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The 2023 SWU Assignment was marked by a Panel including:

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David Callow - SWU Chair

Catherine John-Baptiste - Programme Lead MA in Social Work, Derby University

The criteria: a 750 - 1000 word assignment with the following title:

How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change though joint social action?

Who could take part: Social Work Students undertaking an Undergraduate or Post Graduate Social Work Degree or Social Work Apprentices

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How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change through joint social action?

Aishah Zamir - University of Birmingham

During this assignment, I will explore how understanding the diverse community of women's experiences explored through an intersectional lens can inform appropriate joint social action responses.

Honour-based violence is an umbrella term used to define different forms of violence that share particular motivations and patterns (Gregory et al, 2020). Forced marriage is one form of honour-based violence. It is generally understood as a marriage held without the consent of one or both parties, which involves a certain degree of coercion (Villacampa, 2020).

The dominant media discourse superficially conflates forced marriage by viewing it through a culturalist and religious lens, which denies Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women protection in the name of promoting good cultural and faith relations (Erturk et al, 2011). Black feminists like Southhall Black Sisters repeatedly called for an intersectional practice approach which introduced "mature multiculturalism" into the policy (Siddiqui, 2014). This advocated that multi-cultural sensitivities were not an excuse for moral blindness (Britain et al, 2000). This meant that BME women facing forced marriage weren't sacrificed to cultural and religious relativism (Sisters, 2011).

The policy breakthrough was significant as an emphasis on culture and religion risks portraying specific communities as violent and internally homogeneous (Rigoni, 2022). However, without disregarding the significance of these risks, exploring the dynamics and the cultural and social norms playing a factor in the lives of victims and perpetrators is significant in devising appropriate joint social action responses.

This is in line with the UN statement advocating for the significance of recognising the special nature and unique characteristics of forced marriage (Rigoni, 2022). The theory of intersectionality recognises these unique characteristics by acknowledging society to be based on multiple spheres of oppression and domination (Nayak & Robbins, 2018). Therefore, individual experiences, social practices and cultural ideologies are influenced by a plurality of social categories (Mattsson, 2014).



An intersectional lens aids research which calls for a need to move away from a binary conceptualisation of agency vs passivity for women subject to forced marriage and instead highlights the multiple constraints on women's agency originating both within familial communities as well as external factors like racism (Erturk, 2011). For example, in the South Asian context, respect for parents and religion are socially and culturally constructed modes of behaviour enforced through ideals of izzat (honour) and sharam (shame) (Manion, 2003; Gill, 2004). These modes of behaviour act as coercive forces for South Asian women when facing forced marriage, leading them to feel as if they have no choice but to marry to avoid stigmatising their families (Roy, 2011).

Moreover, transgression for South-Asian women leads to them being punished by honour-based violence, such as attempted murder (Khan et al, 2023). Bourdieu's (2001) theory of masculine domination theorises that this punishment is carried out by the dominant group of men within honour-based societies as a way of restoring their masculine domination and safeguarding their honour (Bourdieu, 2001). This means that women's agency in exiting forced marriages is also constrained through fear of punishment and fear of bringing shame and dishonour (Khan et al, 2023).

Forced marriage, viewed through an intersectional analysis, illustrates how culture shapes the phenomenon and victims' responses. However, isolating culture as an explanatory factor does not provide an appropriate explanation (Erturk, 2011). Crenshaw (1991), cited by Nayak & Robbins (2018), distinguishes different aspects of intersectionality that assist in understanding the peculiarity of the experience of forced marriage. One of these aspects refers to structural intersectionality, which relates to concepts such as immigration status (Nayak & Robbins, 2018). Women with uncertain immigration

status are subject to no recourse to public funds and, therefore, aren't applicable for social security benefits and council housing (Nayak & Robbins, 2018). The research found this to prevent victims from escaping a forced marriage (Hester et al, 2008).

Here, an understanding of these intersectional barriers facing the agency vs passivity for women in forced marriages can inform joint social action responses to centre around community work, education and awareness building in communities, support with the English language for migrant women, information on emergency services and women's help organisations and support with immigration applications (Chantler et al, 2009; Hester et al, 2008).

In recognising diversity, identifying that all cultures contain a variety of positions which reflect liberal, conservative, and radical values is significant (Parrot, 2009). This recognition means that for joint social action in working with diverse communities, promoting values within cultures which contribute to social justice is necessary. The denial of the harms of cultural practices for specific group members, like families which subject women to forced marriage (Roy, 2011), means that the anti-oppressive method of cultural dialogue is significant.

In the context of forced marriage, within the process of cultural dialogue, the social worker would engage in the process of mutuality with the families of women subject to forced marriage where neither the social worker's own nor the family's culture can remain in an uncritical and pristine form (Parrot, 2009). Furthermore, the aim of this is that the families will accept mutual adjustment positively and uncritically. The critical engagement within the method of cultural dialogue investigates both cultures' respective norms and values and aims to create a third culture (Parrot, 2009).

However, the significance of intersectionality, as highlighted above, must be incorporated into practice. Where reflective questions in practice should be shifted from: How can we safeguard victims of forced marriage? To: What intersecting risks are we ignoring when we use forced marriage safeguarding frameworks? (Bernard, 2021). Therefore, in the designation of joint social action, regardless of well-intention, effective social change can only be carried out once we collectively address all oppressive structures. Using the words of Parker (1978), until all the parts of us can come along, we are in a project of eternal reform, not revolution.

To conclude, in understanding the diversity surrounding communities subject to forced marriage, an intersectional lens highlights the multiple interlocking systems of oppression that affect women's experiences of forced marriage. Moreover, for social workers, understanding these different dimensions of oppression is significant in promoting joint social action.

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How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change through joint social action?



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A child once asked me why we don't all like the same things. That is the beauty of diversity. We all have different interests and skills to bring to the table. In social work we are not always all on the same page as other professionals, our motivations, ethics and values differ, and our agendas should align with those we are set to support. Communities across the UK are diverse and getting them to work together towards shared outcomes and improvements to community resources can benefit all. It is essential for social workers to support the diversity in society as we strive for inclusion and equality of opportunity. Social workers follow the standards set by Social Work England which incorporate these themes and gives us the first indication of how this could be achieved.

“We must always listen to, engage with and co-produce alongside those who are directly influenced by our work.” (Social Work England, 2023)

Social workers can begin within their role by engaging with everyone they work with to co-produce change and improve services or research. However, to best support the whole communities' social workers will need to engage beyond those who present for a need for statutory services. Social action is about more than improving and coproducing statutory services, it's

about making a meaningful impact on changes that benefit the whole community.

To really make communities work and engage in joint social action, social workers need to be representative of their communities. Social workers are not elected officials, we sit between and alongside those we are employed to support. This can create an imbalance for those working in local authorities where your representation is to both those within the community and the governing body. The individual social worker may feel a conflict of values between the local authority expectations and government budgeting strategies and the ethical principles which underpin the role of the social worker.

To achieve change through joint social action social workers need to side with those they represent and appreciate and grow to understand the diversity of those communities. Betts (2013) acknowledges that for joint working to be a success, time amongst the community is required and cultural barriers to be overcome. Brown (2022) writes about the experiences of social work researchers who have participated in community activities and tasks, in her example, the researcher works with Inuit communities sewing seal-skin boots. In Brown's example she is writing about building shared knowledge between communities and

social workers, and concludes that coproduction needs to be about getting a community to participate with the social worker and not the social worker imposing their values or methods upon the community.

By embedding social workers within the community, social workers would be more likely to genuinely engage with people and hear their stories. They would experience life alongside the community and develop shared wisdom and share in their concerns. Social work is about inspiring change and to bring this about for whole communities social workers need to be activists. They can start by bringing communities together to sound board concerns, allow for differences of opinions, values, lived experiences and find the strengths in those communities.

Many minorities within diverse communities will have experienced oppression and may be harder to reach. The aims of social work are for social justice and full participation in mainstream community, that's why the social worker must start with working together with communities to promote social inclusion. This may mean approaching communities to make change within themselves before launching into calls for larger scale social action. Whichever the aims, the outcomes should be set by the community for the community, with the social worker acting with those communities to support and empower their rights and champion their decisions. This supports the social worker in generating shared knowledge of what works for communities and by restoring the perceived power imbalance and strengthens the reputation of social work.

An eco-social approach to social work would allow for work with communities to not only grow locally but to influence major change in legislation and policy. Gitterman and Germain (2008) agree that mobilising communities is a key part of the social work role and Jordan (2013) adds that to remove barriers to social justice, social workers must influence law and develop awareness of issues which matter in our communities. The behavioural social intervention approaches suggested by Hornstein back in 1971 propose that social action can be jointly taken between communities and social workers through methods such as direct-action including picketing, non-cooperation for example strikes and interventions by organising sit ins or obstructions. With the 2023 rise in employee strike action across the country in various disciplines aiming to achieve better pay and working conditions it stands to reason that this could be implemented on a

community or national level to influence policy change. The social workers role in this would be to support identifying what the outcomes are communities wish to achieve, perhaps bigger than more funding for local projects and more towards how systems are run. Projects such as the community budgets scheme piloted in 2012 could be more favourable for enabling change within communities because it changes the way people feel valued when they have more of a say in how things are run.

Truell and Banks (2021) call on the principle of 'Ubuntu: I am because we are', to improve social work ethics globally. And so, I tell the child, they are strong, they are important, and they can make a difference, and so can all those around them if we do it together so that everyone can live their best life and enjoy what matters to them.

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How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change through joint social action?



Samantha Ncube - University of Greenwich

Introduction

Social workers have a crucial role to play in supporting diverse communities across the UK to make change through joint social action. Joint social action refers to a collaborative process where individuals and groups work together to address social issues and bring about positive change in their communities. These communities are often diverse, with members from different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. To best support these communities, social workers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and understanding of the complexities of joint social action. This essay will discuss how social workers can best support diverse communities in the UK through joint social action by exploring the importance of cultural competence, the strengths-based approach, and the role of advocacy and partnerships in social work practice.

Discussion

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to the ability of social workers to understand, respect, and work effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Banks et al., 2020). Social workers must be aware of the unique experiences, values, and beliefs of the communities they work with. This includes understanding how their own cultural background and biases may impact their interactions with community members. For example, a social worker working with a South Asian community may need to understand the importance of family and community networks in decision-making processes (Canda et al., 2019). Alternatively, a social worker working with an African community may need to be aware of the role of cultural and spiritual beliefs in healthcare and social service provision. Cultural competence is critical for social workers in joint social action to build trust and develop meaningful relationships

with community members (Fook, 2022). Social workers must be able to demonstrate respect, empathy, and an appreciation for cultural differences. This can be achieved by building relationships based on shared values, engaging in active listening, and using culturally appropriate communication methods. For example, social workers working with the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities should understand the impact of institutional racism and how this affects service delivery, access, and outcomes for BAME service users (Teater, 2019).

Strengths-Based Approach

The strengths-based approach is a way of looking at people and groups that focuses on their strengths, skills, and resources instead of their flaws and problems. This approach works well for joint social action because it focuses on the strengths and possibilities of communities instead of just their problems. (Marsiglia et al., 2021) says that social workers must work with communities to find out what their strengths, resources, and needs are. This process lets people in the community figure out what problems affect them and how to solve them. By helping communities come up with their own solutions, social workers can give them the tools they need to take control of their problems and make changes that will last. An example of a strengths-based approach in practice is the work of the Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities in the UK (Fook, 2022). These communities have been marginalized and stigmatized for generations. However, their resilience, cultural strengths, and social capital have enabled them to establish a vibrant network of community organizations, advocacy groups, and service providers. Social workers working with these communities need to recognize their cultural and linguistic diversity, support their unique aspirations and needs, and work collaboratively to challenge discriminatory policies and practices.

Advocacy and Partnerships

Social workers must work collaboratively with other professionals and agencies to support diverse communities in joint social action (Milner et al., 2020). For this to work, there needs to be good communication, cooperation, and coordination between different agencies so that services can meet the different needs of communities. Social workers also need to be aware of how power works in these partnerships and work to make sure that community members are involved in making decisions. Also, social workers must fight for the rights of different groups and try to fix social problems that affect them. This means fighting against policies and practices that are unfair and promoting social justice and equality. Social workers must also be aware of the structural factors, like poverty, racism, and inequality, that lead to social injustices and work to fix them by changing policies and speaking out.

An example of effective advocacy and partnerships in practice is the work of the Refugee Council in the UK (Parker, 2020). The Refugee Council is a non-governmental organization that works to support refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The organization works with other groups, like the Home Office, local governments, and health and social care providers, to make sure that refugees and people seeking asylum can get the help they need. The Refugee Council also fights for the rights of refugees and people who are looking for asylum, and it tries to change policies and practices that hurt these groups or are unfair to them (Payne, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, social workers have a vital role in supporting diverse communities in the UK through joint social action. To best support these communities, social workers must be culturally competent, adopt a strengths-based approach, and work collaboratively with other professionals and agencies. By understanding and respecting the unique experiences, values, and beliefs of communities, social workers can build trust and develop meaningful relationships. By adopting a

strengths-based approach, social workers can empower communities to take ownership of their issues and achieve lasting change. By working collaboratively with other professionals and agencies, social workers can ensure that services are responsive to the diverse needs of communities and advocate for the rights of these communities. Ultimately, social workers must be committed to promoting social justice and equality for all communities in the UK. By working collaboratively with diverse communities, social workers can play a crucial role in achieving this goal and creating a more just and equitable society.

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How can social workers best support the diverse communities across the UK who are making change through joint social action?



Natalie Cox - Nottingham Trent University

To build a structure, one must firstly consider its' foundations. Social work is a discipline rooted in community development, and historically, in charity and philanthropy (Seed, 1973, p. 3). Its' development has seen social work become a profession with protected status, and 'a practical activity' (Soydan, 2012, p. 471), requiring skill and knowledge to assist others within our communities. One key difference between social work and communities striving for joint social action and change, is power (Forde and Lynch, 2017, p. 15). To best consider how social workers can best support diverse communities in the UK who are making positive impacts on their local communities through joint social action, we must acknowledge the power we hold as professionals.

Social workers are now educated and trained to recognise the potentially oppressive nature of institutional interference, through considering anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive models. Such theory includes the PCS model and its 'interlinked' nature of bias and oppression (Thompson, 2021, p.35) and the reflective practice of 'critical consciousness' (Sakamoto and Pitner, 2005, p. 441). Anti-racist principles in education are also key to our understandings as social workers, and 'should prepare student to challenge racism once they qualify' (Cane and Tadam, 2022, p. 3). Obviously social workers must practice self-reflection, and we must assess our values, in accordance with SWE's Professional Standards (2020). Theory and reflection help us consider the power we hold and the rationale for how we practice, but they also provide basis for action. Simply being taught this crucial theory is not necessarily enough.

The self-reflection we develop through anti-oppressive examination of our personal 'cultural consciousness' (Sakamoto and Pitner, 2005, p. 441) is so important to be able to serve community members in respectful and appropriate ways, but this does not automatically result in cultural competency (Feize and Gonzalez, 2018). Cultural competency is vital for social workers, especially when supporting diverse communities. How can we support schemes improving people's lives and creating opportunities, without understanding the motivations and experiences behind their joint social

action? We can respect people through demonstrating a want to understand.

There is evidence that there are racial and ethnic disparities within UK social services, such as overrepresentation of Black youth on child protection plans and Black children being less likely to be adopted (Department for Education, 2021), and overrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) children in child welfare services (Allen and Hamnett, 2022, p. 3918). These examples of concerning disparities are not as historic as we would like to think. These disparities demonstrate that social workers clearly have potential to be complicit in structural systems of racial and ethnic oppression. For true societal progress, there needs to be action; Anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist praxis.

Communities are striving for joint social action because of many reasons, but much community-driven vision is being enacted by those with working in teams; we must empower and support these teams wherever appropriate. We must avoid falling prey to harmful stereotypes and critical representations of different communities. Recent reports have found media to be a key contributor to public understanding around identity and increasing discriminatory hate crime, such as in the case of Black, GRT and Transgender folk (Sanderson et al., 2022). To absorb prejudicial misconceptions and sensationalised media about race, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity, does a huge disservice to those at the centre of diverse communities. Social workers must guard themselves against any disguised prejudice and unconscious bias. We have the responsibility to be critical of damaging simplism.

In the twentieth century, 'community work presented itself as a radical alternative to social work' (Ledgwith, 2020, p. 86). How do we as social workers reconcile the suggestion that community social action may sometimes be reaching communities or solving issues that our profession struggles to? We must assess our values, our privileges, and sometimes, our pride. Working with community members enacts the partnership principles (BASW, 2012) and should be encouraged! Social workers must strive for justice and empower community members,

and this may mean relinquishing the initial power and control we hold to help people help themselves. Ultimately social work should be supportive, not hegemonically oppressive. Community strengthening, development and activism, all rely on progress. Progress can sometimes contrast with traditional values, but in cases of seeking justice, fairness and opportunity, social workers must be part of positive change.

To conclude, this essay cannot formulate an all-encompassing answer to this question, but it can suggest a good place to start for social workers who wish to support community members in their drive to improve their environments and opportunities. By practicing anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist principles, and considering critical consciousness and cultural competency, social workers can avoid prejudicial traps in their personal understandings. The personal understandings of all working in positions of institutional authority have the collective power to enact structural oppression or instead, actively heed the lessons of the past. Too often historically have institutions halted community progress through interference, abuse of control, and fear of moving away from the status quo. Our relationships with diverse communities are to be nurtured and tended to carefully, like gardens. We must garner understandings of needs, wants and requirements for growth, to ever see anything blossom or produce fruit.

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