powerlessness in Challenging Racism

This study reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory experiences of social workers navigating issues of race within organisational hierarchies. **Bravo** shared divergent experiences with managers of different racial backgrounds. She expressed disappointment with a Black manager who, despite occupying a senior leadership role, discouraged her from challenging what she perceived as systemic racism faced by BME youths in the Youth Justice System:

Bravo: *I raised it with senior managers, and one African manager was looking at me and saying, it's good that you are passionate, but you can't always change everything, I'm looking at her, I'm like why you in this position, but you can't help your own people, I don't get it.*

***Bravo**: I had one white manager, she was amazing, she would give me the space to complain about the issues of racism.*

Bravo's response: *"Why are you in this position, but you can't help your own people?"* reflects a sense of betrayal and disillusionment. She had expected empathy and advocacy from a manager who similarly shared a racial identity with BME adolescents who were allegedly facing discrimination through harsh sentencing within the Youth Justice system. This expectation aligns with Pollock et al. (2024, p. 258), who despite acknowledging lack of "*ethnic progression in management roles*", insist that Black managers continue to fight racism within social work. However, **Bravo's** experience suggests that some Black managers may be perceived as complicit in downplaying structural racism, **key finding**. Conversely, **Bravo** described a positive experience with a white manager who provided space to discuss racism openly. While this manager demonstrated empathy and support, she was ultimately unable to influence decisions made by external institutions such as the courts. This highlights a broader issue: **managerial powerlessness** in challenging systemic racism embedded within powerful structures, **key finding**. Racial identity alone does not determine a manager's willingness or ability to challenge racism. Some Black managers may feel disempowered due to their own early experiences of discrimination, leading to a normalisation of systemic racism and reluctance to confront it, **key finding**. Meanwhile, some white managers may be more open to dialogue but constrained by institutional limitations.

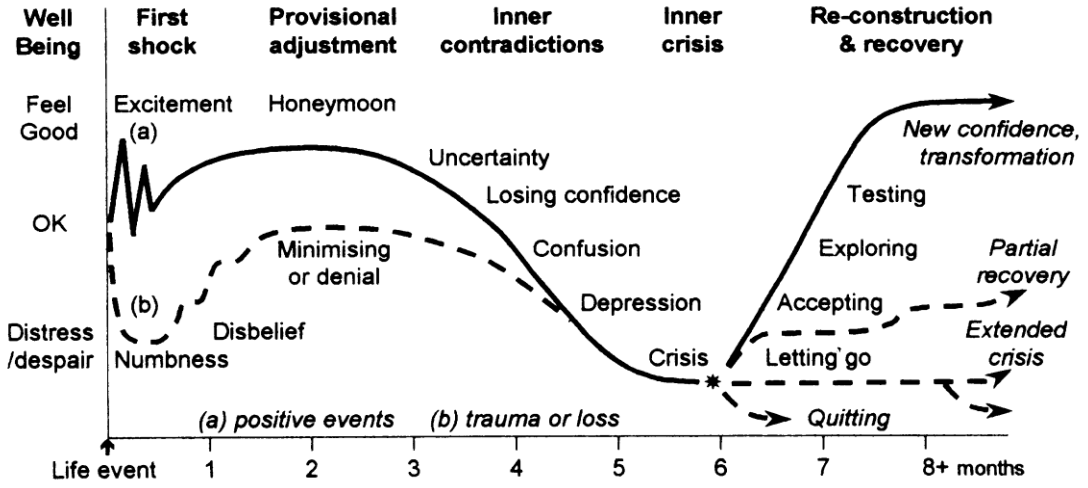
The findings underscore the need for **anti-racist leadership development** that equips all managers regardless of racial background, with the tools, confidence, and institutional support to challenge racism effectively. Without this, social workers advocating for racial justice may feel unsupported, and therefore avoid advocating for vulnerable BME youths, leaving them faced with prolonged periods of systemic discrimination.

7.5.3 The Potential Impact of Racism on Transition for BME social workers.

The first-year of social work practice represents a period of change and transition (Walker, 2014). While most participants **Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Eco, Golf** and **Delta** expressed serious challenges during their transition, **Foxtrot** expressed joy about the support which met his expectations when he started his new role. However, he still felt forced to donate his resting time and work out of hours, demonstrating that transition is not always smooth and at times

may require individuals to sacrifice something, before being able to achieve their goals. Williams (1999) described the transition as a natural process which humans use to adapt to change or respond to trauma caused by change or significant event. Williams (1999/2008) devised a transitional cycle (figure-7), which indicates that transition presents chaotic situations while a human would be adjusting to their new roles.

Figure-7 Williams' (1999/2008)'s transition cycle.



Applying the Wiliams' (1999/2008) transitional cycle to the first-year in social work suggests that this transition could be chaotic. NQSWs and newly arrived IQSWs may need to be creative and reflective during this time, if not, they would struggle to adapt. However, issues of racism mean BME social workers could be faced with higher and often unrecognised levels of chaos in their transition period. Hence, this study argues that Williams' (1999/2008) transitional cycle lacks an essential component as it does not specifically detail the added racism-related chaos which may be experienced by some BME social workers, **key identification**. Critics may argue that racism is represented by uncertainty, confusion and depression, hence, there is no need to update the cycle. However, this research asserts that such comments have been linked to liberalism, which applies colour-blindness, suggesting that all people are the same, but ignoring race-related experiences, thereby, forcing BME individuals to remain feeling isolated in their unfamiliar and somehow unrecognised experiences (Fakhrey, 2011; Cole, 2016). The sensitivity of separatism makes racism experiences distinct, meaning they present an additional layer of

chaos and confusion which may lead to some BME individuals questioning if they were in the right skin colour. Therefore, racism experiences cannot be submerged under all experiences when race has been included among the protected characteristics in the Equality Act, 2010. That means, a new transitional cycle which includes the experience of being excluded or discriminated due to race, is needed to highlight all the extreme chaos which could be only faced by BME individuals, **key finding.**

7.5.4 The Avoidance of Sharing Racism Experiences: A Method of Fitting In?

This study highlights the nuanced ways in which participants navigated the sharing of racism experiences within professional and research contexts. While some participants openly discussed incidents of racism, others appeared hesitant or chose to downplay their experiences.

Alpha: "*I think it's a personal issue, not personal, you know there are some people who are extra sensitive and there are some people who just let things go, so probably it has happened"*.

Juliet*: "I think you missed my hand I had it raised. Just very quickly, I wanted to confirm that for me the racist incident was the only one since I arrived in England"*.

Alpha initially described racism as a "personal issue," suggesting that some individuals were "extra sensitive" while others would "just let things go." Although she later retracted this statement, her initial framing implies that she may have perceived racism as a private matter, not easily shared in public or professional settings. Similarly, when noticing that others in the focus group did not immediately endorse her racism experiences, **Juliet** downplayed those experiences when she raised her hand insisting that it was only a one-off incident. However, her action may be reflected by Janis (1982 p.12)'s Groupthink Theory which argues that "*loyalty requires each member to avoid controversial issues*" in group interviews. Hence, Juliet likely desired to align with the dominant narrative and avoid being perceived as dissenting from the core views shared by the group, **key finding**. **However, India's** account, which focused on

racism involving fellow Black individuals, suggests an alternative strategy where some BME social workers may selectively share experiences to avoid reinforcing perceptions of "otherness" and instead promote a sense of unity or belonging, **key finding**. This study argues that the avoidance of sharing racism experiences may serve as a **coping mechanism** or a **strategy for fitting in** within predominantly white professional environments. Some participants in this study **(Bravo** and **Charlie**) feared being judged, stigmatised, or victimised, leading them to suppress their experiences and present a façade of comfort, **key finding**. This aligns with Freire's (1993, p. 29) concept of the *"culture of silence,"* where the oppressed internalise the norms of the oppressor, choosing silence even when deeply hurt. **Bravo's** account of a Black manager discouraging her from challenging systemic racism in the Youth Justice System may reflect this internalised oppression. The manager's reluctance to advocate for Black adolescents could be interpreted as a normalisation of structural racism, **key finding**.

The emotional consequences of unshared racism experiences may be significant, as suppressing these experiences may lead to distress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges, ultimately affecting the quality-of-service delivery to children, **key finding**. **Alpha's** suggestion that sensitivity to racism varies among individuals introduces another layer of complexity. Those who are more sensitive may be more affected by discriminatory incidents, while others may dismiss or forget them more easily, **key finding**.

This study acknowledges the right of individuals to choose whether to share their experiences. However, the virtual nature of this study may have limited participants' willingness to disclose deeply concerning personal experiences, **key insight**. Hence, using **safe and therapeutic spaces**, rather than virtual platforms may have promoted more open dialogue.

7.5.5 Cultural Competence versus Cultural Humility

Bravo: *"George Floyd passed away in 2020, that's when they think Black Lives Matter was developed, it wasn't, it was developed way before George Floyd passed away".*

The experience described above impacted **Bravo's** feelings as she felt annoyed when white social workers repeatedly stated that the Black Lives Matter Movement was initiated by the

killing of George Floyd in 2020; this raises questions about the cultural competence of those social workers.

Literature highlights cultural competence as essential in ensuring that social workers were equipped with knowledge and skills to provide highly inclusive standards of practice (Carter-Black 2007; Cordero, 2008). However, others argue that the concept of cultural competence suggests that it can be fully achieved (Guy-Walls, 2007: Jani et al., (2016). Furlong and Wight (2011) insist that the diversity changes and fluidity of knowledge about people undermines cultural competence, as one cannot fully attain it. In contrast, Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998 p.123) introduce "*Cultural Humility,"* defined as "*a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique to redressing power imbalances and developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations*". Unlike cultural competence which suggests it can be fully achieved, cultural humility comes with a lifelong commitment of learning and self-evaluating, as reflected on the above definition. Despite the raging debate about cultural competence and cultural humility, literature suggests that either or both can be used to improve knowledge about other social groups consequently improving the assessment of practice behaviours and attitudes (Greene-Moton, and Minkler 2020). Hence, all social workers must be aware of the events which led to people of colour standing up in rallies raising the Black Lives Matter banners. This lack of knowledge could be linked to the social work teaching from university. Educating social workers needs to start with the curriculum in universities where student social workers would learn about the development of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Therefore, questions remain on whether the social work curriculum is committed to addressing issues identified by the "decolonisation of social work" literature. This will be addressed further in Chapter 9.

7.5.6 Proactive Approaches.

Marcus Garvey, the former Jamaican Political Activist (1887-1940) used "*Self-help/Reliance",* as his foundational principle in establishing the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Cronon, 1960 p.65). Therefore, Garvey (1967/1923) urged black people to find ways of developing skills to advance and protect themselves, rather than sit back and wait for help, which may never materialise.

Foxtrot: "*it was my way where I would not give in to people's prejudices, so I worked with them until the case was transferred to a different team".*

After having been informed that parents did not want support from him, **Foxtrot, a black social worker,** applied a proactive approach encouraged by Garvey (1967/1923), when he decided to continue supporting children whose parent had stigmatised him. He felt he needed to challenge the prejudice attitudes displayed by the parent and support their children appropriately, educating the parent about the social work skills he possessed. However, if he had decided against supporting the family, he would have lost the opportunity to challenge stigmatisation through professional behaviours.

Delta: "*I had a situation where I was asking someone a question, but the person felt I was hush [aggressive] on the phone maybe because of the way I sound. However, the manager did not want to hear my side of the story or investigate but just warned me not to repeat it in future".*

Delta's manager may have been wrong not to hear **Delta**'s side of the story, but **Delta** did nothing proactive, instead he sat back and felt unfairly treated. Perhaps, **Delta** had reverted to the "victim-status mode" which has earlier been identified as inhibiting active critical reflection. On the contrary, it may have not been easy for **Delta** to make an approach to the manager since **Delta** had only just started his role. However, **Delta** still needed to question the way he communicated and challenged himself to lower his voice so that he would not continue to be misjudged to have been shouting. This study argues that BME social workers may need to adapt some of their cultural values, norms and behaviours to make it easier for them to settle into the English culture**.** Ultimately, BME social workers would be better placed to remain open and take responsibility of teaching others about their own culture, race, and values where relevant and possible, rather than wait until they have been misunderstood or misinterpreted; this would empower all involved.

7.5.7 Themes Validation.

The expert group validated themes around race being a barrier to social work practice. **Juliet** shared that she was allocated children whose father had previously informed the manager that he did not want his family to be supported by black social workers. However, the high staff turnover meant **Juliet**'s managers could not find a white social worker to support the family. Therefore, they insisted that **Juliet** needed to get started. **Juliet** said, "*just by allocating a social worker of colour to a family that clearly say they don't want a black social worker, you are putting the children at risk, so the race element becomes a barrier to practice, 100 percent, because I could not address the actual lived-experiences of children in that situation, I had to start going through these racial barriers for this father to look at me beyond race and to see me and appreciate me as a professional who actually knows what they are doing, but again I'm thinking anything could have happened to those children within that four months"*. That assertion emphasises the earlier argument that children may remain trapped in abuse until a preferred white social worker was found, if their prejudiced parents were abusive towards them.

However, **Hotel** argued that "racism" was more among the professionals than the service users, *"it's more with the people you are working with, the way they look at you and the way they treat you, even managers sometimes"*. This validates **Delta, Golf and Bravo** who all shared that colleagues including managers had racial attitudes, **key finding.**

Furthermore, **Hotel** suggested that some BME service users may not want to be supported by BME social workers as they may perceive them as "agents of the state", meaning a reluctance in engaging the state in their private lives, **key finding.** However, others may not want support from black social workers for various reasons, for example, women who may fear being recognised after having survived and fled domestic violence or any abuse by fellow black individuals. Such individuals may only want support from white social workers who would be less likely to recognise them.

7.5.8 Section- Conclusion

This section has highlighted racism experiences. However, generalisable research is needed to further explore race being a barrier to social work practice since this study is not intended to be generalisable.

Key points:

- Avoidance of racism discussions may be a strategy for fitting in or self-protection.
- Group dynamics may discourage open sharing of sensitive racism experiences which may be seen as controversial by other group members.
- Internalised oppression may prevent some Black professionals from challenging racism.

7.6 Theme-4. The Power of Effective Support Systems

While the first three themes discussed unfriendly and sometime emotion evoking experiences, this theme unpacks relatively friendly and arousing experiences. **Foxtrot** described receiving substantial support upon qualification, having joined a newly established team, with all staff members starting with a blank slate. However, workloads increased as the service developed, with **Foxtrot** admitting to having been forced to work prolonged hours to ensure his workload remained up to date.

Foxtrot: "*My support was quite good when I first qualified, I joined a newly formed team comprised of a team manager and five social workers, so everything was tailored to work for a NQSW*".

Foxtrot recognised the impact of the support he received: "*I think it gave me confidence in the profession, because obviously when you are a student, you are told that social work is very stressful and things are going to be difficult but when you get a high level of support in your first year, it kind of gives you confidence that things are not as bad as it was portrayed, yeah it made me happy and confident and waking up with the feeling that yeah I need to go to work, I felt motivated to work*". This account suggests that structured, team-based support can foster professional confidence and motivation, **key finding.**

Bravo: "*the first three-months I had a brilliant manager, she was a practice educator, so she fully understood what she needed to do regarding supervision*".

Bravo similarly reported a positive initial experience, attributing this to her manager's dual role as a practice educator. This background enabled the manager to provide high-quality supervision tailored to the needs of a newly qualified practitioner. **Bravo's** experience underscores the importance of managerial expertise in shaping early professional development.

When asked if she felt the formal supervision was tailored to her needs, **Golf r**eplied, "*yes, that's how I felt but I felt more supported in the BME group*". This BME group resembles similar

characteristics with those of the Windrush Generation (1948-1973) conducted by black people when they wanted to discourage isolation (Hewitt, 2020). **Golf** spoke candidly of the support she received from this group where she highlighted being given the space to "vent" her feelings while listening to others vent theirs. She was frustrated with the increasingly unmanageable workloads caused by the continuous case allocation to her, even after she had expressed her inability to manage the increasing caseload. **Golf's** choice of word, "*venting,"* suggests that she had unshared distress which needed to be discharged. Therefore, **Golf** and her compatriots used the "*space to vent feelings"* as a coping strategy, since Pennerbaker, (2012 p.67) identifies the expression of strong emotions as the "*healing power"* which enables individuals to protect their physical bodies from their severe psychological experiences. Therefore, the release of strong emotions while listening to others equally "vent" theirs, enabled **Golf** to relate to what was shared by others and therefore have her nerves calmed, highlighting the importance of informal support platforms, **key finding**. Bourdieu (1992 p.165)'s argument that "*communication, language and culture were structured structures with the symbolic power*", suggests that the BME group was not only a knowledge base, but it was also a power stronghold for the isolated, shocked and stressed BME social workers. Therefore, this group possessed that symbolic power allowing practitioners to persevere and remain in their roles even during challenging periods where they struggled to cope with unmanageable caseloads.

Alpha highlighted the depth of emotional and reflective support received from her ASYE supervisor: *"we would sit for hours to talk about cases and to talk about the impact on my emotions, gaining an understanding of my thoughts and my values, my ASYE supervisor was more supportive."* This suggests that reflective supervision, which attends to both emotional and cognitive dimensions of practice, can significantly enhance professional learning and self-awareness, **key finding.**

Charlie: *"the team was amazing, that's where I got the support from, the most".*

Charlie succinctly noted that the team was the primary source of support, indicating the value of collegial relationships in the absence of consistent formal supervision.

While **Alpha** and **Charlie** did not receive regular formal supervision from their managers, they relied on peer support and occasional input from the ASYE coordinator. Despite these

limitations, all successfully completed the ASYE programme. This outcome suggests that informal peer networks, when combined with intermittent formal guidance, can still contribute meaningfully to professional development and programme completion, **key finding.**

Collectively, these accounts show the positive impacts of effective support systems. **Foxtrot** probably benefited from a new team created when he first started. He expressed that he inherited and adapted these positive support approaches to support students after having become a practice educator. Hence, supportive supervision approaches can be inherited and applied to support others in future, **key finding.** Overall, these positive experiences underscore the importance of both formal and informal structures in fostering resilience, confidence, and professional growth among first-year social workers.

7.6.1Themes Validation

The expert group agreed with these themes. **Hotel** identified peer ad hoc support and training as essential in support of social workers especially during their first-year in social work practice. Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2014) suggests that ad hoc support is part of mentorship in the social work programme. Hence, it is not surprising that participants in this study found peer support to be a very effective support mechanism. This finding was shared by Ravalier et al. (2021p.1105) who argued that UK social workers relied on peer support to alleviate stress caused by what they described as "*chronically poor working conditions"* for social workers.

7.6.2 Conclusion

This theme has unpacked positive experiences associated with job satisfaction, pride and confidence in the social work profession for one participant.

- Participants appeared to value ad hoc peer support than formal supervision from managers.
- The privately created BME group promoted retention as it enabled IQSW-participants to be resilient and remain in their roles, at the time when they were struggling to adapt to the English practice standards.

- Venting frustrations while listening to others equally vent theirs was used as a coping strategy used by IQSW-participants to be resilient at the time when continuous case allocations had caused them distress.
- Positive supportive supervision methods could be inherited and applied to support others at a later stage.

Overall, reflective supervision, emphasised through the Discrimination Model of supervision, see, (6.4.2) was evident as some participants, expressed having been provided with reflective supervision.

7.6.3 Chapter-conclusion

All participants expressed a strong and indistinguishable desire of doing direct work with children. However, they felt the excessive admin caused by unmanageable workloads limited the time they could spend doing direct work with children. Although this study acknowledges the importance of admin work, it asserts that direct work with children must be prioritised, as social workers may be able to support children gain essential practical skills needed in adulthood (Bell, 2011). Critics may argue that children already receive support through education. However, Sutcliff et al. (2017) insists that Looked After Children are the most disadvantaged group when it comes to their wellbeing and educational outcomes. The inability to conduct consistent direct work with Looked After Children could mean the children are worse off in skills development when compared with those who receive support from their parents or guardians. This study asserts that the possibility of doing direct work with children is likely to have spurred many social workers to work in statutory children services. Ultimately, doing direct work with children would not only benefit children, but it would bring what this study will call, "***the feel-good factor",*** a positive feeling among social workers who would be satisfied about their contribution in a child's life, which is something that may have motivated them to become social workers in the first place. The "feel-good factor" would not only mean better outcomes for children, but it would also improve job satisfaction while simultaneously enhancing retention levels for statutory children's social workers. However, without the "feel good factor", social workers may continue to be stressed about their lack of contribution directly into children's lives while Looked After Children's struggles in outcomes would be prolonged. Overall, this chapter has provided detailed analysis through the four superordinate themes, partially addressing the research question. The next chapter discusses selected key findings.

Chapter-8. Discussion of the findings

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of selected key findings from previous chapters. The approach highlights the unique contributions of the current study and explores their potential implications for enhancing social workers' experiences and informing social work practice. However, some findings are addressed in Chapters Seven and Nine, where a running commentary style was employed to facilitate a more fluid and continuous analysis.

The section was deliberately structured to address the limitations of relying solely on a running commentary approach, which Heard (2016) critiques for constraining analytical depth. The line-by-line IPA method adopted in this study yielded a substantial volume of nuanced data, making it impractical to discuss all findings within this chapter. Nevertheless, the running commentary ensured that each finding was explored, albeit with varying degrees of detail. While the findings discussed here have been previously introduced, they are now re-examined through a broader analytical lens to deepen understanding and contextualise their significance.

8.2.1 The role of reflective supervision in social work practice

This study found that effective support systems enhanced job satisfaction, fostered a sense of value, reduced the likelihood of burnout, and improved retention among the participants, a finding widely supported in existing literature (Carpenter et al., 2012; Vito, 2015; Weiss-Dagan et al., 2018; McPherson et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2023). Reflective supervision has been shown to promote self-awareness and serve as a therapeutic outlet (Carpenter et al., 2012; Pitt et al., 2021; Dugmore et al., 2018; Graham & Killick, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2023). This study corroborates these findings, with two participants reporting the benefits arising from their freedom to express personal feelings during supervision.

A k**ey contribution** of this research is the identification of reflective supervision as a mechanism not only for emotional expression but also for fostering reflexivity. This enables NQSWs to assess their strengths, identify areas for development, and evaluate the impact of their decisions, thus supporting professional growth. Prior studies (Vito, 2015; Wilkins, 2017) suggest that effective supervision practices are often carried forward when NQSWs become mentors. This was echoed by one participant who applied supportive methods experienced during their own induction, to his students. However, sustainability of such practices remains uncertain, given current challenges in statutory children's services, including high staff turnover and constrained LA budgets (Johnson et al., 2023)

Positive formal support is associated with critical reflection and ongoing professional development (Manthorpe et al., 2015; Ravalier et al., 2023; Carpenter et al., 2012; Graham & Killick, 2019). While participants in this study reported using reflective supervision to improve practice, the quality of supervision was found to depend heavily on the supervisor's training and capacity. In cases where supervisors lacked appropriate training or were constrained by workload pressures, supervision became task-focused and less reflective, contributing to stress and unresolved issues.

It appeared that the quality of supervision was depended on the manager's training. For example, one participant expressed having been well supported by a manager who had previously held a role as a practice educator, however, the successive manager did not provide similar support. Having been a practice educator meant that manager was well trained as practice educator receive full training to support students (Parker, 2010). It remains unclear if some managers were trained and how the quality of their training was verified as several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the support from managers.

Scholar et al. (2025 p.6) introduce the importance of the team and the manager when they express that, "*social work teams are not a group of equals, they are part of a hierarchical structure with a team leader responsible for managing the team's workload and quality of work".* They identified a good relationship with the manager as key to enabling social workers to handle stressful practice challenges, which may eventually make them feel supported. Additionally, they found that a supportive manager and the social work-related organisational culture was

key to promoting the stability of teams and therefore encouraging social workers to support each other and feel satisfied by their roles. However, an unsupportive manager who is not easily accessible is likely to destabilise the cohesion and stability of the team.

The experience of the participant in this study who expressed having felt supported by their manager within the first three months, verifies Scholar et al. (2025)'s claim that a manager was central to promoting positive experiences and the retention of social workers. This centralises the cohesion and support of team members direct to the manager. Following a change of the manager, the participant struggled to find support from the new manager and colleagues. Therefore, Scholar et al. (2025)'s finding suggests that if the manager was not supportive, team members were unlikely to be supportive to each other leading to the dysfunction of the team, with some members not feeling satisfied with their roles and therefore desiring to leave. Hence, some participants who did not receive support from their managers expressed struggling for peer-support, stating that colleagues were busy with own tasks.

The open-door policy, identified by Pitt et al. (2021) as promoting needs-based supervision, was reflected in this study. Several participants expressed having relied on ad hoc peer support instead of managerial support, which at times was a challenge to access, since time constraints often limited managerial availability (Hair, 2013). However, this current study found that such ad hoc support lacked depth, since experienced peers were at times busy with own tasks, leaving some participants with unresolved concerns.

However, it may be more challenging to benefit from the formal support provided by managers since managers hold what Foucault (1977 p.23) describes as "*dualism of power",* meaning, they possess the top-down approach with both surveillance and discretion. Hence, managers can use that dualism to make judgements on various issues including passing or deeming NQSWs to have failed the ASYE programme. Bourdieu (1990 p. 52) contends that power splits organisations, groups and individuals between "*the powerful and the powerless",* meaning, managers would be deemed the powerful since they hold power to make decisions while subordinates are powerless, as they can only listen, but not challenge managers. Even so, Foucault (1977 p.33) argues that the "*microphysics of power,"* means subordinates can use processes like their organisational policies including grievance procedures to challenge

decisions made by managers. Gilbert and Powell (2009 p. 15) agree with Bourdieu (1990)'s concept of power splitting groups between the powerful and the powerless as they classify the "*Foucauldian power as top-down*", and therefore unhelpful to subordinates as managers' hold the "disciplinary power," meaning, their decisions are likely to be upheld even after the grievance procedures. Therefore, ad hoc peer support may be more helpful since peers may not hold the disciplinary power that may be intimidating for subordinates. Once intimidated, subordinates may be less receptive to managers. However, they would be in a more relaxed situation with their peers who do not possess that dualism of power held by managers and would not make professional judgements which may potentially leave subordinates in trouble.

Bingle and Middleton (2019) and Patterson (2017) identified the importance of group case discussions as helping social workers to learn from peers and reflect on their own practice, to facilitate improvements. This study concurs, however, **key** to this research is the finding that IQSW-participants prioritised the support they received from personal networks including BME groups more than the formal support from managers. This could be linked to various reasons including power dynamics discussed above. Additionally, the BME group was led by experienced BME practice consultants and mentors. This likely promoted a better understanding based on shared cultural values as all practitioners shared significant similarities in racial and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, BME groups may be essential in ensuring that shared cultural, ethical and moral beliefs were effectively used to gain more knowledge and understanding about the challenges of working in the English statutory children services.

This study's other **key** finding suggests that some social workers may use overt avoidance to evade organisations characterised by high staff turnover and excessive workloads. Fine, & Teram (2013) suggests that overt avoidance could be heroic since social workers can manage their wellbeing by evading organisations where they would be more likely to feel stressed. One of this study's **key** findings suggest that personal networks, including BME groups, may serve as informal but influential sources of information about working conditions across LAs in England. These networks enable social workers to identify organisations with more manageable workloads and supportive environments. As a result, LAs with persistently high turnover and unsustainable workloads may struggle to attract applicants, leading to prolonged vacancies. Such organisations are likely to rely on locum staff or recruit internationally, to fill gaps (Johnson

et al., 2023). However, this research also highlights that social workers placed in these high-pressure environments with inadequate support are less likely to remain in roles, perpetuating a cycle of recruitment and attrition. This dynamic presents a significant challenge to workforce stability and service continuity within statutory social work settings.

Carpenter et al. (2012, p.95) identified that NQSWs who received full supervision reported significantly higher "*extrinsic job satisfaction,"* meaning, *"pleased with external factors including public acceptance of their roles*," than those with only partial support. This finding is reflected in the present study, where one participant receiving excellent full supervision expressed feeling that social work was publicly respected. Hence, he was proud to wake up every morning and go to work, and this job satisfaction fostered self-efficacy, identified as "*an individual's confidence that they will be able to successfully perform a particular sequence of behaviours in the future*" (Holden et al., 2017 p.595), and a sense of pride in the social work role. Therefore, they expressed having what Carpenter et al. (2012 p.73) described as "*intrinsic job satisfaction",* meaning they were fully satisfied with how their role fulfilled their desire, through their successful application of a skillset they had acquired through the profession. Such emotional engagement may contribute to improved service delivery and outcomes for children and families. Additionally, the same participant's positive experiences suggests that NQSWs entering **newly formed teams** are more likely to receive full supervision due to the absence of inherited caseloads and organisational pressure. Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of structured support systems in developing core practice competencies and enabling social workers to manage complex challenges while maintaining personal wellbeing.

8.2.2 The impact of Neoliberalism on social work

Neoliberalism, defined, "*a socio-political and economic framework that discourages collective or state provision of services, instead promoting reliance on private markets and individual capacities to meet social needs*" (Baines (2011 p.30). Within this context, managerialism emerges as a key mechanism for workforce restructuring, aligning public service delivery with neoliberal objectives (Baines, 2007). Neoliberalism was promoted by Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), a former Austrian-British economist and philosopher who applied the Scottish economist and philosopher, Adam Smith (1723-1790)'s ideas of free market capitalism

(Hoerber, 2019). Smith and Hayek both believed in free market capitalism with markets freely managing themselves. Smith (1776 p. 77) introduced the term, "*the invisible hand"* through his famous book, *The Wealth of The Nations*, where he argued that individual self-interest in the markets could benefit the society. However, Polanyi (1957 p. 210), "*a non-Marxist socialist and economist*" (Birchfield, 1999 p.28) identifies the idea of self-regulating markets as a myth, arguing that it "*threatens to destroy society*", as markets control the social and economic life of individuals within societies.

Fine and Leopold (2001) argue that neoliberalism suggests that markets are needed in social work because they are one of the main reasons why the capitalist way of operating is superior. Additionally, Harris, (2014 p.9) insists that "*the role of states in neoliberalism is, therefore, to create the institutional frameworks within which social services markets operate*". However, the promotion of markets undermines vulnerable members of society as prioritising the economy means service users are indirectly placed in the market characterised with economic competition (Birchfield, 1999). Ultimately, the economic competition encourages the governments to cut LA budgets through the reduction of public spending, indirectly suggesting that service users must manage their own lives and be responsible. This has resulted in LAs hiring fewer social workers leading to increased caseloads, leaving many social workers struggling (Ravalier et al., 2021).

8.2.3 The State's Doublemindedness

Polanyi's (1957, p.2) theory of the "*Double Movement"* posits that social actors, including social workers, are caught between two opposing forces: the expansion of capitalist free-market principles which led to the "*disembeddedness"* or removal of the economy from society, and a countermovement aimed at re-embedding the economy to society. This tension is evident in the English context, particularly following the economic stagnation of 2018 (Aylett, 2024). Clark (2018, p.2) attributed the decline of the pound to political uncertainty, specifically the potential leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, whom he characterised as "*Marxists"*. Clark (2018) argued that continued Conservative leadership under Boris Johnson would stabilise markets and promote economic growth. Johnson's controversial stance on inequality as a

necessary driver of economic progress, and reported actions, such as allegedly burning a £50 note in front of homeless individuals (Watt, 2013; Morris, 2019), further illustrate the ideological divide between market-driven governance and socially responsive policy.

Jeremy Corbyn, positioned on the far left of the political spectrum, represented the societal movement within Polanyi's (1957) "Double Movement" framework, advocating for increased public spending and higher taxation on businesses (Hirsh, 2015; Martell, 2018). However, as Hanna (2010) notes, no government is exempt from the tension between promoting economic growth and supporting societal welfare. Following Boris Johnson's political clashes with David Cameron, (the former Conservative leader and Prime minister) over austerity, Johnson's then-Chancellor Sajid Javid announced increased funding for local authority social services in 2019 (GOV.UK, 2019). Despite this, financial pressures persisted (Rogowski, 2021), reinforcing the association between Boris Johnson's leadership and market-oriented governance, as the additional funding failed to alleviate systemic challenges faced by social services.

Gramsci (1929)'s theory of hegemony avails the understanding that the bourgeoisie's values and ideas have been normalised, hence the state which seeks to run its departments as corporates has imposed managerialism on social workers and their managers. This is the *"New Public Management"* which is the financial department of organisations responsible for determining "*value for money"* (Connel et al., 2009 P.332). Additionally, Banks (2014 p. 41) argues that the "*New Public Management",* erodes social work into a business model when they are a public service offering support to vulnerable members of society. This causes an ethical impasse as it suggests that social workers must rush through and provide superficial services, which is incongruent with social work values and ethics (SWE,2021. This study argues that neo-liberal ideas imposed on social workers leaves many loyal social workers faced with unmanageable workloads, hence research has identified that many social workers feel stressed by their roles with others desiring to take a break or exit their roles (Carpenter et al., 2012) Johnson et al., 2023). Ferguson (2008) concurs with Gramsci (1929) when they argue that social workers must challenge neoliberalism and advocate for the appropriate provision of services. It could be argued that challenges faced by social workers in the UK (Ravalier et al., 2021) may have resulted from the marketisation of social services, which plays a major role in current challenges faced by social workers.

All participants in this study expressed having been forced to work out of hours to manage their workloads. This finding was corroborated in Johnson et al. (2019-2023)'s study where participants highlighted high workloads and the high staff turnover as having led them to work out of hours. Therefore, this study argues that the persistent tension between market-driven and society-oriented movements leaves the social work profession and the vulnerable populations it serves, caught in a state of ideological conflict. Polanyi's (1957) concept of the "Double Movement" illustrates this dynamic, where social services are pressured to balance economic imperatives with social responsibilities. Gramsci (1929) offers a counterpoint, suggesting that the same institutions used to advance free-market ideologies such as education, can be repurposed to challenge them and advocate for marginalised groups. In this context, social workers may play a critical role in resisting marketisation through research-informed practice, positioning themselves as agents of change capable of advancing social justice and protecting vulnerable communities (Santos-Petiot et al., 2025). However, Maertens (2008) argues that Polanyi's Double Movement theory, would need to be redeveloped if it was to be successfully applied on micro-level, if not, it would be harder to apply it specifically focussing on individuals. Nevertheless, Polanyi's (1957)'s Double Movement Theory can be used to understand that the state is double-minded when making policies. On one hand they must apply the first mind to promote the economy, on the other, they must implement policies which support the society. While democrats including Shapiro (2003) would argue that a stronger economy benefits the society through job creation, this study argues that such policies may conflict with the development and progress of societies, for example, the spending cuts policies which left LAs in England with lower budgets meaning they are not able to hire more social workers to share the workloads Ravalier et al., 2021). Hence, vulnerable members of the society including children who may not be able to work are sidelined as the cuts on public spending means their needs are not prioritised by the government when making policies.

Weinberg and Banks (2019, p.2) argue that the combined impact of neoliberalism as a "*market-based policy agenda and managerialism as a depersonalising practice,"* can place social workers and managers in ethically challenging situations, potentially leading to compromised professional standards. Under neoliberal pressures, social workers are expected to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals (SWE, 2021a), while simultaneously operating within the

constraints of reduced public spending (Polanyi, 1957; Birchfield, 1999). This tension often results in unmanageable workloads and time constraints, which may compel practitioners to bypass established protocols.

A **significant finding** of this study suggesting that some managers may resort to instructing NQSWs to fraudulently create supervision records, claiming sessions occurred when they had not, in order to meet the requirements of the ASYE programme. While intended to support NQSWs progress under pressure, such practices raise serious ethical concerns and suggest systemic vulnerabilities and limitations. Consequently, this suggests that the current system may be fraudulent. If not addressed, this practice risk being internalised by many practitioners and therefore perpetuated as legitimate proxies used to navigate difficult circumstances. Hence, the continuous application of such deceitful practices may be extended to their wider acceptance, which may obscure child protection outcomes. NQSWs may be inaccurately deemed ready for practice, and fail to detect signs of abuse, leaving children exposed to harm. Therefore, the sustainability of social work values and ethical standards (SWE, 2021) remain at risk, if such practices continue. Although managers and NQSWs are equally responsible for promoting this unethical practice, power dynamics, as discussed in chapter 7.3.5, meant NQSWs' vulnerability and desire to progress in the ASYE left them powerless to challenge their managers unethical practices. Managers hold what Foucault (1977 p.23) describes as "*dualism of power",* this includes a top-down approach that they can use to either pass or fail NQSWs. Although participants could have challenged managers, the top-down approach meant they prioritised passing the ASYE since doing as they were told meant managers were likely to deem them to have passed. This suggests that some NQSWs may be made to struggle with limited formal supervision sessions and support, only to be ***rewarded with a pass***, through the falsified supervision notes signed by their managers. Ultimately, such practices could erode the social work profession's credibility in England, reducing it to a flexible, individualised practice model detached from its foundational principles.

Weinberg and Banks (2019) argue that the dominance of neoliberalism can leave social workers and managers vulnerable to ethical compromises such as those identified in this study. Young (1990, p.56) conceptualises this powerlessness as a form of "*oppression",* suggesting that

practitioners may be structurally constrained in their ability to resist unethical practices. In this study, one interpretation of the managers' attitudes is that this request to falsify supervision records could be seen as abuse of power invested in their roles, and therefore taking advantage of the powerless and vulnerable NQSWs. Applying an **intersectional lens**, Crenshaw (1989) highlights that social workers of colour often experience compounded forms of invisibility and marginalisation, rendering them more powerless, and thus, more oppressed, than their white counterparts in similar contexts. These findings underscore the need for inclusive support structures that recognise intersecting social categories and actively empower social workers of colour to fulfil their roles effectively and ethically. Managers were not interviewed in this study, and therefore it is inappropriate to assume that managers willingly engage in unethical behaviour; rather, the study recognises that systemic constraints caused by cuts to public spending (Ravalier et al., 2021) may leave them with limited alternatives.

Ultimately, the state's Double Mindedness leads to a persistent ideological conflict between market-driven and society-oriented agendas placing the social work profession in a precarious position. Therefore, social workers and managers are caught in a cyclical struggle between fulfilling professional values and navigating the demands of an increasingly economised system. This precarious position was evidenced in Carpenter et al. (2012)'s study where some social workers expressed the desire to quit the social work profession due to insufficient funding of services intended for vulnerable individuals in their care. Similarly in the current study, a major finding was that unmanageable workloads contributed significantly to stress and burnout among participants, often resulting in prolonged absences, role abandonment, or a consideration of exiting the profession completely, a finding widely supported in literature (Johnson et al., 2021; Scourfield et al., 2021; Burns, 2011; Cauvain, 2010). A **key** contribution of this study is the identification that the inability to share emerging work-related stress may lead social workers to seek external medical or psychological support, even for issues that could be resolved internally. Such absences often result in caseload redistribution, placing additional pressure on remaining staff (Antonopoulou et al., 2017), which may in turn lead to further mental health deterioration and increased staff turnover (Cleveland et al., 2019). This study has identified a range of consequences of work-related stress; while some practitioners return after recovery, others may transition to locum roles or leave the profession entirely,

particularly when their wellbeing has been severely compromised. These findings **underscore** the importance of accessible organisational support to prevent avoidable absences and promote retention.

Research indicates that many IQSWs may experience cultural and linguistic dissonance upon entering practice in England (Williams & Graham, 2014; Sansfacon et al., 2014). While induction periods and formal supervision may offer some support, this study finds that the absence of a structured adaptation programme can render such support insufficient. Without foundational knowledge of English social work standards and practice culture, IQSWs may feel overwhelmed and stressed. A **key** contribution of this study is the recognition that even experienced IQSWs may feel unprepared to immediately engage in statutory children's services upon arrival. Differences in values, religious beliefs, and cultural norms have been identified as significant barriers to integration. These findings underscore the need for a formal adaptation framework to ensure IQSWs are adequately equipped to navigate the complexities of English social work practice.

A **key** finding in this study suggests that some IQSWs may experience severe mental and physical health challenges due to unmanageable workloads, with risks ranging from burnout to life-threatening incidents such as panic attacks and suicidal ideation. Extreme distress may compel some IQSWs to feel as if they were at a pivotal crossroads, where they must choose between their careers and personal wellbeing. While some may seek employment in LAs with more manageable caseloads (Johnson et al., 2020), others transition to locum roles in search of what this study terms "Safe Haven Spaces". Several of them may return to their home countries to preserve their health, contributing to high staff turnover and further exacerbating workload pressures for those who remain (Ravalier et al., 2021). In contrast, social workers trained in England may be better equipped to cope with these demands and are more likely to remain in their roles. This study argues that the absence of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs not only undermines their wellbeing, but also results in financial losses for LAs, particularly when relocation packages have recently been paid. Hence, a mandatory adaptation programme would improve the integration and retention of IQSWs, reduce turnover, and protect LAs investments made through hiring social workers abroad.

8.2.4 The Victim Status Mode

This study has identified a phenomenon, termed, "***deflection to the victim status mode***", which may be particularly detrimental to first-year social workers. In contexts where expected support is non-existent and workloads are unmanageable, some early-career practitioners may begin to perceive themselves as victims within the system. This mindset, focused on seeking justice, can inhibit reflective practice and limit the application of theoretical frameworks acquired during qualification, even in situations where such knowledge could be beneficial (Herbert, 2015). As a result, these practitioners may externalise their frustrations, attributing their challenges to inadequate university preparation, rather than engaging in critical reflection that could reframe their experiences. This lack of reflection may prevent them from fully benefiting from their academic training. In contrast, those who received adequate support or were assigned protected caseloads were more likely to engage with theoretical concepts and perceive their university education as relevant and valuable to practice. Research suggest that similar trends may exist in the field of education. While Patel et al. (2015) attributes student failure to multiple factors including mental health or personal issues, Pratt (2019) suggests that the inability to handle the pressure exerted by exams could leave some students stressed and unable to reflect. Ncube (2013) argues that once at this stage, students question the way they were taught, and blame the teaching, rather than accept that they had failed to handle the exam pressure, not revised, or could not reflect on the knowledge gained through the teaching process. Therefore, students would attribute their failure to poor teaching rather than admit their inability to reflect on the teaching caused them to fail the exams. This denial and shifting of responsibility is what this study has identified as ***deflecting to the victim status mode,*** where responsibility would be shifted from the perceived victim and placed on others.

8.2.5 Deviation from the victim status mode.

The exploration of strategies to discourage the adoption of a victim status mindset led to an examination of Stoic philosophy as a potential mechanism for fostering resilience. Stoicism, a systematic philosophy composed of logic, physics and ethics, credited to Zeno of Citium 300 BCE, was considered (Cloward ,2025). Stoicism was later strengthened by Epictetus, a Greek philosopher, Marcus Aurellius, the former Roman Emperor (121-180 BCE), Lucius Annaeus

Seneca, the former Roman philosopher, and others (Bryce et al, 2024). Stoicism arguments propose that "*Virtue is the Only True Good",* in (Cloward ,2025 p.19).

Zeno: adapted from Cloward (2025)

Zeno argued that virtue (*moral and intellectual intelligence*) was more important than wealth, power and fame, meaning it is the single and sufficient good for a fulfilled life. Additionally, he insisted that to live in harmony with nature, one needed to use their capacity for reason to understand the universal order and align their actions with it. He perceived humans as rational beings, and reason as their defining feature. Therefore, he encouraged the use of reason and logic in distinguishing between truth and falsehood for making sound moral judgements. He perceived fear, anger, desire, and sorrow as irrational disturbances of mind resulting from misguided judgements. Therefore, he encouraged humans to free themselves from these disturbances and achieve inner peace and serenity *(a good flow of life, p.12)*.

Seneca:

Seneca argued that humans suffered more in imagination than reality, insisting that no man was perfected without trials; hence, humans needed to use difficulties to strengthen the mind (Long, 2024). While participants' challenges were not good, they may be used to build resilience. The main point from Seneca's arguments is that humans should concentrate on the present, rather than be disrupted about the future.

Epictetus:

Epictetus introduced the concept of "*cognitive reframing,"* arguing that inherent inner strengths can redirect attention away from stressors, fostering freedom through focusing solely on what is controllable, namely, one's emotions, reactions, and actions (Seddon, 2006, p.19). He also employed the term "*pneuma,"* referring to the soul or creative force, to argue that individuals possess the power to determine the extent to which external offenses affect them (Valdez, 2014, p.53). This principle is liberating, as it shifts control from external circumstances to one's internal domain. Furthermore, he used the term "*Amor fati"*, meaning, love of fate, arguing that

humans needed to embrace the realities of life; instead of seeing setbacks as damaging, they can be seen as opportunities for personal growth (Cloward ,2025 p. 11).

Marcus Aurellius:

Stress does not begin with what you may have just experienced, but it starts when you question it, arguing that you should have not experienced it. Accept everything that happens as if you chose it, not because the pain is enjoyable but because acceptance gives you your power back. Everyone's mind communicates each situation differently; hence, individuals react differently to a similar situation (Long, 2024). However, when your mind goes into resistance, you start seeing yourself as unfairly treated, and a victim (Long, 2002). This could explain why some participants in this study may have perceived themselves as victims. Overall, Zeno, Seneca, Marcus Aurellius and Epictetus clarified that emotional regulation does not entail suppression of feelings, but rather observation and understanding of triggers; once these roots are identified, responses can be managed more effectively (Long, 2024).

Diaz and Murguia (2015) link Stoic philosophy to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), noting that Aaron Beck (1921–2021) and Albert Ellis (1913–2007) drew extensively on Stoic principles in developing CBT. Robertson (2018) concurs, highlighting Stoicism's influence on foundational CBT concepts and mindfulness-based interventions, which have been applied to mitigate stress and burnout among social workers (Bryce et al., 2024). However, critics argue that the stoic principles cannot be helpful if an individual has serious mental health issues, affecting their ability to reason (Valdez, 2014). Nevertheless, if appropriately articulated, the principles of Stoicism, particularly cognitive reframing and the distinction between controllable and uncontrollable factors, offer a practical self-therapy framework that can foster resilience and reduce individual vulnerability among practitioners, preventing regression into a victim status mindset.

8.2.6 The Deadlines Imposed Coercive Nature of Work.

One of this study's **key findings** suggest that high and unmanageable workloads may compel social workers to sacrifice their personal time, even when formal support structures are in place. Although this may appear voluntary, the phenomenon, termed in this study as **"the Coercive Nature of Social Work"**; reflects systemic pressures that lead practitioners to routinely extend their working hours beyond contractual obligations, resulting in poor work-life

balance. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Walker, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2023; Cleveland et al., 2019; Ravalier et al., 2021), which highlights the hidden extension of working hours as a pervasive issue. Research suggests that similar trends may exist in other professions where deadlines must be met. Literature in the financial field links the pressure of producing high quality financial statements, and meeting deadlines with stress and burnout for financial accountants (Kelley and Seller, 1982; DeZoort and Lord, 1997, Eker and Anbar, 2008), with working out of hours being particularly problematic (Ladva and Andrew 2014). Nehme et al. (2022) argues that competition in the finance field often leaves accountants feeling pressured and forced to donate own time, not only to meet deadlines but also to protect their own, and the company's reputation by producing high quality financial statements. Failure to do so would render contracts to opponents, leaving accountants at risk of losing their jobs (Smith et al., 2011). Reid et al. (2019) concludes that the contracted working hours for accountants are inadequate, making them feel forced to work prolonged hours. Unlike in statutory children social work where pressure is normally caused by high staff turnover and unmanageable workloads (Ravalier et al.,2021), the pressure in the finance field appears to be usually closer to deadline days where financial audit reports must be submitted. Therefore, accountants are better placed than social workers to get their extra hours reimbursed soon after the deadline. Despite that, Lambert et al. (2017) suggest that there may be accelerated filings or correction of errors which may not make it easier for practitioners in finance to take TOIL.

Overall, the similarities of accountants and social workers' contracted working hours being inadvertently extended is an example of how neoliberalism has turned social work into a business model controlled by deadlines. Therefore, the values-based approach of social work practice, more focused on the needs of the society (SWE, 2019b) has been unwittingly sidelined in favour of the markets-based approach built on the economic model used in finance (Reid et al., 2019). Therefore, what this study has termed "***the Coercive Nature of Social Work***", may be associated with other professions such as finance, where evidence of practice must be shown through financial statements before deadlines could be met (Nehme et al., 2022). Hence, it may be rephrased as "***the Deadlines Imposed Coercive Nature of Work***", since it cuts across different professions. Despite the rephrasing, the initial naming will remain unchanged in this thesis, to reflect practice challenges specifically associated with social work practice.

8.3.1 Defining racism

This section is an open discussion where literature on racism has been explored. It is essential to establish a foundational understanding of racism, its historical development and continued maintenance within Western societies, before delving into the racism related findings of this study. The concepts of "race" and "racism" are deeply intertwined and frequently referenced in literature on race relations (Solomons, 2003; Byrne et al., 2020).

Although definitions vary, Benedict (1943, p. 97) offered one of the earliest conceptualisations of racism, describing it as "*the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority, and another group is destined to congenital superiority*." This definition laid the groundwork for subsequent interpretations. Fredrickson (2002, p. 101) expanded the concept, defining racism as encompassing "*discrimination, prejudice, ill-treatment, perception of an individual, community or microaggression behaviour towards other individuals on the basis of their skin colour, cultural or religious backgrounds*". More recently, Cole (2016) emphasised the socially constructed nature of race, identifying it as a classification system used to differentiate humans based on shared traits, including phenotypical characteristics such as skin colour. Coates (2007) adds to this discourse by identifying covert racism, subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion that are often normalised within workplace environments.

Institutional racism has been interpreted in various ways, but the Macpherson report (1999, p. 211), published following the 1993 racially motivated murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence in England (Cathcart,2000), offers a particularly impactful definition: "*Institutional racism should be understood to refer to organisational structures, policies, processes, and practices which result in ethnic minorities being treated unfairly and less equally, often without knowledge."* This definition underscores the possibility of racism being both intentional and unintentional, embedded within the very frameworks that govern social institutions.

8.3.2 Critical Race Theory on Racism

It is important to acknowledge that CRT is made of five tenets as identified in chapter three, hence some views may differ from within these tenets. A Marxist perspective sees race and racism as embedded in the class struggle which involves the Bourgeoise's need to generate

excess profits through their exploitation of the Proletariat (Marx (2012/1844). This Marxist perspective may be used to explain how the Bourgeoise's need to generate excess profits urged them to raid some African countries in search of individuals who would be exported to the West to provide free labour (Genovese and Fox-Genovese, 1979). In agreement, Neilson and Peters (2020) argue that it is the need of labour which created race and racism through the exploitation of Africans during The Slave Trade. Furthermore, Harris (1925 p.375) insists that the Slave Trade was the period where race and racism were created, as "*dominant groups became fixed by law and custom*", leading to distinct social groups of whites and blacks, where whites remained free while blacks were subjected to hard labour and torture. Marx (2012/1844 p.143) insisted that the Slave Trade was important in the creation of capitalism, however, once capitalism became a dominant economic force, "*the Slave Trade become redundant*". Therefore, the Slave Trade was founded on the principles of developing a sustainable economy in the West.

Interest Convergence, a CRT tenet, perceives racism as not just an individual bias, but a phenomenon deeply rooted in legal and social institutions (Milner, 2008). Although admitting to periods of short progress towards equality, Bell (1992) argued that despite being socially constructed, racism stood as a permanent phenomenon. However, Andrews (2011 p. 43) argues that the perception of racism as a permanent feature undermines CRT, making the theory "*pessimistic*". Therefore, he presents Black Radicalism, rooted in African history, where a never dying attitude suggests that racism can be completely eradicated from society.

The identification of racism as a permanent phenomenon may be seen as realistic since Milner (2017) insists that despite many people believing the election of Barrack Obama as the first black US president signalled the end of race and racism in the US, they were proven wrong as race related killings of black men continued. However, the perception of racism as permanent may potentially make different groups of people, including scholars, feel powerless. This may reinforce racist attitudes if they refrained from challenging, resulting in normalising racism. Therefore, researchers, individuals and groups will be better placed to remain hopeful that although difficult, it remains possible to eradicate racism. That faith can spur the challenge and further spread the message rather than just admitting that what you are fighting against will always exist and you will never win.

While this study concurs with Andrews (2011)'s critique of a prominent CRT theorist's view, it argues that Andrews exploited the small limitation of one CRT theorist and did not consider conflicting views from within the five CRT tenets, when articulating to find a gap to promote Black Radicalism. As described above, Marxism renders essential knowledge of links between race, racism and capitalism. Despite that, Andrews (2011 p. 43) was still outrageously critical of the Marxism's approach to race and racism, where he reduces Marxism to a "*conspiracy*".

While critiquing the CRT, Andrews (2011) did not consider Marx (2012/1844)'s prediction of the end of capitalism, which simultaneously meant the end of racism since racism and capitalism are intertwined in Marxist theory (Gabriel and Ben-Tovim 1978). Therefore, Bell (1992)'s insistence that racism was a permanent phenomenon contradicted Marx's prediction of the end of capitalism. Thus, Andrews (2011) needed to be more explicit and separate Bell's views of racism from those of other theorists within the five tenets of CRT. Thereafter, it would have been clearer that Marx's prediction of the end of capitalism rendered racism as temporary, as opposed to Bell (1992)'s view of racism as permanent. Overall, Bell's view of racism as permanent may have been supported by other theorists within CRT. However, this notion remains confined within the Interest Convergence parameters under which it was created. Therefore, the Interest Convergence and Bell's view of racism as permanent is not a weakness of CRT *per se*, but it remains this tenet's shortcoming, since CRT consists of various tenets with theorists who may not always agree on issues.

8.3.3 Racism in the UK

Empirical research confirms the persistence of racism in the UK and other Western nations (Solomons, 2003; Thomassen, 2017, Husband, 2012; Singh, 2002). However, some scholars argue that the UK has made more substantial progress in addressing racism through policy and research compared to other Western countries (Solomons, 2003; Sewell et al., 2021). Sewell et al. (2021) highlight the UK's commitment to promoting race-related research, noting the relative difficulty of collecting such data elsewhere. Despite these efforts, racially motivated crimes have increased, with 106,843 racially aggravated offences recorded in 2021/22, a 19% rise from the previous year (Stop Hate UK, 2023). The reasons behind this escalation remain unclear, warranting further investigation.

Multiple studies have documented instances where BME social workers have experienced racial abuse from colleagues, managers, and service users in England (SWE, 2023c; Obasi, 2022; Dytham, 2024; Brandy-Williams, 2018; Tinarwo, 2017). In response to these findings, Naseem and Arshad-Ayaz (2016) argue that anti-racist pedagogy must be embedded within social work education, as it critically addresses the power dynamics and structural inequalities that underpin racism. However, Cane and Tedam (2022 p.5) found that most NQSWs in England had not previously heard of the term, "*anti-racist social work",* until after the killing of George Floyd in 2020. This reinforces the need to get anti-racist social work, embedded into the English social work curriculum, if not yet done.

8.3.4 The Potential Impacts of Racism

A growing body of literature highlights the profound impact of racism on the mental health and wellbeing of BME social workers across England. Studies have consistently found that experiences of racial abuse, whether from colleagues, managers, or service users, can lead to significant psychological distress, including symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety (Elias & Paradies, 2021; Travis et al., 2016; Fitzhenry et al., 2022; Eden et al., 2022). These experiences often trigger a cycle of rumination and emotional exhaustion, as individuals attempt to make sense of their treatment in professional settings. Over time, the cumulative effects of racism have been linked to physical health deterioration, with increased risks of cardiovascular disease and other stress-related illnesses (Brownlow et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2017).

Elias and Paradies (2016, p. 2) further argue that "*racism-induced absenteeism*," results in tangible productivity losses for employers, including costs associated with depression-related leave, hospitalisation, and replacement staffing. In LA settings, the absence of a social worker due to racism-related illness often necessitates redistributing caseloads among remaining staff or hiring temporary agency workers (Shanks & Bjerland, 2021). Both options carry significant implications: increased workloads may lead to burnout among permanent staff, while agency workers, often unfamiliar with the children and families they support, may struggle to build trust and maintain safeguarding standards (Smith et al., 2017). The lack of

continuity and relational depth can hinder disclosures of abuse or neglect, compromising the quality of care and protection offered to children.

Social work is a female dominated profession as SWE (2022) reports that 82.6% of NQSWs in England identified as females, with males comprising only 17.3%. Fook (2016) argues that the perceived nurturing qualities of Black women may shield them from some forms of racial discrimination, in contrast to Black men who are more likely to be stigmatised. Therefore, intersection of race and gender warrants attention. Lewis and Van Dyke (2018) observe that policing practices in Western societies often associate Black men with aggression, resulting in harsher treatment. Kwate and Goodman (2015) suggest that Black women, perceived as more submissive, are approached with less hostility. This aligns with Brandy-Williams' (2018)'s findings that Western narratives frequently depict Black men as absent fathers and emotionally detached, contributing to their marginalisation in female-dominated professions such as social work. Naseem and Arshad-Ayaz (2016)'s argument that the power dynamics and structural inequalities underpin racism meant there was a need to discuss power before delving into racism findings of this study.

8.4.1 Foucault's Discourse and Gramsci's Hegemony

Foucault's conceptualisation of power is both multifaceted and complex. He argues that power is not solely repressive but also productive, capable of generating knowledge, shaping discourse, and influencing behaviour (Foucault, 1979). Power, in his view, is decentralised and embedded within various institutional structures, rather than being concentrated in a single authority. This systemic nature of power challenges traditional hierarchical models and introduces a dynamic framework in which power circulates through networks of relationships. However, it must be acknowledged that Foucault's writings are often dense and open to multiple interpretations, which can lead to misrepresentation or conceptual ambiguity. To mitigate this, supplementary sources are employed to enhance clarity and contextual understanding.

Central to Foucault's theory is the notion of "*discourse",* which he defines as a system of thought that constructs and represents knowledge through language (Foucault, 1976, p. 123). Discourse is not merely linguistic; it is a practice rooted in the production and regulation of knowledge. Hall (1997, p. 83) reinforces this interpretation, asserting that discourse involves

"*practice based on the knowledge developed through reasoning,"* and that language is the primary vehicle through which such reasoning is expressed. Thus, discourse is both a medium and a mechanism for shaping how subjects are understood within specific paradigms.

Foucault (1976) further contends that speech is not simply a tool for communication but a powerful force that reflects and reinforces societal power structures. Therefore, speeches by influential figures, particularly politicians, play a critical role in shaping public consciousness and legitimising dominant narratives. These discursive acts determine what can be said, by whom, and in what context, thereby influencing societal norms and behaviours (Foucault, 1976; Hall, 1997). Foucault (1979), as cited in Faubion (2020, p. 340), notes that "*consent may be a condition for the exercise of power,"* a view that resonates with Gramsci's (1929) theory of hegemony, wherein dominant groups secure legitimacy not only through coercion but also by manufacturing consent among subordinate classes.

Foucault's (1976, p. 124) assertion that "*knowledge and power*" are inseparable underscores the reciprocal relationship between the two. Power produces knowledge, and knowledge, in turn, sustains and legitimises power. Discourse, therefore, becomes a strategic tool for both acquiring and maintaining authority, as well as for shaping societal conduct. While Foucault (1979) conceptualises power as a fluid and relational force, Haugaard (2022, p. 343) critiques this view, suggesting that it retains a "*top-down*" orientation in practice. Nevertheless, Haugaard (2022) acknowledges that while society may possess some degree of power, ultimate authority resides within institutional structures. He aligns with Gramsci (1929) in arguing that power, though constructed and maintained through institutions such as universities, can also be contested within those same spaces.

Weber (1925/1979, p. 79) adds another dimension by asserting that political party membership confers elevated social "*status",* thereby enhancing the influence of politicians within society. This elevated status means that their speeches are more likely to shape public opinion, reinforcing Gramsci's (1929) notion of hegemonic consent. Young (1990, p. 59) elaborates on this dynamic, arguing that the cultural expressions of dominant groups are widely disseminated and normalised, rendering them "*unremarkable."* In contrast, subordinate groups are simultaneously stereotyped and rendered invisible (Obasi, 2022).

Although Bates (1975, p. 351) acknowledges the significance of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, he argues that the theory remains *"fragmented"* and in need of further development. Nevertheless, the foundational concept of hegemony remains critical to this study, particularly in analysing how political discourse can shape public consciousness. For instance, Prime Minister Gordon Brown's (2009) statement, *"British Jobs for British Workers"*, is interpreted here as a strategic attempt to consolidate political power in the lead-up to a general election (Foucault, 1979; UK Parliament, 2010). The phrase was rapidly internalised and normalised by segments of the British public, as evidenced by its appearance on placards during industrial strikes, where British workers demanded prioritisation over foreign nationals (Summers, 2009). This illustrates how politicians, by virtue of their elevated social status, can subtly influence societal attitudes and secure consent for their ideological positions, an idea central to both Foucault's and Gramsci's conceptualisations of power.

8.4.2 Prejudice linked findings

This study's findings **suggest** that some prejudiced parents or guardians may actively bar black social workers from engaging with children supposedly under the care of these black social workers. Foucault's theory of discourse and power offers a lens through which to understand how political rhetoric, such as Brown's statement or Enoch Powell's infamous *"Rivers of Blood"* speech; can shape societal perceptions and reinforce exclusionary attitudes (Hickson, 2018). These discourses may contribute to the belief that social work is a profession reserved for white British individuals, thereby legitimising discriminatory behaviour toward Black British citizens. Gray et al. (2016) note that such views are often rooted in racialised assumptions that Black people inherently belong elsewhere, such as Africa. While it is possible that some parents have not directly engaged with these political speeches, the broader dissemination of such rhetoric contributes to a cultural climate in which racist attitudes are normalised and perpetuated.

Intersectionality perceives various forms of disadvantage including race, age, gender and ethnicity to have intersected, compounding BME social workers' experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Being BME male or female presented different facets. Working in a female dominated profession suggest that males were more likely to face racial stigma than females, this is exemplified by three male-participants in this study who detailed their racism experiences with

two being instantly denied access to children due to their race; meaning, gender presented an added element of disadvantage. However, female-participants expressed not having directly experienced racism in practice. That legitimatises the argument that the perceived nurturing qualities of black women may shield them from some forms of racial discrimination, in contrast to black men who are more likely to be stigmatised (Fook, 2016; Brandy-Williams, 2018).

Importantly, this study recognises that racism may be used not only as an expression of prejudice but also as a strategic tool to obstruct professional intervention. Some parents may purposely deploy racism attitudes to delay or prevent Black social workers from uncovering neglect or abuse faced by children within the household. Others may express racist sentiments as a reaction to personal stressors or challenging family or personal circumstances. These dynamics introduce complex ethical and practical dilemmas for social work practice. If Black social workers are barred from engaging with families, they are unable to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities, potentially leaving vulnerable children trapped in abusive environments. Social work managers are thus confronted with a difficult choice: uphold principles of diversity and inclusion by assigning Black social workers to all cases? or accommodate parental prejudice to ensure immediate child protection. Ravalier et al. (2021) highlight the prevalence of derogatory behaviour toward social workers from service users, but this **research extends** that understanding by demonstrating that BME social workers may face an additional layer of abuse rooted in racial discrimination.

This study also aligns with the findings of Corrodus (2024, p. 118), which associate the sharing of racism experiences with feelings of *"fear and shame"*, often triggering psychological trauma. However, it adds further nuance by identifying additional reasons why BME social workers may choose not to disclose such experiences. ***First*****,** some may fear being perceived as promoting "*otherness,"* or an unwanted dichotomy between dominant and minority groups, hence, they may seek acceptance by appearing to align with dominant group norms. ***Second,*** concerns about stigma from white colleagues may lead to self-censorship, leading to the avoidance of sharing some worrying racism experiences. ***Third,*** some individuals may have internalised racism to the extent that they no longer recognised it as problematic. ***Fourth,*** others may avoid disclosure due to a belief that their concerns will be dismissed or ignored. These factors

contribute to a culture of silence, where BME social workers suppress their distress to maintain professional and social cohesion. However, this silence can compromise their wellbeing, and, by extension, the quality of support provided to children and families.

This study suggests **two broad categories** of individuals in relation to racism: those who are highly sensitive to its effects and those who consciously choose to disengage from its impact. Muntinl (2020) offers a compelling critique of the latter, arguing that although avoidance of distressing experiences may be used to reduce the impact of the trauma, it can also lead to severe psychological trauma. This study revealed that some BME social workers may "**sugarcoat,"** downplay, or divert attention from their experiences of racism. This behaviour may stem from a desire to avoid dissenting from group norms or to maintain professional harmony. In some cases, individuals may only feel comfortable disclosing their experiences when others have done so first, reinforcing the notion that **silence may be a strategy for fitting in with the majority**. Such dynamics underscore the urgent need for culturally responsive support systems and anti-racist organisational cultures that validate and address the lived-experiences of BME practitioners. It is imperative to foster environments in which BME social workers feel safe and supported in sharing their experiences without fear of reprisal or marginalisation.

Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. (2025) present a compelling historical oral study that highlights the longstanding contributions of social workers of colour in advocating for equality and inclusion within England's social care landscape. However, a key finding of this current research reveals a complex and often overlooked dynamic: some **Black** managers may be unintentionally co-opted into reinforcing structures of white supremacy, thereby becoming disconnected from the lived-experiences of fellow people of colour. This finding draws a parallel with recent comments made by Kemi Badenoch, the current leader of the Conservative Party, who publicly renounced her Nigerian identity, stating that she no longer identified as Nigerian (Mitchell, 2025). While Badenoch's political position and public statements may not directly correlate with the experiences of Black social workers in managerial roles, her remarks mirror the findings of this study, wherein some BME social workers appear to suppress or avoid discussing their experiences of racism as a strategy for assimilation. On a deeper level, Fanon (1952/2021, p. 2) attributes such behaviour to the psychological legacy of colonialism, arguing

that "*the more the colonised has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush, the more he rejects blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become*." This suggests that the desire to be accepted within dominant structures may compel individuals to consciously or unconsciously reject aspects of their racial identity.

The implications of this phenomenon are significant. This study found that one Black manager within the Youth Justice System opposed those who challenged racial discrimination faced by some black youth, potentially due to a sense of privilege associated with their managerial status. This echoes broader concerns about representation without transformation, where inclusion at the leadership level does not necessarily translate into advocacy for racial equity. However, Andrews (2011 p.42) argues that "*the skin colour of the manager will make no difference if the institution itself is racist"*. This reinforces the earlier argument that **Black** managers may be unintentionally co-opted into reinforcing structures of white supremacy, in the unhelpful prejudiced systems.

This study argues that assimilationist strategies, whether in political or professional contexts can inadvertently perpetuate white supremacy by discouraging open dialogue about racism and marginalising the voices of those most affected. The avoidance of racial discourse, particularly by individuals in positions of influence, risks reinforcing systemic inequalities and undermining efforts toward genuine inclusion and equity within social work practice. Cole (2016) argues that white supremacy is deeply intertwined with the values of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, whose cultural dominance is sustained through mechanisms of consent rather than overt coercion. This aligns with Gramsci's (1929) theory of hegemony, which posits that the ruling class secures ideological control by subtly embedding its values within societal norms, thereby gaining acceptance from subordinate groups. In this context, the unintentional complicity of individuals from marginalised backgrounds can be understood as a product of unforced consent, shaped by the pervasive influence of dominant cultural narratives.

Foucault's (1976) theory of power and knowledge offers further insight into this dynamic. His framework suggests that power is exercised through discourse and institutionalised knowledge, which shape individual behaviour and societal expectations. Applying this lens, Badenoch's recent comments distancing herself from her Nigerian heritage may be interpreted as a strategic discursive act aimed at aligning with British voters who may harbour nationalist or exclusionary sentiments. As Foucault (1979) contends, individuals may use discourse to

acquire desired power or status, in this case, Badenoch's aspiration to become Britain's first Black Prime Minister.

However, Badenoch's positionality contrasts sharply with that of Bell Ribeiro-Addy, a Labour MP and vocal advocate for the inclusion of Black history in British education (De la Mare, 2021). Upon her election in 2020, Ribeiro-Addy openly celebrated her Ghanaian heritage (Crewe, 2025), presenting a counter-narrative to assimilationist politics. These divergent approaches within the Black political community highlight the tension between advocacy for racial equity and strategic silence or distancing. Badenoch's earlier stance on immigration, which emphasised stricter controls and reduced access to British citizenship (Hayton, 2025), further complicates her relationship with inclusion, raising questions about the extent to which her rhetoric may reinforce exclusionary ideologies.

The use of elevated status by politicians such as Brown, Powell, and Badenoch to shape public opinion reflects the enduring relevance of Gramsci's hegemony. Through their public discourse, these figures have influenced societal attitudes toward race, nationality, and belonging. While it remains uncertain whether Badenoch's distancing from her Nigerian roots will enhance her political prospects, her comments exemplify how individuals in positions of power may navigate identity politics to secure legitimacy within dominant cultural frameworks.

Statistics from Social Work Today (2022) reveal troubling patterns of racial discrimination within the profession. One in ten Black social workers reported seriously considering leaving their role due to experiences of racism. The same proportion (9%) indicated that they had been subjected to racist behaviour from colleagues, including social work managers. Additionally, 9% reported witnessing racism directed at Black service users and families by fellow professionals, while 34% stated they had experienced racism from service users and families on five or more occasions annually. These findings align with the GSCC (2012) and SWE (2023b) which associated black social workers with misconduct investigations, raising concerns about systemic bias within regulatory and organisational structures.

Recent data from GOV.UK (2025) indicates a 3% rise of BME social workers employed in statutory children's services between 2023 and 2024, making the overall numbers of BME social workers reach 26.2%, while white social workers made 73.8%. Despite this increase, representation at senior levels remains disproportionately low. While 20.5% of BME social

workers occupy frontline case-holding roles, only 13.1% are in senior positions, and a mere 10.2% hold management roles. These disparities underscore the need for targeted support and structural reform to ensure that BME social workers are not only recruited, but also fully integrated and equitably represented across all levels of the profession.

Literature consistently affirms that black social workers face racial discrimination in practice (Tinarwo, 2017; Dytham et al., 2024; Brandy-Williams, 2018; Skills for Care, 2024; Mbarushimana & Robbins, 2015). However, statistical data above reveals that **race is not a barrier to entry** into the social work profession, as many individuals from different races are employed as social workers in England. This study, however, identifies a critical nuance: ***race may become a barrier to practice*****,** particularly when prejudiced parents or guardians refuse black social workers access to children, thereby obstructing their ability to support children.

8.4.3 The Breadwinner Profile

Johnson et al. (2019–2023) identified a strong association between BME social workers and agency roles. This current study also identified that earning more money partly attracted BME social workers to agency roles. To explore the motivations behind this trend, McLaughlin et al. (2025, p. 190) argue that limited opportunities for career progression may drive BME social workers toward agency work, which is often perceived as the "*quickest"* route to higher earnings. While McLaughlin et al. (2025) highlight this economic motivation, they do not delve into the underlying reasons why higher earnings may be particularly important for BME social workers; this study addresses that gap.

Although SWE (2023b) does not explicitly link agency work to restricted career advancement, their findings reveal that BME social workers frequently express dissatisfaction with the lack of progression opportunities. This study concurs with that observation but posits that additional, culturally embedded motivations also play a role.

Family structures in England typically follow a "*nuclear model",* comprising two parents and two or three children, with financial responsibilities confined to the immediate household (Hakak & Francis, 2022, p. 2784). Extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts, often live separately and manage their own finances (Schürer et al., 2018). In contrast, the concept of family extends beyond the nuclear unit in many countries including India, China,

and several African nations. In some contexts, particularly where polygamy is practiced, families may be significantly larger (Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014).

When social workers from such backgrounds migrate to England, they often assume what this study terms the "*breadwinner profile*." This role is shaped by both pre-existing responsibilities and heightened expectations from extended family and community members, who may perceive the migrant as financially privileged due to their earnings in British pounds (Erdogmus, 2021). Consequently, these individuals are expected to provide financial support, commonly referred to as "*international remittances"* (Singh et al., 2012, p. 279) to assist with medical expenses, education, housing, and other needs in their countries of origin (Siddique et al., 2016).

While some families may be financially self-sufficient, research shows that remittances not only support individual households but also contribute to the broader economy of the receiving country (Singh et al., 2010, 2012; Van Dijk et al., 2020). However, as global family structures evolve and more societies adopt nuclear family norms (Blunt & Dowling, 2022), some diasporans may limit their financial support to immediate relatives. Still, the breadwinner role is often reinforced through cultural, religious, and moral expectations, which frame remittances as a voluntary, yet socially compelled act aimed at alleviating poverty and promoting familial stability (Ewubare & Okpoi, 2018; Kumar, 2019). Even when financial support is directed primarily toward close family members, diasporans may still be morally obligated to assist extended relatives in times of crisis, such as covering emergency medical expenses (Singh et al., 2012). This study, therefore, argues that the decision to pursue agency work among BME social workers is not solely driven by career stagnation, but also by complex transnational obligations rooted in cultural and familial expectations.

8.4.4 The Double Bills Responsibility

Migrating often requires migrants to establish a new household (Van Dijk et al., 2020), effectively creating a "home away from home." This phenomenon was reflected in this study where participants expressed feeling at home, while away from their homes in Africa, within the BME group. This introduces what this study terms, "*the double bills responsibility*", the financial burden of maintaining living expenses in the host country while simultaneously supporting dependents or obligations in the country of origin. This dual responsibility can

significantly increase financial pressure on IQSWs. Chogugudza (2017) notes that many IQSWs intend to reside in England only temporarily, with the goal of earning as much as possible before returning home; this short-term outlook may further incentivise agency work. Additionally, those who intend to extend their work-visas incur further renewal application fees which may be costly (Kharicha et al., 2023). Consequently, the combination of the *"double bills responsibility"* and the intention to return home or extend the work visas, intensifies the financial pressures on IQSWs, making agency roles more attractive due to their comparatively higher remuneration (McLaughlin et al., 2025).

In contrast, white British social workers who are generally not subject to the same transnational financial obligations, are less likely to experience the *"home away from home"* phenomenon and, by extension, the *"double bills responsibility."* This may partly explain the lower representation of white British social workers in agency roles as observed by Johnson et al.'s (2019-2023). The findings suggest that financial motivations linked to transnational responsibilities are a significant, yet underexplored factor influencing the employment choices of BME social workers in England. However, the new DFE (2024) guidelines introduce a new shift as discussed on chapter 7.4.5 which will pile misery on "breadwinners", as the increase in permanent staff will likely reduce agency vacancies, leaving BME social workers relying only on the scarce promotion opportunities to get more money (McLaughlin et al., 2025). Overall, the breadwinner profile and the double bills responsibility apply to all diasporans, regardless of skills and profession.

8.4.5 Colonial legacy

Gray et al. (2016) argues that colonialism left a legacy which continuously benefits the West. This legacy is reflected in the current England policy system which allows organisations to hire healthcare staff abroad in times of crises (DfH,2025). This has similar characteristics with the policy applied when the UK hired individuals from the Caribbean, the Windrush Generation, when the UK was faced with major staff shortages in various sectors (Hewit, 2020). However, this study asserts that the colonial legacy does not only benefit the West, but it equally aids IQSWs who may only work in England temporarily, with the goal of earning as much as possible before returning to their countries (Tinarwo, 2017), (see 8.4.3 and 8.4.4).

Pollard (2016 p.71)'s perception of colonisation as a "*manifestation of power and inequality",* avails the understanding that inequalities may be subtly promoted through the colonial legacy. The British welfare state would have not been funded without an empire to extract wealth from, meaning, it was funded through colonialism (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018; Williams, 2022). Additionally, Drayton (2005) asserts that the UK economy was founded on colonialism and the higher proportion of BME workers in public sector, which ensured that the UK economy continued to grow. However, findings from this study suggest that key contributors to the economy including BME social workers, continue to be perceived as outsiders, who at times are refused access to children by parents who harbour exclusionary views, even if they had acquired the British citizenship.

IQSW-participants in this study expressed having their qualifications questioned by local white colleagues, suggesting a persistent questioning of professional legitimacy; this raises a question of citizenship. This research acknowledges that there are various interpretations of citizenship. However, this study will focus on the participatory citizenship, identified as "*participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence in accordance with human rights democracy" (*Fransen et al., 2015 p.263). This definition promotes equality as it focuses on mutual trust among workers and colleagues. Fransen et al. (2015 p.263) argue that *"participatory citizenship is expressed through occupation with others in a social context, and is challenged by inequality, discrimination and other forms of exclusion or privilege*". Therefore, when white colleagues questioned IQSWs' qualifications, they equally queried their participatory citizenship, thereby promoting inequality. The question of participatory citizenship suggest that some white social workers may perceive social work as only preserved for white individuals. This study argues that part of the challenges including, struggles for promotion, and the feelings of being invisible or hypervisible (Obasi, 2022) faced by BME social workers in England stem from the colonial legacy. This suggests that BME individuals may not be seen as legitimate citizens in England, since many within the public still harbour exclusionary views.

8.5.1 Six faces of statutory children's social work in England

This discussion section has been pivotal in illuminating and interpreting the findings in context of theory and research evidence. To summarise the relevance of these findings to social work practice, this section will outline what this study terms the "six faces of children's statutory social work practice" in England. Face one -**Toxic Working Conditions,** face two-**Agencies** as **Safe Haven Spaces,** face three-**The Underground Pressure Manager,** face four-**Culture Shock**, face five-**Shadows**, and finally face six-**Supportive Working Environments**.

8.5.2 Face one – Toxic Working Conditions

This study's identification of this face of ***"Toxic"*** working environments within statutory children's social work in England (Ravalier et al., 2021 p.1113) is supported by extensive literature (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2012; Ravalier et al., 2021, Johnson et al., 2022). These studies consistently highlight challenges such as high staff turnover, excessive workloads, and burnout. As a result, some social workers may feel forced by what this study has termed, **"the Coercive Nature of Social Work"**, to donate their resting time and work prolonged hours. While some may seek agency roles for greater flexibility, others may seek similar roles in organisations with more manageable workloads. However, those unable to cope, may take extended leave or exit the profession entirely. This underscores the urgent need to address systemic issues contributing to unsustainable working conditions in social work practice.

8.5.3 Face two – Agencies as Safe Haven Spaces

This "face" is characterised by two interrelated dynamics. First, as Johnson et al. (2019) found, unmanageable workloads have led some social workers to seek agency roles or move between LAs as a strategy for preserving their wellbeing. Secondly, this study's findings where participants used covert avoidance to seek roles in organisations where workloads would be manageable suggest that constant movements between LAs may be used as a coping mechanism. Agencies may therefore be viewed as "Safe Haven Spaces", in avoidance of unmanageable workloads. These findings suggest that while some organisations may present

challenging environments, others offer more manageable workloads, highlighting significant variation in working conditions across the sector.

8.5.4 Face three – The Underground Pressure Manager

This face is grounded in this study's original findings and builds upon the first face, which highlighted the pressures of unmanageable workloads and resource constraints within LAs (Ravalier et al., 2021). Although ungeneralisable, this study's significant finding suggests that some managers and NQSWs may resort to unethical practices, including the fabrication of supervision records for ASYE portfolios. While no manager is presumed to willingly engage in such misconduct, the findings suggest that systemic pressures linked to budget cuts and staff shortages, may compel them to do so, just to manage pressure caused by what this study has described as the **Coercive Nature of Social Work**. These practices raise serious concerns about the integrity of current systems and risk becoming normalised if left unaddressed.

8.5.5 Face four – Culture shock

This "face", while supported by previous research which collectively highlight the theme of *culture shock* experienced by newly arrived IQSWs (Fouché et al., 2014; Tinarwo, 2011), is primarily informed by this study's findings. A key contribution of this research is the identification of the absence of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs, which may lead to stress, burnout, and difficult decisions regarding their professional futures. Some may take extended leave, seek roles in organisations with more manageable workloads, or opt for agency work due to its flexibility. In more severe cases, IQSWs may choose to abandon England altogether and return to their countries to protect their wellbeing, leaving LAs facing high staff turnover and financial loss, especially if full relocation packages had been recently paid to the quitting IQSWs. While this face shares connections with earlier findings on stress and burnout, it is distinct in its focus on the specific challenges faced by IQSWs.

8.5.6 Face five - Shadows

This "face" centres on the racism experiences of BME social workers in England, drawing on this study's findings and those of key contributors (e.g., GSCC, 2012; SWE, 2023b; Dytham, 2024). A significant contribution of this study is the rephrasing of Obasi's (2022) concept of *invisibility* and *hypervisibility*: Black social workers are described as either "*faint shadows*," barely acknowledged, or "*strong shadows,"* perceived as overly visible and disruptive. This metaphor reflects the dual marginalisation faced by Black practitioners, which includes this study's key finding that suggests that some prejudiced parents or guardians may actively bar Black social workers from engaging with children, further reinforcing exclusion. Therefore, when Black social workers are barred, they are seen as strong and disruptive shadows, not accepted by families. Overall, this face portrays the working environment as unaccommodating and stressful for social workers of colour, raising urgent concerns about equity and inclusion in social work practice.

8.5.7 Face six -Confidence in the Social Work Profession

This sixth and final "face" is grounded in the positive findings of other studies (Carpenter et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2019–2023) and this study, highlighting the impact of effective supervision and support. It reveals that when social workers feel well-supported, they are more likely to develop professional confidence, and experience job satisfaction, approaching their work with enthusiasm and pride. This is particularly significant for BME social workers, who, despite facing racism and exclusion in some contexts, may also encounter welcoming environments that affirm their identity and contributions. The presence of such positive experiences suggests that statutory children's social work in England is not universally negative. While the first five faces expose systemic challenges, this sixth face offers a counterbalance, showing that supportive practice environments can foster resilience and wellbeing for practitioners. However, for prospective social workers, awareness of these varied experiences may help prepare them for the realities of the profession and support their development of professional resilience. Overall, all social workers can experience at least one of the above faces. However, this study has yielded a piteous identification that black social workers can experience all the six faces while white social workers may only experience face one, two and six.

8.5.8 Conclusion

Although the primary focus of the study was on BME social workers, several findings such as those related to workload pressures, ethical dilemmas, and support systems may also resonate with white British social workers, suggesting broader relevance across the profession. The findings offer significant contributions to social work research, education and practice. They highlight the urgent need for:

- **Ethical reform**, particularly in addressing unethical practices linked to performance pressures.
- **A formal adaptation programme** for IQSWs, to mitigate IQSWs unwittingly exposing children to harm, and reduce culture shock which may promote safe practice and wellbeing for IQSWs.

If these systemic issues are addressed, the five challenging "faces" of social work identified in this study could gradually dissolve into the sixth face, characterised by effective support, job satisfaction, pride and confidence in the social work profession for all social workers.

Despite lack of clarity surrounding the association of black social workers with misconduct investigations by two regulatory bodies over a period of eleven years (GSCC, 2012; SWE, 2023b). This study's findings suggest that such patterns may reflect systemic racism rather than individual failings. The significant discovery that prejudiced parents and guardians may bar black social workers from engaging with children further supports this interpretation. While the majority of this study's findings suggest that black social workers particularly males, may be the least accepted ethnic minority group within statutory children services in England, the Sixth face identified above provides a counterbalance, suggesting that some black social workers including males, can experience acceptance and inclusion within the English statutory services. The next chapter scrutinises relevant policies, alongside selected findings.

Chapter-9. Policy Implications

9.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines relevant policies designed to support social workers, alongside evidence emerging from this study. The theoretical lens is grounded in Foucault's (1979) conceptualisation of power as both a repressive and productive force exercised by institutional authorities. Key institutions include government bodies such as Parliament and the House of Commons, where England's legislation is enacted (Zander, 2015), and institutions governing social work. The chapter is informed by the findings of the GSCC (2012) and SWE (2023b), which identified the disproportionate representation of Black social workers on misconduct cases.

These entities embody what Foucault (1977, p.23) terms the "dualism of power," (in Gordon, 1980) characterised by a top-down approach that combines surveillance with discretionary authority. Complementing this perspective, Bourdieu (1990, p.52) argues that power structures divide organisations, groups, and individuals into the "powerful" and the "powerless." Within this framework, the state emerges as the dominant institution, while local authorities, social workers, and managers occupy subordinate positions, constrained by state decisions. This understanding facilitates an analysis of how the power embedded in selected policies may have influenced participants' experiences, illuminating the factors that shape both positive and negative outcomes and informing strategies for improvement. In line with Bowen's (2009) guidance, an initial document skimming process was undertaken to identify overarching themes, followed by a detailed review to extract relevant content from each policy document prior to selection.

The central question emerging from the document analysis concerns why social work regulators, specifically the GSCC and SWE, investigated the experiences of BME social workers. The following policies and legislation have been selected based on their relevance to the findings of this study and other studies, will be examined: -

1. The Local Government Association's Standards for Employers of Social Workers (2020) in England. https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support.

2. Social Work England's Qualifying Education and Training Standards for Social Workers (2021) https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/qualifying-education-and-training-standards-guidance-2021.

3. The Department for Health's Code of Practice for Recruitment of Health and Social Care Personnel in England, DfH (2025). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-international-recruitment-of-health-and-social-care-personnel/code-of-practice-for-the-international-recruitment-of-health-and-social-care-personnel-in-england.

4. The Social Work Regulations 2018. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2018/9780111170090/contents.

5. The Children and Social Work Act 2017. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga_20170016_en.pdf

The analysis revealed that these regulators were required to comply with specific policy frameworks. Therefore, this section will refer to the Equality Act 2010, the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Public Sector Duty (2022) and standard three of the Professional Standards Authority's (PSA) (2022) Standards of Good Regulation. This standard obliges regulators to understand the diversity of their registrants and to ensure that regulatory processes do not impose inappropriate conditions or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics. Standard four of Standards for Employers of Social Workers (LGA, 2020)

instructs employers of social workers to promote their wellbeing. This states that all employers should:

(1). *Foster a culture of openness and inclusion in the organisation that empowers social workers to make appropriate professional judgements within a supportive environment*.

(2). *Be responsive to workforce needs and proactive and creative by working with social workers and others in their organisation to develop wellbeing frameworks that supports social workers to thrive at work*.

(3). *Enable social workers and managers to raise concerns about inadequate resources, operational difficulties, workload issues or their own skills and capacity for direct work with children, adults, and family without fear of recrimination* (Local Government Association 2020)

The analysis of these policies seeks to explain why certain experiences occurred among participants, complementing the CRT analysis presented throughout the chapter. This approach enhances transparency and strengthens the reliability of the research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a critical examination of the state through CRT's Neo-Marxist tenet, followed by the researcher's reflective commentary.

9.2 Confidential spaces

While elements of points 1 ("openness and inclusion"), 2 ("workforce needs"), and 3 ("enable social workers and managers to raise concerns") suggest involving social workers and managers, the policy does not explicitly prioritise the "voice of the social worker." If this were paramount, a statutory duty would require employers to provide confidential platforms for social workers to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Such spaces could prevent newly arrived IQSWs from feeling pressured to accept additional cases against their will. Although supervision offers an avenue for raising issues, this study and others indicate it is inconsistently provided (Ravalier et al., 2023). Therefore, proactive support is needed to help social workers identify early stress symptoms and seek assistance before reaching burnout, reducing long absences and ensuring continuity for children. Findings also suggest some BME NQSWs may fear being judged as incompetent if they disclosed their work-related stress symptoms. While

the LGA (2020) reference wellbeing frameworks and encourage raising concerns without fear, they lack clear directives for safeguarding confidentiality. An amendment or a new policy may be necessary to guarantee that NQSWs can share sensitive information without risk of misuse, key **argument.**

This study found no standard explicitly promoting the experiences of BME social workers within social work practice. However, learning can be drawn from the NHS, which introduced the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) in 2015 under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Duty (2022) to address discrimination against EMG staff. WRES, updated in 2020, emphasises amplifying EMG voices through confidential spaces and staff networks. Similarly, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) implemented an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy to ensure promotions were based on merit rather than race. Furthermore, Skills for Care (2024) developed the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES) for social care staff. However, SC-WRES adopts a collectivist approach, assuming uniform experiences across healthcare professions (Giddens, 2013), which this study argues does not reflect the distinct challenges faced by social workers. A dedicated standard for social workers is therefore needed.

Following findings in 2022–2023 that Black men over 40 were overrepresented in misconduct cases, SWE (2024) endorsed SC-WRES and formed an oversight group with academic advisors. While this demonstrates engagement, reliance on SC-WRES risks obscuring the specific experiences of Black social workers. Given evidence of disproportionate misconduct cases and limited promotion opportunities, SWE should introduce policies tailored to social workers rather than depend on frameworks designed for broader healthcare, key **finding.**

The use of the term “should,” in the Employers for Social Workers (2020) guidance grants employers flexibility to determine measures that promote social workers’ wellbeing. While this openness allows tailored approaches, it also reduces accountability, as organisations are not obligated to implement such measures. Conversely, using “must” would have created enforceable duties, compelling compliance. Critics may argue that social workers, as professionals, should recognise when their wellbeing is compromised; however, this research found that some have taken extended leave due to work-related mental health issues, with

Johnson et al. (2023) noting similar trends. By omitting a clear duty of care, the LGA (2020) policy indirectly exposes social workers to inadequate wellbeing support, **key finding.** Consequently, the policy's effectiveness is questionable, as it fails to fully safeguard the wellbeing of both social workers and the children they support.

9.3 Experiences of racism

Following the killing of George Floyd in 2020, Black Lives Matter protests in the UK prompted the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson to commission an inquiry into racial disparities in the UK, led by Dr Tony Sewell. The resulting report (Sewell et al., 2021 p.43) controversially downplayed institutional racism, portraying the UK as a "*beacon of hope*" for equality. This position is challenged by Coles (2022), who linked 22 preventable deaths of ethnic minority individuals in English and Welsh prisons (2015–2022) to institutional racism, arguing that these fatalities would not have occurred without systemic discrimination.

Although the Prime Minister's intention appeared to address racial disparities, the commission's composition exclusively EMG members, raises concerns. While these individuals had relevant expertise, including prominent white scholars such as David Gillborn who is a UK CRT analyst might have strengthened credibility (Gillborn, 2008). Johnson's choice of Sewell, who previously argued that racism was largely historical and attributed Black boys' educational failure to behaviour (Sewell, 2010), suggests tokenism. This strategy arguably sought to legitimise findings that downplayed racism, while enabling the government to deflect criticism by citing the commission's ethnic diversity.

A **key** finding from this research suggests that prejudiced parents may deny some black social workers access to children. However, there is no policy on how LAs may support black social workers in such circumstances. Barn and Das (2016) stress that family group conferences can be used to empower families and support them in key decision-making. Brown, (2003) states that family group conferences were developed in New Zealand before being included in the New Zealand policy system. Their aim of supporting children and families means they may be applied to educate and challenge prejudiced parents (LGA, 2020). However, they are voluntary and not legally binding in England (Barn and Das, 2016). Hence, they may be unhelpful if

prejudiced parents refused to participate when challenged on their racism views. Consequently, it remains unclear how such pervasive parents may be challenged or educated, in efforts to promote equality and inclusion. Instead, it appears as if this has been left to individual employers to decide how they would like to intervene in such conditions. Arguably, managers could intervene using the duties under part one of the Equality Act 2010, which enforces the equality duty that requires public sector bodies to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. However, this study asserts that the sensitivity of this issue, and the impact it may have on children who may be deprived of support, and their affected social worker's wellbeing, makes it paramount. Therefore, this study calls for a new guidance which would build on from the Equality Act 2010 to direct employers of social workers on how they must approach such a matter, **key identification.** Lack of policy could be seen as indirectly promoting racism.

9.4 Stereotypical views about black social workers

Delta's manager appeared to have had a preconceived assumption about mature black African male social workers (see-7.5.6). Although **Delta** was not reported, his manager's response suggested that being an African male social worker meant he was at risk of being reported for a misconduct issue if another complaint had been raised at a later stage. Therefore, this study argues that being a mature black male social worker is likely to be a barrier to having a long and successful career in social work practice, as being overrepresented on misconduct issues means this group is more likely to be expelled from the profession than their white counterparts, whose numbers remain low on misconduct issues in England (SWE, 2023b), **key finding**. This could be seen as a misrepresentation of chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010, which highlights race among protected characteristics. Therefore, the stereotypical behaviour displayed by **Delta's** manager could be one of the reasons why black African males are overrepresented on misconduct issues (SWE, (2023b).

Having partly complied with PSA's standard three of Standards of Good Regulation (2022), which enforces the regulator to understand the diversity of their registrants, lack of a policy supporting BME social workers could be seen as unintentionally disadvantaging people with protected characteristics, meaning, the regulator could be deemed to have not fully addressed regulation three. Additionally, the NMC (2022)'s clear proactive support policy for all its

registrants could be seen as an empathetic consideration of personal feelings and values. However, SWE appears to offer that empathetic support only to the already suspended social workers, as it does not have any policy/statement showing their intention to protect or promote social workers' personal rights, feelings and freedoms. That could mean, social workers must be on misconduct issues if they are to receive any personal support from SWE. This study appreciates that social work is a profession, hence it promotes professional standards and values. However, it argues that behind each professional, there is a person with personal feelings, which do not evaporate once they have become a professional. Additionally, on the flipside of resilience, there is burnout which may affect personal feelings and wellbeing. Hence, there is a need for the regulator to consider personal feelings, rights, and freedoms of social workers as some participants in this study shared that they had concerns about detailing their confidential experiences in supervision sessions. Despite being critical of SWE, there is evidence that they inherited some of these challenges from the previous regulators, since there was no policy developed after the GSCC (2012)'s findings that black social workers were seven times more likely to be reported for a misconduct issue than their white counterparts. Overall, SWE (2024)'s update statement does show that they do have intentions to improve the experiences of black social workers. However, their intentions remain questionable as they prefer to use policies developed by others than formulate own supportive policies.

9.5 White Supremacy

It appears that white supremacy may be one of the factors condemning BME social workers to racism in practice. Cole (2009 p.24) defines white supremacy as '*a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources*". McIntosh (1988 p. 32) argues that white supremacy, gave rise to "*white privilege",* which they defined as the "*unearned societal advantages"* gained by white people, often unconsciously. DiTomaso (2024 p.3) concurs with CRT when they argue that white supremacy, and white privilege are intertwined with "*white colour-blindness*" (Cole, 2009). As a result, CRT contends that all white people are beneficiaries of white supremacy and white privilege (Gillborn, 2008). Critics may argue that the homogenisation of all white people is not appropriate as there are different white groups who may not benefit from white supremacy, for example, Irish people. This research acknowledges differences among white populations. However, social workers from different white groups including the Irish may be initially allowed access to children until a

later stage where it would have been established that they were from a different ethnic group. Therefore, they may only experience racism at a later stage after having interacted with parents and children; this emphasises CRT's view that all white people benefit from white supremacy, **key identification.** However, the distinctively different skin colour and other physical body characteristics make BME social workers easily identifiable. Hence, they are more likely to be instantly denied access to children due to their race when compared with their white counterparts.

Cole (2009) contends that white supremacy has power to adapt perspectives, ensuring that all people, regardless of race normalised it and therefore contributed to its advancement. Additionally, Muzanenhamo and Chowdhury (2023) argue that white supremacy commands individuals to regard white people, their culture and everything associated with whiteness, over people of colour and everything associated with them. Therefore, it could be argued that **Bravo**'s manager who despite being black, had been unwittingly forced by white supremacy's power to normalise the stereotyping which allegedly left BME children disadvantaged in the Youth Justice System. Hence, a new argument could be raised that when a black person assumes a role as a manager, they unwittingly take the responsibility of advancing white supremacy, meaning their views change, as they would be more likely to apply white privilege and downplay negative experiences of fellow black colleagues. Therefore, black managers may be used as agents to advance white supremacy. For example, those in power may purposely promote a black social worker into a manager's position, knowing that, if any racism complains were raised, they will argue that the manager was black, hence there would be no promotion of racism. Therefore, black managers may be unwittingly under more pressure to get fellow black people punished; this pressure could mean, black managers may be more likely to report a BME social worker for a misconduct issue than a white one. However, on the flipside of the coin, it must be acknowledged that many BME social workers have been actively involved in advocating for inclusion. This is exemplified by Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. (2025) who emphasises the role of many BME social workers and managers in advocating for equality and inclusion. Hence, the promotion of black social workers may be celebrated instead of being seen as negative.

9.6 Qualifying Education and Training Standards

Social work's primary aim is to eliminate inequalities by promoting racial, social justice, and economic freedom for all people (King-Jordan and Gil, 2021). That commitment begins in the classroom with social work students. SWE (2021b) provided a clear guidance on how social work students can be supported. Although the focus of this study is not on students, it takes inspiration from participant **Bravo's** experiences. She raised questions if local white social workers knew enough about people of colour after having witnessed many saying the Black Lives Matter movement only began after the killing of George Floyd in 2020. Therefore, it could be argued that some white social workers may lack cultural competence, or cultural humility as described in chapter seven. This raises what research (Yadav 2019; Gray et al., 2008/2016, Smith 2022; Tusasiirwe 2022) described as "decolonisation of social work".

Decolonisation of social work has been defined as a process of identifying damaging beliefs and practices and rejecting uncritical thoughts which undermine the inclusion of various research methods that would accommodate ethnic minority beliefs, values, and practices in social work education, particularly in research where knowledge is created (Gray et al., 2016). According to Grey et al. (2008), Western models of social work have been exported and imposed on many countries. This has led to some writers arguing that social work has contributed to intellectual, cultural, and corporate colonisation (Hang, 2001; Nagpaul ,1972, 1993; Zakaria, 2001), in Gray et al. (2008), meaning, the profession has some colonial legacies which continue to segregate groups from outside the West. Additionally, Smith (2002) argues that *"Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of civilised knowledge"*, in (Grey et al., 2008 p. 2). This suggests that the West considers knowledge created outside the West or knowledge that does not support Western culture and values as illegitimate and disregards it. This research argues that SWE (2021b)'s failure to consider the "decolonisation of social work" literature, in the training and education policy may be seen as a way of protecting Western values. However, the rise of globalisation and England's continuous employment of social workers from abroad (SWE, 2023b) makes it very incomprehensible to continue inhibiting innovative ideas on bases that proposals from outsiders do not promote local values. By excluding the decolonisation of social work literature, SWE could be seen as failing to uphold point "C" of the Equality and

Human Rights Commission (2022)'s Public Sector Duty; this point enforces public bodies to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Therefore, SWE could be seen as unintentionally promoting an unwanted dichotomy between ethnic groups. On one hand, they preach diversity while on the other, they are ignorant to the real innovative ideas which could enhance diversity and inclusion, **key identification.**

The need to protect Western values may be understandable, however, Rasool and Harms-Smith (2021) insist that decolonisation in social work does not seek to disregard all social work existing knowledge, but it aims to unify the Western knowledge with all other parts of the world who may not be represented in the current social work knowledge**.** Therefore, this study argues that excluding decolonisation of social work in social work education policy could be seen as an exercise of sciolism, meaning, the regulator pretends to prioritise diversity and inclusion when they avoid the real innovative ideas which could promote diversity and inclusion. Hence, SWE could be accused of deliberately undermining the diversity and inclusion it claims to promote, **key identification.** Arguably, the curriculum already includes materials of decolonisation of social work, since standard 4.3 states that "Ensure that the Course is Designed in Accordance with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Principles and Human Rights Legislative Frameworks". However, this study argues that it does not specifically direct universities to include decolonisation of social work literature, and decolonisation of social work has not been acknowledged under any human rights' legislative framework. Additionally, some teaching institutions may apply decolonisation of social work literature in their teaching materials while others may not, meaning the policy may indirectly promote inconsistencies on the diversity knowledge, **key finding**.

CRT theorists would argue that the social work education policy applies a liberalist approach which promotes equality but does not consider race-related experiences (Cole, 2016), **key finding**. Therefore, the ignorance of the "decolonisation of social work literature" in education policy makes the diversity knowledge offered to social work students superficial. That could be the reason why some social workers lack either cultural competence or cultural humility as described in chapter 7.6.5. Surely, decolonisation aims to increase the knowledge available for

better social work practice and service user outcomes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Therefore, attending to the innovative ideas raised by the decolonisation of social work literature would not only progress social work, but it would also unify the profession globally and strengthen its universal identity and image, **key identification**. Overall, the identity of social work is unlikely to be influenced by decisions made by a few enlightened teaching institutions, yet it can be significantly advanced by either a government department or the regulator who has the power to influence the teaching materials through policy implementation. Critics may argue that the Social Work Education and Training materials are not only inspected by SWE, but also by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (DfE, 2023). However, this study asserts that Ofsted may be also led by a liberalist approach which promotes equality but ignores race related experiences (Cole, 2016). If the regulator had included "decolonisation of social work" in the education policy, all teaching institutions would have been expected to include chronological events leading to the development of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This would have promoted cultural humility which would have the potential to reduce stereotypical behaviours associated with lack of knowledge about other groups.

While this research has been critical of SWE for being superficial in their diversity promotion, it concurs with Bell Riberio-Addy, the labour MP who has been campaigning for the teachings of black history in British schools (Dela Mare, 2021). Therefore, the promotion of diversity must not only lie in social work education, but it must be embedded in the overall English education system. That means, when students enrol in social work courses, they would already have been equipped with knowledge of the experiences of people of colour, **key identification.**

9.7 Internationally Qualified social workers

The IQSW-participants' experiences in this study were not consistent with either the LGA (2020)'s Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England and the DfH's Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health and Social Care Personnel (2025). The duty of care outlined under the LGA (2020) was exercised when one participant received great care and support on arrival in England, yet another described their arrival experiences as challenging. The two contrasting experiences demonstrates high levels of unwarranted variation between LAs in

their approaches to welcoming and onboarding IQSWs. The DfH (2025) states that "*All Newly Appointed International Health and Social Care Personnel Be Offered Appropriate Support and Induction*". Both participants received inductions, yet the DfH (2025) appears to have given LAs powers to decide on what could be deemed appropriate support. On the other hand, it appears to have unintentionally opened a window for LAs to abuse their power when delivering this supposedly appropriate support.

This was evidenced in this study when six-month support plans for IQSW-participants involving a protected caseload were ignored with many cases allocated after only two months. Therefore, this research argues that the above policies do not prioritise the protection of IQSWs. However, these IQSW-participants experiencing contract breaches may have benefited from support from a union. Instead, this appears to have been left to LAs to decide. Therefore, this research asserts that LAs who employ social workers from abroad could be misleading IQSWs by promising a protected caseload prior to migration, but once in England, LAs change and breach those contracts, leaving IQSWs feeling powerless and forced to quit their roles in promotion of their wellbeing, **key finding.** Therefore, a new policy specifically placing a duty for all IQSWs to be assisted to join a union before they could start working is needed.

Despite the challenges faced by this study' IQSW-participants, there is evidence that LAs attempted to follow the policies on the employment of the social care staff from abroad, including the DfH (2025)' s policy *"All Health and Social Care Personnel required to undertake supervised practice by a regulatory body should be fully supervised in this process".* However, the guidance appears to have been built under the "one size fits all myth", derived from the principle of collectivism, which promotes group interests ahead of individual desires (Giddens, 2013). This umbrella approach led to the unifying of all healthcare professions and 'dressing them in the same uniform', suggesting that they all share similar experiences. That means, the needs specifically related to individual professions may be submerged in favour of what may be common with all professions. Therefore, this study argues that if there was a guidance specifically designed for social work, the experiences of IQSWs would be promoted rather than submerged under those of all internationally recruited staff, **key identification.**

The now defunct GSCC (2005) had developed a post-qualifying module for IQSWs, in Sims, (2012). The module meant IQSWs were required to first enrol in a UK university where they would undertake adaptation training before they could practice as social workers in the UK. The primary aim was to allow IQSWs to learn and understand the UK social work policy, debate differences between the UK practice and the practice of their native countries, understand the UK values, culture, and anti-discriminatory principles of the UK social work (Sims, 2012). However, the successive regulator, the Health and Care Professionals Council 2012 to 2019, appear to have abandoned that policy. Consequently, the current regulator SWE assumed their role when that policy had already been abandoned. The scrapping of the policy left a gap, meaning LAs had to apply the LGA (2020) and the DfH (2025) which this research has exposed as giving LAs the autonomy to decide on the type of support they felt was appropriate for IQSWs. Evidently, this is likely to lead to inconsistencies in the experiences of IQSWs. Undoubtedly, the scrapping of that policy was an unjustifiable error considering differences in culture, religion, values, practice approaches, policies and languages which may affect how each country delivered social work services. On this note, IQSWs cannot be expected to have cases on their first day of work, without any specific formal prior adaptation training. Hence, this research argues that a new policy specifically designed to introduce a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs is needed, including specific support tailored to address gaps between practice approaches used in IQSWs' native countries and local approaches. In the absence of this support, IQSWs will continue to struggle with some choosing to return to their native countries, leaving a high staff turnover in English social work, and others applying inappropriate approaches exposing children to harm.

This study acknowledges the BASW's (2024) Overseas Qualified Social Workers Programme (BASW, 2024) as it focuses on developing skills for IQSWs to be competent when practicing in the UK. However, this approach remains voluntary as it is up to each IQSW to opt into it. Despite fronting the PCF, after inheriting it from the now defunct college of social work, BASW is not an authoritative body which can impose duties on employers of social workers. Additionally, this study appreciates the support provided by the Social Care Empowering Training and Consultancy (SCETC) for IQSWs to settle in the UK (Koutsounia, 2023). However, the support is also voluntary and informal as it is not recognised under any English law, or guidance for IQSWs. Therefore, the appropriate formal support programme for IQSWs must be introduced

by a relevant government department or the regulator which would be able to make it mandatory to all employers, with each employer or commissioner paying the training fee. Furthermore, the BASW appears to have exploited this gap to expand their membership base and financial gains, as registrants must pay a fee in addition to the registration fee. Similarly, the SCETC is not provided for free as interested IQSWs are charged for services.

While this research has been critical of SWE for not having a clear policy or any adaptation training for IQSWs, they would argue that their role was enforced by the Social Work Regulations 2018, developed from part two of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. However, neither the Children and Social Work Act 2017 nor the Social Work Regulations 2018 provides a duty or provision for the dispensation of a formal adaptation training to IQSWs. Clearly, there is a gap in law since the LGA 2020 and the DfH 2025, also fail to recognise that even where educational qualifications were equivalent, divergent welfare provisions and cultural backgrounds could mean different approaches applied in social work practice in other countries, **key finding**.

Therefore, this research argues that issues mentioned above mean IQSWs need some time to adapt to the English practice standards, even if they were experienced in their countries. If not, IQSWs would continue to apply unacceptable practice approaches from their countries, leaving children at risk of harm, as seen with **Eco** in this study. Critics may argue that the ASYE programme was not created through a statute law, therefore, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, should not be discussed in relation to a support programme. However, this research affirms that the ASYE programme was only created after significant child atrocities where social workers failed to identify signs that children were at risk of harm while living with parents, before the children eventually died at the hands of the same parents. Therefore, a formal adaptation programme is needed before similar child atrocities involving IQSWs, could happen**.**

9.8 Neo-Marxists critical analysis of the State

This research evidences the Neo-Marxist view of the state as an instrument serving the Bourgeoisie (see 3.7). High staff turnover and unmanageable workloads in social work can be linked to austerity measures aimed at strengthening the economy. For instance, the Coalition government (2010) introduced public spending cuts to reduce the deficit and stimulate growth,

framing this as a strategy to attract investment, create jobs, and reduce "*dependency culture*" through Universal Credit (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2023 p. 2; DWP, 2010). Neo-Marxists (Poulantzas, 1980; Althusser, 2014) argue that such policies reflect class interests: vulnerable groups, unable to generate profit, are marginalised, while the proletariat is encouraged to sell labour cheaply to capitalists. Universal Credit is given based on income, meaning if you earn below a certain threshold, you may lose it (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2023); thus, exemplifying the state's covert role in advancing capitalist profit-making ideas, since it most likely forces people to get jobs and contribute to the bourgeoisies' profits.

This study argues that cuts to public spending associate vulnerable members of the society including children, with **"uselessness".** The inability to participate in the Bourgeoisies' productive activities such as working for them, may mean vulnerable members of the society may be deemed **"useless,"** since they may not contribute to the growth of the economy, **key finding**. On the contrary, those who can sell their labour and work for the capitalists may be associated with **"usefulness,"** since the Bourgeoisies can extract value from them while expanding businesses. Therefore, it is the Bourgeoisies who covertly control the state's decisions about the economy growth leading to spending cuts in public services, which the Bourgeoisies do not consider profitable, **key identification.** This reaffirms the idea that the state is an instrument used by the Bourgeoisies, since the state is unable to make decisions against the growth of the economy which has been linked to the Bourgeoises' profit-making views.

Furthermore, cuts to public spending have negative effects on social services, as LAs must work with reduced budgets in an increasing population across England (Office for National Statistics 2023), **key identification.** Decreased budgets for LAs result in hiring of fewer social workers (McLaughlin et al., 2023), and this coupled with an increasing population have likely led to severely increased and unmanageable workloads, making it harder for statutory children's social workers to cope. Increased workloads for social workers could equally increase pressure on social work managers as more duties would emerge, meaning they have little time for formal supervision. Therefore, this study argues that the policy to public spending appear to be based on a deprivation than a beneficial formula as it inhibits LAs from employing reasonable numbers of social workers who would share caseloads, making them manageable, **key identification.**

Hiring additional social workers requires increased budgets, which would necessitate borrowing and raise the deficit. This could shrink the economy, placing the state in conflict with the Bourgeoisie, whose profits might decline, prompting them to invest elsewhere. Such outcomes risk undermining the state's credibility and electoral prospects. This research argues that the state adopts a "***protectionist view,"*** safeguarding what Lenin (1915/2011, p.8) calls "*petty-bourgeois ideologists*," creating a façade of serving public interests while prioritising political survival. To remain in power, the state must appease the Bourgeoisie by implementing policies that support investment. Public spending cuts, presented as economic growth strategies, ultimately protect capitalist interests. While a stronger economy may generate jobs, these benefits do not extend to all, leaving social workers in a dilemma: tasked with supporting vulnerable groups while facing staff shortages and escalating workloads, **critical finding.**

Critics may argue that some LAs have managed with reduced budgets despite spending cuts. Research, however, suggest that workload variations often reflect demographics: LAs in affluent areas face fewer service demands, while those in high-need regions experience heavier, often unmanageable caseloads (Ravalier et al., 2021. Neo-Marxists (Cole, 2016; Lenin, 1915/2011) would contend that the state uses such isolated successes to mask its dependence on capitalist interests, creating an illusion of control. Ultimately, both positive and negative experiences stem from the state's instrumentalist role in prioritising the Bourgeoisie over vulnerable groups, **key finding**. The wellbeing of social workers and service users is compromised by excessive workloads driven by austerity. This study calls for new funding sources to prevent further mental health strain among social workers and inadequate support for vulnerable populations.

9.9 Discussion of selected policy-findings

Duty of Care: The Standards for Employers of Social Workers (LGA, 2020) has been found to be less effective than expected. Failure to make care of social workers a duty, could mean employers have the power to make claims for this provision without any practical evidence of supporting the wellbeing of social workers. This study's **key** finding where some participants did not want to share their early practice-related mental health symptoms in fear that managers would deem them unable to cope with the pressure of statutory children services, suggest that

other social workers may share such feelings. Managers are expected to support NQSWs with their early mental health practice related symptoms (Parker, 2010). However, there is no policy or procedure to prevent managers applying what this study has termed as, "***a water-down approach",*** characterised by using shared mental health concerns against NQSWs who may have shared it.

Misconduct cases and the over-representation of BME male social workers: The inability to act on the findings of their 2022/ 2023 studies which found black men above the age of forty to be overrepresented on misconduct issues, may mean SWE only research BME social workers' experiences in an attempt to address standard three of the PSA's Standards of Good Regulation (2022) and the Public Sector Duty (2022). That duty enforces public bodies to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between groups. This tick-box exercise may mean they only publish equality objectives just to demonstrate compliance. However, lack of a pragmatic approach including a new policy to specifically deal with this issue means SWE has been anonymous in practically improving the experiences of black social workers. They may argue that they have started an oversight group and agreed with employers to have issues resolved at organisational levels (SWE, 2024). However, this study argues that this is a "***disguised compliance,"*** which may have been done to prevent questions raised about their commitment to address the Public Sector Duty (2022) and the Standards of Good Regulation (2022). Lack of a desire to act on these findings by the successive regulators may be the reason why the GSCC (2012) and SWE (2023b) came to the same results even when the two studies were conducted many years apart. It appears as if there is an ***ignorance culture*** which SWE unwittingly inherited from previous regulators who similarly failed to introduce policies supporting BME social workers.

NMC's EDI Policy and the NHS's inclusion policy WRES. The NMC's (2022) inclusion policy ensuring that promotions were only considered on individual skills rather than race, has left SWE England's inability to promote equality and inclusion laid bare. Therefore, the social work regulator lags on diversity and inclusion when compared with other public bodies. This study acknowledges that SWE can adopt policies created by other public bodies including the SC-WRES (2024) to support BME social workers. However, this may be seen as a way of diverting from their responsibilities and choosing to be beneficiaries of generic policies developed by

other organisations, rather than creating their own policies specific to social workers. Overall, the SC-WRES applies principles of collectivism which suggest that all healthcare staff share similar experiences, leaving sensitive social workers experiences submerged under those of other healthcare staff. Therefore, SWE need to formulate own policies specific to social work experiences.

Decolonisation of Social Work: Lack of clarity or inclusion of the "decolonisation of social work" literature in the Social Work Education Policy (2021) makes the education policy look less effective than expected. Additionally, the policy appears to apply a liberalist approach which supports colour-blindness, leaving race-related experiences sidelined (Cole, 2009). Hence, it promotes superficial knowledge around diversity and inclusion issues. Social work students are unlikely to be consistently taught about the impacts of significant periods including imperialism and the Slave Trade, how those periods affected the colonised and how they benefited or continued to benefit England and the West. Therefore, the stringent education policy which appears to only promote Western values could be a barrier to the development of cultural humility for social workers, **key argument**.

The need to support newly arrived IQSWs join a union: Lack of knowledge about their legal rights as social workers in England could mean IQSWs may be powerless to challenge their LAs who have been found to breach contracts. Additionally, there is no policy to ensure that employers empowered IQSWs with knowledge of their rights as social workers in England before they could start working. Therefore, duties must be imposed on organisations hiring IQSWs to support them join a union before any case allocation. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that **the voice of the social worker** is promoted and heard. Moreover, SWE's inability to acknowledge personal values of social workers could leave some social workers feeling powerless and unable to voice their concerns challenging their managers' unacceptable decisions.

The Need for IQSWs' own Code of Practice: The DfH, (2025) has been found to be built on the one-size-fits-all myth, derived from the principle of collectivism, as it assumes various health care professions all share similar experiences. However, the sensitivity of social work and the recent child atrocities in England means this collective approach could leave children exposed

to harm. Therefore, this study argues that social work needs its own code of practice for IQSWs, which would not leave the profession submerged under other professions.

Adaptation programme for IQSWs: This research has found that there is a gap in law as neither the Children and Social Work Act 2017 nor the Social Workers Regulations 2018, provides a duty or provision for the creation of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs. The scrapping of the GSCC (2005) post-qualifying module for IQSWs left a gap, as there is no recognition of divergent welfare provisions and cultural backgrounds, which could mean different approaches applied in social work practice in other countries. Therefore, lack of a national formal support policy could mean IQSWs may be expected to already know everything about the English social work practice on arrival. Failure to provide a duty or provision for formal support of IQSWs, means children are unintentionally exposed to harm.

This study argues that a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs is paramount as it would provide several benefits for different stakeholders: (1) Promote the ***wellbeing*** for IQSWs by reducing work-related stress and burnout. (2) Ensure IQSWs remained in their roles, thereby promoting ***retention.*** (3). When retention is promoted, ***familiarity*** with the English practice standards will reduce the risk of children being unintentionally exposed to harm, as seen in this study. (4) Children would receive **consistent support** from their allocated social workers. (5), LA ***finances*** spent on relocation packages or during the recruitment process would be saved, (6), IQSWs would avoid ***spending money*** on the BASW and the and SCETC's voluntary training packages.

Responding to Service User Prejudice: One of this study's key findings suggest that some black social workers may be denied access to children by prejudiced parents. However, there is no policy to support affected social workers or managers to educate or challenge parents. Therefore, new guidance is required to guide employers on how to support stigmatised social workers and educate prejudiced parents. This policy would not only promote the experiences of social workers, but it would also ensure that children received support from their allocated BME social workers as early as possible. Surprisingly, Social Work England were adjudged to have addressed 17 out of 18 Professional Standards between 2024 and 2025 (SWE, 2025) including standard three, which addresses Equality Diversity and Inclusion (Professional

Standards Authority (2024). **One wonders how SWE have addressed** that standard when evidence from the GSCC, (2012) and SWE, (2023b) has associated black social workers with misconduct issues for at least eleven years, yet SWE have not created a single policy to address the issue. This suggests black social workers may be left in an impractical grey zone where their experiences are not considered, further exacerbating their systemic invisibility in England (Obasi, 2022).

9.10 Critical Race Theory-Framework

This study has been shaped by the insights of key contributors to Critical Race Theory, particularly Marx, Althuser, Gramsci, Crenshaw, Cole, Bell, Gillborn and others. These theoretical perspectives have provided a robust lens through which to examine the complex realities faced by social workers.

CRT has argued that some of the policies including the LGA (2020) and the DfH (2025) were developed under the liberalist-approach which promotes colour-blindness, seeking to promote equality and inclusion, but ignoring race-related experiences (Cole, 2009). The liberalist approach applied when formulating these policies meant race was downplayed even when the Equality Act 2010 included "race" among the protected characteristics. Failure to highlight race-related experiences could mean, the two policies undermine the Equality Act 2010, thereby unintentionally promoting racism. Therefore, this study calls for the update of these policies to acknowledge the race-related experiences.

Intersectionality provided a lens through which to understand participants' intersecting experiences, while Gramsci's (1929) hegemony promoted the understanding that the bourgeoisie used consent to get their values accepted by the public and seen as legitimate. Additionally, Neo-Marxism has been applied to critically analyse the state, arguing that the state was informed by the bourgeoises' profit-making ideas when making decisions. Furthermore, CRT has enabled the understanding that white supremacy has power to adapt perspectives, leading to some black managers unwittingly promoting it at the expense of fellow BME individuals. Overall, Bell's (1992) conceptualisation of racism as permanent has led to this study's argument that this perception may discourage the public including some scholars who may feel, there is no need to challenge racism since it is permanent.

Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu's (1992) conceptualisations of power, together with Weber's (1925) discussion of status and power, including Polanyi's (1957) theory of the Double Movement added to the discourse. These theorists have promoted the understanding of how power is operationalised to shape public opinion. Polanyi's (1957) theory of the Double Movement promoted the understanding of how social workers were caught between two opposing forces, the expansion of capitalist free-market principles which moved the economy away from society, and a counter-movement aiming to re-embed the economy to society. These forces interact, constantly leaving social workers in dilemmatic positions where they are expected to support vulnerable members of the public, yet lack of financial resources including the continued cuts on public spending makes their position precarious.

However, recent political developments in the US suggest that CRT is under threat. President Trump's threats to dismantle EDI initiatives in the US (Michelle et al., 2025) leaves CRT at risk of being reversed. Additionally, Charlie Kirk, the recently assassinated Conservative right-wing activist who was a loyal supporter of President Trump often criticised EDIs and affirmative action (Evans, 2025). Despite being deceased, Charlie Kirk's Movement, the Turning Point US, is said to be growing fast owing to his unfair and unfortunate assassination (Cheshire, 2025). President Trump and this movement remain a threat to equality as they aim to undo significant progress done through activism in the 19th century. Kuhn (1996 p. 49) argued that whenever there was a paradigm shift, there will be those who would resist change in attempt to "*defend old ways"*. Therefore, President Trump and the Turning Point Movement could be seen as resisting change brought by the paradigm shift, through EDI initiatives and the affirmative action. Hence, they could be seen as advocating for the continuous segregation of some groups.

9.11 Reflection and research exposure

The decision to adopt a running commentary style throughout the thesis was intentional, although it may appear unconventional. This approach reflects the iterative nature of IPA, where interpretations emerged at different stages some during initial analysis, others later in the discussion chapter. Given the richness of the data and the volume of findings generated by IPA, it was impractical to confine all insights to the discussion section or to tabulated summaries,

which necessarily present only selected findings. The commentary style allowed for a more nuanced and transparent engagement with the data.

My positionality as a BME social worker and researcher shaped both the research process and its interpretation. Positionality refers to the intersection of personal identity, professional background, and social location, and how these influence the research relationship. I occupy a dual role: as an insider with shared cultural and professional experiences, and as an outsider adopting an academic lens. This duality created both opportunities and challenges. During the recruitment process, I noted that many potential participants initially expressed an interest in participating, but many of them disengaged often without any explanation. I reflected on my presentation and the communication skills I used when talking to them. However, I could not see anything wrong I might have done to prevent them from engaging. Overall, the example of one participant who withdrew in the last minute, citing fears including job security, suggests that my positionality did not play a role in discouraging engagement, but sensitivity in some potential participants' experiences may have discouraged them from engagement.

Presenting findings at two events (1) the Joint Universities Social Work Conference (2024) and (2) a local authority diversity forum; provided opportunities for reflexive dialogue. Feedback from academics and practitioners challenged assumptions, enriched interpretation, and confirmed the practical relevance of the research. For example, managers acknowledged gaps in policy for supporting BME social workers barred by families and committed to implementing changes. These outcomes illustrate how positionality, when reflexively managed, can enhance both scholarly and practical impact.

Being part of the BME community may have facilitated rapport with participants, as shared identity can foster trust and openness. However, it also raised questions about bias and subjectivity. During presentations, I was asked whether my background made recruitment easier and whether my interpretations were influenced by personal experiences. I acknowledged that while my identity may have encouraged some participants to engage, recruitment remained challenging, since 55 respondents expressed interest, but only seven engaged. Some declined, fearing that involvement might serve my career advancement, while

others cited workload pressures. This suggests that my positionality did not guarantee access and, at times, may have been perceived as a barrier.

I recognise that my proximity to the subject area and my lived-experiences could influence interpretation. To mitigate this, I employed several strategies: maintaining an audit trail of analytic decisions, engaging in peer debriefing, and validating themes through an expert focus group. These steps enhanced transparency and credibility, addressing concerns about IPA's perceived lack of validity. While I cannot claim complete neutrality nor is this desirable in qualitative research. I aimed for reflexive awareness of how my perspectives shaped the research narrative.

Positionality also informed my inclusion criteria. Questions arose about combining BME NQSWs who qualified in England with IQSWs. Critics suggested these were distinct social groups requiring separate objectives. I defended my decision by referencing the study's aim: to explore first-year experiences of BME social workers in children's services, an under-researched area. The inclusion of both groups reflects this broader focus rather than programme-specific concerns. I acknowledged that differences existed and made them explicit where relevant but argued that shared racialised experiences justified a combined approach.

My positionality intersected with professional ethics, particularly when critiquing policy. Some NQSWs at the first conference feared that my analysis might conflict with Social Work England and jeopardise my registration. Experienced practitioners countered this, affirming that critical engagement with policy is integral to professional discourse. This exchange highlighted the tension between insider status and academic critique, a tension I navigated by grounding arguments in evidence and framing critique as constructive. Overall, my positionality was not a static attribute but a dynamic factor influencing recruitment, analysis, and dissemination. Rather than viewing it as a source of bias to be eliminated, I embraced it as a lens through which to interpret complex social realities, while remaining critically aware of its limitations.

9.12 Chapter-conclusion

This research has identified significant gaps in policy and practice affecting BME social workers. Evidence shows that DfH (2025) adopts a collectivist approach, obscuring needs specific to social work, while SWE's engagement with diversity appears driven by regulatory compliance rather than genuine commitment to change. Policies analysed in this study largely reflect liberalist, colour-blind principles, sidelining race-related experiences and unintentionally perpetuating inequalities. Despite SWE's diversity statements, the absence of targeted policies addressing the overrepresentation of Black social workers on misconduct cases renders these claims misleading. Overall, the vulnerability of BME social workers, as described in chapter (5.6), appear to be exacerbated by lack of supportive policies. This could be linked to the colonial legacy which depicts black people as second class citizens (Smith, 2022), leading to the application of colour-blind policies developed under liberalism (Cole, 2009). The next and final chapter is focusing on conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter-10. Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Chapter-introduction

This chapter details the limitations and strengths of this study. It proceeds to detail the concluding thoughts before providing the final recommendations in addition to those which have been continuously made during the study.

10.2.2 Limitations.

The small sample size and the qualitative approach applied in this study means the findings cannot be used for representation or generalisation purposes; for example, only seven NQSWs and two IQSWs were involved. Although the IPA methodology and the running commentary style of writing enabled an in-depth line by line approach, they equally led to a shallow wider analysis. Furthermore, a PhD study with a single researcher and limited amount of time allocated to the research process, meant insufficient time became a limitation, particularly in the recruitment process. The exclusion of grey literature in the literature review remains a limitation as some of that literature may have led to different if not new understanding. However, this was partially addressed by updating the search and undertaking a further search for relevant policy and professional documents discussed in Chapter 9.

10.2.3 Strengths

A careful consideration of essential data from each participant and a cross-case analysis coupled with IPA's line-by-line approach increased the depth of the findings. The limitation of the running commentary style was supplemented by chapters eight and nine, where selected essential findings were discussed. Additionally, the findings were also enhanced by the application of CRT and the analyses of policies, which explored why some experiences may have happened; therefore, results have been comprehensive.

A rigorous analysis guided by IPA ensured that deeper analysis was accomplished which would not have been easily achieved through a larger sample size. This detailed analysis builds a platform on which to recommend future studies with larger sample sizes where representation and generalisation can be achieved. Such studies could either refute or supplement findings

from this study, ensuring that knowledge gained represented the lens of social workers in England and across the globe.

Conducting the interviews away from LAs enabled participants to feel free to express their experiences, at times exposing unacceptable practices in their organisations. However, if the interviews had been conducted within LAs, it would have been unlikely for participants to expose bad practices. Additionally, managers may have selected those with positive experiences ensuring that poor practices remained hidden.

Despite the identified limitations, this study has shed light on the first-year experiences of BME social workers in England.

10.2.4 Revisiting the Research Question.

This study employed an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach to explore the first-year experiences of statutory children and family social workers from Ethnic Minority Groups in England. Analysis of individual participant descriptive accounts yielded three superordinate themes detailed below. However, the freedom to explore deeper into experiences given to participants meant an additional superordinate theme, not directly addressed by the three research questions, was identified, taking the number of these themes to four. These themes were examined in a cross-case analysis. To promote rigour, validity and trustworthiness, all themes were validated further by an expert group of social work managers.

10.2.5 Identified themes

1. The Impacts of Unreliable Support Systems.
2. The Consequences of Unmanageable Workloads.
3. Race, a Barrier to Social Work Practice?
4. The Power of Effective Support Systems.

The sections below will briefly re-cap on some of the key findings, focussing on the experiences of support, workload management, why social workers may leave their roles, how policies influence social worker experiences, and lastly will remind the reader of the Six Faces of Statutory Children's Social Work identified in this study.

10.2.6 Experiences of support.

This section focuses on the experiences of supervision and support.

Positive formal support experiences promoted critical reflection which enabled participants to reflect on their recent practice and learn while continuing to develop as professionals. On the other hand, lack of expected support led some participants to deflect into what this study has termed, **"*the victim status mode.*"** Once in this mode, participants appeared stressed and felt like victims of the unavailability of the expected support and therefore thought and reflected from a victim's standpoint. When that happened, participants could not utilise the maximum benefits of their qualification knowledge as the inability to reflect meant that knowledge was either sidelined or forgotten when it was needed the most. However, those who could reflect identified the knowledge gained from university as helpful, while clearly identifying theories they reflected upon while in practice.

Most participants depended on ad-hoc peer support rather than the formal supervision from their managers. Additionally, frequent manager changes appeared to affect the way formal supervision sessions were delivered to some participants. Furthermore, managers' different approaches and perceptions of supervision meant some participants received unreliable and inconsistent support, affecting the progress of those participants.

Some NQSW-participants did not receive formal supervision for long periods, leading their managers to ask them to create false supervision notes before handing them over to the managers for signing. If notes were not falsely created, these participants may not have had enough practice evidence in their portfolios, meaning they would have been at risk of failing the ASYE programme. However, power dynamics likely compelled these participants to accept their managers unethical practice and focus on progressing in their careers.

IQSWs-participants received adequate formal support including induction periods and consistent formal supervision. However, lack of a formal adaptation programme rendered

supervision unhelpful, as lack of knowledge about the English social work practice standards and culture, placed them at a disadvantage, contributing to stress.

Contrary to the above negative experiences of support, some participants shared positive experiences of formal supervision and support from their managers, with one identifying that the support they received meant they were satisfied with social work profession and their role, meaning, they were motivated to wake up and go to work every morning. While one linked their great support to their manager whose experience as a practice educator meant they knew how to provide support appropriately, others linked their effective support to a BME support group, formed by BME social workers to provide support to each other. Overall, the effective support systems meant participants were encouraged to perform their roles to the best of their abilities, ensuring that children received appropriate support.

10.2.7 Workload management.

- The best way of managing workloads articulated in this study is the ability to plan, prioritise and put reminders on electronic calendars. However, emergencies often hampered good planning, as prioritisation forced participants to adapt their plans at frequent intervals.

- NQSWs-participants were under pressure to keep their workloads up to date as managers would have likely deemed them to have been unable to meet their deadlines, potentially impacting on the outcome of the ASYE programme. Such participants had to work prolonged hours to ensure their workloads remained up to date.

- Some participants described feeling uneasy and anxious until they had donated their resting time and worked out of hours; this study has linked such feelings to what it has termed, **the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work** (see 7.4.2 and 8.6.2). The pressure of the workload meant participants rarely claimed their "time in lieu" as they feared this would impact negatively on their already challenging workload.

- Most participants identified business support as helpful in ensuring that they were able to manage their workloads. This support came through updating calendars and ensuring that plans which were due to be updated remained highlighted, meaning participants could easily see which cases were close to be overdue and therefore updated them on time.

10.2.8 Social workers leaving roles

This study has identified different factors which may contribute to social workers feeling forced to consider quitting their roles or even leaving the profession altogether.

- The first may be the inability to cope with the complexity of cases and practice related challenges in statutory children services. Those who struggle with coping skills have been found to be more vulnerable than those who have embraced a range of coping strategies including relaxation activities. The second is the inability to plan, prioritise, stay organised and express feelings where necessary. However, stress related experiences, largely caused by unmanageable workloads, could mean even those who may be resilient good planners are likely to find themselves struggling to cope. This may lead to working prolonged hours, causing a poor work-life balance, which has a potential to increase the likelihood of burnout.

- Unmanageable workloads left some newly arrived IQSWs-participants on the brink of serious mental and physical health conditions, including one participant recounting a colleague's potential suicidal ideation. Additionally, participants felt as if they were at a pivotal crossroads, where they were forced to choose between their careers and their wellbeing. Hence, they used covert avoidance to identify organisations with unmanageable workloads and therefore avoided them when applying for jobs. Overall, flexibility in contracts meant some used agencies as Safe Haven Spaces to escape organisations with unmanageable workloads.

- Participants argued that LAs should hire more social workers who would share caseloads making them lower and manageable. However, the cuts on public spending may be a barrier to LAs hiring more social workers, making it more imperative to build strategies to retain them.

10.2.9 Policies

- Some black social workers-participants, particularly males were barred access to children by parents/guardians who did not want their children to be supported by black social workers. However, there is no policy apart from the Equality Act 2010, to ensure that barred social workers were supported while prejudiced parents were challenged or educated. Being barred access to children suggest that black social workers, particularly males may be the least accepted ethnic minority group within statutory children services in England.

- This research has identified a gap in law as neither the Children and Social Work Act 2017 nor the Social Work Regulation 2018, provides a duty or provision for the creation of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs. The scrapping of the General Social Care Council (2005)'s post-qualifying module for internationally qualified social workers left a gap. Unaware that they may be putting children at risk of harm, IQSWs may apply their countries' practice approaches, exposing children to harm. Failure to provide a duty or provision for formal support of IQSWs, means children are unintentionally exposed to harm. Therefore, lack of a formal adaptation programme could mean IQSWs may be expected to already know everything about the English social work practice on arrival.

- The NMC's EDI policy, which emphasises that promotions must only be considered on individual skills rather than racial backgrounds, has exposed Social Work England's lack of regard towards the experiences and feelings of BME social workers. Additionally, the NHS' inclusion policy, the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and the Skills for Care (2024) Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES) has laid bare Social Work England's inability to promote equality and inclusion, meaning, Social Work England lags on promotion of diversity and inclusion when compared with other public bodies.

- The Code of Practice for Recruitment of Health and Social Care Personnel in England, (Department for Health), (2025) has been found to be built on the one-size-fits-all myth, derived from the principle of collectivism, as it dresses various health care professions in the same uniform, suggesting that they all share the same experiences. However, the sensitivity of social work, and the recent child atrocities in England means this collective approach could leave children exposed to harm.

- This study has used Critical Race Theory to argue that some policies including the Local Government Association's Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England (LGA), (2020) and the DfH, (2025) were developed under liberalism, which has been identified as promoting equality, but ignorant of race-related experiences. Arguably, failure to highlight race-related experiences means both policies unintentionally promote racism. Therefore, these policies must be updated to include race related experiences. Additionally, instead of depending on SC-WRES, (2024) which has equally been found to have been developed under the principle of collectivism, Social Work England need to formulate own policies central to social workers experiences.

10.2.10 Six faces of statutory children's social work in England

This study has identified what it has termed, the Six Faces of Statutory Children Social Work England. These findings relate to multiple issues faced by statutory children's social workers in England. It is through these faces where it was identified that although BME social workers may face racism in practice, some may be equally supported and accepted by the public, meaning their skills and abilities recognised.

10.2.12 Final-conclusion

In conclusion, this small-scale study has explored in-depth, the first-year experiences of statutory children and family social workers from ethnic minority groups in England. The research question, as well as the aims and objectives of the study have been achieved.

Therefore, this study has highlighted important findings that will contribute towards narrowing the identified gap in knowledge related to the first-year experiences of social workers from ethnic minority groups in England. Moreover, the study has strengthened phenomenology (see 4.10), Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Thematic analysis and Document Analysis. The application of these approaches reiterates their validity and continued applicability within social work and health research.

10.3. Recommendations.

10.3.1 Social Work England.

- Consider revolutionising the education and training policy by introducing "decolonisation of social work". This would enable teachings of historical events including colonisation and the Slave Trade, thus promoting awareness of the contributions made by the colonised and how England and the West continue to benefit from those historical periods.

- Consider conducting a survey, exploring the experiences and events, which may have led to some black social workers to be reported for misconduct, and use the findings to inform a new policy to reduce their numbers on misconduct cases.

- Consider acknowledging personal values of social workers. Although this may clash with the professional standing of social work, it may encourage social workers to freely express their views; hence, they would be less likely to feel stressed by their experiences, and they would feel empowered to challenge their managers' sometimes unethical decisions.

10.3.2 Government departments

- This study acknowledges the falling numbers of social workers on agency roles, as identified by ADCS, (2025). However, it argues that to further discourage social workers from joining locums, temporary roles for statutory social workers are needed, mirroring McLaughlin et al. (2025)'s recommendation of temporary roles for statutory social workers. Therefore, the government may consider introducing a policy which would allow LAs to employ social workers on temporary short-term basis, giving them

autonomy to decide at any stage during their temporary contract if they wanted to upgrade into permanent positions. Therefore, LAs would have both permanent and temporary contracts. In doing that, LAs may have to pay temporary social workers a mid-range figure better than permanent ones, but less than what locums earn in the same roles. The flexibility to exit their roles earlier and that little extra pay has a potential to entice social workers to leave locums who have had their short-term contracts ended (DFE, 2024). Instead of paying a lot of money to hire locum social workers, LAs can hire social workers on temporary short-term contracts. This will provide flexibility and address the short-term career breaks and other needs encouraging social workers to join agencies, as identified by Johnson et al. (2019-2023). Additionally, short-term contracts will reduce the possibility of social workers remaining trapped in unhealthy working conditions, as they will be able to exit such roles earlier before they could get to the burnout stage where they would likely require long absences to recover. That way, LAs, can seize the benefits of short-term contracts previously held by agencies, and gradually decrease the dominance of agency in statutory social work practice. This approach has a potential to promote the retention of LA hired social workers, while reducing LAs' spending on agency social workers.

- This study has argued that unmanageable workloads are caused by cuts to LAs budgets. Therefore, a new source of funding may be needed if the experiences of social workers and service users are to be improved. The funding would enable LAs to employ more social workers, which would mean reduced and easily manageable caseloads were shared; that way, social workers would be able to do more direct work with children.

- Previous child atrocities in England make social work unique, hence, it cannot be hidden under other health care departments. Therefore, a practice guidance specific to social work which would replace the DfH (2025) should be established; the policy would be used to create formal adaptation support for IQSWs, ensuring that errors which may expose children to harm were reduced. Additionally, the policy would enforce all LAs to support IQSWs to join a union before they could start working; this would ensure that IQSWs were able to challenge LAs who may breach their contracts.

- An inclusive new policy mirroring the NHS' WRES is needed to ensure that all social workers are supported with confidentiality spaces made available for them to discuss personal issues related to their race. Additionally, the LGA (2020) must be updated to include race related experiences.

- A new policy is needed to ensure that barred black social workers were supported while prejudiced parents educated. This is due to this study's key finding which suggests that some black social workers may be barred access to children by prejudiced parents.

- The evidence from this study and other studies (General Social Care Council, 2012; Social Work England, 2023; Dytham, 2024) suggests that a more inclusive model of diversity may be needed to improve the experiences of social workers from EMGs. Kandola and Fullerton (1994)'s model of diversity could be useful if recommended for use, by all LAs in England (See figure-5).

10.3.3 Teaching institutions

Psychological Preparation Participatory Programme.
(see 2.9.1)
Use the stoic principles as a guiding framework, (see**7.3.3 and 8.2.5**

- Consider introducing what this study will identify as the Psychological Preparation Participatory Programme (PPPP). This would be best done in a group activity where students will participate in role plays. The aim of this activity is to support students to develop proactive ways of dealing with the ***"here and now"*** practice challenges, including how to cope in event of the unavailability of expected formal supervision and induction.

- Ask students to form groups preferably within the skills days where some service users may be available to also participate. Give each student the phrase, ***"Reflect on***

knowledge gained through Education", as their ***buzzword,*** which would be a reminder for first-year social workers to reflect on the knowledge gained through qualification, when faced with practice challenges. Put students in rotating roles, meaning they would alternate being NQSWs expecting an induction or formal supervision but not getting it, or being busy experienced social workers and managers who may have no time for formal supervision. Include people with experience of receiving services who may be available on the skills days. Ask them for example, to pretend as parents who would like their child to be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, then send a student pretending to be a NQSW who expected a full induction and formal supervision but did not receive any, to chair the meeting advising the parents on the next steps on accommodating their child under section 20.

- Remind students of their ***buzzword,*** which would enable them to reflect on the knowledge gained through education. Ask each student to identify different types of knowledge they could reflect upon and why such knowledge may be influential in calming their nerves and ensuring that they controlled the situation and avoided deflecting into what this study has called, "***the victim status mode".*** For example, students would be encouraged to reflect on section 20 of the Children Act 1989, what it stands for and why. Additionally, they may reflect on theories including the person-centred approach and why they may have to apply that approach. Furthermore, students may politely approach busy experienced social workers and ask for tips which may include shadowing opportunities. Although experienced colleagues may be busy with their work, they may listen and provide some tips or allow NQSWs to shadow them on a different day. In the end, ask each student to feed back to their group, before opening the floor for an interactive debate on the knowledge all students had to reflect upon, or what creative skills they had to use, and say why reflecting on that knowledge, or applying those creative skills may be important.

- This activity may not only encourage students to reflect, but it may also allow them to develop empathy needed to understand the challenges which may be faced by managers who may not always be able to provide consistent formal supervision. Overall, the PPPP may help students to develop essential self-care skills needed in

social work practice, thereby, availing the "***psychological readiness and calmness***" which may enable social workers to reflect and avoid having to "***dive in"*** and do what they thought to be appropriate as shared by one participant in this study.

Despite these recommendations, this study acknowledges that some teaching institutions may already be doing as recommended.

10.3.4 Local Authorities

- One of this study's key findings suggest that some NQSWs on temporary positions may not be afforded support including full inductions, which may be received by those in permanent roles in some LAs. Hence, LAs are encouraged to ensure that those in temporary roles received appropriate support.
- Provide appropriate training and support to managers, enabling them to better understand the requirements of the ASYE programme and their role. The training may empower managers with knowledge and likely decrease unethical practices such as asking NQSWs to document notes of supervision sessions which never took place.
- Support newly arrived IQSWs to join a union before they could start working. This would ensure that they can seek legal advice even when faced with disagreements in their organisations.
- Include the stoic principles on the LA's training programmes for social workers, this would help them develop self-care skills and promote retention (see 8.2.5).
- Require Social Work managers to record any incidents of racism including parental or a child refusal of social workers due to the social worker's race, and ensure the LA has a policy to respond to such incidents.
- Provide practical support (funding, time, location) for employees to set up and participate in diversity support groups or networks.
- Consider gradually easing NQSWs into the demanding key workers' role. This will likely reduce stress-related symptoms and promote retention.

10.3.5 Social Work Managers

- Promote uninterrupted time for induction and training. This would ensure that social workers on training are not disrupted, hence get the full benefits of the training as they would not have a divided attention.
- Consider the complexities of cases when allocating to NQSWs, as this study found that complex cases often took more time.
- This study has found that some managers may not be directly accessible, leaving social workers having to communicate via intermediates (practice-consultants) to managers, instead of having direct communication with managers. Therefore, managers are encouraged to be accessible and promote direct discussions with social workers
- Be familiar with the requirements of the ASYE programme including ensuring that supervision was appropriately conducted and documented.
- Be reminded of the power invested in managerial roles and support NQSWs to feel free to challenge your decisions. This would likely reduce stress while promoting professional development for NQSWs.
- Consider applying a more Laissez-Faire style (hands-off) of leadership, promoting autonomy for social workers while decreasing the stress associated with being micromanaged; this will promote relations between supervisors and supervisees.
- Ensure that case-oriented supervision does not encroach on the development and reflection aspect of supervision where possible.
- Always engage social workers in discussions before each case allocation.

10.6.6 BME Managers

- Be reminded that they may have been unwittingly used to promote white supremacy, at the expense of BME children who may see them as role models.
- Ensure that your decisions do not place BME children and social workers at disadvantageous positions where they would likely face discrimination.

Despite these recommendations, this study acknowledges that both sets of managers above may already be applying them in practice.

10.3.7 First-year social workers.

- Consider asking experienced colleagues for shadowing opportunities in the unavailability of a full induction.

- Apply the stoic principles in the event of challenging experiences (see 8.2.5)
- Form own support networks as they have been found to be helpful in decreasing stress through practice related sharing experiences.

10.3.8 Internationally Qualified Social Workers.

- Consider joining a union and seeking legal advice where there is concern that employment rights may have been exploited or a contract may have been breached by the organisation.
- Express to line managers or supervisors if feeling unequipped or unready to practice in England. This would discourage the application of other countries practice approaches which may potentially leave children at risk of harm. Request further cultural and practice training if this is available.

10.3.9 BME social workers

- Consider being open to educating others about your cultural norms. This would promote understanding and reduce some stereotypical views associated with lack of knowledge about other groups.
- Consider applying the stoic principles as a deterrent against being negatively affected by racism experiences. (see 8.2.5)
- Identify ways in which cultural norms may be usefully adapted. This would promote an understanding and likely reduce stereotypical views associated with lack of understanding.
- Be proactive in providing support for other BME colleagues, for example through setting up or participating in formal or informal support groups and networks.

10.3.10 Research.

- Future research should focus on the experiences of statutory children and family social work managers in supporting NQSWs. This would explore reasons why supervision has not been provided consistently and identify support for managers if needed.

- A country-wide (England) survey is needed to expand on the experiences of BME social workers who have been rejected by service users due to their race.
- A UK-wide survey on what this study has referred to as the Hidden Coercive Nature of Social Work is needed. This will explore potential contractual breaches caused by this phenomenon.
- A new transition cycle recognising race-related experiences is needed to ensure that such experiences were not undermined.
- Future research to explore lack of research engagement reasons among BME individuals.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Literature Review Table 1

Newly Qualified Social workers' readiness for practice in Scotland	2017	useful in helping to understand the experiences of Newly Qualified Social workers.
The making of social workers	2014	
Organisational factors, job satisfaction and intention to leave among Newly Qualified social workers in England	2013	
An examination of support and development mechanisms for newly Qualified social workers across the UK	2020	Enable the understanding of the support available for newly qualified social workers
Baptism of fire: The first year in life of a newly qualified social worker	2010	Enable the understanding of the experiences of Newly Qualified social workers
Exploring the development of professional identity	2016	Enable the understanding of a developing professional identity
Doing it right? Accessing the narratives of identity of newly qualified social workers through the lens of resilience	2011	
Recognising the person within the developing professional	2009	

Readiness for practice for Newly Qualified Social workers	2016	Enable the understanding of readiness for practice
Content and purpose of supervision in social wok practice in England: views of managers and newly qualified social workers	2013	Enable the understanding of the experiences of Newly Qualified social workers
Newly Qualified social workers, supervision, and child protection	2019	Enable the understanding of newly qualified social workers in child protection
Readiness to practice social work in Aoteaora, Newzeland	2018	Enable the understanding of readiness for practice for newly qualified social workers
Beyond Qualification: Experiences of Black social workers on a post qualifying course	2009	Enable the understanding of Black social workers
Diversity and progression among students starting social work qualifying programs in England BETWEEN 1995 and 1998	2008	Enable the understanding of inclusion of all races in social work education
Building Resilience in Early social workers	2017	Useful in enabling the understanding of developing resilience
Levels of stress and anxiety in child and family social work: workers perceptions of organisational structure, professional support and workplace opportunities in the UK.	2017	Enable the understanding of the pressure in child protection

The Black male effect: challenges and experiences of young Black male social workers in children and young people services	2018	Enable the experiences of Black male social workers in children services
Using social work theory and values to investigate the implementation of community treatment orders	2012	Excluded, not in interested subject area
Developing confidence and competence of the Newly Qualified child and family social worker	2015	Enable the understanding of the development of confidence in newly qualified social workers.
Recruitment and retention of Newly Qualified social workers: A case study	2010	Enable the understanding why it may be difficult to retain newly qualified social workers
The workplace experiences of BAME professional women	2014	Would give an indication of how BAME professional feel in professional practice
Anti-racism in social work: No more questions just action please	2020	Enable the understanding of what needs to be done to be anti-racist in social work.
Perfect opportunity: perfect storm? Raising the standards of social work education in England	2014	Enable the understanding of the social work education in England
Patchy implementation of		Give an insight into the experiences of some

the ASYE leaves Newly Qualified social workers facing unprotected caseloads		newly Qualified social workers.
	2016	Brings to light some of the microaggressions faced by other marginalised groups
A mixed method enquiry into trans environmental microaggressions on college campuses		Enable the understanding of events following the death of Baby P
Social work, class politics and in the moral panic over Baby P	2017	
Heads must roll: Emotional politics, the press, and the death of Baby P	2012	Enable the understanding that some BAME individuals may act white
Exploring the immigrants and none immigrants	2013	
"Understanding of the acting white		Excluded due to insufficient links to the research question
Making the transition from practitioner to supervisor: Reflections on the contributions made by post qualifying supervisory service course	2017 2018	
What does supervision help with? A survey of 315 social workers in the UK		Enable the understanding of the importance of supervision
Student practitioner. A study of preparedness for social work practice	2019	Enable the understanding of readiness for practice
Transition and adjustment of		Enable the understanding of

professional identity as a newly qualified social worker.	2010	developing the professional identity
A qualitative analysis of migrant social workers' work experiences and perceived prejudice from an empowering acculturative integration approach.	2019	Enable the understanding of the experiences of foreign social workers
Challenges facing international social workers: English managers' perceptions.	2019	
Lost and finding: experiences of newly graduated social workers	2016	Give an insight into the experiences of Newly Qualified social workers
Newly Qualified social workers, supervision, and child protection	2018	Give an insight into the experiences of Newly qualified social workers
Role of stress, burnout and workplace support among newly recruited social workers.	2019	Excluded
An examination of the transition from philanthropy to professional social work in Ireland.	2021	Excluded
How good is good enough? Exploring social workers' perceptions of preparedness for practice	2000	Enable the understanding of the social workers' perceptions on

Safety as the fifth dimension: stories from frontline. Australian Social Work. Tick if applicable: A critique of a National UK social work supervisory policy	2016 2015 2015	preparedness for practice Rich in child protection information. Enable the understanding of the UK social work supervisory policy.
UK Social workers: working conditions and wellbeing Black ethnic minority and disabled practitioners face disproportionate difficulties passing ASYE The quality of social work students in England Retaining novices to become expert child protection practitioners: Creating career pathways in direct practice The contradictions of contemporary social work	2018 2021 2009 2017	Useful in helping to understand the social work conditions Give us a glimpse of how difficult it is for ethnic minority newly qualified social workers to pass the ASYE Program Enable the understanding of the pressure in child protection Enable the understanding of contemporary social work
Lost in transition? Newly Educate social workers' reflections on their first months in practice.	2017	Useful in helping to know the experiences of newly Qualified soil workers

Appendix B.

Methods of Critical Appraisal.

Critical Appraisal is a tool that enables researchers to systematically scrutinise research literature to identify important and the relevant literature. (Aveyard, 2014). Critical Appraisal tools come with leading questions which would ensure that the researcher scrutinised all aspects of the article including the title, methodologies, and findings. Hence, the researcher can select relevant and leave irrelevant literature (Burls, 2009). While searching for a critical appraisal tool I could use on my review, I initially identified the Practitioner Appraisal of Local Service Evaluations (PALSE), (Satherley et al, 2007). This appraisal tool interested me as it raises questions about alternative conclusions to each study I may review. However, it appears that the appraisal tool is applied more in clinical trials (Lyn et al, 2007). I had to consider applying the Critical Appraisal tool (CASP) which has been very popular in analysing studies in health research since its introduction by the NHS in 1993 (Lyne, et al, 2007). On consideration of my methodological approaches, I decided to apply CASP alongside the TAPUPAS framework which has similar intentions (Pawson et al, 2002: Smith et al, 2009) with the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) I will apply in this research. TAPUPAS and IPA both strive for validity and appropriateness of the results. I will apply all the ten CASP questions but only include questions 1,4 and 5 of the TAPUPAS model. These questions seek to understand if each article is open to scrutiny, if the article is fit for use and seek clarity on the legal status of the article. Such methods have been seen as stronger (O'Connor, 2020) producing effective analysis in social work research. I will initially apply all the 10 CASP questions before adding the TAPUPAS questions as 11, 12 and 13 on analysis of each article.

Authors: Beddoe L, Hay, K.,Maidment, J., Ballantyne, N. and Walker, S. (2018) Readiness practice social work in Aotearoa, New Zealand: perceptions of students and educators. The International Journal. (Online). Available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02615479.2018.1497152?needAccess=true. (Accessed: 15th November 2021). Peer reviewed article.

Overview

The researchers stated clearly that they had been challenges in social work practice, hence they interviewed students to seek their perceptions on practice after qualification; they highlighted criticism by government figures who questioned the knowledge of Newly Qualified social workers coming onto the fast-paced children services; that happened after high profile incidents which raised eyebrows and put the social work profession in jeopardy has surfaced.

CASP Questions and answers

1. **Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? Answer:** Yes.
    - **What was the goal of the research?**
    - **Why it was thought important**
    - **Its relevance**

The authors did provide a clear statement for the research. The study was important as social services had been under pressure to improve services after a lot of high-profile incidents had taken place.

2. **Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? Answer:** Partly.
    - **If the researcher seeks to interpret or illuminate actions and/or subjective experiences of participants**
    - **Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?**

Authors applied a mixed method as they had a quantitative data analysis component to do with measurement. However, the qualitative methods side was appropriate as they sort to gain perceptions of students and educators before being able to interpret and illuminate new actions.

3. **Was the research recruitment design appropriate to address the aims of the research.**
    - **Consider if the researchers have justified the research design (e.g have they discussed how they decided which method to use)**

The authors did justify and explain their chosen methodology. However, they did not detail how they decided on their chosen methods.

4. **Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?** Yes
    - **Consider if the researchers have explained how the participants were selected.**
    - **If the explained why the participants, they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study.**
    - **If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g why some people chose not to take part).**

The aims of the research were clear, and the authors clearly explained how they selected the participants. However, they did not detail if some people chose not to participate.

5. **Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?** Yes
    - **Consider if the setting for the data collection was justified.**
    - **If it is clear how data were collected (e.g focus groups, semi-structured interviews etc).**
    - **If the researcher has justified the chosen methods**
    - **If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g for interview method, is there any indication how interviews were conducted, or did they use a topic guide)**
    - **If the methods were modified during the study, if so, has the researcher explained how and why?**
    - **If the form of data is clear (e.g tape recordings, video material, notes etc).**
    - **If the researcher has discussed saturation of data**

The setting for data collection was discussed. Researchers clearly discussed their methods; however, they did not detail if they had to modify or adapt their methods during the research. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of practice. Some students anticipated challenges in practice and rightfully raised concerns about their readiness. A clear methodology involving interviews and focus groups was applied. In the end, there was no statement in relation to the saturation of data.

6. **Has the relationship between the researcher and the participants been adequately considered?** No

- **Consider if the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias, and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location.**
- **How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered implications of any changes in the research design.**

Researchers did not discuss about their relationships with the participants, and the potential bias of the study was not highlighted.

7. **Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?** Yes.
    - **Consider if there is sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether standards were maintained.**
    - **If the researcher has discussed issues discussed by the study (e.g) issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study.**
    - **If approval has been sought the ethics committee.**

The study was approved by the university's ethics team and the researchers did explain to the participants about issues of confidentiality, rights, inflamed consent, and handling of data.

8. **Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?** Yes
    - **Consider if there is an in-depth description of analysis process.**
    - **If thematic analysis used, if so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?**
    - **Whether the researcher explains how the data presented to support the findings.**
    - **If sufficient data are presented to support the findings.**
    - **To what extent contradictory data are taken into account.**
    - **Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data presentation.**

    I think the data analysis were explicit and fair as they highlighted the demands of being a newly qualified social worker against the academic experiences gained by the new graduates. There is little information about contradictory data.

9. **Is there a clear statement of findings? Can't tell**
    - **Consider if the findings are explicit.**
    - **If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments.**
    - **If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)**
    - **If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research questions.**

The authors did focus on the perceptions of the participants but did not discuss their own potential biases. In addition, they did not discuss the credibility of their study.

10. **How valuable is the research?** Valuable
    - **Consider the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g) do they consider the findings to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature.**
    - **If they identify new areas where research is necessary.**
    - **If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways, the research can be used.**

The researchers did discuss about the policy implications in relation to their findings. In addition, they did state that their research would fill the gap in literature as little is known about the experiences of newly graduated social workers in New Zealand. The results will obviously help locally as they offer the experiences of newly graduated social workers which would not be expected to be much different from those locally.

TAPUPAS

Transparency: the process of knowledge generation should be open to outside scrutiny. For knowledge to meet this standard, it should make plain how it was generated, clarifying aims, objectives and all the steps of the subsequent argument, so giving readers access to a common

11. **Is the article open to scrutiny?** Yes

The researchers did highlight other perspectives and results from different articles.

Utility: knowledge should be appropriate to the decision setting in which it is intended to be used, and to the information need expressed by the seeker after knowledge. For knowledge to meet this standard, it should be 'fit for use', providing answers that are as closely matched as possible to the question.

12. **Is it fit for use?** Yes.

The research is clearly fit for use as clear methods of data collection have been applied.

Propriety: knowledge should be created and managed legally, ethically and with due care to all relevant stakeholders. For knowledge to meet this standard, it should present adequate evidence, appropriate to each point of contact, of the informed consent of relevant stakeholders. The release (or withholding) of information should also be subject to agreement.

13. **Is the research legal and ethical?** Yes

The research is legal because ethical approval was granted prior to the commencement of the study.

Appendix C.

Brief Overview of using thematic analysis in qualitative research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a method used to systematically identify, organise, and offer an insight into patterns or themes within the collected data. Thematic Analysis enables the researcher to have an insight into the data and make sense of commonalities or shared meanings or experiences. There has been an increase in the application of thematic analysis in qualitative research. That is despite Braun and Clarke (2016) stating that there is still limited literature around the application of thematic analysis.

Advantages of Thematic Analysis.

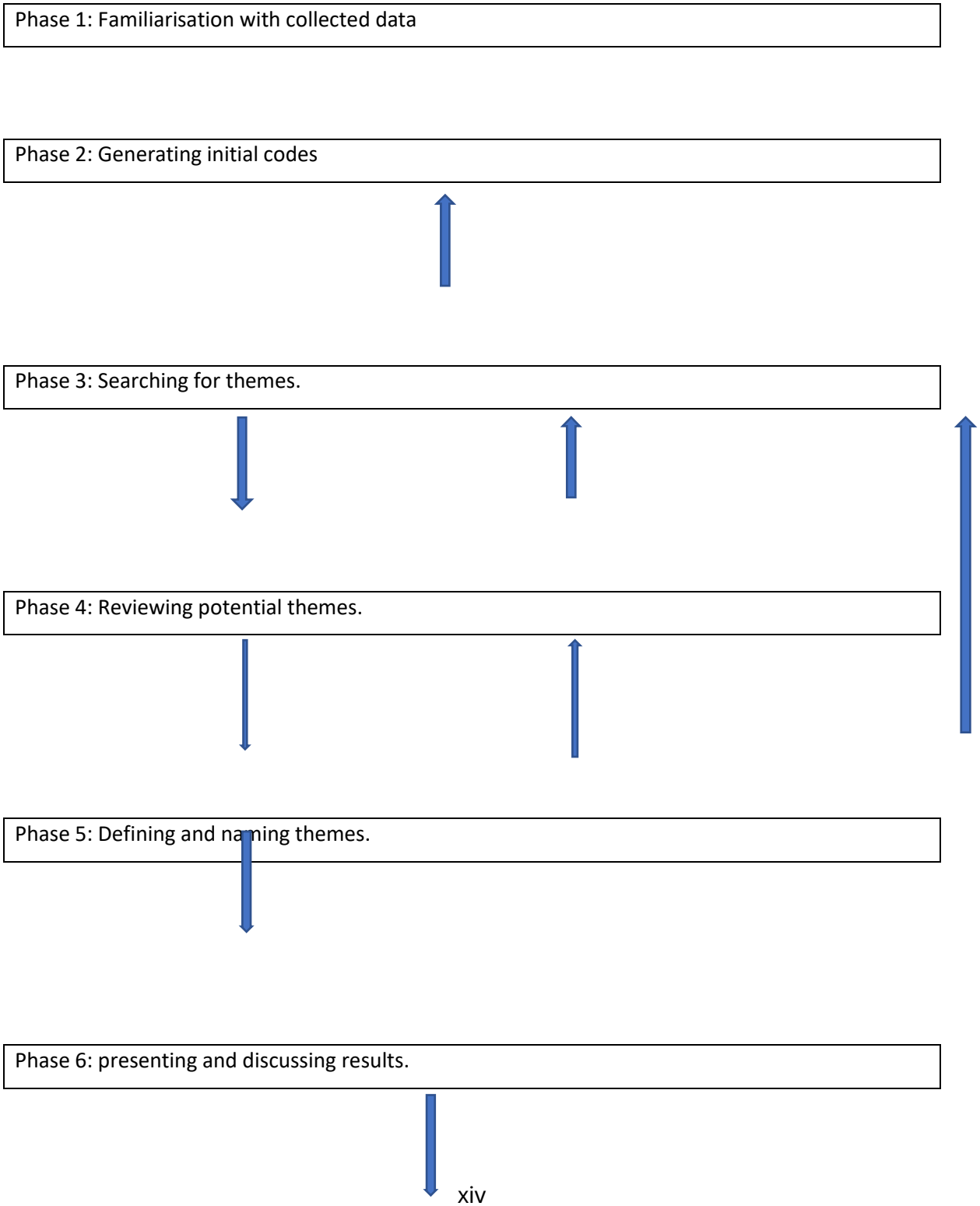
Thematic analysis has been increasingly applied by new researchers as it is less complex and easier to understand as opposed to the qualitative methods including grounded theory (Braun and Clarke (2006), (2022). In addition, Lorelli et al (2017) including Labra et al, (2019) describe the thematic analysis as easy to learn, flexible as it entails theoretical freedom. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2022) state that it makes it easier to identify common patterns and themes.

Disadvantages of Thematic Analysis

This method may be so interesting that some researchers may enjoy collecting data together with coding and familiarising with themes but forget to analyse the gathered data (Kiger and Varpio, 2020) in addition (Braun and Clarke, 2012) warn that focusing on common themes may lead to the exclusion of less common but very important data. Furthermore, new researchers could be confused by the excessive flexibility and fail to

conduct proper analysis (Turan, 2020). Despite that, I will try to focus on analysing the data vigorously.

Figure 7. Step by step guidance of using Thematic Analysis as adapted from Labra et al (2019, p4).



Appendix D.

Literature Review Matrix

Author/Date	Research Area/Idea	Methods/Summary	Themes	Conclusions
Ravalier, J., Wainwright, E., Clabburn, O., Loon, M. and Smith, N. (2021).	The study explores the wellbeing and working conditions of UK Social Workers. A mixed method approach was applied to collect data from participants. Findings highlighted high stress levels for statutory social workers; these have been identified as caused by physical working environment including lack of hot desking. Additionally, the high levels of administrative paperwork have	The study applied a mixed methods which incorporated surveys and interviews. **Findings** indicate the high levels of administrative paperwork contributed to increased workload. Furthermore, the administrative paperwork was found to be poignant as it contributes to social work burnout, high levels of stress resulting in long absence from work. **Strengths** The application of thematic analysis makes it easier to identify the qualitative component while disruptive statistics makes it easier to	Excellent social work education presented. Administrative paperwork contributes to burnout and lead to increased stress levels among social worker forcing many to stay off work for long periods.	The article provided rich information in addition to the already available data from Ravalier's 2018 report. However, I feel it would have been better if they had changed their methodology and only focused on the qualitative component as they struggled to employ a bigger sample size to represent the population from a quantitative side of the data collection.

	been found to have contributed to increased workload. Furthermore, the administrative paperwork was found to be poignant as it contributes to social work burnout, high levels of stress resulting in long absence from work.	identify the quantitative side of the data. **Limitations** Researchers highlighted their sample size of 19 participants as small for the quantitative part. Perhaps they should have only focused on the qualitative component. **Ethics.** The is no discussion of the ethics approval. **Reference.** Ravalier, J., Wainwright, E., Clabburn, O., Loon, M. and Smith, N. (2021). *Working Conditions and wellbeing in UK Social Workers. Journal of Social Work*. Vol. 21 (5) 1105-1123.		

Author/Date	**Research Area/Idea**	**Methods/Summary**	**Themes**	**Conclusions**
Tham, P and Lynch, D. (2021)	The article reports on the experiences of 12 Swedish	Qualitative research and semi-structured interviews applied. **Findings** suggested	Adequate social work education presented.	The article is precisely on point as it is backed by the

	NQSW with the aim of gaining an insight into their journey from education to qualified professionals in the first year of practice.	that participants expressed dissatisfaction about working in social services. **Strengths** Provided rich themes direct from participants. **Limitations** Participants were only asked to detail what they considered problematic. **Ethics** Ethics approval granted. **Reference.** Tham, P. and Lynch, L. (2021) "Perhaps I should be working with potted plants or standing at the fish counter instead?": Newly educated social workers' reflections on their first year in practice. European journal of Social Work, 24:3, 541-553.	Detailed how social work education is delivered in Sweden. Implications for training.	clear historical conceptual social work framework. That enables the understanding of where we are and how we got here as social workers. Themes presented appeared very short, however they still presented rich information direct from participants. It would have been more informing if the participants were asked to share all the experiences including positives ones than to ask them to share challenges. This negatively paints the social work profession as a problematic profession.

				Potential social work students may feel discouraged if they read it.

Author(s)/Date	**Research Area/Idea**	**Methods/Summary**	**Themes**	**Conclusions**
Cleveland, M.,Warhurst, A. and Legood, A. (2019)	The article reports on studies exploring resilience among NQSWs in the UK.	Qualitative designs with semi-structed interviews and thematic analysis applied as data collection and analysis methods. **Findings** indicate that most NQSWs lacked resilience and identified the need for emotion management skills and regular formal and informal supervisions with managers and peers as the best ways of supporting NQSWs early in their careers. **Strengths** Provided rich detail and themes direct from NQSWs. **Limitations**	Adequate social work education presented. Skills development through training, exposure to practice dilemmas, supervision, and peer-support.	The article only provided a few sentences on the findings section. Despite that, they presented very informative and comprehensive data in other sections. As a social worker, I believe resilience comes with experience and exposure to complicated cases with challenging and unfamiliar information or situations. Hence, it would naturally take time for NQSWs to consider themselves

		Only a few sentences on the findings section. **Ethics** Ethics approval granted. **Reference.** Cleveland, M.,Warhurst, A. and Legood, A. (2019) Experiencing Resilience through the eyes of Early Career social workers. British journal of social work		resilient until they are faced with practice dilemmas and be forced to make hard and unsatisfactory decisions. However, shadowing dilemmatic and complicated cases would help NQSWs to gradually develop resilience.

Appendix E- Selected Key finding.

Key findings-1

Sporadic formal supervision became a suppression of early work-related stress disclosure for some participants, leaving them stressed.
Lack of trust and confidence in their managers prevented some NQSW-participants from disclosing their early work-related stress symptoms; they feared being judged as unable to cope with the pressure of statutory children services, if they disclosed their experiences. Additionally, toxic organisational cultures have been found to have prevented some participants from discussing their experiences openly, worried that their experiences would be used against them and therefore affect their progress. The inability to share confidential information related to the emerging stress related issues and get support in their organisations led some of the participants to take extended time off and seek external professional and medical support, however, with support in their organisations, retention would have been promoted since social workers would have been encouraged to remain at work.
Sporadic supervision sessions appear to have not promoted professional development among participants since some expressed difficulties associated with the inability to reflect on their recent practice and learn.
Some participants (NQSWs and Newly arrived IQSWs) were inadvertently rushed to fill roles vacated by experienced staff before being afforded an induction or supported to understand the English practice standards.
Although ad hoc support has been identified as essential in the absence of formal supervision, it left some participants feeling isolated, as colleagues could only offer limited time for support.
The pressure of high staff turnover appears to have forced some managers of IQSWs to breach contractual agreements and allocate a lot more cases than agreed for some IQSWs.
Lack of knowledge about their legal rights means some IQSW-participants were easily exploited by their employers who breached their contracts. Therefore, their organisations could have purposely misinformed them with the aim of using them as stopgaps during high staff turnover periods.
The pressure of unmanageable workloads has a potential to force managers to ignore proper practice protocols and make unethical decisions, which are against social work values and professional standards. This is illustrated in some NQSW-participants experiences of being asked to create supervision notes, pretending as if sessions had taken place when they had not. These notes then got added to the ASYE portfolios, enabling participants to meet the requirements of the ASYE Programme, before eventually being deemed to have passed the programme. However, sporadic supervision sessions

could have aligned these participants with failure, as inconsistent supervision could have led to insufficient practice evidence in their final ASYE portfolios, meaning, they would have failed the ASYE Programme if their managers had not asked them to create those false supervision notes. Therefore, these participants were made to struggle with limited support, only to be awarded with a pass, through the falsified supervision notes signed by their managers.
IQSW-Participants expressed being shocked by not only the culture of the English practice standards, but also by the number of caseloads allocated to them due to high staff turnover, since they witnessed many colleagues quitting their roles due to work-related stress. • **Unmanageable workloads** identified as a major driver of mental health strain and staff attrition among IQSWs. • **Peer support networks**, such as the BME group, as valuable but insufficient without structural workload reform. • **Overt avoidance** identified as key to managing wellbeing since it encouraged some participants to avoid organisations with unmanageable workloads. • **Locum work** as a coping strategy that benefits individual wellbeing but contributes to organisational instability. • **Greater vulnerability among IQSWs** compared to domestically trained social workers, highlighting the need for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs.
Powerlessness coupled with the desire to pass the ASYE programme left some NQSW-participants in a dilemmatic situation, where they were forced to either accept their managers' unacceptable practices or face the risk of refusing and then failing the ASYE programme.
This research has identified what it has termed, "the deflection to the victim status mode', as destructive for some first-year social workers. Lack of support coupled with unmanageable workloads could make some first-year social workers feel like victims in practice. Once they feel like victims, they may only think from a victim's perspective which only seeks justice.
The deflection to the victim status mode appears to have prevented participants reflecting on the approaches they learned in university, even when faced with challenging practice dilemmas where that information would have been beneficial. Hence, the "perceived victims" likely extended their frustrations caused by practice challenges to the universities and argued that the universities did not prepare them well, whereas reflection on theory may have changed that perception.
The inability to reflect meant some participants were not getting the maximum benefits of their learning.

However, those who either received support or had a protected caseload were able to reflect on different theories they learnt in university; therefore, perceiving the knowledge they gained from university as useful in social work practice.
IQSW-participants expressed having received adequate support including induction periods and consistent formal supervision sessions. However, lack of a formal adaptation programme meant, they found support unhelpful, as lack of knowledge about the English social work practice standards and culture, left them feeling stressed. While stressed, managers continually allocated more cases to them as their organisations had a high staff turnover. Therefore, this study argues that there must be reasonable work-related stress levels for supervision to work effectively, if not, it would feel unhelpful. Additionally, supervision and induction periods cannot be used as replacements for a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs.
One participant expressed concerns about having to renew his contract at the end of his one year-ASYE temporary role. The participant struggled for formal support until he swapped his temporary role with a permanent position in adults' team within the same organisation. Therefore, effective formal support could be associated with a permanent position in that organisation, while insufficient support was likely exacerbated by his temporary role.
Case-oriented supervision appears to have played a part inhibiting the reflective component among participants, as some were only encouraged to discuss what to do next on cases, but not reflect on their recent practice or their feelings.

Key-findings 2.

Different factors which contributed to participants feeling forced to consider quitting their roles or even leaving the profession altogether have been identified. The first may be the inability to cope with the complexity of cases and practice related challenges in statutory children services. Those who struggled with coping skills or had no time for helpful activities, have been found to be more vulnerable than those who were able to find helpful activities. The second being the inability to plan, prioritise, stay organised and express feelings where necessary. However, work-related stress largely caused by the unmanageable workloads meant, even resilient good planners still found themselves struggling to cope and therefore forced to work prolonged hours.

Unmanageable workloads left some participants (newly arrived IQSWs) on the brink of serious mental and physical health conditions. Having panic attacks and the feelings of driving onto oncoming traffic poses danger to life, as the social worker may get others and themselves injured in a car crash. Therefore, the participants (IQSWs) appear to have felt as if they were at a pivotal crossroads, where they were forced to choose between their careers and their wellbeing. While one participant joined an agency, which has been identified as a safe Haven for escaping stress, the other looked for a similar permanent role in a different organisation where workloads were lower and manageable. However, participants expressed that stress due to unmanageable workloads and insufficient knowledge about the English practice standards forced several of their compatriots to abruptly abandon their roles and return to their native countries in promotion of their wellbeing.

- Lack of a supportive a formal adaptation programme means the vulnerability of this group, as described in chapter 5.6, is further exacerbated, since they are more likely to be distressed by the work experiences.

This study argues that lack of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs means LAs may be losing a lot of money when IQSWs prematurely return to their native countries, especially if their relocation packages would have been recently paid. Hence, if there was a mandatory adaptation programme for IQSWs, their experiences and those of recipients of services would be improved while retention may be encouraged. However, those who qualified in England appeared to have less hazardous experiences when compared with those who qualified abroad. Their knowledge of local culture and the English practice standards mean, they can easily adapt.

Travelling to visits vice versa was found to have caused stress to some participants as it reduced the number of hours which would have been used to support families or update the system. However, IQSWs have been found to be more worried about travelling time than those who qualified in England. This could be based on various reasons including unfamiliar road networks, traffic congestion or less experiences of driving to visit families in their countries.

Some participants expressed that they investigated staff levels in different organisations before attempting to apply for jobs, therefore avoiding LAs where there were a high staff turnover and high workloads. It has been established that personal networks including BME groups are sources where social workers share information about different LAs in England, enabling them to identify LAs with lower levels of workloads which can be easily managed. Therefore, it may not be easy for a LA with high staff turnover and unmanageable workloads to attract new social workers, meaning social work vacancies may remain unfilled for long periods. Such LAs may end up being forced to either recruit locum social workers or even social workers from abroad. However, this research has established that social workers may be less likely to remain in roles with high workloads and poor support,

meaning such organisations may find themselves trapped in a vicious circle of always recruiting new social workers while other social workers would always leave.
This study has found that the best way of managing workloads may be to plan, prioritise and put reminders on calendars. However, emergencies could hamper good planning, as participants described prioritisation to have regularly forced them to change their plans. Business support has been identified as helpful in ensuring that social workers were able to manage their workload. Their support comes through updating calendars for social workers and ensuring that plans which were due to be updated remained highlighted. That way, participants could easily see which cases were close to be overdue and therefore update them on time.
All participants expressed being forced to work prolonged hours, if not, they would have not managed their workloads. Although participants expressed that they were entitled to get their additional hours reimbursed, they argued that it would be unhelpful to take a day off as workloads would pile up in their absence and therefore become even more unmanageable. However, NQSWs-participants appeared to be under more pressure to work prolonged hours and keep their workloads up to date, as failure may lead to the unsuccessful ASYE programme, since managers may deem them to have been unable to meet their deadlines.
While this study acknowledges that micromanagement may be positive as portrayed by Hoch et al (2018), it argues that it may damage relations between managers and social workers, leading to stress among the micromanaged social workers. Although micromanagement may be faced by all social workers, racism experiences could mean BME social workers may be faced with a higher level of scrutiny when compared with white population.
This research asserts that the difficulty of securing another ASYE position mid-programme may trap NQSWs in unhealthy working environments.
One IQSW-participant expressed that he and IQSW colleagues were prematurely placed on a performance plan before they could fully understand the English practice standards and culture; this may have been done to ensure that deadlines on their cases were met. However, the performance plans could be a type of micromanagement, to ensure that the LA received value for their efforts of hiring social workers from abroad. Contrary, some managers may use micromanagement for efficiency in service delivery. However, others could be using micromanagement as a racial profiling mechanism which may condemn BME social workers to discrimination.

Unmanageable workloads left participants feeling forced to donate what would have been their resting time, even, despite having been afforded adequate formal support. Although appearing voluntary, this study has identified this as 'the Coercive Nature of Social Work', which forces many social workers to unwittingly donate what would have been their resting time and work prolonged hours, causing them to have a poor work-life balance. Additionally, the coercive nature of social work', has been found to secretly extend social workers' working hours beyond their contracted hours, meaning normal social work working hours may not be enough for them to conduct their duties.
IQSWs-participants expressed having only remained in their initial LA permanent positions to gain confidence in the English statutory children social work practice. However, the prospect of what has been earlier described as a "Triple Combo-joy Benefit" enticed participants and their remaining compatriots to join locums once they had gained confidence in the English practice.
All participants in this study expressed that, to prevent social workers from leaving, LAs needed to hire more social workers to ensure that cases were shared and therefore kept lower and manageable
All participants in this study expressed that, to prevent social workers from leaving, LAs needed to hire more social workers to ensure that cases were shared and therefore kept lower and manageable

Key-findings-3

Some black social workers (participants) expressed having been barred access to children or witnessed fellow black colleagues being barred by prejudiced parents. That enabled this study to establish that "Race could be a Barrier", to social work practice, since "being black", meant those black social workers were prevented from conducting their normal duties. • Lack of a supportive policy means the vulnerability of this group, as described in chapter 5.6 is further exacerbated since they are likely to be distressed by their practice experiences.
Some participants did not feel free to express their racism experiences for different reasons. ***First*****,** some may have feared being perceived as promoting "otherness," or an unwanted dichotomy between groups, hence, they may have felt compelled to seek acceptance by appearing to align with dominant group norms. ***Second,*** concerns about stigma from white colleagues may have led to self-censorship, leading to the avoidance of sharing some worrying racism experiences. ***Third,*** some individuals may have internalised racism to the extent that they no longer recognised it as problematic. ***Fourth,*** others may have avoided disclosure due to a belief that their concerns will be

dismissed or ignored. These factors likely contributed to a culture of silence among participants, where some may have suppressed their distress to maintain professional and social cohesion. However, this silence can compromise their wellbeing, and, by extension, the quality of support provided to children and families.
The first year in social work practice has been found to be chaotic. However, issues of racism could mean BME social workers may be faced with higher levels of chaos than their white counterparts. Therefore, this study argues that the Williams' (1999/2008) transition cycle applies colour-blindness, suggesting that all people have similar experiences, ignoring experiences related to race; therefore, the cycle lacks essential components as it does not include the elements of chaos caused by racism, which could only be faced by BME individuals during their transition periods.
While this study acknowledges the discrimination and stereotyping suffered by some BME social workers, it argues that such social workers would benefit from being self-advocates who would commence any desired positive changes rather than sit back and complain of being unfairly treated. BME social workers would benefit from taking responsibility of being open and educating others about their culture rather than waiting until they have been misinterpreted or misunderstood. Additionally, they must adapt some aspects of their culture than continue with their unfamiliar culture which may lead to more misunderstandings leading to misinterpretations.
A well supported participant expressed feeling confident to challenge prejudiced service users. However, less supported participants did not feel confident to either challenge racist practices or express their racism experiences.
Some BME managers may be unwittingly used to downplay racism inherent in structures such as court systems.
This research has uncovered that some BME social workers may not choose to discuss their racism experiences. Hence, they may "sugarcoat" those experiences, divert such questions or downplay the experiences. Additionally, some BME social workers may not want to be seen as dissenting from the group norms. Hence, they may only feel free to share their racism experiences if others in a group have shared similar experiences; this reinforces the earlier argument of withholding racism experiences as a method of fitting in with the majority.
There may be two types of people when it comes to being affected by racism; these include the sensitive ones who may easily notice or be affected by racism and the less sensitive ones who may overtly choose not to be affected by such experiences. However, Muntinl (2020) provides a poignant response as she argues that the avoidance of sharing distressing information may lead to severe mental health issues for those affected. Therefore, there is a need to encourage BME social workers to feel free to share their racism experiences and avoid "sugarcoating".

Key-policy findings 4, Policy discussion

This section only presents little details. However, full data is available on chapter 9.10.

Duty of Care: The Standards for Employers of Social workers (2020) has been found to be less effective than expected.

NMC's EDI Policy and the NHS's inclusion policy WRES. The NMC's (2022) inclusion policy ensuring that promotions were only considered on individual skills rather than race, may mean SWE is less empathetic as it only intends to support social workers once they are on misconduct issues.

Decolonisation of Social Work: Lack of clarity or inclusion of the "decolonisation of social work" literature in the Social Work Education Policy (2021) makes the education policy look less effective than expected.

The need to support newly arrived IQSWs join a union: Lack of knowledge about their legal rights as social workers in England could mean IQSWs may be powerless to challenge their LAs who have been found to breach contracts.

There is no policy to ensure that employers empowered IQSWs with knowledge of their rights as social workers in England before they could start working. Therefore, duties must be imposed on organisations hiring IQSWs to support them join a union before any case allocation.

There is a need to ensure that **the voice of the social worker** is promoted and heard.

Social Work England 's inability to acknowledge personal values of social workers could leave some social workers feeling powerless and unable to voice their concerns challenging their managers' unacceptable decisions.

The Need for IQSWs' own Code of Practice: The (DfH, (2025) has been found to be built on the one-size-fits-all myth, derived from the principle of collectivism, as it assumes various health care professions all share the same experiences.

Adaptation programme for IQSWs: This research has found that there is a gap in law as neither the Children and Social Work Act 2017 nor the Social Workers Regulations 2018, provides a duty or provision for the creation of a formal adaptation programme for IQSWs. The scrapping of the GSCC (2005) post-qualifying module for IQSWs left a gap, as there is no recognition of divergent welfare provisions and cultural backgrounds, which could mean different approaches applied in social work practice in other countries. Therefore, lack of a national formal support policy could mean IQSWs may be expected to already know everything about the English social work practice on arrival. Failure to provide a duty or provision for formal support of IQSWs, means children are unintentionally exposed to harm.

Responding to Service User Prejudice: One of this study's key findings suggest that some black social workers may be denied access to children by prejudiced parents. However, there is no policy to support affected social workers, educate or challenge parents.

The Application of Critical Race Theory: CRT has revealed that some of the policies including the LGA, (2020) and the DfH, (2025) were developed under the liberalist approach which promotes colour-blindness, seeking to promote equality and inclusion but ignoring "race or skin colour-based experiences"; both policies fail to mention race-related experiences, (Cole,2009).

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