



Non-Neutral Counseling and Guidance Services: Understanding Forms of Gender Microaggressions in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Gender microaggressions within counseling services are frequently challenging to detect due to their subtle or indirect nature, often remaining unnoticed by both counselors and clients. Despite their seemingly minor nature, these microaggressions contribute to a non-neutral therapeutic environment, adversely impacting the comfort and psychological well-being of individuals, especially within the inherent power asymmetries between counselors and students. This study employs a case study methodology to explore the various manifestations of gender microaggressions in high school guidance and counseling settings. Data were gathered via in-depth interviews and observations involving two counselors and six students. Analytical procedures were guided by microaggression theory, categorizing behaviors into microinsults, Microassaults, and microinvalidations. The results reveal that gender microaggressions are expressed through stereotypical gender roles, neglect of students' emotional experiences, and the use of gender-biased language. This research significantly advances the discourse on gender awareness in counseling practices and emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive training among counseling professionals to foster a more inclusive environment conducive to students' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Gender Microaggressions; Multicultural Counseling; Social Justice Counseling; Gender Bias; Counselor-Counselee Communication

ABSTRAK

Mikroagresi *gender* dalam layanan konseling sering kali sulit diidentifikasi karena cenderung muncul dalam bentuk yang halus atau tidak langsung, bahkan tidak disadari oleh pihak

yang terlibat. Meskipun tampak sepele, mikroagresi ini dapat menciptakan lingkungan yang tidak netral, memengaruhi kenyamanan dan kesejahteraan psikologis individu, terutama dalam dinamika kekuasaan antara konselor dan siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk mikroagresi *gender* yang terjadi dalam layanan bimbingan dan konseling di sekolah menengah dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi terhadap dua konselor dan enam siswa. Analisis data dilakukan dengan merujuk pada teori mikroagresi yang mengklasifikasikan mikroagresi menjadi *microinsult*, *microassault*, dan *microinvalidation*. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mikroagresi *gender* muncul dalam bentuk stereotip peran *gender*, pengabaian perasaan siswa, dan bahasa yang bias *gender*. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting untuk meningkatkan kesadaran *gender* dalam layanan bimbingan dan konseling serta mendorong perlunya pelatihan sensitif *gender* bagi praktisi konseling, guna menciptakan ruang yang lebih inklusif dan mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis siswa.

Kata kunci: Mikroagresi *Gender*; Konseling Multibudaya; Konseling Keadilan Sosial; Bias *Gender*; Komunikasi Konselor-Konseli

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counseling services play a pivotal role in fostering the holistic development of students, encompassing academic, personal, social, and career domains. In senior high schools, counselors are instrumental in facilitating students' self-understanding, decision-making, and coping strategies amidst adolescent challenges (Sa'adah & Rofiqah, 2023; Sabila, 2024). Counselors are expected to deliver equitable, objective, and culturally sensitive services tailored to the diverse characteristics of students (Akdemir, 2023). Nonetheless, the ideal of unbiased counseling is frequently compromised by the influence of cultural norms, social conventions, and implicit biases, particularly concerning gender dynamics (Robinson-Wood, 2016). These challenges underscore the increasing relevance of addressing gender issues within counseling relationships.

One frequently overlooked form of bias is gender microaggressions, defined as subtle, often unconscious discriminatory acts that carry significant psychological effects for recipients (Sue et al., 2007). Such microaggressions manifest in verbal and nonverbal interactions between counselors and students, including the marginalization of female

students' emotions, reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles, and biased language use (Kim & Meister, 2023). Although subtle, cumulative exposure to these behaviors may induce discomfort, mistrust, and psychological distress among students (Ogunyemi et al., 2020), rendering it critical to comprehend their presence within counseling contexts that ideally promote neutrality and inclusivity.

For instance, female students may receive less academically challenging guidance compared to male peers, while male students might suppress emotional support-seeking due to hegemonic notions of masculinity. Such incidents, often dismissed as trivial or inadvertent, contribute to students feeling misunderstood or marginalized, potentially diminishing their engagement in counseling (Irawan et al., 2024). These dynamics necessitate critical scrutiny of how gender stereotypes shape counseling interactions.

The inherently subtle and frequently unrecognized nature of gender microaggressions poses significant barriers to providing impartial and effective counseling support. This issue is particularly salient in educational settings where counselors may unknowingly perpetuate entrenched social biases (Tremblay, 2002). Hence, augmenting counselor awareness and competence in identifying and mitigating gender microaggressions is imperative to fostering inclusive counseling environments.

Gender microaggressions within educational institutions mirror broader societal power imbalances between men and women. Counselors lacking gender awareness risk reinforcing stereotypes, such as steering female students towards traditionally "feminine" fields or disregarding the emotional expressions of male students (Dhiman, 2023; Meyer, 2015). Aligning with Nadal et al. (2011), such microaggressions reflect dominant sociocultural paradigms that marginalize minority experiences, leading to feelings of invalidation in spaces meant to be supportive. This underscores how insufficient gender sensitivity exacerbates existing inequities.

Such imbalances disrupt the counseling alliance, which ideally rests on empathy, acceptance, and nonjudgmental attitudes. Capodilupo et al. (2010) document that women and gender-nonconforming individuals commonly encounter microaggressions within professional and educational contexts. Counselors' language, listening behaviors, and nonverbal cues may inadvertently convey bias, impeding student openness and willingness

to engage in counseling (Tremblay, 2002). Addressing these issues is fundamental to developing gender-responsive counseling frameworks.

Despite increased advocacy for gender justice in education, implementation within guidance and counseling remains constrained by structural and cultural barriers. Many counselors lack formal training on gender equity and often do not recognize microaggressions as significant psychological phenomena (Nuraini, 2022a, 2022b). Spellman et al. (2022) found that school counselors in many developing countries possess limited gender competence, increasing the risk of undetected microaggressions. Empirical research in Samarinda confirms the prevalence of gender microaggressions in both secondary and tertiary educational settings (Irawan, 2022; Irawan et al., 2023), highlighting the need for further exploration of gender awareness in counseling quality.

This complexity is amplified in patriarchal school systems where male emotional expression is stigmatized and female academic success is exceptionalized (Durosaro, 2016). Absent critical consciousness, counselors may inadvertently perpetuate these inequalities, affecting both counselor-student rapport and long-term identity formation (Ali & Sichel, 2014; Ecclestone, 2007). These realities mandate enhanced gender-sensitivity training for counselors to address sociocultural influences in their practice.

Previous research has documented gender microaggressions across various domains, including workplaces (Basford et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2023), general education (Lester et al., 2016; Ogunyemi et al., 2020), and healthcare settings (Periyakoil et al., 2020). However, a notable research gap exists regarding gender microaggressions specifically in secondary education counseling. Most studies focus on overt discrimination or bias in classrooms, with minimal attention to subtle, unconscious microaggressions in private counseling interactions. Addressing this gap is crucial for enhancing guidance and counseling effectiveness.

By examining gender microaggressions in secondary school counseling sessions, this study offers novel insights into how implicit biases and gender expectations shape counselor-student interactions. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how subtle discrimination may undermine counseling neutrality and inclusiveness. Focusing on secondary schools in Samarinda, Indonesia, this research uniquely enriches the global discourse by providing a localized perspective contrasting with predominantly Western-

based studies. Through qualitative methods including observation and interviews with counselors and students, the study underscores the tangible effects of often invisible gender biases. It advocates for gender-sensitive training to enhance counseling quality. Consequently, elucidating the emergence of gender microaggressions in high school counseling is essential for advancing equitable educational practices.

This investigation not only contributes to academic literature on educational microaggressions but also informs strategies to cultivate gender competence among guidance and counseling practitioners. Given the critical role of counseling in student psychological well-being, understanding and mitigating gender microaggressions is vital for fostering inclusive, equitable learning environments. Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze manifestations of gender microaggressions within guidance and counseling services in secondary schools.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach to investigate the phenomenon of gender microaggressions within guidance and counseling services at high schools in Samarinda City (Hancock et al., 2021). The case study method was selected due to its capacity to provide an in-depth exploration of subtle and often unconscious gender microaggressions in secondary school counseling contexts. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of counselors' and students' experiences, generating rich qualitative data essential for understanding the nuanced power dynamics and interpersonal interactions that contribute to gender microaggressions (Baskarada, 2014). The procedural flow of this research is illustrated in Figure 1.

The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and audio recording devices. Data collection comprised two main stages: non-interventionist participatory observations of counseling interactions and subsequent in-depth interviews with participants. Observations occurred during regular counseling sessions, focusing on verbal and nonverbal behaviors indicative of gender microaggressions, such as the use of gender-biased language, reinforcement of gender role stereotypes, disregard for emotional experiences, and communication patterns involving

interruption or dominance by counselors. These data were meticulously documented through field notes and structured observation sheets.

Following observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify and deepen understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences. Interviews with counselors explored their awareness of gender equality issues and communicative practices within counseling sessions, while interviews with students focused on their comfort, acceptance, and perceptions of counselors' behaviors. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded for transcription and detailed analysis.

The interview guide was specifically developed based on the gender microaggression frameworks proposed by Sue et al. (2007) and Nadal et al. (2011), adapted to the Indonesian secondary education context. Complementary to this, a participatory observation sheet was utilized to capture verbal and nonverbal behaviors, including facial expressions, intonation, and language choices that reflect gender bias or stereotypes. The observation instrument employed behavioral categories grounded in prior literature, facilitating systematic and objective data collection. Key parameters assessed were the forms, frequency, and contextual circumstances of gender microaggressions within guidance and counseling services at the high school level. Specifically, the research focused on: (1) types of gender microaggressions, (2) participant responses, and (3) interactional contexts of occurrence.

Participants were purposively sampled to ensure relevance and representativeness concerning the research aims. Purposive sampling was employed to target individuals with direct exposure to gender microaggressions, thereby enhancing the richness and relevance of the data. This technique is effective for eliciting specific experiential insights and perspectives pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation. The sample included two groups: guidance counselors and students from several high schools with active counseling programs. Inclusion criteria for counselors required at least two years of school counseling experience and willingness to participate in observations and interviews. Students were eligible if they had engaged in at least one counseling session during the prior academic year and consented to share their experiences. Details of participants are provided in Table 1.

Data were analyzed thematically, guided by the theoretical frameworks of gender microaggressions by Sue et al. (2007) and Nadal et al. (2011). To ensure validity, data triangulation was conducted by comparing observational and interview data for consistency. NVivo software facilitated systematic coding and organization of qualitative data. Moreover, member checking was performed by sharing interpreted findings with participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of reported experiences.



Figure 1. Flowchart of Research Stages

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

No.	Participant Type	Participant Name	Gender	Age	Experience in Counseling Services	School
1	Guidance Counselor (Counselor)	Mrs. R	Female	35	5 years	High School A
2	Guidance Counselor (Counselor)	Mr. A	Male	40	8 years	High School B
3	Student	D	Female	16	2 counseling sessions	High School A
4	Student	B	Male	17	3 counseling sessions	High School B
5	Student	A	Female	16	1 counseling sessions	High School A
6	Student	F	Male	17	2 counseling sessions	High School B
7	Student	C	Female	16	1 counseling sessions	High School A
8	Student	R	Male	15	3 counseling sessions	High School B

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings center on the identification of gender microaggressions in counseling interactions, alongside participants' responses and interpretations. Thematic analysis was guided by the microaggression frameworks of Sue et al. (2007) and Nadal et al. (2011), categorizing these microaggressions into microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. Each theme is elaborated with direct participant quotations to substantiate the interpretations.

Gender Bias in Counseling Guidance and Responses

The primary finding indicates that gender microaggressions most frequently manifest as reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes during advice-giving, decision-making, and counselor responses. Observations of two counseling sessions and interviews with ten students revealed counselors' gendered perceptions influencing their interactions. For example, female students were often steered toward careers deemed "feminine" such as culinary arts or nursing, while male students were encouraged toward "masculine" fields like engineering or information technology. This reflects a microinsult that perpetuates restrictive gender roles and constrains students' academic and career aspirations.

One female participant recounted expressing interest in mechanical engineering but being told the field was "unsuitable for women" and "difficult to compete with men," underscoring how counseling practices can perpetuate limiting gender norms and instill self-doubt. Additionally, microinvalidations targeting emotional expression were observed; for instance, a male student was discouraged from showing vulnerability with comments implying men should be emotionally stoic. This reinforced toxic masculinity and led the student to feel unheard and reluctant to seek further counseling.

Another counselor indirectly invalidated gender nonconformity by labeling a female student with masculine traits as a "tomboy" and suggesting she conform more to femininity for better acceptance. Though casually expressed, this comment undermined the student's sense of identity safety, exemplifying microaggressions that marginalize gender diversity. Furthermore, language in counseling sessions contained implicit gender biases, with terms like "real man" and "good woman" conveying normative expectations that alienated students who did not conform.

Importantly, counselors appeared unaware of these biases, indicating microaggressions stemmed from internalized societal values and a lack of gender sensitivity training. This unconscious perpetuation of gender microaggressions challenges the ideal of counseling as a neutral, supportive space, emphasizing the critical need for enhanced gender competence among secondary school counselors.

Lack of Reflective Awareness of Gender Microaggressions Among Counselors

A second significant finding is counselors' limited reflective awareness of their own gender microaggressions, impeding equitable counseling practices. Interviews revealed counselors believed their guidance was aligned with social norms and student welfare, yet failed to recognize implicit gender biases. For instance, one counselor claimed advice was based solely on student benefit, not gender, yet acknowledged that societal gender expectations influenced some judgments, such as deeming nursing more appropriate for women.

No formal reflective mechanisms or supervision related to gender equity were reported. Counselors primarily relied on intuition and personal experience without explicit gender-sensitive frameworks, allowing microaggressions to persist unchecked. This deficit in awareness detrimentally impacted students' counseling experiences. Some students expressed discomfort discussing gender or identity issues due to perceived lack of understanding or acceptance from counselors.

These findings highlight the urgent need for systematic gender sensitivity training for counselors. Such training can increase their awareness of social power dynamics and help reduce bias during counseling interactions. Ultimately, this will create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

Microinsult

Microinsult refers to subtle or indirect comments or actions that harm the recipient, often without the perpetrator's awareness (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Although seemingly trivial or unintentional, microinsults can have significant impacts on the recipient, particularly by limiting opportunities and personal development (Sue, 2010). This form of microaggression often emerges from the reinforcement of gender stereotypes that restrict individuals from realizing their potential based on interests or talents, rather than being constrained by socially internalized gender roles (Kim & Meister, 2023).

In this study, several examples of microinsults were identified in counseling interactions between counselors and students, especially related to career guidance and emotional expression. One example involved the counselor's tendency to direct female students toward academic or career choices considered "feminine" or "gentle." For instance, Counselor Mrs. R suggested to D, a female student, majors such as culinary arts, nursing, or accounting, arguing that these options were more "suitable" for the "natural traits of women." Conversely, male students such as participant B were frequently directed toward majors traditionally associated with masculinity, such as engineering or automotive studies, with the justification that these fields required more "logic" and "strength."

This example clearly illustrates a microinsult, as the counselor inadvertently reinforces traditional gender roles and limits students' potential based on their gender. Directing female students exclusively toward career paths deemed appropriate for women and male students toward those expected of men severely restricts students' freedom to explore their potential in other areas. Consequently, this limits their ability to develop broader interests and perpetuates gender inequality in education. Career choices should be free from gender influence, allowing students to pursue paths aligned with their interests and talents without being burdened by narrow social stereotypes.

Another example of microinsult occurred when A, a female student, expressed interest in mechanical engineering. The counselor dismissed A's interest by stating that the field was "not suitable for women" and would make it "hard to compete with men." This comment not only undermined women's capabilities in technical fields but also instilled a sense of inferiority regarding career options that deviate from societal gender norms. Such statements indirectly limit female students' career opportunities, which should be free from gender bias. A perceived that her aspiration to pursue engineering was questioned solely based on her gender, which should not constrain academic or professional potential.

Furthermore, microinsults were evident in counselors' responses to the emotional expressions of male students. For example, F, a male student, expressed concerns about family pressures, but the counselor responded by stating he "needed to be stronger because men shouldn't be overly emotional." This response implied that intense or sensitive emotional expressions are incompatible with masculine identity. The comment belittled F's feelings and pressured him to conform to masculine norms that demand strength and

discourage vulnerability. Such dynamics inhibit F's ability to express himself openly in a counseling setting, where emotional openness should be respected.

The microinsults identified in this study reinforce social norms that constrain students' career choices and personal development based on gender. Counselors, often unknowingly, uphold traditional gender roles that deem women suitable only for "soft" fields and men for "strong" or "technical" domains. When students are guided according to these stereotypes, their freedom to explore interests and potentials independently is significantly curtailed, thereby hindering their aspirations and exacerbating societal gender inequalities.

Microinsults can also damage students' self-esteem (Martin, 2018). When individuals perceive that their choices or emotions are restricted by narrow gender norms, their capacity to realize their full potential is compromised (Sprow et al., 2021). Moreover, these behaviors intensify gender inequality within educational environments, which should be inclusive spaces for all students regardless of gender (Ogunyemi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the psychological and emotional ramifications of *microinsults* extend beyond immediate interactions, potentially contributing to long-term consequences such as decreased motivation, heightened anxiety, and diminished self-efficacy among students (Blume, 2022; Blume et al., 2012). Repeated exposure to such subtle biases may hinder students' academic engagement and overall well-being, underscoring the urgency of addressing these issues in educational settings.

Equally important is the role of counselor awareness and professional training. Implementing comprehensive gender-sensitivity and *cultural competence* programs can enhance counselors' ability to recognize and mitigate *microinsults*, thereby fostering a more equitable and supportive counseling environment (Sackett & Jenkins, 2019; Smith et al., 2017). Additionally, differentiating *microinsults* from related forms of *microaggressions*, such as *microassaults* and *microinvalidations*, provides a nuanced understanding of how these behaviors collectively influence students' experiences and identity development (Sue, 2010).

The socio-cultural context, including prevailing patriarchal norms and localized gender expectations, further shapes the manifestation and impact of *microinsults* in counseling, indicating the need for culturally adapted interventions (Barrera et al., 2017; Soto et al., 2018). From a policy perspective, the findings advocate for the integration of

gender equity principles into counselor education curricula and institutional policies to dismantle systemic biases. Practical strategies, such as reflective supervision and ongoing bias-awareness workshops, are recommended to empower counselors to challenge ingrained stereotypes effectively.

Moreover, applying social identity theory elucidates how *microinsults* disrupt students' self-concept and group belonging, which are critical for academic resilience and career exploration (Anderson et al., 2020). Methodologically, employing mixed-methods approaches may enhance the detection and understanding of *microinsults*, combining quantitative measures of bias with qualitative insights into personal narratives.

Finally, acknowledging the diversity of gender identities, including non-binary and transgender students, is essential to ensuring that counseling practices are inclusive and responsive to all individuals, as these populations may experience unique forms of *microinsults* not captured in traditional binary frameworks (Barnes et al., 2020; McCullough et al., 2017).

Microassault

Microassault is a more explicit and intentional form of microaggression, although perpetrators often fail to recognize their actions as such (Sue et al., 2007). Unlike microinsults, which are subtler, Microassaults manifest as comments or behaviors that directly insult or demean an individual's gender identity. These acts tend to be more overt and frequently involve criticisms of gender expressions that deviate from prevailing social norms. Despite the directness of their impact, perpetrators may remain unaware of the harm caused (Gartner et al., 2020).

In this study, several instances of Microassaults were observed in interactions between counselors and students, particularly concerning students' gender expressions deemed unconventional. One example occurred when Counselor Mr. A referred to C, a female student exhibiting masculine traits, as a "*tomboy*" and suggested that she "be more feminine to be better accepted." Although conveyed in a seemingly casual tone, this comment explicitly judged C's self-expression as inconsistent with traditional feminine norms. The use of the term "*tomboy*" implies that C's appearance was regarded as incorrect or misaligned with societal expectations for women. By advising C to appear more feminine,

the counselor directly pressured her to alter her appearance or self-expression in order to gain social acceptance.

Such remarks can induce insecurity in students whose gender expression diverges from socially accepted norms. For C, hearing this comment may provoke feelings of rejection regarding her gender identity and heighten discomfort in authentic self-expression. This microassault generates tension between her true self and the identity imposed by societal expectations, potentially undermining her self-confidence and restricting genuine expression within an environment that should be safe and inclusive.

Additionally, another microassault was identified during an interaction where F, a male student, shared feelings of pressure related to family conflict. The counselor responded by advising F to “be stronger because men shouldn’t be too emotional.” This statement reflects norms associated with toxic masculinity, which discourage men from expressing emotions or showing vulnerability. By interpreting F’s emotional expression as incompatible with male roles, the counselor inadvertently reinforces an ideology that restricts men’s freedom to openly share their feelings. Similar to C’s experience, this advice may cause F to feel that his emotions are undervalued or unaccepted, compelling conformity to rigid social expectations of masculine strength and emotional stoicism.

The psychological impact of such Microassaults is profound, especially for students whose gender expressions do not conform to societal norms (Irawan, 2025). When students’ authentic expressions—whether in appearance, behavior, or emotion—are criticized or negatively labeled, they risk experiencing insecurity and discomfort. Students with non-conventional gender identities, such as C and F, may feel marginalized or pressured to conform, which can impede personal development and diminish long-term self-confidence (Periyakoil et al., 2020).

Microassaults serve to reinforce rigid gender norms and constrain students’ freedom to express their identities authentically (Hansen-Osborne, 2023). When counselors make direct judgments or recommendations regarding students’ gender expression, they not only demean the individual but also hinder development in environments that should promote freedom of expression. The consequences of these Microassaults extend beyond immediate feelings of humiliation to engender doubts about abilities and identity, which may influence students’ life choices in the future (Nadal et al., 2014).

Microinvalidation

Microinvalidation is a form of microaggression characterized by the denial or negation of an individual's feelings, experiences, or identity, particularly regarding gender (Sue et al., 2007). Unlike microinsults, which typically reinforce stereotypes, or Microassaults, which are more overt, Microinvalidation tends to be subtler and often unnoticed by the perpetrator. Nevertheless, its impact is especially detrimental, as individuals subjected to microinvalidation may feel that their emotions or identities are unacknowledged or invalid, leading to diminished self-esteem and obstructed personal development (Iswari et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2021).

In this study, microinvalidation was evident in counselor-student interactions, especially concerning emotional expression and career choices that diverged from prevailing gender norms. One example occurred during a counseling session between F, a male student, and a counselor. F described the emotional pressure he experienced due to family conflicts, to which the counselor responded that F needed to "be stronger because men shouldn't be too emotional." This remark clearly minimized F's emotional expression, which deserved respect and validation within the counseling context. The response reflects norms associated with *toxic masculinity*, which discourage men from displaying vulnerability or openly expressing emotions.

By providing such a response, the counselor not only disregarded F's feelings but also reinforced prescriptive norms dictating that men must avoid vulnerability. This message may have led F to perceive his emotions as invalid or inconsistent with societal expectations for masculinity. Consequently, this microinvalidation undermines the essential validation process in counseling and may cause F to feel isolated or undervalued in expressing himself. Such an outcome can deter the student from future self-disclosure or seeking counseling support, potentially impeding effective intervention.

Another instance of microinvalidation was observed in an interaction with Counselor Ibu R, who asserted that professions such as caregiving and early childhood education are more appropriate for women than men. Although not expressed in an overtly derogatory manner, this statement dismisses the possibility that men may have interests or talents in these domains. Here, the counselor unconsciously responded to a male student's career

aspirations that conflicted with traditional gender stereotypes, thereby disregarding the student's potential to pursue careers based on interest rather than gender.

Comments like these diminish and negate the ambitions of male students seeking careers outside conventional gender roles, potentially restricting their exploration of more suitable career paths regardless of social expectations. The impact of such microinvalidation is that male students interested in these fields may feel their choices lack legitimacy or that they must conform to social norms that deem these careers inappropriate for their gender. This dynamic can lower their self-confidence and exacerbate existing gender inequalities by invalidating their aspirations solely due to gender.

Microinvalidation harms individuals by causing them to feel unaccepted or unappreciated in expressing their emotions or aspirations (Rosa-Davila et al., 2020). When a student's feelings or identity are ignored or invalidated based on gender alone, psychological barriers emerge that diminish motivation to discuss personal issues, both in counseling settings and everyday life (Helgeson, 2020). Within guidance and counseling, it is crucial for counselors to acknowledge and respect students' emotional expressions and life choices without confining them to rigid gender norms. Rather than rejecting or overlooking students' feelings or aspirations, counselors should prioritize creating safe spaces that enable authentic self-expression free from judgment or rejection grounded in irrelevant social standards.

This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in guidance and counseling, particularly within the context of secondary education. The findings highlight forms of gender-based microaggressions in counseling interactions and reveal their impact on service quality for students. This underscores the importance of enhancing gender awareness among counselors to foster inclusive, safe, and discrimination-free environments. Consequently, this research provides a foundation to encourage reforms in counseling practices that are more sensitive to gender issues and supports the development of policies and training programs enabling school counselors to recognize and address microaggressions in their student interactions.

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has limitations. The small sample size—two counselors and six students—may limit the representativeness of experiences. Furthermore, the study was conducted solely in Samarinda, which has socio-cultural

characteristics that may differ from other Indonesian regions. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized across diverse regional or educational contexts. Future research should expand participant diversity by involving multiple schools from various regions to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of gender-based microaggressions in secondary school counseling. Additionally, subsequent studies could evaluate the effects of gender-sensitive counselor training on awareness and service effectiveness, as well as its role in mitigating or eliminating microaggressions during counseling.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the presence of gender-based microaggressions within high school guidance and counseling services, manifesting through microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. Microinsults were identified in gender-biased career guidance, microassaults appeared in comments that demeaned students' gender expressions, and microinvalidations were evident when counselors dismissed emotional expressions, particularly from male students. These findings suggest that counselors often lack awareness of how their practices may constrain students' self-expression and aspirations. The study offers valuable insights into gender microaggressions in counseling contexts and underscores the necessity of fostering gender awareness to establish inclusive environments. However, the limited sample size and the study's focus on a single city restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research should expand participant demographics, assess counselors' gender sensitivity, and examine the effectiveness of gender equality training in mitigating microaggressions in counseling services.

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