



Microaggressions in the Child Welfare Workplace

Weng, S. S., & Gray, L. (2018). Racial microaggressions within social work: Perceptions of providers. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 1–14.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This resource evaluates the qualitative responses on the topic of microaggressions in the workplace from 30 social workers who identified as people of color. The authors asked about staff interactions with clients, focusing on policies, practices, and beliefs.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Racial microaggressions are defined as unconscious and automatic gestures, tones, looks, or exchanges, often invisible, that cause emotional and psychological injuries to people of color. Three forms of microaggressions can occur:

Microassault
Deliberate verbal or nonverbal attacks

Microinsult
Subtle insensitivities

Microinvalidation
Communications that negate or invalidate experiences

Researchers found that racial microaggressions were expressed toward clients through:

1. Ignoring clients' cultures and being dismissive of their backgrounds and experiences (e.g., being unfamiliar with other racial/ethnic backgrounds and experiences; not featuring people of color on handout materials)
2. Providing services based upon stereotypes (e.g., only giving Latinx populations work leads; not emphasizing educational services to African Americans)
3. Putting down clients in subtle ways (e.g., talking down to them)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCIES TO ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS:

- Recognize differences among and within different racial/ethnic groups
- Understand that colorblindness is an outdated, problematic philosophy that perpetuates racial microaggressions
- Acknowledge that all people, even social workers, have biases
- Create safe and supportive environments for sharing experiences of microaggressions
- Provide training on recognizing, minimizing, and confronting racial microaggressions that avoids focusing on blame

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

As a helping profession, when social workers have negative working relationships with clients it can be extraordinarily harmful as it can weaken rapport. If clients perceive their service providers as biased, there may be low usage and premature termination of services. Increasing workers' awareness and understanding can lead to changes in beliefs and behaviors. Working toward an environment that minimizes racial microaggressions helps families feel welcomed and get the services they need for success.