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# MAJORITY HARASSED BY THE MINORITY? MICROAGGRESSIONS BASED ON RELIGIOSITY IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

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## Abstract

Tensions related to the presence of religion, its symbols or moral judgments in the public space are noticeable signs in many contemporary societies. Research shows an increasing level of prejudice against believers, which translates into emerging microaggressions. This phenomenon of questioning and hostility towards religion is surprisingly also the case in societies where the majority consists of religious adherents. The aim of this article is to present and analyse the research results on the extent of prejudices and manifestations of hostility towards believers in 2019 in Poland, on a representative sample of respondents. First, the religious situation in Poland will be briefly discussed, in particular the way the Poles experience religious practices. This will be followed by discussion of the most common manifestations of microaggression included in the classification proposed by David R. Hodge, and a legal analysis of the Polish penal system. Finally, we will present a hypothesis regarding the nature of these phenomena and the challenges they represent to religious freedom.

*Keywords:* freedom, discrimination, speech, religion, public space

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## 1. Introduction

In contemporary societies, the phenomenon of the marginalisation of religion in public life can be observed by the redefinition of its role in society [1]. This also includes certain behaviours towards religious believers that stem from prejudices towards or stereotypical images of believers, which in the following stages turn into acts of microaggression. These are behaviours that - although not characterised by physical violence - provide the first stage in

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expressing hostility. A response at this level may prevent further escalation of the phenomenon.

What comes as a surprise is that this phenomenon often applies to the members of majority denominations, who report a number of behaviours indicating a change in the attitude of the interviewees towards them when their religious affiliation is revealed, rather than to the members of religious minorities who usually have been the subject of studies. This change is not confined to the intellectual level, but shapes mutual references, and therefore it is important to understand its manifestations and effects. For this purpose, empirical studies were conducted on a representative sample of the Polish society.

After short presentation of the existing research on the treatment of religious adherents in Poland, the religious situation in the country will be briefly discussed, in particular the way Poles experience religious practices, based on sociological research carried out in 2019. This will be followed by discussion of the most common manifestations of microaggressions, included in the classification from the field of legal sciences, and by formulation of a hypothesis regarding the nature of these phenomena and their significance for religious freedom.

## **2. Existing research on the treatment of religious followers in Poland**

In the 1990s and early 2000s the question of the presence of various religious denominations in Poland and their treatment by society drew interest of several researchers and opinion poll centres [2-10]. What is characteristic, however, is that those analyses were focused on the attitudes towards religious minorities, especially new religious movements. It seems it was taken for granted that in order to be potentially treated differently by the rest of the society one had to be a member of a minority religion, and that the factor that determines a person's relations with others is his or her minority status, not religious affiliation as such. The other characteristic of this research was its concentration on the attitudes prevailing in the society, not on the perceived treatment from the point of view of the religious followers themselves.

Later, however, the issue of the treatment of the followers of various denominations have drawn surprisingly little attention from academics analysing the Polish religious landscape. In late 2000s and 2010s with regard to discrimination and attitudes towards members of different social groups, researchers have turned their attention to such questions as gender and sexual orientation or migrants - that is, those issues that have been prominent in the public discourse. The treatment of religious followers became a question of relatively little interest among scholars. The exception are the attitudes towards Muslims [11-14], which is another issue often raised by the media, though in case of Poland it is in the context of European events rather than a national situation, due to the scarcity of the followers of Islam in Poland.

Still, the question of the treatment of members of religious groups and attitudes towards them has been undertaken in the last 15 years, for example within the frame of in-depth and qualitative research on a given locality or denomination [15]. Especially abundant is the literature on legal provisions for ensuring equal treatment of religious followers and preventing discrimination on religious grounds, also in the context of Poland's belonging to the European Union [16-20]. What is notable, however, is that the issue of actual or perceived discrimination of religious followers is currently researched mainly within the frame of projects specifically commissioned by government agencies (Polish or foreign), other political bodies or NGOs. One of the most extensive was the project *Equal Treatment as a Standard of Good Governance*, carried out by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the Centre for Evaluation and Analysis of Public Policies of the Jagiellonian University and the Warsaw School of Economics. As this mainly quantitative research has shown, belonging to the denomination other than Catholicism is one of the rarest reasons for experiencing mistreatment from other members of the society, while the main causes for such mistreatment seem to be related to gender and age. Noteworthy, the researchers also took into account the specialists' opinions, pointing to the mistreatment of deeply religious Catholics in Poland [21], and their project proved that the personal feeling of being mistreated due to one's Catholicism is more widespread than perceptions of mistreatment associated with belonging to a non-Catholic denomination or religious tradition. Additionally, one third of the respondents indicated that they personally know someone mistreated due to his or her religious affiliation or irreligiousness.

Another notable study from the point of view of our analyses was the project *Labor Market and the Equal Treatment on Religious Grounds*, commissioned by the Commissioner for the Human Rights and carried out in 2017 by the Institute of the Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw [22]. This research illustrated that discrimination at the workplace on religious grounds may concern representatives of both minority and majority denominations, since "the factor that increases the risk of discrimination is strong identification with given religion and revealing [one's] own religious commitment at work, even if one is a member of a dominant religion" [22].

Another area being researched is the issue of religious discrimination at schools, especially in terms of the organization of Catholic catechesis and lessons of ethics or other religious denominations. These projects in turn are usually commissioned by the NGOs and focus on discrimination and mistreatment experienced by members of minority religions or students with no religious affiliation [23]. However, as another project on religious freedom in Poland has shown, Catholic religious education teachers also experience various forms of microaggressions and discrimination, despite representing the majority religion [24].

All in all, the question of mistreatment of representatives of various religious denominations, including persons with no religious affiliation, remains relevant in Poland, despite being 'overshadowed' by the issue of discrimination on other grounds.

### **3. Survey and its methodological framework**

The study was conducted from November 18 to December 6, 2019, preceded by a pilot study. These studies were part of our project realized in cooperation with Polish Institute of Justice.

The selected sample  $N = 1000$  is representative of the Polish population, based on GUS data (Central Statistical Office of Poland), and its selection was based on RDD (*Random Digital Dialling*). The standard error for this sample is  $\pm 3\%$ . Computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) technicians were used in the conducted research, who utilized a standardized questionnaire.

The items in the questionnaire were posed in a specific way: they concerned the reaction toward given respondent due to his or her religiosity or the lack of it, without directly defining it. Such an approach helped to avoid biased reactions and prejudices. However, the fact that the majority of Polish citizens are believers means the research primarily reports on situations concerning this group of people. Therefore, a proper interpretation of the results requires an illumination of the religious demographics of Poles in 2019, in terms of practices of religious attitudes, their frequency and the nature of that faith expressed through a series of daily reactions, rather than in terms of declaration. Such psychological analysis of experiencing faith - indicating how the respondents feel about their religiosity and the naturalness of professing their faith - can provide the appropriate background for understanding why certain behaviours are perceived as microaggressions.

The second part of the study, which draws attention to the behavioural aspect, points to a catalogue of situations which the respondents had to face when their religiosity was at stake, can be read from this perspective. The results also provide a reference point for understanding of a certain change that arose in October 2020 after the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, followed by physical attacks - while the respondents in our study had reported such attacks only to a small extent. This shows that microaggressions do not serve as a 'safety valve', but intensify aggressive actions, and therefore disregard of or lack of response to them may lead to dangerous situations.

### **4. Current religious framework in Poland**

The conducted research provides a behavioral description of the real practices of Polish believers, and not only their intellectual identification. Therefore, the picture emerging from the study is a worthy supplement to other existing studies on the issue. At the same time, the description of how Poles

experience their own religiosity is a necessary reference point for understanding the subsequently reported manifestations of hostility towards them.

#### ***4.1. Faith in God***

Compared to research conducted by the Gallup Institute in 2012 [*Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism*, 2012, <https://www.redcresearch.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/RED-C-press-release-Religion-and-Atheism-25-7-12.pdf>], there was only a slight decrease in the religiosity of Poles in 2019. Almost 80% of Poles still declare their faith in God (or gods), of which 48.2% do not have any doubts about the existence of God. The state of religiosity of Poles is characterized not only by a high percentage of those who declare faith in the existence of God, but also by prevalence of the individual belief expressed in the statement that ‘The idea of God means a lot to me’. Roughly three-quarters of the respondents agreed with this statement. Furthermore, the religiosity of Poles is largely based on personal religious experience understood as a subjective sense of contact with a transcendent reality, as referenced by more than half of those questioned (57.6%). Therefore, nearly two-thirds of the respondents (62.2%) believe that Jesus helps them in their daily individual life, whereas 70.5% of the respondents believe that their lives are led by God (or gods).

The intimacy of the relationship with Jesus is another feature that characterizes the faith of Poles. More than three-quarters of believers agree with the statement that ‘Jesus is very close to them’, 14% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, while one in ten refused to give an unequivocal answer. The characteristic of the religiosity of Poles is also confirmed by the attitude towards the strongly negative statement ‘Jesus means nothing to me’: three-quarters of those surveyed rejected this statement (75.9%), one in ten avoided answering, while for 12.5%, Jesus does not matter.

#### ***4.2. Religious practices***

Faith and religiosity are expressed in religious practices, which include personal Bible reading, personal prayer, and participation in religious services.

##### ***4.2.1. Personal reading of the Bible***

For more than half of the Poles, the Holy Bible does not lose its relevance. However, a fairly large percentage of Poles - almost a third - unambiguously say that listening to the words of the Bible is boring, whereas just over a quarter also say the Bible is outdated.

##### ***4.2.2. Personal prayer***

The attachment and positive attitude of Poles to personal prayer demonstrate their religiosity. More than two-thirds of respondents consider

personal prayer to be a very good thing. Simultaneously, they claim prayer brings subjective benefit in their lives. Three out of four Poles surveyed clearly say that prayer brings them personal benefits in their daily life. According to 68.2% of respondents, it is not only their subjective experience, but a real belief that ‘God hears prayers’.

#### *4.2.3. Participation in services*

Participation in religious services is an important determinant of religiosity. Almost half of the respondents in Poland declare weekly visits to places of worship (church, Orthodox church, synagogue, mosque or other temple), whereas one in a hundred believers declares daily participation in services. Nearly twenty percent visit church at least once a month. One in ten Poles never visits a place of worship (10.6% of the responses). These data prove that participation in services is an important feature of religiosity for Poles who declare their faith.

The religious service attendance data correlate with personal involvement in liturgical activities. Slightly more than a quarter of respondents considered ‘services are boring’, but more than half of the believers denied this statement about participation in services. It is, however, worth noting that 35.6% of Poles believe that ‘going to Church is a waste of time’, but approximately half of the respondents do not consider participation in religious practices to be a waste of time (49.6%). It is worth concluding this brief characterization of the religiosity of Poles with respondents’ beliefs regarding the Church as an institution. For almost two-thirds of Poles (63%) ‘the Church is very important’. Conversely, just over one-fifth (21%) held the opposite opinion.

Although the overall attachment to religion is still high in Polish society, we can observe internal differentiation within the overall population of religious believers. One relatively small group is comprised of highly engaged individuals (daily service attendance, definite declaration of attachment to Church etc.). Another larger group consists of people who are more or less consistent in their religious declarations and practices. A third group declares affiliation to the Church, but does not believe in the importance of prayer, the Bible, etc. This may lead to a conclusion that although outwardly religious composition of the Polish society is more or less monolithic (86.5% report belonging to the Catholic Church), there is significant internal differentiation, based on the level of personal commitment.

## **5. Manifestations and forms of microaggressions reported by the respondents**

Reported behaviours, which form a sequence: from stereotypes and prejudices, through microaggression to discrimination, can be analysed against this background. Most of all, the respondents pay attention to microaggressions,

but the existing prejudices and discrimination that the respondents experience due to their religiosity or lack thereof are also captured in the answers.

### 5.1. Behavioural scale - theoretical framework

**Table 1.** Hodge's division of microaggressive behaviours.

<b>Type of spiritual microaggression</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Example</b>
endorsing stereotypes	Messages that play on over-generalized beliefs about spiritual groups.	<i>"He is such a catholiciban."</i>
assuming homogeneity	All believers are the think and behave alike in their given tradition; and have almost the same assumptions on certain topics.	<i>"What do you Christians think about this topic?"</i>
pathologize spirituality	When people through communication pathologize other people because of their spirituality, characterizing their rituals and opinions as sick and abnormal.	<i>„I think it is abnormal and insane when believers worship or pray to the bodies or bones of saints.“</i>
disparaging spirituality	Mocking, denigrating, or otherwise disparaging people who are members of a faith.	<i>"In a TV show, the host says: Even God agrees with me, the audience and the polls that this is the best middle-class car in 2020!"</i>
exoticizing spirituality	It also takes place through communication how certain practices of spirituality are unusual and bizarre.	<i>„I find it so unusual and bizarre when Christians walk through the city in procession behind the cross.“</i>
presupposing secularism	When values within secularism are set for the standard and their acceptance is expected.	<i>„There is no place for theologians and religious experts in preparing curricula for schools.“</i>
denying the existence of spiritual prejudice	There are two levels: micro and macro. The former encompass refuting bias in hers own thinking (on a personal level). The latter encompass denials of the structured and systemic bias.	Personal bias: <i>"I am not against believers, even my grandmother was a believer."</i> Systemic bias: <i>"Members of a religious group that is the majority in a particular society cannot be victims of social prejudice."</i>



As Derald Wing Sue observed, microaggressions are “everyday verbal, non-verbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate group identity or the experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.” [D. Sue, *Microaggressions: More Than Just Race*, 17.11.2010, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>] Microaggressions are not as visible and public as aggression [25-28].

Microaggressions defined this way arise, according to Richard Hanes, from bias, that is a personal judgement, often unreasoned and prejudiced outlooks [29]. Meanwhile, discrimination is an unfair treatment based on arbitrary standards or criteria. Being a highly complex and historically old phenomena, prejudice is a negative attitude, emotion, or behaviour towards individuals based on a prejudgment about those individuals with no prior knowledge or experience. Stereotyping is an over simplified prejudgment of others using physical or behavioural characteristics, usually exaggerated, that supposedly apply to every member of a given group [30].

Hodge uses the term ‘spiritual microaggressions’, developing in his article seven overlapping categories within this domain [31]. It should be noted that microaggressions can affect a specific group of believers, but also a group that includes all believers as such. Let us list (Table 1) the categories with the Hodge’s brief explanation and examples of attitudes directed against Christians in particular and believers in general provided by the authors of this paper. Hodge’s scheme provides an important understanding of the microaggression phenomenon, allowing us to better identify the presence of this phenomenon in society. Microaggressions are built upon prejudices ‘which have taken root’ in everyday opinion and often shape the behaviour of individuals and social institutions on an unconscious level.

In stressing how microaggressions are a complex and layered phenomenon, Hodge also follows Sue’s further distinction of microaggressions into verbal (directly pronounced negative and humiliating messages), behavioural (body language towards members of the target group), and environmental (the message is transmitted through social structures and imposes one’s own worldview on society as something ‘normal’) [32; S. Horvat, *Do you know how to recognize microaggressions directed at believers?*, Laboratorium Wolności Religijnej, <https://laboratoriumwolnosci.pl/en/do-you-know-how-to-recognize-microaggressions-directed-at-believers/>, accessed on 13.11.2020].

## **5.2. Microaggressions based on religiosity in Poland**

The survey consisted of 43 questions that reveal various types of behaviour towards religious people. Basing on Hodge’s work and for the

purposes of this article, we have categorized these behaviours into six groups: endorsing stereotypes, assuming homogeneity, pathologizing spirituality, disparaging spirituality, presupposing secularism, denying the existence of spiritual prejudice. We are aware, as also Hodge noted, that some categories can overlap in given experience. We have skipped one type of spiritual microaggressions that Hodge mentions (exoticizing spirituality), as it was not reported by the respondents.

With regard to the first group of microaggressions (endorsing stereotypes), over 33.5% of respondents experienced once the suggestion that religious people do not want to accept different beliefs. 6.5% experienced it more than once (Table 2). The suggestion that religious people consider themselves as better was a one-time experience for 36.1% of respondents, and happened more than one time to 6.7% of them. The belief in the intolerance of religious people was less common, as only 22.8% of respondents reported hearing this sentiment once, while 8.5% of respondents reported hearing it more than once.

**Table 2.** Endorsing stereotypes.

<b>Reported microaggression</b>	<b>Experienced once (%)</b>	<b>Experienced more than once (%)</b>
suggestion that all religious people consider themselves as better than others	36.1	6.7
suggestion that religious people do not want to accept the beliefs of other people	33.5	6.5
asking why religious people are intolerant	22.8	8.5

As far as the second type of microaggressions is concerned (assuming homogeneity) more than 63% of respondents encountered others' (assuming that religious people are all the same) and more than three-third experienced this assumption more than once (Table 3).

Over 70% of those surveyed have once met with somebody 'acting as if all believers were similar or the same'. And almost one-fifth experienced such attitude more than once in 2019.

**Table 3.** Assuming homogeneity.

<b>Reported microaggression</b>	<b>Experienced once (%)</b>	<b>Experienced more than once (%)</b>
assumption that all religious people are all the same	63.8	26.7
acting as if all believers were similar	70.3	19.4

Pathologizing spirituality was manifested only by admonishing someone for thanking God or gods for something. Such microaggression was experienced once by 50.2% of the respondents, more than once by 7.4%.

The most numerous group of microaggressions (because of the variety of behaviours) is disparaging spirituality. These types of microaggressions were noticed more than once in behaviours towards the respondents in 6.3% of the cases (teasing or nagging), 4.8% of cases (making fun of someone because of their [non]religiosity), 4.7% of cases (mocking). These three are also most often reported as ‘one-time events’ (Table 4).

The least frequent cases were ‘end up resenting (respondent) for something’, ‘hostile treatment’, ‘rejection’, ‘insulting’ which were reported as happening more than once by only 0.7% of respondents.

**Table 4.** Disparaging spirituality.

Reported microaggression	Experienced once (%)	Experienced more than once (%)
teasing/nagging	40.3	6.3
mocking	42	4.7
making fun of someone	43.5	4.8
insulting	28.8	0.7
treating not well (worse than others)	24.6	3.6
ignoring	21.7	2
end up resenting (respondent) for something	24.4	0.7
hostile treatment	26.5	0.7
unjust treatment	27.4	3.6
rejection	25	0.7
treating someone in a distanced way	19.3	4.4
speaking about someone’s religion in a negative way	33.7	1.5
expressing someone’s hate to a religious person	21.3	0.9
treatment as second-category-person	24.4	1.0
isolating	24.6	0.9

Another group of spiritual microaggressions concerns presupposing secularism (Table 5). According to our survey, the most frequent cases of it consisted in ‘assuming that a religious person has less worthy things to say than a non-religious one’ - over one-fourth of respondents experienced that microaggression more than once, and 46% of respondents noticed it once. ‘Downplaying opinion because of one’s (non)religiosity’ was experienced by 23.9% of respondents, and almost 60% of them noticed such microaggression once. The majority of respondents (66.1%) suffered from ‘refusal of opinion because of being (non)religious’ and over 12% of them experienced such attitude more than once.

**Table 5.** Presupposing secularism.

Reported microaggression	Experienced once (%)	Experienced more than once (%)
downplaying opinion because of one's (non)religiosity	58.5	23.9
assuming that a religious person has less worthy things to say than a non-religious one	46	25.2
refusal of opinion because of being (non)religious, assuming that one is (not) religious	66.1	12.1
assuming that one is (not) attending to places of worship	28.6	5
expressing one's astonishment that another person believes in God or gods	37.1	7
	50.2	7.4

Denying the existence of spiritual prejudice as a group of microaggressive experiences in the respondents' lives has appeared more than once in 8,6% answers as 'suggestions on in-comparability of negative discrimination towards religious people to non-religious discrimination', 7,2% of the answers concerned 'refusal of right to express one's complaint about discrimination' (Table 6). The last type of microaggression appears in over 50% of the responses as a one-time experience.

The rest of the reported cases in this group oscillate between 26.6 and 40.5% of 'one-time' answers and 0.7-4.3% in 'more than once' answers.

**Table 6.** Denying the existence of spiritual prejudice.

Reported microaggression	Experienced once (%)	Experienced more than once (%)
suggestion that one should not complain about (non)religious discrimination	40.5	1.9
denying that religious people encounter extra obstacles in comparison to other people	39	4.3
refusal of one's experience of religious discrimination and treatment of such discrimination as excessive	31.8	3.5
suggestions that one is overly sensitive to religious discrimination	39.5	3.8
refusal of right to express one's complaint about discrimination	52.2	7.2
suggestions that people do not suffer from discrimination these days	26.6	0.7
suggestions on in-comparability of negative discrimination towards religious people to non-religious discrimination	31.1	8.6

In order to deepen the analysis and tease out how layered the social phenomenon of microaggressions are, we have also created a table with the most common examples (Table 7) that illustrates how some of the reported microaggressions can be divided into verbal, behavioural, and environmental types.

Table 7 demonstrates the preponderance of ‘microaggressive cases’ consists of verbal microaggressions. Nevertheless, we are aware that these categories can overlap. Further on, since the survey did not give us information about the exact environmental circumstances of microaggressive behaviours, we cannot provide a more detailed analysis concerning the frequency of environmental microaggressions. Although lacking more precise data to make this distinction, this table clearly suggests there is a need for a survey that would be dedicated to environmental microaggressions in Poland that are difficult to recognize [33], but are “especially pernicious” and “particularly concerning due to their culture-shaping influence” [31].

**Table 7.** Examples of microaggressions divided into verbal, behavioural, and environmental types.

Reported microaggression	Type of spiritual microaggression (%)		I have experienced such microaggression (%)	
	A	B	once	more than once
assumption that all religious people are all the same	Assuming homogeneity	verbal	63.8	26.7
acting as if all believers were similar	Assuming homogeneity	behavioural	70.3	19.4
downplaying opinion because of one’s (non)religiosity	Presupposing secularism	verbal	58.5	23.9
assuming that religious person has less worthy things to say than non religious one	Presupposing secularism	verbal	46.0	25.2
refusal of opinion because of being (non)religious	Presupposing secularism	verbal	66.1	12.1
refusal of right to express one’s complaint about discrimination	Denying the existence of spiritual prejudices	verbal	52.2	7.2

According to Nadal, environmental microaggressions may need to be measured differently than other types of microaggressions, since these experiences manifest differently. Unlike verbal microaggressions that are

interpersonal, environmental microaggressions “represent perceptions that individuals have of the environment around them” [34].

It is important to notice the question of feeling as if one did not fit into the rest of society. 12.3% of respondents report that they have felt this way once, while only 3.9% declared experiencing such feeling more than once.

We can conclude that the majority of Poles experienced at least once some form of microaggressions on the basis of their religious affiliation and beliefs, despite the fact that - as has been shown - formally most of them belong to the same denomination. It also seems significant that the most common types of microaggression (presented in the tables above) in fact undermine a person's right to participate in public discourse and put the believers in the position of 'less valuable' members of the society.

### ***5.3. Microaggressions reported in the surveys and Polish criminal law***

It also seems reasonable to ask whether the manifestations of microaggression can be treated as fulfilling the features of prohibited acts under Polish substantive criminal law.

In the Polish Penal Code (the Act of 6 June 1997, the Penal Code (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 1444)) (hereinafter: Penal Code/PC), chapter XXIV defines offences against freedom of conscience and religion. These crimes include religious discrimination (Art. 194 PC), malicious interference in the performance of religious acts (Art. 195 PC) and offending religious feelings (Art. 196 PC). According to Art. 194 PC whoever limits a person's rights because of this person's religious affiliation or lack of a religious affiliation, is subject to a fine, the penalty of limitation of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years [35-37]. According to Art. 195 § 1 PC, whoever maliciously interferes with a public performance of a religious act of a church or another religious association having a regulated legal status, is subject to a fine, the penalty of limitation of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years. Pursuant to Article 195 §2 PC, whoever maliciously interferes with a funeral, mourning ceremonies or rites, is subject to the same penalty. Finally, in accordance with Article 196 PC whoever offends religious feelings of other persons by profaning in public an object of religious worship or a place dedicated to the public celebration of religious rites, is subject to a fine, the penalty of limitation of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years [38-40]. The presented issue deserves a separate study, at least as part of a separate scientific article. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning a few points now. In the Polish normative order, for a specific act to be classified as a prohibited act, regardless of the problem of determining the perpetrator of this act and the conditions of criminal liability, it must meet the legal definition of the prohibited act provided for in Article 115 § 1 PC.

Pursuant to this provision, a prohibited act is a behaviour with the features specified in the criminal law. The issues raised here concern the subject of protection, the objective side, the subject and the subjective side of the

prohibited act. The presented definition of micro-aggression should be taken into account, as well as the factors determining the classification of an act as a prohibited act, without presenting details here. It seems that it is not possible to categorically indicate or prejudge that religious microaggression in each case is an act prohibited under the Penal Code or that it is not. This conclusion refers to the abstract level detached from the particulars. It all depends on the specific facts and the judgement of the court, although it can be indicated that *prima facie* the vast majority of manifestations of microaggression will not constitute the basis for classifying this act as a prohibited act under the Penal Code. Nevertheless, as it has already been noted, this is a matter for a separate independent study, as the assessment of the current legislative solutions in Poland is not clear in the presented scope. To sum up, it can be indicated that the analysis of the reported microaggressions from the criminal law perspective leads to a preliminary conclusion. It seems that, in the vast majority of cases, discussed behaviour is not classified as prohibited under the Polish criminal law. This is especially concerning since studies have shown negative health issues related to microaggressions [41; G. Torino, *Center for Health Journalism*, 2017, <https://www.centerforhealthjournalism.org/2017/11/08/how-racism-and-microaggressions-lead-worse-health>]. Further on, the essence of microaggression and their scale of occurrence in society clearly determine that this phenomenon threatens the freedoms and rights of every human being. Moreover, microaggressions, despite the fact that they do not constitute prohibited acts themselves according to the Polish criminal law, may give rise to a dangerous foundation of, or even cause, prohibited acts actually penalized in Poland. For this reason, counteracting microaggressions can actually be counteracting the causes of crime both in Poland and abroad.

## 6. Conclusions

The results of the studies contribute to the understanding of the dynamism of the development of microaggressions and discrimination based on religious affiliation. Although firmly present in societies, this topic is under researched on a global level.

The presented microaggressions directed towards religious believers indicate a concerning situation regarding religious freedoms and rights, especially when it comes to the state of Poland, where the vast majority of citizens declare themselves Catholics. The criterion of religiosity still remains important to Poles; however, a social change associated with the new atheism, which tends to disparage religious belief, may be occurring. This seems to be connected to the withdrawal of the Church from certain spheres of dialogue and the handing over of the terrain; and, on the other hand, the ideologization of atheism, developed from philosophical theories. Like all social processes, also this one has its beginning, development and end: presented research and the nature of the microaggressions - which quickly take 'deep root' in society - may justify the warning that we can expect an increasing trend towards prejudice.

The reasons why various forms of microaggressions have become 'domesticated' in everyday communication and relations among citizens - which we can rightly say given the figures from this study - can be various and it is not possible to discuss them in detail in this paper. Nevertheless, we can point to certain indicators that could be analysed more broadly in other studies. Although some questions in the survey included non-religious persons with the item '(non-) religious' in the posed questions, we hold that most of the recorded microaggressions in this survey are directed towards believers. It is not necessary that all of them are perpetrated by unbelievers or members of some other religion. However, given that most of these are microaggressions motivated on the basis of one's religion and beliefs, it seems best to conclude that in most cases the perpetrators are non-believers or secular individuals. Considering the majority Poles are Catholics (86.5%), we can assume that in most cases the microaggressions target Catholics. Since there is an internal differentiation within the majority religious group (as indicated in previously), the perpetrators may also be nominal believers who only declaratively belong to the majority of believers and do not live their faith.

Based on this understanding, we can suggest a refinement to Sue's definition of a microaggression. Namely, it indicates how microaggressions in many cases suggest to the attacked that 'they do not belong with the majority group'. In this case, we see that the members of the minority group are suggesting to the members of the majority group that they do not belong to the minority group, which cultivates certain worldviews. This means that the definition of microaggression should be expanded to include the minority-toward-majority relationship.

Thinking in this direction, it is obvious that the minority is bothered by the religious worldview of the majority and that it is trying to change it with the help of microaggressions. The very tendency of the minority to change the majority is a well-known social phenomenon called 'minority influence'. Namely, it has been shown how the minority group can influence the majority group and the reshaping of the majority opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Members of the majority group - faced with a seemingly firm, provocative and unusual attitude of the members of the minority group - are surprised and then compare and question their own values with the values of the members of the minority group. After some time, this can lead to a change in the attitude of the members of the majority group [42-44].

In our case, it could be the case of the influence of the minority on the majority, with the help of various forms of microaggressions, and for the purpose of downplaying a religious attitude or worldview shaped by religion. The hypothesis certainly deserves further research that would examine the background and motivation for the existence of 'religious microaggressions'.

The question also arises as to whether this is an isolated Polish phenomenon or whether similar experiences are taking place in other predominantly Catholic countries in Europe, such as Croatia, where the



influence of a ‘vocal minority’ opposed to Christian values on the ‘silent majority’ is also often hypothesized to exist [45].

Furthermore, given the number and frequency of microaggressions, the question arises regarding the education of citizens and the legal recognition of these social pathologies. Moreover, there is a need of designing social frameworks that would promote inclusive and supportive environments, as well as providing assistance to victims of microaggressions.

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