A COMPREHENSIVE MICROAGGRESSION MODEL: INTEGRATING RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

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Abstract

Background: Although overt discrimination has declined, subtle everyday discrimination known as microaggressions (MAs) continues to undermine employee well-being and organisational effectiveness. These behaviours contribute to psychological strain, interpersonal tension, and reduced work performance, making MAs an ongoing organisational concern.

Problem statement: Despite growing research interest, no empirically grounded conceptual model exists that integrates the antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of workplace MAs based solely on quantitative evidence. This limits theoretical cohesion and hinders the development of targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Methodology: A systematic literature review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, focusing exclusively on quantitative studies published between 2015 and 2025. Twenty studies met the inclusion criteria, and data were synthesised to identify verified antecedents, consequences, and conditional mechanisms. The review was registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF).

Results: Findings show that MAs arise from individual, interpersonal, and organisational antecedents such as biased beliefs, discriminatory climates, and leadership-related factors. MAs consistently predict negative psychological, health, work-related, and organisational outcomes. Their effects operate through mediating mechanisms and are conditioned by moderators including ethnicity, military rank, cognitive reappraisal, and identity-related factors.

Conclusion: This review consolidates fragmented quantitative findings into a coherent conceptual model of workplace MAs. The model advances theoretical understanding and provides a practical foundation for designing organisational interventions to identify, address, and mitigate the impact of MAs.

Keywords

Workplace Microaggressions, Discrimination, Mediators, Moderators, Organizational Outcomes and Systematic Review

Introduction

Microaggressions (MAs) in the workplace have garnered significant attention in recent quantitative research, revealing a complex between relationship between antecedents, mediators, moderators, and consequences. Understanding these interactions is important for developing inclusive work environments

and for managing and minimizing the social and psychological harm that MAs may cause (Fattoracci & King, 2022; King, 2016).

MAs are subtle and everyday forms of discrimination that can manifest through derogatory remarks, insinuations, gestures, or even body language. Academically, they are commonly categorized as microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Sue, 2010). Often, perpetrators do not recognize that they are enacting an MA (Nadal, 2019a; Williams, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). Victims are typically individuals associated with minority groups based on gender, race, language, religion, sexual orientation, or health status (Williams, 2021). Thus, MAs represent a complex, frequently misunderstood phenomenon, yet remain an undeniable reality in organizational contexts.

In addition, the ambiguity of MAs in the workplace complicates the identification, reporting, and correction of these behaviours (Young et al., 2015). In many cases, perpetrators may not even recognize that they are enacting an MA and are therefore unable to acknowledge that their subtle, often unconscious actions may harm both the victim and the organization (Young et al., 2015). The lack of recognition perpetuates a cycle of subtle discrimination, which undermines the establishment of inclusive work environments (Fattoracci & King, 2022).

Research further suggests that workplace discrimination, including MAs, is shaped by shifting societal attitudes, particularly toward race and ethnicity (Hammond et al., 2010). Historical stereotypes also play a role in triggering MAs (Kuo et al., 2021). Beyond race and ethnicity, any minority status may become a basis for MAs. For instance, individuals with rare health conditions may encounter bias linked to their illness (Lee et al., 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic illustrates this dynamic, as it generated new waves of MAs directed at groups newly perceived as minorities, unrelated to historical patterns or attitudinal shifts.

The impact of MAs is mediated by individual coping mechanisms and moderated by contextual factors. Social support can buffer their adverse effects on mental health (Salami et al., 2021), while a strong ethnic identity may protect against harm (Barrita & Wong-Padoongpatt, 2023). These findings underscore the complexity of MAs, as multiple personal and organizational elements influence their effects.

The consequences of MAs are multifaceted, shaping both individual well-being and organizational functioning. At the individual level, MAs are consistently linked to heightened anxiety, depression, and stress (Holder et al., 2015; Nadal et al., 2019). Beyond psychological outcomes, they affect work-related attitudes and behaviours, reducing job satisfaction, weakening engagement, and increasing turnover intentions (Fattoracci & King, 2022; Frank et al., 2021). Collectively, these outcomes extend beyond personal harm, undermining employee performance and threatening organizational commitment and effectiveness.

Despite these insights, no comprehensive conceptual model grounded in quantitative evidence has yet integrated the antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of MAs. Such a model is essential to advance theoretical understanding and to provide organizations with empirically based tools for designing interventions that can reduce the prevalence and mitigate the impact of MAs in the workplace.

Problem Investigated

Although research on MAs has expanded, the field remains fragmented and inconsistent. Existing studies frequently adapt definitions and applications to specific contexts, victims, or perpetrators, making comparisons difficult (Lilienfeld, 2017; McCallaghan & Steyn, 2024). Moreover, many frameworks are tailored to specific minority groups (Kay et al., 2022; Kim & Meister, 2023; Kunte et al., 2025; Shahid & Dale, 2024), which prevents the development of a universal model applicable across diverse workplace settings. The absence of such consistency limits both theoretical progress and the ability of organizations to address MAs effectively.

To date, no comprehensive framework has integrated empirical findings on the antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of MAs in workplace contexts. A generalizable, empirically grounded framework is needed to move beyond fragmented, group-specific studies. Such a model would consolidate existing evidence, provide greater consistency for future research, and offer managers practical guidance on identifying and reducing MAs in order to minimize their harmful organizational and individual effects.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to present a model of MA based on empirically confirmed antecedents, mediators, moderators, and consequences from quantitative research on MAs in the workplace.

1. To compile a comprehensive list of antecedents associated with MAs.
2. To identify the outcomes/consequences associated with MAs.
3. To identify the mediators and moderators of MA's impact.
4. To organize the data from 1, 2, and 3 in terms of the present models of MAs.

To achieve these objectives, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the antecedents to the development of MAs?
2. What are the outcomes associated with MAs?
3. What are the factors that increase or decrease the potency of MAs?
4. What model can house these results on antecedents, mediators, moderators and outcomes of MAs?

The goal of this study is to solely include variables, empirically grounded in quantitative research, in a model to explain MAs in the workplace. This is about confirming variables, rather than exposing new ones. It is envisaged that the end product will be a conceptual model that illustrates the antecedents, mediators or moderators, and outcomes of MAs.

Literature Review

In the sections that follow, the literature on variables within the workplace is examined. Current perspectives and proposed frameworks regarding antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes are reviewed, as these provide the foundation for the study's objectives. This study seeks to move beyond theoretical propositions by concentrating on findings substantiated by empirical evidence. It adopts the position that progress is best achieved through quantitative research, and accordingly, thresholds for both practical and statistically significant relationships among variables are also briefly considered.

MA in a workplace context

MAs in the workplace refer to subtle, often unintentional discriminatory remarks or behaviours that negatively affect individuals from marginalized groups. These can take the form of verbal slights, dismissive actions, or environmental cues that communicate hostility or exclusion (Nadal, 2011, 2019b; Williams, 2021). Their harm lies in their subtlety; seemingly minor incidents accumulate to create a hostile work environment, often leading to significant psychological distress (Nadal et al., 2019).

The subtle nature of MAs makes them particularly difficult to identify and address. Research indicates that women often perceive these behaviours more acutely when they are less explicit, underlining the importance of incorporating gender perspectives into organizational equality assessments (Basford et al., 2014). King (2016) similarly highlights how Black employees experience MAs that are invisible to others yet profoundly draining, reinforcing the need for organizations to recognize and respond to such encounters (Fattoracci & King, 2022).

Gender-based MAs are a pervasive form, contributing to discomfort, offence, and reduced workplace satisfaction among women (Iswari, 2023). Jacob (2024) further observes that these experiences can discourage women in IT from aspiring to leadership positions, thereby impeding professional advancement.

The cumulative consequences of MAs extend well beyond the individual. Studies link these experiences to heightened anxiety, diminished job satisfaction, and other mental health concerns (Schultz et al., 2022). At an organizational level, MAs contribute to reduced performance, burnout, and higher turnover rates (Harris-Haman, 2023). For Black women in leadership positions, racial MAs can obstruct effectiveness and hinder career progression (Holder et al., 2015).

In sum, MAs in the workplace represent a complex and multifaceted form of subtle discrimination. Their effects undermine both individual well-being and organizational functioning,

underscoring the need for comprehensive strategies to identify, address, and mitigate their impact in order to foster inclusive and equitable work environments.

Antecedents in behavioural studies

Antecedents, within organizational behaviour, are factors or circumstances that precede and shape specific attitudes, behaviours, or outcomes (Cassano et al., 2023; Cooper et al., 2007). Operationalized through validated instruments, they are typically measured as psychological, social, or contextual variables that helps to explain workplace dynamics (Goode & Harris, 2007). In essence, antecedents function as predictors of employee experiences and performance, as well as broader organizational culture and climate (Park et al., 2020; Pierce & Aguinis, 2011).

Knowing antecedents is valuable because it clarifies the types of outcomes that may be expected, enabling individuals to prepare for them (Goode & Harris, 2007). Such insight also supports better planning and fosters proactive responses by anticipating the behaviours likely to follow (Cooper et al., 2007; Goode & Harris, 2007).

In behavioural studies, it is beneficial to categorize antecedents into three domains: organizational, situational, and individual. This approach helps to better understand the factors influencing behaviour and can lead to more effective interventions and strategies. At the organisational level, climates characterised by ethical behaviour and emotional intelligence have been identified as important antecedents (Zhang et al., 2022). Similarly, organisational policies and situational factors such as reward systems have been shown to shape behaviour in the workplace (Samnani & Singh, 2012). At the individual level, demographic characteristics, including age, gender, tenure, and race, have been found to play a role (Han et al., 2022), while personality traits have also been established as significant antecedents (Samnani & Singh, 2012).

Outcomes/consequences in behavioural studies

In organisational behaviour studies, particularly in quantitative research, outcomes are often referred to as the dependent variable and are examined as measurable or observable results that stem from preceding intentional interventions or unexpected events (Belcher & Palenberg, 2018; Schneider & Barbera, 2014). Especially in quantitative research, such outcomes are typically operationalised as numerical observations or variables to assess the consequences of organisational processes or behaviours (Schneider & Barbera, 2014).

Scholars generally distinguish between individual-level outcomes and organisational-level outcomes. At the individual level, outcomes often include job satisfaction, commitment, or organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). For instance, OCB is frequently considered a consequence of job satisfaction, as satisfied employees are more inclined to engage in extra-role behaviours that support organisational functioning (Murdiono et al., 2023). At the organisational level, performance outcomes dominate, usually expressed through productivity, efficiency, or financial metrics. Research in this domain frequently investigates which forms of leadership are associated with increased performance, given that higher productivity and efficiency are expected to translate into improved profitability (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Krekel et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2016). Insights into such relationships enable organisations to refine leadership practices to strengthen performance outcomes (Hurduzeu, 2015).

Ultimately, the analysis of outcomes in organisational behaviour serves a critical managerial purpose: by linking specific interventions, processes, or behaviours to observable consequences, scholars and practitioners contribute to a more robust understanding of how to improve organisational effectiveness (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Mediators and moderators

Within the field of organisational behaviour research, a mediator is considered a variable that explains the relationship between an independent variable (input) and a dependent variable (output) (Hayes, 2017; Wu & Zumbo, 2008). The mediating variable acts as a mechanism through which an independent variable affects the dependent variable (Hayes, 2015; Wu & Zumbo, 2008). Studying mediation provides insight into the underlying processes that occur during behavioural phenomena and helps to clarify how the relationship between the independent and dependent variables operates (Igartua & Hayes, 2021). For example, organisational commitment serves as a mediator in the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Samad et al., 2012). This suggests that organisations cannot rely solely on improving job satisfaction to reduce turnover intentions; an improvement in organisational commitment is also

necessary (Samad et al., 2012). Mediators are typically psychological or behavioural constructs, such as attitudes, perceptions, or motivation, measured as continuous variables (Hayes, 2019).

In contrast to mediators, which explain how or why relationships occur, moderators specify when or under what conditions these relationships hold. In organisational behaviour studies, a moderator is a variable that influences the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Igartua & Hayes, 2021; MacKinnon, 2011; Wu & Zumbo, 2008). Moderators are especially valuable for understanding the conditions under which selected behaviours occur in the workplace and the strength of these relationships (MacKinnon, 2011; Wu & Zumbo, 2008). For example, research shows that contingent rewards moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Puni et al., 2018). In practice, exposure to transformational leadership is generally associated with increased job satisfaction; however, the addition of contingent rewards can further enhance employees' satisfaction (Puni et al., 2018). Categorical and demographic variables, such as gender, race, and job role, are also frequently used as moderators in organisational research (Hayes, 2017).

Method

An outline of the methodology applied in this study is provided below.

Research design
Systematic literature reviews can investigate and systematize the results of previous research (Pati & Lorusso, 2018; Snyder, 2019). The present study aims to collect, record, and organize selected information from previous quantitative studies that have examined the antecedents, outcomes, moderators, or mediators of MAs. The ultimate goal is to integrate this information into an empirically and quantitatively defensible model of variables associated with MAs. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (PRISMA 2020 Statement Paper, 2020) will be followed, as these are well suited for studies of this nature (Page et al., 2021). To maintain transparency and promote authenticity and thoroughness, the present research project was registered on the Open Science Framework (McCallaghan & Steyn, 2025).
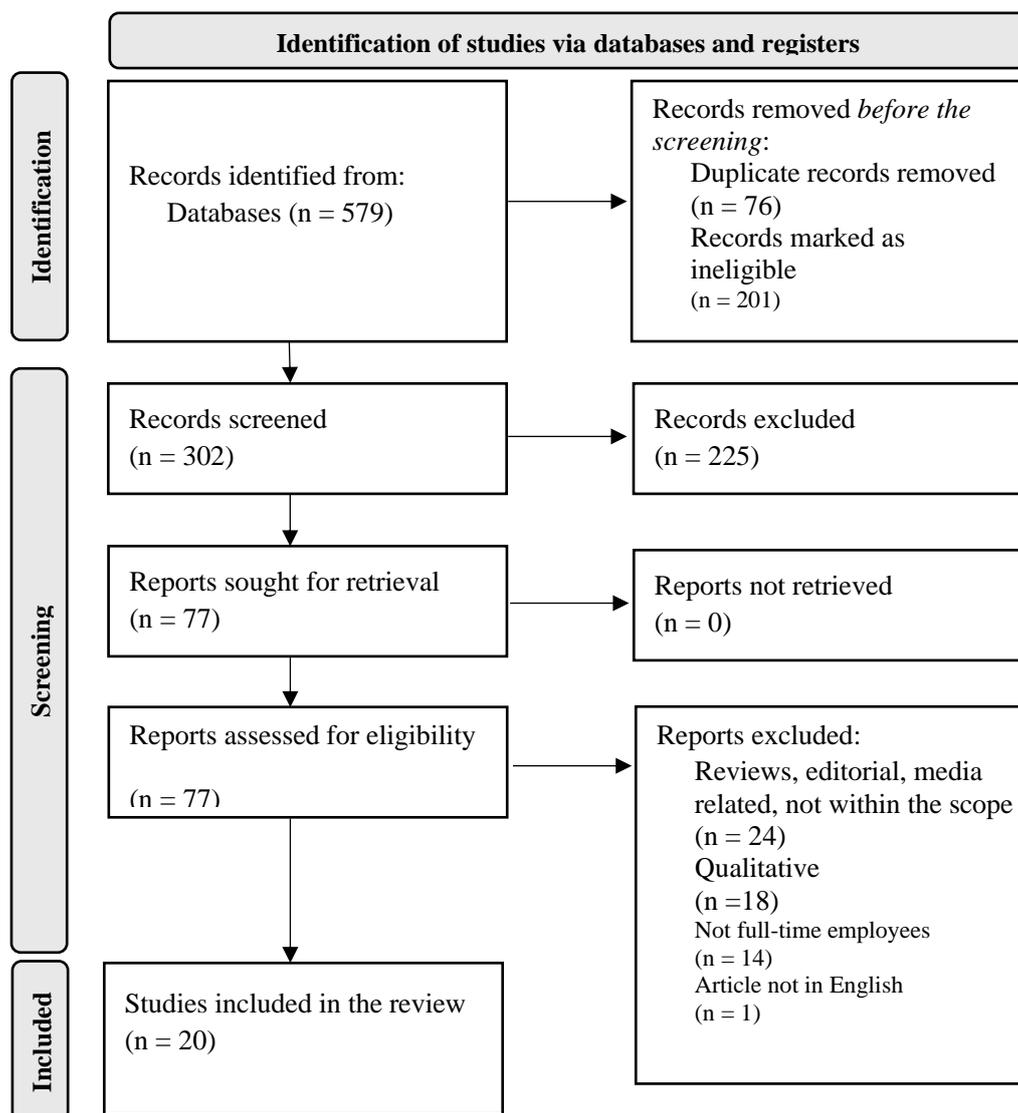
Inclusion and exclusion criteria
Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to address the research questions and achieve the study objectives (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Snyder, 2019), and the present study therefore included: (1) research on MAs in workplace contexts with participants identified as working individuals, (2) studies employing a quantitative research method, (3) studies in which causes, antecedents, outcomes/consequences, mediators, or moderators were clearly described or illustrated in a measurement model, (4) studies reporting statistical findings regarding these relationships, (5) studies published in recognized academic journals indexed in credible scientific databases, (6) studies published between 2015 and 2025, and (7) studies for which the full text was available.

The following exclusion criteria were applied: (1) studies using a qualitative research approach, (2) reviews, editorial manuscripts, case studies, theses or dissertations, and media-related opinions, (3) studies in which participants were community members rather than fully engaged or full-time employees of an organization or entity, and (4) articles not written in English.

Search strategy and retrieval of studies
A search was completed in the EBSCOHost, Academic Search Premier, and Business Source Complete electronic databases. Search restrictions to only include scholarly articles published in English were selected on search engines. Several Boolean phrases were used during the search, such as 1) "Microaggressions in the workplace" AND "antecedents" AND "causes" AND "outcomes" AND "consequences" AND "mediator" AND "moderator." Date filters on search engines were limited to 2015–2025. The process of the current systematic review is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Process followed to retrieve items for current systematic review

Study selection

The process for selecting studies, as outlined in the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, is illustrated in Figure 1 and includes the identification, inclusion, and exclusion stages at each step (Page et al., 2021). The two authors independently screened the abstracts (n = 302), after which the eligible articles were retrieved for full review (n = 77). Following this review, 20 articles were deemed eligible and included in the study. Any differences in applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria were resolved through discussion and consensus (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Higgins et al., 2019).

Data collection and extraction

A standardized extraction form was developed in Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2025) to capture study identifiers (authors, year, title) and sample characteristics, with only working individuals (employees) included, as stated earlier. The data were further organized according to the antecedents, outcomes or consequences, mediators, and moderators of MAs. Statistical results describing the relationships between variables, together with key findings, were also recorded. In the tables that follow, sections of this extraction form are presented as the findings of the study.

Quality assurance
Each study was evaluated using several questions to assess its quality. Common inquiries pertain to study design, validity and reliability, outcomes, the identification and management of confounding variables, and the execution of appropriate statistical analysis (Moola et al., 2024). In this study the question directly related to the presence of the required data for the study, as outlined in the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each of the reports assessed suitable for inclusion (n = 77) was independently evaluated by both authors, who assigned one of the following responses: "Yes, No, Unclear or Not Applicable". Any disagreements were resolved through further discussion, and a decision was made based on consensus (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Higgins et al., 2019). This aligns with scoring practices commonly used in systematic literature reviews for quantitative cross-sectional studies (Condon et al., 2020; Dardas et al., 2016).

Data Synthesis
Given the diversity of measurements and sample characteristics across the reviewed studies, a narrative synthesis approach was adopted to integrate the findings. This method was chosen because the lack of comparable effect sizes and statistical uniformity precluded a meta-analysis (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Popay et al., 2006). Narrative synthesis is particularly suited to identifying conceptual patterns and contextual nuances in heterogeneous datasets (Rodgers et al., 2009). The synthesis was guided by the structured groupings of data in the Microsoft Excel file, where organizing similar information in columns enabled systematic comparison of antecedents, outcomes, mediators, and moderators. This approach facilitated the identification of commonalities across studies, including intersectional factors, varied work-related outcomes, and contextual influences.

The review ultimately grouped these shared elements and condensed them into broader themes, which were integrated into a conceptual model (Figure 2) illustrating how MAs operate within organizational contexts. Similar approaches have been employed in previous research to extract thematic patterns across complex workplace experiences (Archer et al., 2021; Leamy et al., 2011).

Ethical consideration
The current study is part of a larger research project. Ethical clearance was obtained by the second author from the UNISA Graduate School of Business Leadership ethical committee. This study was considered to have minimal risk and complied with the UNISA policies on research ethics and the standard operating procedure on research ethics risk assessment (Ethics reference number 2024_SBL_AC_011_EX-3781).

Results

The initial search produced 579 records. After removing 76 duplicates and 201 ineligible items, 302 records remained for title and abstract screening. During this stage, 225 records were excluded based on relevance, allowing 77 full-text articles to be assessed for eligibility. Of these, 57 studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. This process resulted in 20 quantitative studies that met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

A detailed breakdown of the study selection process is shown in Figure 1. Table 1 presents the key characteristics of the included studies, including author and article title, identified antecedents, outcomes, and variables tested as mediators or moderators.

Antecedents of MA in the workplace
The review identified a focused set of empirically verified antecedents that were tested across the included quantitative studies (see Table 1). Although only five studies overtly examined these antecedent variables, they collectively reveal consistent patterns across individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

At the individual level, traditional gender role beliefs (Kim et al., 2024), implicit racial biases, and leadership efficacy (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023; Sims et al., 2021) were found to be associated with an increased prevalence of MAs. At the interpersonal level, factors such as manager racial bias, racial dissimilarity, and individual consideration emerged as relational conditions influencing the enactment of MAs (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023). At the organizational level, discriminatory climates and practices including racial climate (Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022), sexual discrimination, racist behaviours, and disability discrimination (Brown & Brown, 2020) acted as structural antecedents to MAs.

Importantly, perceived social support (Cancela et al., 2024) and individualized consideration (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023) were identified as protective factors that reduce the likelihood or intensity of MA

experiences. Overall, these findings indicate that MAs are most prevalent in environments characterized by biased beliefs, discriminatory interpersonal dynamics, and inequitable organizational climates.

Outcomes or consequences of MA in the workplace

The studies included in this review (Table 1) reveal a wide range of empirically verified outcomes associated with workplace MAs, affecting psychological, health-related, work-related, social, and organizational domains. Consistently, these outcomes indicate damaging effects on both employee well-being and workplace functioning.

At the psychological level, exposure to MAs has been linked to increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, general stress, traumatic stress responses, distress intolerance, racial vigilance, and cognitive patterns such as rumination, all of which aggravate emotional strain (Bostwick et al., 2021; Burke et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Nadal et al., 2019; Sissoko et al., 2023; Torres & Taknint, 2015; Williams & Lewis, 2019; Wilson et al., 2024). These findings illustrate a consistent pattern in which MAs undermine emotional functioning and increase vulnerability to psychological harm.

In addition to psychological effects, several studies have documented adverse health consequences, including poor sleep quality, diminished overall physical health, and increased substance use as a coping mechanism (Bostwick et al., 2021; Monte et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2024). This suggests that MAs have significant impact on physical well-being.

Work-related outcomes are similarly negative, with MAs contributing to work–family conflict, parental burnout, and general work burnout. They also lead to elevated turnover intentions, counterproductive workplace behaviours, reduced job satisfaction, reduced engagement, lower work volition, and decreased organizational citizenship behaviour (Batool & Kashif, 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Marks et al., 2022; McCallaghan, 2022; Morando & Platania, 2024; Schultz et al., 2022; Sims et al., 2021). These consequences indicate that MAs wear down employees' motivation, performance, and wider commitment to the organization.

Social and interpersonal harms are evident as well, with studies identifying heightened perceptions of social invisibility and abusive supervision as downstream effects of MA exposure (Batool & Kashif, 2023; Bergh & Hoobler, 2023). This further contributes to exclusionary and hostile work environments. At the organizational level, MAs are associated with a weakened diversity climate and reductions in workgroup and leadership cohesion (Brown & Brown, 2020; McCallaghan & Heyns, 2022). This highlights their capacity to disrupt organizational culture and collective functioning.

Variables mediating or moderating the relationship between MA and outcomes

The studies summarized in Table 1 identify various psychological, social, and contextual variables that mediate or moderate the relationship between workplace MAs and their associated outcomes. Several mediating mechanisms were identified. For instance, self-compassion was found to mediate the effects of microinvalidations on workplace incivility, turnover intentions, and counterproductive behaviours (Morando & Platania, 2024). Rumination served as a mediator between MA exposure and poor sleep quality (Wilson et al., 2024), while social invisibility mediated the relationship between MAs and intentions to leave the organization (Batool & Kashif, 2023).

Racial MAs acted as mediators in several models, linking implicit racial bias to abusive supervision (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023), racial climate to emotional well-being (Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022), and organizational climate factors to outcomes like job satisfaction, workgroup cohesion, and leadership cohesion (Brown & Brown, 2020). Additionally, diversity climate mediated the effects of racial MAs on employee well-being outcomes, such as turnover intentions, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviour (McCallaghan, 2022). Traumatic stress symptoms also mediated the relationship between racial MAs and depression (Torres & Taknint, 2015), and disengagement coping mediated the link between gendered racial MAs and depressive symptoms (Williams & Lewis, 2019).

Moderating variables also influenced the strength or direction of MA-related outcomes. For example, military rank, which reflects hierarchical position, moderated the relationship between gendered MAs and depressive symptoms (Kim et al., 2024). Cognitive reappraisal buffered the negative impact of MAs on general health (Monte et al., 2023). Skin tone and skin tone satisfaction moderated the association between gendered racial MAs and traumatic stress symptoms (Sissoko et al., 2023). Ethnicity moderated the relationship between racial MAs and perceptions of the diversity climate (McCallaghan & Heyns, 2022).

Furthermore, calling, defined as vocational purpose, moderated the relationship between MAs and job satisfaction (Schultz et al., 2022). Bicultural self-efficacy moderated the association between racial MAs and work volition (Marks et al., 2022). Finally, ethnic identity self-efficacy was found to moderate the relationship between racial MAs and traumatic stress symptoms (Torres & Taknint, 2015), while gendered racial identity private regard moderated the indirect effect of gendered racial MAs on depressive symptoms through disengagement coping (Williams & Lewis, 2019).

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the impact of MAs is shaped by a complex interplay of emotional, identity-based, and contextual variables, highlighting the conditional and multidimensional nature of MA-related harm in organizational settings.

Discussion

The thematic synthesis presented in Table 2 aligns with the first three objectives of the study: identifying the antecedents of MAs (occurrences/behaviour), cataloguing their outcomes or consequences, and determining the variables that either amplify or weaken their effects. This thematic organisation also lays the foundation for addressing the fourth objective, which is to develop an integrated conceptual model that captures the relationships among antecedents, mediators, intrapersonal processes, moderators, and outcomes or consequences in workplace settings. Collectively, the themes summarised in Table 2 make an empirical contribution to formulating a comprehensive model of MA dynamics in the workplace.

Studies examining antecedents consistently highlight individual, interpersonal, and organisational factors that contribute to the occurrence of MAs (occurrences/behaviour). These factors include biased beliefs (e.g., traditional gender role beliefs), various forms of prejudice and discrimination (such as implicit racial bias, sexual discrimination, racist behaviour, and disability discrimination), contextual conditions like the racial climate, and leadership-related characteristics, including leadership efficacy and individual consideration. Although protective antecedent conditions, such as perceived social support, appeared less frequently, they demonstrate the potential buffering effect of supportive environments.

Research focusing on mediators has identified the intrapersonal pathways through which MAs exert their effects. These include perception and appraisal, emotional response, meaning-making, and cognitive mechanisms such as rumination, symptoms of traumatic stress, disengagement coping, and self-compassion, as well as organisational mechanisms such as diversity climate. Notably, microaggressions themselves can act as mediating variables. These findings suggest that microaggressions influence outcomes through both internal processes and pathways linked to perceptions of climate and interpersonal treatment.

Studies investigating moderators reveal that the effects of MAs are conditional and vary according to individual, interpersonal, and institutional contexts. Moderation was observed for demographic and identity-related variables (including ethnicity, skin tone, skin tone satisfaction, ethnic identity self-efficacy, bicultural self-efficacy, and gendered racial identity private regard), psychological strengths (such as cognitive reappraisal and calling), and structural factors like military rank and individual consideration in leadership. These moderators illustrate the multi-level conditions under which the impact of microaggressions can be either intensified or mitigated.

Finally, research on outcomes or consequences confirms the widespread and multifaceted effects of MAs for both employees and organisations. Identified outcomes include individual psychological harm (such as depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress) and health-related impairments (including poor sleep, decreased general health, and substance use), behavioural and work-related impacts (such as burnout, turnover intentions, reduced job satisfaction, diminished engagement, counterproductive behaviours, and lower organisational citizenship behaviour), interpersonal outcomes (like social invisibility and abusive supervision), and organisational outcomes (such as weakened diversity climate and reduced cohesion among workgroups and leadership). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that MAs in the workplace have significant negative effects across personal, social, and organisational domains.

Together, these themes of antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes and consequences provide the empirical foundation for the multi-level conceptual model proposed in this study. This model integrates individual, interpersonal, and organisational pathways to explain how MAs (occurrences/behaviour) emerge, how they influence employee experiences, and under what conditions their effects become compelling. This integration advances theoretical understanding and offers a structured framework for future empirical research and organisational interventions.

Table 2: Thematic mapping

Theme	Representative Studies	Description
Antecedents *Individual factors* *Interpersonal factors* *Organizational factors*	Kim et al. (2024); Cancela et al. (2024); Bergh and Hoobler (2023); Thomas-Hawkins et al. (2022); Brown and Brown (2020); Sims et al. (2021)	Antecedents include biased beliefs (traditional role beliefs, implicit racial bias), discriminatory climates (racial climate, sexual discrimination, racist behaviour, disability discrimination), and leadership factors (leadership efficacy, individual consideration). These factors increase the likelihood of MA enactment. Perceived social support may function as a protective antecedent.
Mediators *Variables explaining how MAs influence outcomes.* **Intrapersonal processes** Perception and appraisal Emotional response Meaning-making Cognitive mechanisms	Morando and Platania (2024); Wilson et al. (2024); Batool and Kashif (2023); Bergh & Hoobler (2023); Thomas-Hawkins et al. (2022); Brown and Brown (2020); McCallaghan (2022); Williams and Lewis (2019); Torres and Taknint (2015)	Mediators capture the psychological and organisational mechanisms through which MAs exert their effects, including self-compassion, rumination, social invisibility, diversity climate, disengagement coping, traumatic stress symptoms, and MAs themselves. These variables explain the pathways linking MA exposure to adverse well-being or organisational outcomes.
Moderators *Variables specifying when or for whom MAs have stronger or weaker effects.* Individual Interpersonal Institutional	Kim et al. (2024); Monte et al. (2023); Sissoko et al. (2023); McCallaghan and Heyns (2022); Schultz et al. (2022); Marks et al. (2022); Williams and Lewis (2019); Torres and Taknint (2015); Bergh and Hoobler (2023)	Moderators include individual identity factors (private regard, ethnic identity self-efficacy, bicultural self-efficacy), social and demographic characteristics (skin tone, ethnicity), psychological resources (cognitive reappraisal, calling), and organisational hierarchy (military rank). These variables determine the conditions under which MA exposure leads to stronger or weaker negative outcomes.
Outcomes **Individual** Psychological Behavioural **Interpersonal outcomes** Social invisibility Abusive supervision **Organisational outcomes** Climate Performance Leadership cohesion	Kim et al. (2024); Bostwick et al. (2021); Wilson et al. (2024); Monte et al. (2023); Morando and Platania (2024); McCallaghan (2022); Bergh and Hoobler (2023); Brown and Brown (2020); Sissoko et al. (2023); Williams and Lewis (2019)	Outcomes include psychological harm (depression, anxiety, traumatic stress), health effects (poor sleep, reduced general health, substance use), work-related consequences (burnout, turnover intentions, counterproductive behaviours, reduced job satisfaction, work volition, engagement, OCB), social outcomes (social invisibility, abusive supervision), and organisational-level effects (weakened diversity climate, reduced cohesion).

Conclusion

The primary objective of the present study was to identify, gather, and organise empirical research evidence on the antecedents, outcomes, mediators, and moderators associated with microaggressions (MAs) in the workplace. Through a rigorous screening process, twenty quantitative studies met the inclusion and exclusion criteria and were synthesised to address the research objectives.

Firstly, although antecedents were examined in only a small number of studies (n = 5), the evidence that did emerge revealed several verified predictors of workplace microaggressions. These

antecedents operated across individual, interpersonal, and organisational levels. At the organisational level, racial climate (Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022) and broader discriminatory practices, including sexual discrimination, racist behaviours, and disability discrimination (Brown & Brown, 2020), were shown to heighten the likelihood of MAs. At the interpersonal and individual levels, implicit racial bias, manager racial bias, racial dissimilarity, and traditional gender role beliefs (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023; Kim et al., 2024) were also identified as significant antecedents. These findings align with previous views that discriminatory or biased beliefs and climates are strongly linked to the emergence of MAs in work environments.

Secondly, the results confirm that MAs are associated with multiple categories of outcomes or consequences. The first category consists of individual psychological well-being outcomes; including depressive symptoms, anxiety, traumatic stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and poorer physical health (Bostwick et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2024; Nadal et al., 2019; Torres & Taknint, 2015; Wilson et al., 2024). The second category encompasses behavioural and work-related outcomes, such as turnover intentions, job satisfaction, engagement, counterproductive behaviours, work volition, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Marks et al., 2022; McCallaghan, 2022; Morando & Platania, 2024; Schultz et al., 2022; Sims et al., 2021). The third category reflects organisational-level outcomes, including deterioration in diversity climate and reduced workgroup and leadership cohesion (Brown & Brown, 2020; McCallaghan & Heyns, 2022). Collectively, these results support previous findings that MAs undermine both personal well-being and organisational functioning.

Thirdly, most of the included studies examined mediators, intrapersonal processes and moderators to clarify how MAs operate and under what conditions their effects become more or less compelling. Mediating variables included self-compassion, rumination, social invisibility, traumatic stress symptoms, disengagement coping, and diversity climate (Batool & Kashif, 2023; McCallaghan, 2022; Morando & Platania, 2024; Thomas-Hawkins et al., 2022; Williams & Lewis, 2019; Wilson et al., 2024). These mechanisms demonstrate that MAs influence outcomes through processes of perception and appraisal, emotional response, meaning-making, and cognitive strain, as well as perceptions of organisational climate. Moderating variables were also prevalent and included contextual, individual, social, and institutional characteristics, such as military rank, skin tone and skin tone satisfaction, ethnicity, calling, bicultural self-efficacy, ethnic identity self-efficacy, private regard, cognitive reappraisal, and individual consideration (Bergh & Hoobler, 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Marks et al., 2022; McCallaghan & Heyns, 2022; Monte et al., 2023; Schultz et al., 2022; Sissoko et al., 2023; Torres & Taknint, 2015; Williams & Lewis, 2019). These findings highlight the conditional nature of MA-related harm, showing that individual identities, psychological resources, and organisational hierarchies influence the severity of effects.

Finally, based on the synthesis of antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes/consequences, this study proposes a comprehensive conceptual model for understanding MAs in workplace contexts, thereby fulfilling the fourth research objective. The model conceptualises MAs as emerging from individual, interpersonal, and organisational antecedents. Following exposure, individuals form perceptions of MAs, experience emotional and cognitive responses, and engage in meaning-making processes that can lead to a range of psychological, behavioural, interpersonal, and organisational outcomes/consequences. These processes are moderated by individual, social, and institutional factors, which determine the strength and direction of MA-related effects. This conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2 and provides a holistic representation of how MAs in the workplace develop, operate, and exert their influence within organisational environments.

Figure 2: Proposed conceptual model for MA in the workplace
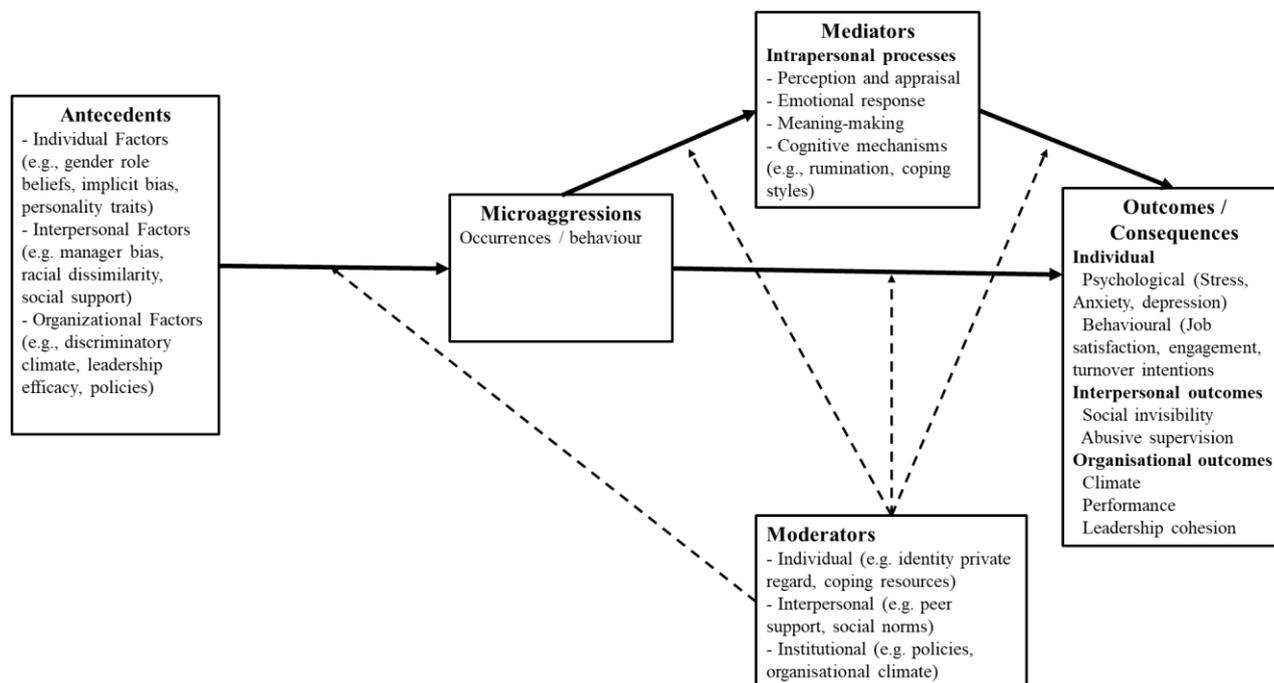
Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study focused exclusively on MAs within workplace environments. While this allowed for a clearly defined scope, workplace settings are regulated spaces where subtle or covert behaviours may carry formal consequences. MAs occurring in public, educational, or informal environments may manifest differently, be tolerated to varying degrees, or have distinct social meanings. Future research should therefore investigate MAs across less regulated and more heterogeneous settings to determine whether their antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes differ from those identified in organisational contexts.

A further limitation concerns the sensitivity of MA experiences. Although the present review synthesised quantitative evidence, the lived experiences of individuals, particularly those with strong minority group identities may be more nuanced or emotionally complex than can be captured through survey-based methods. Because of the social risks associated with reporting discrimination, individuals may underreport or mask their experiences, contributing to gaps in understanding. Future research should therefore prioritise qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to capture the depth, context, and emotional significance of MA encounters, especially among marginalised groups who may experience these behaviours more frequently or intensely.

Another limitation relates to the contextual diversity of the included studies. Many quantitative investigations of MAs focus on specific occupational groups, demographic populations, or narrow workplace contexts, limiting the generalisability of findings. To enhance external validity, future studies should examine MAs across varied organisational structures, industries, and cultural settings. Comparative designs may help identify patterns that are consistent across workplaces and those that are context specific. Finally, although this review intentionally centred on quantitative research to build an empirically grounded model, this emphasis also restricted the types of insights that could be incorporated. MAs involve complex emotional, interpersonal, and identity-related processes that may be more fully illuminated through qualitative interviews, focus groups, longitudinal fieldwork, and ethnographic approaches. Future work should therefore integrate both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to deepen understanding of the mechanisms underlying MAs and to explore how employees interpret, navigate, and respond to these experiences over time.

Researchers are encouraged to apply and extend the conceptual framework proposed in this study to test its validity across different organisational and cultural environments. Such efforts may refine the model's components, clarify boundary conditions, and enhance its utility for predicting, diagnosing, and ultimately mitigating MAs in diverse settings. Collectively, these recommendations underscore the

importance of broadening methodological approaches, diversifying research contexts, and expanding theoretical inquiry to advance a more comprehensive and actionable understanding of workplace microaggressions.

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