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University students and racial discrimination: an analysis based on family income*Estudantes universitários e a discriminação racial: análise a partir da renda familiar**Estudiantes universitarios y discriminación racial: un análisis basado en la renta familiar*

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Abstract

Introduction: Racial discrimination is a complex problem that directly affects the experience of university students, impacting not only their academic performance, but also their mental health and well-being. **Objective:** To discuss the characteristics of racial discrimination and its interfaces with the family income of university students. **Methodology:** A descriptive, exploratory, cross-sectional study was conducted, with a sample of 751 university students from the state of Ceará, Brazil. The instruments used were a sociodemographic questionnaire and the discrimination experience scale. **Results:** Among the students, 36.9% had a family income of between 1 and 2 salaries. With regard to discrimination because of their race or color, those with an income of less than one minimum wage were the ones who experienced this the most, 39.9%. The place of occurrence with the highest exposure for those with an income of less than one minimum wage was school, 37.5%. **Conclusion:** The results suggest that there is a direct relationship between family income and racial discrimination: the lower the income, the greater the exposure to racial discrimination. There is an urgent need to implement strategies to protect and support those who experience racial discrimination.

Keywords: Racism; Universities; Socio-economic factors; Students.

Resumo

Introdução: A discriminação racial é um problema complexo que afeta diretamente a experiência dos estudantes universitários, impactando não apenas seu desempenho acadêmico, mas também sua saúde mental e bem-estar. **Objetivo:** discutir as características da discriminação racial e suas interfaces com a renda familiar de estudantes universitários. **Metodologia:** Estudo descritivo, exploratório e transversal, com amostra de 751 estudantes universitários do estado do Ceará, os instrumentos utilizados foram: questionário sociodemográfico e a escala de experiência de discriminação. **Resultados:** Entre os estudantes 36,9% possuem renda familiar de 1 a 2 salários. Quanto a discriminação por causa da sua raça ou cor, os que possuem renda de menos de um salário-mínimo, foram os que mais vivenciaram tal situação 39,9%. O local de ocorrência com alta exposição aos que possuem renda menor que um salário-mínimo foi a escola 37,5%. **Conclusão:** Os resultados sugerem que existe uma relação direta entre renda familiar e discriminação racial, quanto menor a renda, maior a exposição a discriminação racial. Urge a necessidade de implementação de estratégias de proteção e apoio aos que vivenciam experiências de discriminação racial.

Palavras-chave: Racismo; Universidades; Fatores socioeconômicos; Estudantes.

Resumen

Introducción: La discriminación racial es un tema complejo que afecta directamente la experiencia de los estudiantes universitarios, impactando no solo su desempeño académico sino también su salud mental y bienestar. **Objetivo:**

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discutir las características de la discriminación racial y sus interfaces con la renta familiar entre estudiantes universitarios.

Metodología: Se trató de un estudio descriptivo, exploratorio, transversal, con una muestra de 751 estudiantes universitarios del estado de Ceará. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron: un cuestionario sociodemográfico y la escala de experiencia de discriminación. **Resultados:** Entre los estudiantes, el 36,9% tenía una renta familiar de entre 1 y 2 sueldos. En cuanto a la discriminación por raza o color, los que más la habían experimentado eran los que tenían una renta inferior a un salario mínimo, el 39,9%. El lugar de ocurrencia con mayor exposición para aquellos con ingresos inferiores a un salario mínimo fue la escuela, 37,5%. **Conclusiones:** Los resultados sugieren que existe una relación directa entre el ingreso familiar y la discriminación racial: a menor ingreso, mayor exposición a la discriminación racial. Es urgente aplicar estrategias para proteger y apoyar a las personas que sufren discriminación racial.

Palabras clave: Racismo; Universidades; Factores socioeconómicos; Estudiantes.

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1. Introduction

The right to life constitutes the paramount human prerogative. A democratic state must provide and safeguard the right to life for all citizens, without discrimination and with equality of rights. Consequently, any attempt to disrupt democratic institutionalism must be vigorously opposed, as it infringes upon the right to life of the entire population, particularly those segments exhibiting greater social disadvantages and vulnerabilities (Gomes and Laborne, 2018).

The enslavement of Black individuals in Brazilian territories was officially abolished in 1888; however, even today, the Black population persistently endures the effects of racial prejudice, a consequence of a phenomenon termed racism. According to Lima (2020), racism must be recognized as the primary determinant of the exclusionary landscape that the Black population currently faces in the country.

This phenomenon, characterized by Ribeiro (2019) as a system of oppression, manifests "through conscious or unconscious practices that culminate in disadvantages or privileges for individuals, depending on the racial group to which they belong" (Almeida, 2018, p. 27), and its fundamental basis lies in the supposition of the existence of biologically and socially inferior and superior human races. It is important to note that, currently, the Brazilian population is categorized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) into five distinct racial categories: white, Black, Asian, mixed race (parda), and indigenous, with the aggregation of the Black and mixed-race populations constituting the Black population in the country (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010).

Blacks, defined as individuals identified as either Black or Brown by the IBGE, represent a significant portion of Brazil's population. Despite their numerical predominance, this demographic group continues to occupy the lowest tiers of the social hierarchy and faces substantial barriers in accessing resources essential for improving quality of life (Santiago and Gaudenzi, 2023). The underrepresentation of blacks in higher education institutions is a critical issue that perpetuates social segregation, inequality, and the marginalization of this population.

At this juncture, it is well known that this reality is not only a socio-structural consequence, but a historical one, of a country that had 338 years of slavery, the longest period of slavery in the world (Ferreira et al., 2020). Thus, motivated by a different reality, or rather, by the ideology of the awareness phase conceptualized by Blackness, by and for the black population, an important social milestone was achieved, the Quotas Law No. 12.711/2012.

Historically, the movement for the implementation of the Quota Law in Brazil gained prominence in the mid-1990s, starting with the Zumbi dos Palmares National March in Brasilia, but it was only in 2012 that it actually became federal law (Law No. 12.711/2012). The pre-existing reality of this movement refers to public universities where access was mostly destined for a certain portion of the population, made up of white and economically advantaged students, so quotas were adopted with the aim of broadening social inclusion and the democratization of Brazilian public education (Ribeiro and Mendes, 2023).

However, according to Ferreira and Nunes (2023), "the black population lives in the myth of racial democracy, in the midst of racial and social inequality", which has various consequences for the mental health of this population, since they are still idealized as inferior or disqualified, structural racism is present in different spheres and in power relations in various ways. Especially regarding students, who according to a survey conducted in 2022 with young Black people, showed that the school environment is where discrimination occurs most, with 10.9% having suffered at least once, 31.8% two to three times and 41.8% reporting having suffered four or more times (Oliveira et al., 2022).

Freitas et al. (2015) point out that discrimination is associated with lower levels of academic and work performance, physical and psychological health, as well as self-esteem and life satisfaction. Not only that, economic vulnerability corroborates the intensification of the problem, since, in an analysis carried out by Osorio (2021), in the last three decades, according to IBGE statistics since 1986, when the PNAD (National Household Sample Survey) began to ask the color of the interviewees, it determined that the average income of whites is approximately twice that of blacks in all periods.

It is therefore worth noting that, in Brazil, a university degree gives individuals a better chance of receiving better pay and more suitable working conditions, making it a potential mechanism for reducing the impact of racism on the Black population's integration into the labor market (Ancillotti and Silva, 2023).

Despite this, there are still few studies on the subject. The aim of this article is therefore to discuss the characteristics of racial discrimination and its interfaces with the family income of university students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study design

This is a descriptive, exploratory, cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach, conducted with students from public and private institutions in the state of Ceará. The study was coordinated by the Mental Health and Care Study and Research Group (GESAM) at the Vale do Acaraú State University (UVA).

2.2 Participant recruitment

The sample consisted of 751 higher education students. The inclusion criteria included students over the age of 18 who were actively enrolled at the institutions, of any race/color, gender, and family income. While the exclusion criteria included students who did not complete the form and who did not sign the consent form.

Data collection took place between September 23 and December 16, 2023. It took place in two formats, online and in person. Initially, to mark the start of the collection, marketing strategies were conducted to publicize it. To this end, t-shirts and cups were made with the slogan "My university is not the place for your discrimination", with the aim of holding draws for those who participated, as well as publications on the social networks of the partner HEIs: Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú (UVA), Faculdade Luciano Feijão (FLF), Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC), Faculdade 05 de Julho (F5) and Faculdade Leducare (FIED), in the city of Tianguá.

The first stage of data collection took place online, after providing the emails of all the students duly enrolled in the undergraduate courses at the Vale do Acaraú State University and the Federal University of Ceará. The snowball method was also used, by sending the form via social networks such as *WhatsApp* and *Instagram*.

However, after little support from the students, we moved on to the second stage, face-to-face data collection. After agreeing with the HEI professors, GESAM members entered the universities, both before and after classes, as well as during events and in the university restaurants.

2.3 Instruments

The instruments used were a questionnaire on the sociodemographic profile and the Discrimination Experiences Scale. The Discrimination Experiences Scale, developed by Krieger in 1990, is an instrument made up of four dimensions, Response to Unfair Treatment, which aims to question the individual's actions in the face of a situation in which they consider unfair based on their race or color difference, whether they accept it as a fact of life or try to do something about it and if they experience it, whether they keep it to themselves or seek support from someone else, the Concern dimension. This encompasses students' concerns about racial discrimination encountered throughout childhood and adolescence, alongside recent experiences in the past year. Additionally,

it includes an analysis of their level of concern for fellow members of their racial group when subjected to unfair treatment due to skin color (Fattore et al., 2016).

The Discrimination dimension is used to determine whether the individual has suffered discrimination, or has been in some way prevented, inconvenienced or inferior in any social environment, such as at school, when looking for a job, at work, when buying a house, during medical care, on the street or in public establishments, by the police or in courts of law, based on differences of race/color, sex, socioeconomic position, sexual preference or religion. Finally, the last dimension is Complaint filed, which asks the participant if they have ever had to file a police report because of the prejudice they have suffered. The scale showed high reliability and good internal consistency (Fattore et al., 2016).

2.4 Statistical analysis

For statistical analysis, Pearson's chi-square test of hypothesis of association was used to study the relationship between the qualitative variables of the experience of discrimination and family income. When a considerable discrepancy exists between observed and expected data, the null hypothesis is rejected. This rejection signifies a statistically significant association, implying that the variables are dependent upon one another.

2.5 Ethical considerations

This article is an excerpt from a larger study, "Racial Discrimination and Mental Health in Universities," which received approval from the Ethics Committee of the affiliated educational institution. The research adhered to the ethical principles of the CNS, ensuring participant confidentiality, non-maleficence, and autonomy through the provision of an Informed Consent Form (ICF). It was also approved by the UVA Research Ethics Committee (Opinion No.: 6.279.258).

3. Results

3.1 Diagnóstico de VPH y conducta sexual de los participantes

According to the sociodemographic profile, as presented in Table 1, 394 (52.5%) of the public were women, 350 (46.6%) men, 4 (0.5%) participants declared themselves to be non-binary and 3 preferred not to answer. The average age was 22.8 years, with the three most prevalent being between 18 and 19 years old, with 165 (22%), 20 to 21 years old with 188 (25.1%) and between 22 and 23 years old, with 183 (24.4%). In terms of race, 439 (58.5%) of the participants declared themselves to be Brown, followed by 209 (27.8%) who were white, 93 (12.4%) who were black and 10 (1.3%) who were yellow. The majority were single, with 666 (88.7%) and Catholic, with 446 (59.4%). Regarding family income, 277 (36.9%) of the participants reported that they earned between one and two minimum wages, 168 (22.4%) less than one minimum wage, 146 (19.4%) one minimum wage, 120 (16%) two to five minimum wages and 40 (5.3%) more than 5 minimum wages.

Table 1

Distribution of sociodemographic data of university students (n = 751)

		n (%)
1 Gender	Female	394 (52.5)
	Male	350 (46.6)
	Non-binary	4 (0.5)
	I prefer not to identify myself	3 (0.4)
2 Age M=22.8 SD=5.02 Min=18 Max=64 (2 missing values)	18 or 19	165 (22.0)
	20 or 21	188 (25.1)
	22 or 23	183 (24.4)
	24 or 25	94 (12.6)
	26 a 30	71 (9.5)
	More than 30	48 (6.4)
3 Race	Brown	439 (58.5)
	Black	93 (12.4)
	White	209 (27.8)
	Yellow	10 (1.3)
4 Marital status	Single	666 (88.7)
	Married	48 (6.4)
	Stable union	35 (4.7)
	Widower	2 (0.3)
6 Family income	Less than the minimum wage	168 (22.4)
	A minimum wage	146 (19.4)
	From 1 to 2 minimum wages	277 (36.9)
	From 2 to 5 minimum wages	120 (16.0)
	More than 5 minimum wages	40 (5.3)
7 What is your religion?	Catholic	446 (59.4)
	Evangelical	88 (11.7)
	Spiritist	10 (1.3)
	Umbanda	10 (1.3)
	Candomblé	1 (0.1)
	Atheist	37 (4.9)
	I have no religion	135 (18.0)
	Other religions	24 (3.2)
	Total	751 (100.0)

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Moving on to table 2, when asked about unfair treatment, regardless of family income, the answers were mostly to try to do something about it and talk about it with other people, not accepting the situation as something common in everyday life and showing efforts to change it. According to the

chi-squared test, both items showed no statistically significant association between the variables, with p 0.538 for the first statement and p 0.569 for the second.

Table 2

Presentation of responses to unfair treatment and family income of university students ($n = 751$)

Response to unfair treatment	Less than one minimum wage ($n = 168$)		One minimum wages ($n = 146$)		More than 1 to 2 minimum wages ($n = 277$)		More than 2 to 5 minimum wages ($n = 120$)		More than 5 minimum wages ($n = 40$)		χ^2_4	P
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I) If you feel you are being treated unfairly, you usually do:											3.119	0.538
A) Accept it as a fact	39	23.2	30	20.5	75	27.1	28	23.3	12	30.0		
B) Try to do something about it	129	76.8	116	79.5	202	72.9	92	76.7	28	70.0		
II) If you are being treated unfairly, you usually do:											2.931	0.569
A) Talk to other people about it	124	73.8	110	75.3	217	78.3	93	77.5	34	85.0		
B) Keep this to yourself	44	26.2	36	24.7	60	21.7	27	22.5	6	15.0		
<p>* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$</p>												

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

In addition, table 3 shows responses to exposure to racial discrimination in different environments, whether at school, when looking for a job, at work, when buying a house, when looking for medical care, in stores or restaurants, when applying for a bank loan, on the street or in public establishments, by the police or in a court of law, and their relationship to different family incomes. It is possible to observe the predominant response to low exposure for all items.

Contrary to what was observed in the previous table, Table 3 identifies statistically significant values for the items: experienced discrimination because of their race, ethnicity or color ($p < 0.05$), when looking for a job ($p < 0.05$), and by the police or justice system ($p < 0.05$), with individuals with higher family incomes (more than 5 salaries) reporting the lowest exposure. Thus, the higher the chi-square value, the more significant the discrimination and family income variables become.

Table 3

Presentation of the Experience of Racial Discrimination and Family Income in University Students

(n = 751)

Discrimination	Less than one minimum wage (n = 168)		One minimum wages (n = 146)		More than 1 to 2 minimum wages (n = 277)		More than 2 to 5 minimum wages (n = 120)		More than 5 minimum wages (n = 40)		X ² ₄	P
	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%		
Have you experienced discrimination because of your race, ethnicity or color?											9.469	*
No	101	60.1	103	70.5	198	71.5	90	75.0	26	65.0		0.050
Yes	67	39.9	43	29.5	79	28.5	30	25.0	14	35.0		
A) At school											7.594	0.108
Low exposure	105	62.5	100	68.5	185	66.8	93	77.5	28	70.0		
High exposure	63	37.5	46	31.5	92	33.2	27	22.5	12	30.0		
B) When looking for a job											9.787	*
Low exposure	140	83.3	131	89.7	243	87.7	114	95.0	36	90.0		0.044
High exposure	28	16.7	15	10.3	34	12.3	6	5.0	4	10.0		
C) At work											7.142	0.129
Low exposure	146	86.9	130	89.0	238	85.9	114	95.0	35	87.5		
High exposure	22	13.1	16	11.0	39	14.1	6	5.0	5	12.5		
D) When buying a house											8.584	0.072
Low exposure	164	97.6	145	99.3	264	95.3	119	99.2	38	95.0		
High exposure	4	2.4	1	0.7	13	4.7	1	0.8	2	5.0		
E) Seeking medical attention											6.126	0.190
Low exposure	156	92.9	132	90.4	252	91.0	117	97.5	37	92.5		
High exposure	12	7.1	14	9.6	25	9.0	3	2.5	3	7.5		
F) Requesting service in a store or restaurant											3.299	0.509
Low exposure	133	79.2	119	81.5	219	79.1	103	85.8	34	85.0		
High exposure	35	20.8	27	18.5	58	20.9	17	14.2	6	15.0		

G) When applying for credit or a bank loan											2.512	0.643
Low exposure	161	95.8	141	96.6	265	95.7	117	97.5	40	100.0		
High exposure	7	4.2	5	3.4	12	4.3	3	2.5	0	0.0		
H) In the street or in a public establishment											5.892	0.207
Low exposure	117	69.6	112	76.7	219	79.1	94	78.3	32	80.0		
High exposure	51	30.4	34	23.3	58	20.9	26	21.7	8	20.0		
I) By the Police or at the Forum											9.841	* 0.043
Low exposure	150	89.3	133	91.1	259	93.5	115	95.8	33	82.5		
High exposure	18	10.7	13	8.9	18	6.5	5	4.2	7	17.5		
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001												

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Moving on to table 4, the results show the participants' concern about racial discrimination directed at themselves or at people from the same racial group, according to family income. High exposure, i.e. high concern, predominates for almost all the items. Statistical analysis shows that the answers are significant, with the lowest salaries reporting the greatest concern, for item "A", less than one minimum wage 72.6%, one minimum wage 74.7% and more than one to two minimum wages 59.2%, with $p<0.001$. Item "B" shows less than one minimum wage 76.6%, one minimum wage 77.4% and more than one to two minimum wages 68.6%, with $p<0.001$ and item "C" less than one minimum wage 61.9%, one minimum wage 58.9% and more than one to two minimum wages 55.2%, with $p<0.05$.

Table 4

Exposure of concerns related to racial discrimination and family income in university students
(n = 751)

Concern	Less than one minimum wage (n = 168)		One minimum wages (n = 146)		More than 1 to 2 minimum wages (n = 277)		More than 2 to 5 minimum wages (n = 120)		More than 5 minimum wages (n = 40)		X ² ₄	p
	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%		
A) When you were a child or teenager (under 18), did you worry about people in your racial group being treated unfairly because of their race or skin color?											33.526	*** 0.000
Low exposure	46	27.4	37	25.3	113	40.8	59	49.2	24	60.0		
High exposure	122	72.6	109	74.7	164	59.2	61	50.8	16	40.0		
B) In the last year, have you been concerned about people in your racial group being treated unfairly because of their race or skin color?											23.791	*** 0.000
Low exposure	39	23.2	33	22.6	87	31.4	49	40.8	21	52.5		
High exposure	129	76.8	113	77.4	190	68.6	71	59.2	19	47.5		
C) In the last year, have you been concerned about experiences of unfair treatment because of your race or skin color?											10.003	* 0.040
Low exposure	64	38.1	60	41.1	124	44.8	64	53.3	23	57.5		
High exposure	104	61.9	86	58.9	153	55.2	56	46.7	17	42.5		

* p<0.05

** p<0.01

*** p<0.001

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Finally, table 5 shows the response to racial discrimination in relation to police complaints, according to family income. The results show that most participants denied when asked if they had ever filed

complaints because of racial discrimination, regardless of family income, and there was little association between the items.

Table 5

Response to racial discrimination and family income in relation to filing a police complaint among university students (n = 751)

Complaint filed	Less than one minimum wage (n = 168)		One minimum wages (n = 146)		More than 1 to 2 minimum wages (n = 277)		More than 2 to 5 minimum wages (n = 120)		More than 5 minimum wages (n = 40)		X ² ₄	p
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%		
Have you ever filed a complaint because of racial discrimination?											6.109	0.191
No	163	97.0	145	99.3	273	98.6	120	100.0	40	100.0		
Yes	5	3.0	1	0.7	4	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0		
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001												

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

4. Discussion

Regarding the sociodemographic profile of the research, the high participation of women stands out, with more than half of the respondents (52.5%), as shown in Table 1. This finding underscores the central role that Black women play in debates on social injustices in Brazil. They face not only racial inequalities but also gender and class disparities. Santos and Silva (2022) affirm that Brazilian social structures have been shaped over centuries according to predominantly male interests, needs, and perspectives, with women historically relegated to lower-valued social roles, long confined to domestic work and systematically excluded from access to higher education institutions.

According to the *National Survey on Domestic and Paid Care Work*, conducted by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) in partnership with the Ministry of Racial Equality (MIR), in 2025, Black women represented 69.9% of individuals who reported engaging in domestic and/or paid care work in Brazil (Ipea, 2025). This context significantly impacts the mental health of these women, who are often subjected to exhausting work hours, demeaning situations, and extreme living precariousness.

Studies have already shown the negative effects on the mental health of individuals exposed to racial discrimination, making the effort to mitigate the historical impacts of the country a daily struggle through protests, legislation, and the implementation of activities in public spaces such as schools, aimed at raising awareness about discrimination and racial violence (Fattore et al., 2022; Borges et al., 2023).

Regarding the results presented in Table 2, it is observed that most participants, irrespective of income bracket, report attempting to take action or discussing instances of unfair treatment with others. This finding reveals a proactive stance in the face of experiences of discrimination or injustice, indicating that, despite social vulnerabilities, there is a movement towards confrontation and individual and collective mobilization.

Such behavior can be interpreted as a form of everyday resistance and the construction of agency, particularly among Black women, who have historically been silenced in social and institutional spheres. The act of sharing these experiences with others also reinforces the role of support networks and community solidarity as strategies for psychological protection and subjective strengthening.

Furthermore, this data challenges the notion of passivity in the face of injustice and invites reflection on the importance of institutional spaces open to qualified and empathetic listening, capable of addressing these demands and promoting restorative practices. It is worth noting that, even in the context of adverse structural conditions, such as socioeconomic precariousness, the willingness to react and share demonstrates a potential for social transformation that needs to be recognized and fostered by public policies and educational and health institutions.

As presented in Table 3, two contexts revealed a statistically significant association between the experience of racial discrimination and family income: when seeking employment ($p=0.044$) and in interactions with the police or in court ($p=0.043$). In the former case, the greater exposure among students with an income of up to two minimum wages (MW) highlights how structural racism is intertwined with economic inequalities, restricting equitable access to the labor market and perpetuating cycles of exclusion. In the latter, the higher incidence among students in both the lowest and highest income brackets (>5 MW) is noteworthy, indicating that skin color remains a social marker of vulnerability in police and judicial practices, even among those with greater economic capital. These findings reinforce the understanding that racism is a structural and cross-cutting phenomenon across social classes, particularly in institutional spaces of control, regulation, and the administration of citizenship.

Racial discrimination can be understood as the operationalization of prejudiced and racist attitudes, which frequently manifest subtly and covertly, although they can also occur explicitly. This discrimination is present in various contexts of daily life—streets, stores, supermarkets, bars, churches, or public institutions—exposing Black individuals to stigmatization and the undue association between their racial identity and behaviors considered criminal (Willige, 2018).

This process is even more evident in violence statistics. Data from the Brazilian Public Security Forum indicate that, in 2022, approximately 76% of homicide victims in Brazil were Black individuals. This disparity not only reflects socioeconomic vulnerability but also reveals the enduring impact of structural racism on public security institutions. Police approaches are systematically more violent and lethal in Black communities, revealing discriminatory practices and the criminalization of poverty (Ipea, 2024). Thus, the data in Table 3 are articulated with this broader scenario of racial exclusion, demonstrating how discrimination operates persistently and institutionally in the experiences of young Black individuals, including within the university environment.

Additionally, educational and labor market inequalities contribute to the marginalization of this population segment, often forcing them to enter the workforce earlier to help support their families.

In a survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2022, results showed that the Black and mixed-race population leads unemployment rates in the country, meaning they are the most unemployed, as well as those occupying the most informal jobs compared to whites — with 43.4% of workers being Black, 47% mixed-race, and 32.7% white. The same study also pointed out that these same people are most often in poverty, with a monthly per capita family income below US\$5.50 (R\$486): 18.6% of the white population, 34.5% mixed-race, and 38.4% Black (Faria and Maggi, 2023).

In light of this, some of the most evident psychological and emotional impacts include the development of feelings of inferiority, helplessness, and powerlessness (Damasceno and Zanello, 2018). These situations provoke indignation and a sense of injustice. As demonstrated in Table 4, many participants expressed concern regarding unfair treatment motivated by race or color, both directed at themselves and at individuals within their social group, particularly among those with income below the minimum wage.

The data reveal that these concerns originate in childhood and persist into adulthood. Among students with a family income below one minimum wage, 72.6% reported high levels of concern during childhood or adolescence about individuals of their racial group being treated unfairly. This concern progressively decreases with increasing income, reaching 40% among those with an income greater than five minimum wages. A similar pattern emerges when considering recent experiences: in the past year, 76.8% of participants in the lowest income bracket expressed concern about unfair treatment directed at other individuals of their racial group, in contrast to 47.5% of students in the highest income bracket.

Regarding personal experiences of discrimination, 61.9% of students with an income below one minimum wage reported recent concern about potential unfair treatment experienced by themselves, while this percentage falls to 42.5% among those with higher income. These statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) suggest that socioeconomic vulnerability not only increases exposure to racism but also intensifies its emotional and psychological effects.

These findings highlight the cumulative effect of racial and socioeconomic oppression, demonstrating how the early internalization of racial prejudice shapes emotional responses over time. The constant state of alert and concern reported by these students can be interpreted as a form of anticipatory stress or racial vigilance—a psychological adaptation to environments perceived as unsafe or discriminatory, which contributes to mental health issues, particularly among those with less access to support networks and social protection.

Thus, the results in Table 4 not only demonstrate the omnipresence of racism in the daily lives of university students but also reveal how its emotional burden is unequally distributed, intersecting with markers of class and income. This reinforces the need for intersectional approaches in mental health policies and academic support services, especially those aimed at Black and low-income students.

Thus, it is worth highlighting the social movements that demanded more inclusive public policies. A notable achievement in the Brazilian context is the National Policy for the Comprehensive Health of the Black Population (PNSIPN), which recognizes that the living conditions of the Black population result from unfair social, cultural, and economic processes rooted in the country's history. This policy, implemented in Brazil, aims to eliminate institutional racism within health environments and promote equity (Damasceno and Zanello, 2018).

Another important step within Brazilian public policy was Law No. 10,639 of 2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian culture mandatory in schools throughout the country. This legislation marks a turning point in the appreciation of cultural diversity and the recognition of the historical, social, and cultural contributions of the Black population to Brazil. Furthermore, this Brazilian initiative seeks to encourage and empower Black children to embrace and affirm their racial identity, challenging persistent paradigms and stereotypes. The policy also established November 20 as the National Day of Black Consciousness in the school calendar, reinforcing the importance of memory and the anti-racist struggle within educational institutions (Santis et al., 2022).

Another essential milestone was the Quota Law No. 12.711 of 2012, which established access to university education for Black and Indigenous populations. It significantly increased the number of students with up to 50% of reserved seats. Later, other projects were developed to ensure not only access but also the retention of these students, such as the provision of scholarships and financial aid. However, this topic sparked divided opinions: while some viewed the policy as anti-democratic and anti-meritocratic — arguing that quotas might harm academic standards — others defended the need for such measures to promote racial equality (Andriola and Araújo, 2023).

Nevertheless, even after this period, individuals continued to be racialized, as a racial hierarchy persisted in which Black men and women remained at the base of the social pyramid. Affirmative policies have — and continue to — pressure the state to reduce these inequalities, seeking reparation and compensation for the Black population, while recognizing that there is still a long way to go to achieve real equality (Marques, 2018).

According to Borges et al. (2023), Brazil's historical legacy painfully reveals itself in the fact that "poverty has a color," with most of its poor and uneducated citizens being Black. This reality increasingly underscores the presence of racism in the country and the urgent need for its eradication

Table 5 highlights a concerning finding: the exceedingly low rate of police complaint filings for racial discrimination among university students, regardless of income bracket. Only 10 students out of the 751 participants (1.3%) reported having formally filed a complaint for this reason. The group with an income below one minimum wage accounted for the highest absolute number of filings (3.0%), while no students with an income above two minimum wages reported having filed a complaint. Although the association between income and reporting did not reach statistical significance ($p=0.191$), the most salient finding is the widespread underreporting of racial discrimination through institutional channels.

According to the study by Santos (2015), these results indicate a recurring tendency within the Brazilian judicial system to reclassify acts of racism, frequently categorizing them under less severe offenses such as simple insult. This practice contributes to discouraging reporting and reinforces the perception of impunity regarding racist manifestations.

This outcome suggests the existence of structural and symbolic barriers that discourage the formalization of complaints—whether due to a lack of trust in police institutions, fear of retaliation, the normalization of racial violence, or even the invisibility of these experiences as rights violations. Furthermore, it reinforces the need to broaden the discussion on access to racial justice, with actions that strengthen safe, accessible, and reliable reporting channels, especially within the university environment and in public services.

4.1 Study limitations

According to the study by Santos (2015), these results indicate a recurring tendency within the Brazilian judicial system to reclassify acts of racism, frequently categorizing them under less severe offenses such as simple insult. This practice contributes to discouraging reporting and reinforces the perception of impunity regarding racist manifestations. In public services

5. Conclusion

The study findings demonstrated that racial discrimination is strongly associated with the socioeconomic status of students, revealing that the lower the family income, the greater the exposure to symbolic, institutional, and emotional violence. Low-income students more frequently face situations of injustice motivated by race or color, both in public spaces and in formal institutions such as schools, healthcare services, workplaces, and police interactions. This correlation reveals the structural nature of racism, which manifests more intensely on Black bodies in contexts of economic vulnerability.

Beyond material barriers, the subjective effects of discrimination are profound: Black and low-income students report feelings of inferiority, fear, powerlessness, and psychological distress, often originating in childhood. The precarious access to basic rights, such as housing, sanitation, quality education, and healthcare services, not only perpetuates historical inequalities but also amplifies the impact of racial discrimination on these young people's trajectories. Conversely, students with higher incomes report fewer episodes of discrimination, which reinforces the interdependence between race and class in the production of inequality in Brazil.

Despite these adversities, the study also revealed strategies of resistance and confrontation, especially among Black women. Many students demonstrate critical awareness, social engagement, and articulation with support networks, refusing passivity in the face of racism. This attitude represents not only an individual reaction but a collective movement for recognition, reparation, and racial justice.

Even with significant advances in recent decades—such as the implementation of racial quotas, the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian history in schools, and public policies aimed at equity—the results indicate that there are still serious gaps in the realization of rights and in confronting institutional racism. The extremely low formalization of discrimination complaints reveals distrust in institutions, fear of retaliation, and the persistent normalization of racial violence.

In conclusion, overcoming racism in higher education requires structural, intersectional, and continuous actions that recognize the centrality of race and income in the production of inequalities. Promoting racial equity in this context means guaranteeing not only access but also retention, mental health care, the valorization of Black identity, and the active listening to historically silenced voices. The construction of a truly democratic university necessarily involves an effective commitment to racial and social justice.

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