

HEALTH & HUMAN SCIENCES

Microaggression Among Registered Nurses: An Exploratory Study

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Microaggression is a term growing in use in both scholarly writing and popular media. *Racial microaggression* is any act that subtly presents harm to people of color, and these acts are associated with negative physical and mental health effects. In particular, racial microaggression in health care could exacerbate health disparities already observed among racially diverse populations.

Past research has examined the prevalence or impacts of microaggression among medical professionals, yet studies on registered nurses (RNs) and microaggression are lacking. RNs make up a large proportion of health care workers (30%, according to a 2019 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics), which makes an investigation of this population relevant.

In this mixed method study, RNs ($N = 22$) completed the "Acceptability of Racial Microaggressions Scale" (ARMS, based on Mekawi and Todd's 2018 research) before reading a vignette depicting a Black man in the emergency room. Subsequently, participants responded to three open-ended questions. Results revealed that there was overall low agreement with the ARMS subscales, indicating that the participants were generally unlikely to endorse microaggression; however, the Color Evasion subscale had the greatest agreement ($M = 2.701$). This suggests a greater adherence to colorblind beliefs and ideology than other forms of microaggression within the sample.

Table 1. Three themes identified through thematic analysis and example responses of those themes.

Themes	Example
Helpfulness	"You enter the hospital to [receive] help, please allow us to help you [. . .]"
Emotional (in)attentiveness	"I would say that he is scared of what will happen to him [. . .]"
Emergency response	"He's having a heart attack. Pain makes people cranky. Get him some morphine and ASA [. . .]"

The open-ended responses generated three themes: helpfulness, emotional (in)attentiveness, and emergency response. Helpfulness included a desire to assist the patient and obtain the patient's compliance. Emotional (in)attentiveness was characterized by observations of the patient's emotions, yet a subsequent lack of acknowledgment of the patient's feelings. Finally, emergency response encompassed the medical observations and recommendations of the RNs.

Research advisor Janet Davis writes: "In the United States, health disparities among marginalized groups are evident. Nurses have not examined their roles in the microaggression experienced by marginalized groups when seeking health care. This research makes an initial contribution to the field. In particular, it can spark candid reflection about microaggression in the nursing profession."