

# International Journal of Psychology Sciences



ISSN Print: 2664-8377  
ISSN Online: 2664-8385  
Impact Factor: RJIF 5.26  
IJPS 2023; 5(1): 11-14  
[www.psychologyjournal.net](http://www.psychologyjournal.net)  
Received: 15-02-2023  
Accepted: 24-03-2023

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## Gender microaggressions towards females and its negative effects on mental health: A review

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648377.2023.v5.i1a.29>

### Abstract

Inconsistency between societal expectations and reality creates lags in emotional, academic, social, familial, sexual, and physical well-being. Because of this; they have a hard time integrating into society. We investigate the impact of gender-based microaggressions on the mental health of women. A review of the literature was conducted to look at how gendered microaggressions affect women's daily experiences. Results revealed that microaggressions had a negative impact on women's mental health, as well as had a strong association with depressive symptoms. The results emphasized that there is a strong need to address these widespread, subtle forms of sexism and gender standards that affect women's mental health in adverse ways outcomes.

**Keywords:** Gender, microaggressions, mental health, discrimination

### Introduction

According to the 2011 Indian Census, there were 1210.2 million people living in India, of which 623.7 million were men and 586.5 million were women, making up 48.53% of the total population. According to India's 2011 population census, 65.46 percent of women were literate. Education and empowerment for females reduce maternal mortality; reduce gender disparities, Protection of females' rights, and ensure their development is the key to sustainable and equal development of the country. Males and females are equal according to the Indian constitution. Many rules and regulations are developed by the Indian government to ensure the empowerment and protection of female rights. The Indian government established National Commission for Women (NCW) as the statutory body in charge of the promotion of women's rights and interests on the 31st of January 1992. Despite all these things, the ground reality is differences. Women are in marginal situations in economic, political, and social domains. In many cultures, women are treated as second-class citizens. Women got fewer opportunities' than men. In many cultures, women are perceived as less competitive, less ambitious, less achievement-oriented, less intelligent, and lack of emotional intelligence than men (Nelson, 2006) [39]. Because of constitutional rights and policies that ensure women's protection against discrimination, it seems difficult to directly express aggression and discrimination against females because of gender. In recent times, overt gender discrimination appears or manifested in a new form, which is now manifested in lower intensity and in a covert way, many times below the threshold. Psychiatrist Chester Pearce 1970 coined a new term for covert discrimination, termed micro aggression. Many research suggested that long-term experiences of microaggressions have an aversive effect on mental health. An increasing amount of research focuses on the negative effects of covert discrimination.

### Microaggressions

The term "Microaggressions" is a new term from a historical perspective. The term microaggression was first used by psychiatrist Chester Pearce in 1970, in reference to his work with African Americans. Other groups, such as Asian Americans, also encounter regular microaggressions (Nadal *et al.*, 2012) [36]. The term was originally conceived as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce *et al.*, 1977) [45].

One another researcher Sue *et al.*, (2007) <sup>[45]</sup> define microaggressions as “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group. “Discrimination occurs blatant and openly clears the intention behind discriminatory act. At present overt and blunt discrimination replaced by subtle and secret forms of discrimination”.

Gender Micro Aggression is defined as “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative sexist slights and insults towards women” by (Nadal 2013) <sup>[32]</sup>.

### **Mental Health**

Many times, it seems difficult to define mental health completely from a cross-cultural perspective. However, many cultures commonly acknowledged that mental health encompasses more than the absence of psychological disorders.

Mental health has been defined by the World Health Organization (2001) as a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” For the general well-being of people, societies, and nations, mental health is just as significant as physical health. Gender microaggressions are a new term with limited literature and its conceptual overlapping with Sexual Assault, Sexual and Harassment. Important formal national and international institutions and organizations have not yet published any publication and formally not recognized gender microaggressions. Microaggressions occurs frequently with minimal impactful. Due to its subtle nature, it is hard to recognize by the victim. Women claim that gender micro-aggression commonly happens and that they hinder their effectiveness in social, educational, occupational, and professional situations by diminishing their efforts, treating them like sex objects, and devaluing their achievements (Morrison, 2002) <sup>[31]</sup>. These subtle forms of sexism, like aversive racism, are committed by well-intentioned men who favour equality between genders and would never intentionally discriminate against women. Despite their apparent being innocent or harmless, they injure recipients because they have negative psychological effects and promote inequities.

### **Review of Literature**

Microaggressions were a new term coined in early 1970. Due to the new historical background, little research work is available regarding the variable of microaggressions and mental health. Gender micro-aggression is a new term with limited literature and its conceptual overlapping with sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence against females, objectification of the female body, myths and stereotyping beliefs prevailed in society.

A dearth of studies was found that measure the effect of micro-aggression on the mental of females. Important formal national and international institutions and organizations have not yet published any publication and formally not recognized gender micro-aggression. Due to its subtle nature, it's hard to recognize by the victim. Women claim that gender microaggressions commonly happen and

that they hinder their effectiveness in social, educational, occupational, and professional situations by disregarding their contributions, treating them like objects for sex, and discounting their achievements (Morrison, 2002) <sup>[31]</sup>.

These subtle forms of sexism, which are similar to aversive racism in that they are committed by well-intentioned men who favor gender equality and would never wilfully discriminate against women, are also called subtle sexism. Despite their apparent being innocent or harmless, they injure recipients because they have negative psychological effects and promote inequities in society

Feigt (2018) <sup>[10]</sup> conducted research titled “The Relationship of Gender-Based Microaggressions and Internalized Sexism on Mental Health Outcomes: A Mother-Daughter Study”. Results showed that a direct link was found between gender-based microaggression and anxiety and depressive symptoms. Women and girls who faced high levels of gender-based microaggression experienced severe forms of anxiety symptoms. Results also revealed gender micro-aggression was also correlated with depression. Females who are continuously exposed to gender-based aggression develop depressive symptoms.

Gonzalez *et al.*, (2015) <sup>[14]</sup> published an article in a psychiatric rehabilitation journal. Isolation, unfavourable feelings, and treatment non adherence were among the reported negative effects of microaggressions events. Results of the study revealed that most perpetrators of gender microaggressions were close friends, and family members, and most of the time they were authority figures. Victims of microaggressions also experience negative emotions, isolation, and nervousness. According to Hansson (2009) <sup>[17]</sup>, there is a negative association between microaggressions and self-esteem, a sense of coherence, and empowerment.

Asian military pupils who faced racism during their duty, experienced 20% more severe post-traumatic symptoms than those that were typically explained by combat exposure or rank maintained in their branch of service (Loo *et al.*, 2001) <sup>[26]</sup>. When confronted with interracial discrimination, victims experienced increased cardiovascular reactivity (Mendes *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[29]</sup>.

### **Future Direction**

After independence, there have been many changes in the status of women in Indian society, the law has given equal rights to women as men, and along with this, many such laws have been made that protect women and protect their self-respect, and their dignity. Underestimating women in comparison to men and treating them as second-class is very deep-rooted in society. But due to legal provisions, due to legal provisions, it is not easy for today's civilized society to expose such discrimination directly. In such a situation, society has also changed the way of displaying violence and aggression due to ethics and legal provisions. As society is growing more aware of what misogyny is and its harmful impacts on women, the aware, planned, and intentional forms of gender bias have seemed to wane; nonetheless, they have survived in the form of subtle and accidental expressions. Microaggressions are like electromagnetic rays which cannot be seen but who's had a significantly bad impact on people who are frequently exposed to it. So, understanding this construct is necessary over time. Future research should focus on investigating the motivations, and justifications behind those who commit these acts. Research

on gender microaggressions is essential to comprehend how they contribute to the conditions that lead to highly serious and criminally punishable gender-based violence.

### Conclusion

Microaggressions have more long-lasting psychological impacts on the victims of these acts. The secondary but devastating impact of microaggressions is that they prevent people from having equal access to and opportunities in work, education, and basic health care. Despite appearing to be of a minor nature, the harm they do has a systemic and large-scale impact. There is a need for more longitudinal research to understand microaggressions and their effects on mental health. International and national organizations effectively address all types of violence related to female mental health but due to the subtle nature of microaggression away from the reach of all international and national organizations.

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