

Influence of Micro Aggressions on Work Engagement among IT Professionals in Kerala

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Abstract

Micro Aggressions are subtle, unintentional comments or behaviours that result in discrimination and affect the well-being of employees. This study explores how Micro Aggressions affect Work Engagement among IT professionals in Kerala and emphasizes the importance of building resilient organizational cultures with inclusive work environments.

Keywords: Micro Aggressions, Sustainable, Well- Being, Work Engagement

Introduction

The concept of Micro Aggressions was introduced in 1970, by Chester M. Pierce, a psychiatrist at the Harvard University, to explain common, everyday slights and dismissals that relate to various aspects of one's identity such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, etc. that he observed being inflicted by a section of society on another. Such behaviour could be intentional or unintentional, signaling negative attitudes toward members of underrepresented groups. By the early 21st century, Micro Aggressions were interpreted as disrespect towards socially marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities (PwDs), the LGBT community, etc.

Schaufeli et al. define Work Engagement as a positive and fulfilling state of mind at work, characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour indicates high levels of enthusiasm and resilience. Dedication refers to high involvement and pride in one's work. Absorption denotes total concentration and passion at work.

Theoretical Framework

Renowned psychologist, Derald Wing Sue (2007), proposed the **Micro Aggression Theory** which states that Micro Aggressions are subtle, often unintentional discriminatory behaviours directed at marginalized groups. They manifest as regular short-lived exchanges that convey belittling messages to certain individuals because of their group membership.

Micro Aggressions may occur in four forms:

- Micro Insults, refer to rude or insensitive comments, often associated with stereotyping, that demean a person's identity. Unlike overt acts of discrimination or aggression, Micro Insults are subtle forms of dismissive or derogatory communication that undermine an individual's sense of self-worth, belonging, or competence.
- Micro Invalidations comprise behavior that dismiss, exclude or deny the thoughts,

feelings, or experiences of persons belonging to particular groups.

- Micro Assaults, represent relatively explicit deliberate discriminatory actions, such as avoidant behavior. They are overt, usually unconscious actions that aim to offend or intimidate.
- Environmental Micro Aggressions are insults and invalidations that are manifested at a systemic or macro-level.

The **Implicit Bias Theory**, conceptualized by Mahzarin Banaji (1995), postulates that individuals have unconscious attitudes and biases. These stereotypes influence behaviour unconsciously. This theory explains why Micro Aggressions are often unintentional.

The relationship between Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement could be explained with the **Affective Events Theory (AET)**, proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). AET postulates that events at the workplace could trigger emotional responses which, in turn, impact attitudes and behaviours.

Literature Review

- Huynh et al. (2012) and Torres-Harding et al. (2012) suggest a positive correlation between Micro Aggression frequency and emotional distress, indicating the cumulative impact of these experiences on mental health.
- Sims et al. (2021) and Algner & Lorenz (2022) reported a significant negative association between Micro Aggressions and Employee Engagement, highlighting their detrimental effect on workplace well-being.

Research Gap

A systematic review by Newman et al. (2025) reveals that studies on Micro Aggressions are focused in Western contexts, limiting applicability to diverse cultural contexts such as India.

A systematic literature review by Fletcher et al. (2021) indicates the inadequacy of empirically tested studies to address Micro Aggressions at the work place. According to Salari et al. (2024), Micro Aggressions are associated with reduced well-being and productivity. However, their specific impact on Work Engagement remains underexplored.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature and extent of prevalence of Micro Aggressions in the IT industry of Kerala?
2. Do Micro Aggressions affect Work Engagement?

Research Objectives

1. To study the perceptions of IT professionals in Kerala regarding micro-aggressions
2. To study the influence of micro aggressions on work engagement

Methodology

Primary data for the study was collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire, among 50 IT employees at the three major IT hubs of Kerala, Technopark (Trivandrum), Infopark (Kochi) and Cyberpark (Calicut). The questionnaire was designed based on standardized and validated scales from prior empirical studies. Minor modifications in wording were made to ensure contextual relevance, without altering the original meaning of the items.

Workplace Micro Aggressions were measured using the Workplace Micro Aggressions Scale (WMS) developed by Basford, Offermann, and Behrend (2014). The scale consists of 10 items assessing employees' experiences of subtle, everyday discriminatory behaviours in the

workplace. Responses were recorded on a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Frequently).

Work Engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES–9) developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). The scale comprises nine items across three dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Responses were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Always).

Descriptive Statistics was applied to explore the perceptions of IT professionals in Kerala regarding Micro Aggressions. Correlation Analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of relationship between Micro aggressions and Work Engagement. Simple Linear Regression was used to assess the predictive effect or influence of Micro Aggressions on Work Engagement.

Results And Discussion

Reliability Analysis

Reliability Analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study, namely Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement, using Cronbach’s Alpha.

Table 1 Micro Aggressions

Item	Variance
Q1	1.024
Q2	1.029
Q3	0.908
Q4	0.875
Q5	0.637
Q6	0.573
Q7	0.798
Q8	0.621
Q9	1.053
Q10	0.834
Total Score Variance	24.735
Cronbach Alpha	0.736

The Micro Aggressions scale consists of 10 items. The variance of individual items ranges from 0.573 to 1.053, indicating moderate variability among responses. The total score variance is 24.735. The Cronbach’s Alpha value for the scale is **0.736**, which exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the items have acceptable internal consistency and reliably measure the construct of Micro Aggressions.

Table 2 Work Engagement

Item	Variance
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WE1	0.684
WE2	0.622
WE3	0.534
WE4	0.549
WE5	0.578
WE6	0.418
WE7	0.776
WE8	0.766
WE9	0.934
Total Score Variance	8.40
Cronbach Alpha	0.913

The Work Engagement scale includes nine items. The item variances range from 0.418 to 0.934, indicating consistent variability across items. The total score variance is 8.40. The Cronbach’s Alpha value is **0.913**, which is well above 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency. This suggests that the items are highly reliable in measuring Work Engagement.

Inference

Both scales demonstrate satisfactory reliability:

- The **Micro Aggressions scale** shows **acceptable reliability** ($\alpha = 0.736$)
- The **Work Engagement scale** shows **excellent reliability** ($\alpha = 0.913$)

The instruments used in this study are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis, such as Correlation and Regression.

Objective 1

Demographic Profile

The study was conducted among **50 IT employees** to examine the influence of Micro Aggressions on Work Engagement. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented below.

Table 3 Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 25	8	16.0	16.0
25-34	18	36.0	52.0
35-44	17	34.0	86.0
Above 45	7	14.0	100.0

The majority of respondents fall within the **25–34 years age group (36%)**, followed closely by those aged **35–44 years (34%)**. Respondents below 25 years constitute **16%**, while those above 45 years account for **14%**. This indicates that most participants are in their early to mid-career stages.

Table 4 Distribution of Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
UG	19	38.0	38.0
PG	30	60.0	98.0
Doctorate	1	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

In terms of education, a significant proportion of respondents hold a **postgraduate degree (60%)**, followed by **undergraduate degree holders (38%)**. Only **2%** of the respondents possess a doctoral qualification. This suggests that the sample is largely well-educated.

Table 5 Distribution of Work Experience

Work Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 1 year	2	4.0	4.0
1-5 years	17	34.0	38.0
6-10 years	26	52.0	90.0
> 10 years	5	10.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

With regard to work experience, the majority of respondents have **6–10 years of experience (52%)**, followed by those with **1–5 years (34%)**. A smaller proportion have **more than 10 years (10%)**, while only **4%** have less than one year of experience. This indicates that most respondents have moderate professional experience.

Table 6 Distribution of Job Position

Job Position	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Entry level	11	22.0	22.0

Middle level	31	62.0	84.0
Senior Level	8	16.0	100.0

Most respondents occupy **middle-level positions (62%)**, while **22%** are at the entry level and **16%** hold senior-level roles. This shows that the sample is predominantly composed of mid-level professionals.

Table 7 Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	26	52.0	52.0
Female	24	48.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with **52% male** and **48% female** respondents, ensuring fair representation of both genders.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Descriptive Statistics were computed to summarize the key characteristics of the variables, Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement, among the 50 respondents.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Micro Aggressions	50	22	42	33.72	4.882	-0.800	0.358
Work Engagement	50	30	43	34.74	2.898	0.443	-0.135

The results reveal that the mean score for Micro Aggressions is 33.72, with a standard deviation of 4.882, indicating a moderate level of variation in respondents' experiences. The values range from 22 to 42, suggesting that respondents reported varying levels of Micro Aggressions. The skewness value of -0.800 indicates a slight negative skew, meaning that more respondents reported relatively higher levels of micro-aggressions, while the kurtosis value (0.358) suggests a distribution close to normal.

For Work Engagement, the mean score is 34.74, with a standard deviation of 2.898, indicating relatively lower variability compared to Micro Aggressions. The scores range from 30 to 43, showing that respondents generally exhibit moderate to high levels of work engagement. The skewness value of 0.443 indicates a slight positive skew, suggesting that more respondents reported moderately lower engagement levels, while the kurtosis value (-0.135) indicates a distribution that is approximately normal.

Objective 2

Correlation Analysis

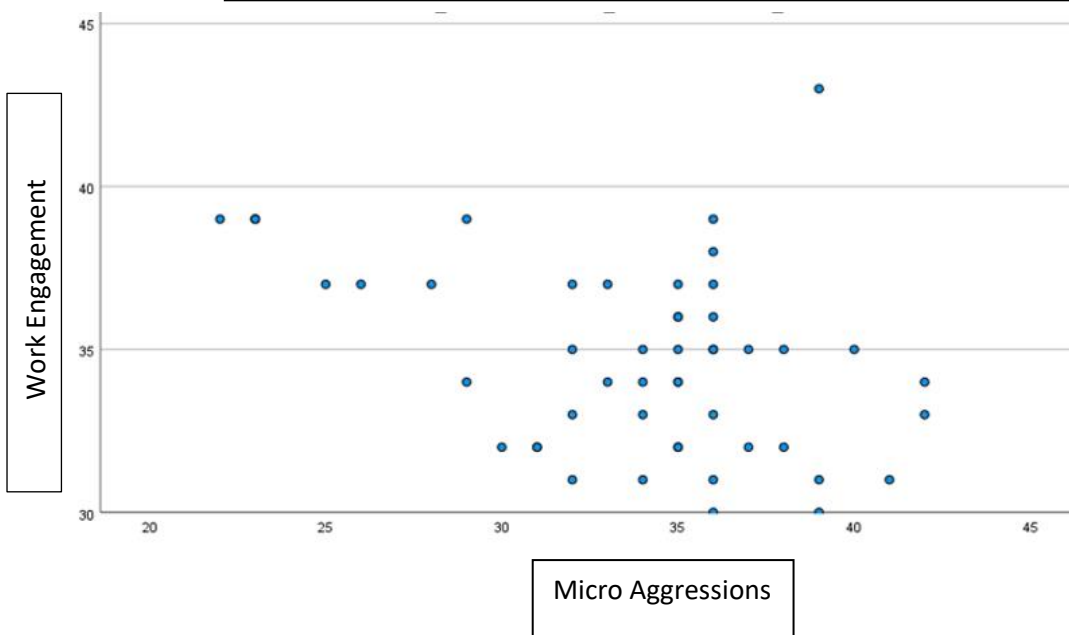
The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between **Micro Aggressions** and **Work Engagement** among IT employees.

Table 9 Correlation

Correlation			
		Total MA	Total_WE
Micro Aggressions	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.449
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.001
	N	50	50
Work Engagement	Pearson Correlation	-0.449	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	
	N	50	50

Figure 1

Scatter Plot of Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement



The results indicate the correlation coefficient $r = -0.449$, which shows a **moderate negative relationship** between the two variables. This implies that as Micro Aggressions increase, Work Engagement tends to decrease among IT employees. The significance value ($p = 0.001$) is less than 0.01, indicating that the relationship is **statistically significant at the 1% level**. With a sample size of 50 respondents, the findings provide sufficient evidence to conclude that there exists a meaningful and inverse association between Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement.

Regression Analysis

Regression Analysis was performed to examine the influence of Micro Aggressions on Work Engagement among IT employees. In this analysis, Micro Aggressions were considered as the independent variable, while Work Engagement was treated as the dependent variable. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the extent to which Micro Aggressions predict Work Engagement and to assess the significance of this relationship. The results of the Regression analysis are presented in the following tables.

Table 10 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	0.449	0.202	0.185	3.037

The model summary table presents the overall fit of the regression model used to assess the influence of Micro Aggressions on Work Engagement. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.449$) indicates a moderate level of association between the variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.202$) reveals that **20.2% of the variation in Work Engagement** is explained by Micro Aggressions. The adjusted R^2 value (**0.185**) is slightly lower, suggesting that the model maintains reasonable explanatory power without over fitting. The standard error of the estimate (**2.724**) indicates an acceptable level of prediction accuracy. Overall, the model demonstrates a moderate but meaningful ability to explain changes in Work Engagement based on Micro Aggressions.

Table 11 ANOVA

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	89.937	1	89.937	12.118	0.001 ^b
Residual	356.243	48	7.422		
Total	446.180	49			

The ANOVA table evaluates the overall significance of the regression model. The results show that the model is statistically significant, with an **F-value of 12.118** and a **p-value of 0.001**, which is less than 0.01. This indicates that the regression model provides a significantly better fit than a model with no predictors. In other words, Micro Aggressions significantly contribute

to explaining variations in Work Engagement. Thus, the model is considered valid and suitable for further interpretation.

Table 12 Coefficients

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	43.777	2.715		16.122	0.000
Micro Aggressions	-.277	0.080	-0.449	-3.481	0.001

The coefficients table provides insight into the individual contribution of Micro Aggressions to Work Engagement. The constant (intercept) value is **43.777** and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), representing the expected level of Work Engagement when Micro Aggressions are zero. The regression coefficient for Micro Aggressions is $B = -0.277$, indicating that for every one-unit increase in micro-aggressions, work engagement decreases by **0.277 units**. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = -0.449$) reflects a moderate negative effect. The p-value (**0.001**) confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. These results clearly demonstrate that micro-aggressions have a **significant negative influence** on work engagement among IT employees.

Managerial Implications

The findings from the Correlation Analysis reveal that there is a **moderate and statistically significant negative relationship** between Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement among IT employees in Kerala. The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.449$) indicates that as experiences of Micro Aggressions increase, the level of Work Engagement tends to decrease. The significance level ($p = 0.001$) further confirms that this relationship is not due to chance and is significant at the 1% level. This result is consistent with theoretical expectations and existing research, which suggest that Micro Aggressions act as subtle but persistent stressors at the workplace. Such negative experiences can lead to reduced psychological well-being and reduced commitment at work. As a result, employees who frequently encounter Micro Aggressions are likely to exhibit lower levels of Engagement in their roles.

Although the relationship is moderate, it highlights the importance of addressing micro-aggressions within organizational settings. The findings suggest that reducing micro-aggressive behaviours can contribute to improving employee engagement. However, since the correlation is not very strong, it also indicates that other factors—such as organizational culture, leadership support, and job satisfaction—may additionally influence work engagement.

The results of the Regression Analysis clearly indicate that Micro Aggressions have a **significant and negative influence on Work Engagement** among IT employees. The

correlation coefficient ($R = 0.449$) and coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.202$) suggest that Micro Aggressions explain **20.2% of the variation in Work Engagement**, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. The ANOVA results further confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 12.118$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that the model provides a good fit to the data.

The negative regression coefficient ($B = -0.277$) reveals that an increase in Micro Aggressions leads to a **decrease in work engagement**, emphasizing the detrimental impact of such experiences at the workplace. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that Micro Aggressions contribute to psychological distress, reduced motivation, and lower levels of employee involvement. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = -0.449$) also indicates a moderate effect size, emphasizing that Micro Aggressions are an important predictor of Work Engagement.

Although the model explains a meaningful portion of the variance, the remaining **79.8% of variation** in Work Engagement may be attributed to other factors such as organizational support, leadership style, job satisfaction, and organizational culture. Therefore, while Micro Aggressions play a significant role, they are not the only determinant of Work Engagement. The findings of this study could be related to the interpretations of Nadal et al. (2015), that frequent Micro Aggressions toward persons with disabilities may result in reduced psychological safety, increased stress, and poorer job outcomes. Their repetitive nature can reinforce existing biases and stereotypes that further marginalise already disadvantaged groups.

Age-based Micro Aggressions, or Ageism, include subtle comments or behaviors that convey stereotypes about competence, adaptability, or relevance. These Micro Aggressions may affect both younger and older adults, leading to decreased belonging.

Recommendations

- As per the Micro Aggression Theory, Micro Aggressions may occur due to lack of awareness regarding the potential impact of such comments or behavior. Sensitivity training and training on unconscious biases and stereotypes at all levels of the organization, could address the issue.
- Reverse Mentoring could be implemented as a collaborative learning approach to exchange constructive feedback and appreciate diversity.
- D. W. Sue, who popularized the term Micro Aggressions, introduces in the 2020 edition of his book with Lisa Spanierman and in a 2021 book with his doctoral students, the concept of **Micro Interventions** as potential solutions to Micro Aggressions. Micro Interventions are small, deliberate and immediate actions taken to address problematic behaviors such as Micro Aggressions. They are practical tools used in workplaces, institutions and social settings to promote inclusion and psychological safety.

Limitations of the Study

- The findings of the study may be limited by self-report bias, wherein respondents provide socially desirable responses.
- The cross-sectional design of the study, collected at a single point in time, restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement.
- Cultural sensitivity in interpreting perceptions of Micro Aggressions may be subjective,

owing to cultural norms and social conditioning, particularly in the Indian context.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Contribution of the Research

The findings of this study, consistent with the theoretical framework and existing research, suggest that Micro Aggressions act as subtle but consistent stressors at the workplace. Negative experiences related to Micro Aggressions could lead to reduced emotional well-being and feelings of disconnect at work. As a result, employees who frequently encounter Micro Aggressions are likely to exhibit lower levels of Work Engagement in their roles.

Scope for future research

Future research could examine the impact of mediating or moderating variables such as contextual and organizational variables on the relationship between Micro Aggressions and Work Engagement. The relevance and impact of Micro Aggressions in different sectors and different regions could be assessed.

Conclusion

Micro Aggressions arise from unconscious prejudices which manifest consciously or unconsciously through daily interactions. Although apparently harmless to observers, they are classified as a form of subtle discrimination, comparable to covert discrimination such as racism. As the prefix “micro” indicates, these aggressions occur in such a subtle manner, that it is often difficult to describe. Awareness regarding Micro Aggressions and their detrimental impact, coping mechanisms as well as intervention strategies could serve to minimize the occurrence of Micro Aggressions in all forms as well as their adverse consequences.

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