SHADES of BIAS

Reflective Social Work case studies

Exemplar 1 - Covert racism in team meeting

Shades of Bias (SoB) is a case study template designed to help document and analyse discriminatory/oppressive/racist incidents effectively. Case study examples can be provided either from the perspective of victims/survivors of bias, observers/witnesses or the person/people responsible for the bias.

Please provide as much detail as possible whilst maintaining appropriate anonymity, confidentiality and sensitivity.

It may be helpful to read the associated SoB guidance before completing this template.

BASW England
The professional association for social work and social workers

BPS Black & Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium

Professional Capabilities & Development Group

Anti-Racist Movement

BLACK LIVES MATTER BASW
One world, one race... the human race!

School Of Shabs

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1. Case study title

A brief descriptive title. For example: 'Discriminatory language used by a senior manager' or 'Inadequate adjustments made for a physically disabled colleague'

(20 words max)

Covert racism in team meeting

2. Background and context

- *Whose perspective is this case study written from?*
- *Date of the incident (approximate or exact)*
- *Location. For example: workplace, university, professional event, online etc*
- *Setting. For example: team meeting, supervision, face-to-face interaction, training session etc*
- *People involved. For example: anonymised service-user/lived experience/expert by experience, manager, colleague etc)*
- *Relevant policies/protocols. For example: anti-racism policy, EDI framework, complaints process etc)*
- *What prior experiences or organisational culture may have influenced the incident?*
- *Were there any signs or indicators that the incident might occur? If so, what were they?*

(100 words max)

Role: Senior Social Work Practitioner
Ethnic Group: Black Caribbean
Gender: Male
Years of experience in social work: 14 years
Workplace setting: Adults' Services, Local Authority
Role in relation to the incident: Directly impacted (victim) and partial witness
Date of incident: 21 September 2024
Time of incident: 2:15pm
Setting: Internal team meeting via Microsoft Teams

3. Nature of the incident

- *Describe the incident as clearly and factually as possible*
- *Was the racism covert (microaggressions, exclusion, unconscious bias) or overt (racial slurs, harassment, direct discrimination)?*
- *Was the racism internalised, interpersonal, institutional, medical and/or structural?*
- *Were any other forms of discrimination/oppression present from an intersectionality perspective?*
- *What was the immediate impact on you or others involved?*
- *How did the incident affect the dynamics within the team or organisation?*
- *Were there any specific phrases or actions that stood out as particularly harmful or impactful?*
- *How did the incident reflect broader societal issues related to race, discrimination and oppression?*
- *What emotions did you and others involved feel before/during/after the incident?*
- *How did the incident affect your professional relationships?*
- *Did you notice any changes in team morale or cohesion following the incident?*

(400 words max)

During a virtual team meeting focused on resource allocation, I raised concerns about the underrepresentation of culturally appropriate services in our locality. My comments were met with visible discomfort and eventually interrupted by the team manager who stated, "We mustn't make everything about race. We all have to manage with what's available." Several colleagues nodded in agreement while one rolled her eyes visibly on camera. The conversation quickly moved on without addressing my point.

This was not the first instance of such behaviour. Over the past year, my attempts to raise race-related systemic issues have consistently been minimised, ignored, or reframed as personal grievances. My expertise in anti-racism was subtly questioned in prior supervision, and I've been excluded from strategic workstreams, despite having previously led such initiatives elsewhere.

Emotional impact:
- Immediate feelings of embarrassment, isolation, and frustration.
- Built-up emotional fatigue from repeated invalidation.
- Questioning of professional value and internalised self-doubt.

Professional impact:
- Loss of motivation to contribute meaningfully in team meetings.
- Avoidance of future race-based discussions due to fear of further marginalisation.
- Increased workload burden due to lack of managerial advocacy on culturally specific cases.

Wider impact:
- Other staff of colour have privately expressed similar concerns but feel unsafe raising them.
- One junior Black colleague reached out afterwards, thanking me for "saying what needed to be said."

4. How was the situation handled?

- *Who responded to the incident (if anyone)?*
- *What action(s) were taken at the time? For example: reported to HR, challenged informally, ignored, escalated, etc.*
- *Did the organisational policies/processes support an adequate and fair response?*
- *Was trade union advice and/or representation provided?*
- *What was the final outcome? For example: no action, disciplinary response, mediation, etc.*
- *Were there any barriers that prevented a more effective response to the incident?*
- *If you could change one aspect of how the situation was handled, what would it be and why?*

(400 words max)

- I documented the incident immediately for my own records.
- Raised the issue with my manager in supervision the following week.
- The manager became defensive and reiterated that I was "reading too much into things."
- I escalated to HR under the EDI policy, but no formal investigation took place. I was instead invited to an informal "restorative chat" with the manager, which I declined due to lack of psychological safety.
- While the incident was logged internally, there was no clear accountability, acknowledgement, or redress. The emotional harm was never recognised, and there were no visible steps taken to prevent recurrence.

5. Reflection and learning

- *What could have been handled differently? For example: by you, colleagues, others involved or the organisation)*
- *How did this incident affect your professional confidence, mental health, or sense of belonging in the workplace?*
- *Has there been any follow-up action or commitment to change? If so, what?*
- *What structural/systemic issues contributed to this incident?*
- *Has the organisation taken any long-term corrective actions since the incident?*
- *Is there a timeline/deadline for implementation, investigation, resolutions and/or review?*
- *Key takeaways or recommendations for BASW*
- *What personal biases or assumptions did this incident reveal in yourself or others?*
- *Could your own practice be adjusted to avoid similar incidents in the future?*
- *What role does self-care play in your response to incidents of racism, and how can it be prioritised?*
- *Was there any resources or specific support that was helpful to you?*
- *What advice would you give to someone encountering a similar situation in future?*

(400 words max)

- The manager could have validated my concerns and opened the space for meaningful discussion rather than silencing the issue.
- HR could have followed policy frameworks for complaints involving racial dynamics.
- The team could have benefited from facilitated anti-racism training to address underlying cultural defensiveness and unconscious bias.
- Bias can be overt or subtle - minimising racial concerns is itself a form of bias.
- Emotional labour often falls on minoritised professionals to "educate" others, without support or protection.
- Institutional defensiveness perpetuates harm and obstructs learning.
- Allies are often passive or silent, which reinforces oppressive dynamics.
- Following informal advocacy, the local EDI board agreed to review cultural competence standards in supervision and meeting protocols.
- A reflective group was piloted for staff of colour, but participation remains low due to mistrust in leadership.
- SoB is now being trialled in two service areas for feedback and potential integration into formal reflection tools.
- Using this template allowed me to structure my experience clearly, especially in a system that often gaslights or downplays racial harm.
- The prompts helped me reflect without retraumatising.
- It validated the complexity of bias - not just "what happened," but how it lands emotionally and systemically.
- I will use this tool in future supervision and share it with trusted colleagues.

6. Reflection and learning (for the person/people responsible for the bias)

- *What was your initial rationale, justification or motivation for your action/inaction?*
- *How has this incident changed your approach to discrimination, racism and oppression?*
- *How do you think your actions were perceived by the victim(s) and others involved?*
- *Have you since recognised any unintended consequences of your actions?*
- *What steps will you take to repair harm and/or prevent future incidents?*
- *Is there a timeline/deadline for implementation, investigation, resolutions and/or review?*
- *Were your actions shaped by wider workplace culture, policies, or expectations? If so, how?*
- *Are there systemic or structural factors that may have enabled your behaviour?"*

- *What have you learned from reflecting on this incident?"*
- *What concrete steps will you take to change your approach to discrimination, racism and oppression moving forward?*

(400 words max)

N/A

7. Other comments or reflections

(300 words max)

N/A

Would you be willing to be contacted regarding your submission? If so, please confirm your name and email address below. These details will remain confidential.

Name (optional): .....

Protected characteristics (optional): .....

Email address (optional): .....
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If you would like to share your case study with BASW England for collation and potential (anonymous) publication in the future, please send your completed form to wayne.reid@basw.co.uk.

Confidentiality Notice:
Please ensure all details remain anonymous. This form is designed to support constructive systemic change within the profession.