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STUDENT ASSISTANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION IN BRAZILIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

Assistência estudantil e promoção da saúde mental nas universidades federais brasileiras:
uma revisão integrativa

Asistencia estudiantil y promoción de la salud mental en universidades federales
brasileñas: una revisión integradora

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Abstract: This article aims to describe the interrelationships between student assistance and mental health care promotion strategies for university students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES). Methodologically, this is a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study developed through an integrative literature review. Articles published in the last five years (2019-2024) in Portuguese and English, available in the BVS-Psi, Lilacs, CAPES Journals, and SciELO databases, were selected. The search terms included the descriptors "student assistance," "mental health," and "well-being," resulting in the selection and analysis of 18 studies, according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The results reveal a complex and multifaceted scenario in the implementation of student assistance actions and programs focused on student mental health, also highlighting the challenges that compromise the effectiveness of these initiatives. Therefore, the need for coordinated actions between university administrators and student organizations is highlighted, as well as the strengthening of mental health care strategies and intersectoral assistance, with a

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view to promoting students' biopsychosocial well-being and consolidating a healthy and supportive academic culture.

Keywords: student assistance; mental health; higher education.

Resumo: O presente artigo tem como objetivo descrever as inter-relações entre a assistência estudantil e as estratégias de promoção do cuidado em saúde mental direcionadas aos estudantes universitários das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior (IFES) brasileiras. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, de caráter descritivo e exploratório, desenvolvida por meio de uma revisão integrativa da literatura. Foram selecionados artigos publicados nos últimos cinco anos (2019-2024), nos idiomas português e inglês, disponíveis nas bases de dados BVS-Psi, Lilacs, Periódicos CAPES e SciELO. Os termos de busca incluíram os descritores "assistência estudantil", "saúde mental" e "bem-estar", resultando na seleção e análise de 18 estudos, conforme os critérios de inclusão e exclusão. Os resultados revelam um cenário complexo e multifacetado na implementação de ações e programas de assistência estudantil voltados à saúde mental dos estudantes, evidenciando, também, os desafios que comprometem a efetividade dessas iniciativas. Diante disso, destaca-se a necessidade de ações articuladas entre gestores universitários e entidades estudantis, além do fortalecimento de estratégias de cuidado em saúde mental e assistência intersetorial, com vistas à promoção do bem-estar biopsicossocial dos estudantes e à consolidação de uma cultura acadêmica saudável e solidária.

Palavras-chave: assistência estudantil; saúde mental; ensino superior.

Resumen: Este artículo busca describir las interrelaciones entre la asistencia estudiantil y las estrategias de promoción de la salud mental para estudiantes universitarios en Instituciones Federales de Educación Superior (IFES) de Brasil. Metodológicamente, se trata de un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio, desarrollado mediante una revisión bibliográfica integradora. Se seleccionaron artículos publicados en los últimos cinco años (2019-2024) en portugués e inglés, disponibles en las bases de datos BVS-Psi, Lilacs, Revistas CAPES y SciELO. Los términos de búsqueda incluyeron los descriptores "asistencia estudiantil", "salud mental" y "bienestar", lo que resultó en la selección y análisis de 18 estudios, según los criterios de inclusión y exclusión. Los resultados revelan un escenario complejo y multifacético en la implementación de acciones y programas de asistencia estudiantil centrados en la salud mental estudiantil, destacando también los desafíos que comprometen la efectividad de estas iniciativas. Por tanto, se destaca la necesidad de acciones coordinadas entre los administradores universitarios y las organizaciones estudiantiles, así como el fortalecimiento de las estrategias de atención en salud mental y la atención intersectorial, con miras a promover el bienestar biopsicosocial de los estudiantes y consolidar una cultura académica saludable y solidaria.

Palabras clave: asistencia estudiantil; salud mental; educación superior.

1 INTRODUCTION

Student Assistance at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES) is a set of policies and programs designed to promote retention and improve the academic performance of students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability (Soares; Amaral, 2022). Furthermore, it recognizes the social right to assistance, encompassing areas such as food, educational support, daycare, culture, sports, digital inclusion, housing, healthcare, and transportation (Brasil, 2010).

According to Araújo (2003), Student Assistance in Brazil is shrouded in ambiguities and contradictions, sometimes seen as an investment and other times as a citizenship right. Furthermore, as the aforementioned author points out, this assistance is characterized by selectivity based on need and meritocratic aspects, such as the student's academic performance score. Similarly, Barbosa (2009) identifies a tension between socioeconomic parameters and meritocratic criteria, resulting from the limited availability of resources in the sector.

In this context, the promotion of mental health care emerges as a central aspect of Student Assistance, aiming to ensure the well-being and well-being of students throughout their academic careers. This approach requires Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES) to pay close attention and take proactive actions that consider the multiple dimensions that permeate the university experience.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), mental health is defined as a state of psychological well-being, influenced by social, psychological, economic, biological, and environmental factors, which interact in a complex way and vary throughout the different stages of life. This understanding reinforces the importance of integrated strategies within student assistance, capable of responding to the specificities and vulnerabilities faced by the university population.

Furthermore, mental health is also associated with an individual's ability to engage and develop, within their limits and possibilities, in favorable social contexts. To this end, access to basic citizenship conditions, such as health, education, leisure, sports, safety, work, and culture, is essential, as they contribute to building an environment conducive to well-being and inclusion (Alcântara; Vieira; Alves, 2022; Heloani; Capitão, 2003).

According to Andrade and Teixeira (2017), Student Assistance and the mental health of university students represent interdependent and complementary areas. Therefore, access to socioeconomic benefits, such as scholarships, housing, transportation, and food, in addition to enabling equal opportunities for all students, contributes to reducing stress and anxiety, factors that can compromise or exacerbate mental health problems in students (Castro, 2017). Despite the progress made, Student Assistance and mental health promotion in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HIEs) still face several challenges, and the scarcity of financial resources limits the provision of services and support programs. The lack of institutionalization of mental health actions, in turn, compromises the continuity and effectiveness of these initiatives (Araújo; Morais; Pires, 2023). According to Araújo *et al.*, (2019), another challenge lies in the difficulty of identifying students' specific mental health needs. The heterogeneity

of the student population, with different social backgrounds, life trajectories, and psychological needs, requires HIEs to constantly strive to map and address the particularities of each individual. Certainly, understanding the relationships between Student Assistance and the mental health care promotion landscape in Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions is essential to building a comprehensive and proactive outlook for the future of higher education in Brazil, implementing support strategies, intervention programs, and specific prevention that promote care in this field. In the study conducted by Almeida, Oliveira, and Seixas (2021), from 2003 to 2016, there was a process of expansion of HEIs that led to a significant increase in the hiring of psychology professionals by these institutions.

Furthermore, according to Tesfaye (2009, p. 1), mental health becomes a public health issue, since the integration of students into universities requires facing challenges and other stressful elements, constituting a health problem that requires public and institutional policy intervention. It is also emphasized that well-being and health constitute a fundamental human right and an essential good for quality of life, being an inalienable and universal right (UN, 1948; Brazil, 1978, 1988, 1990). Promoting them, as recommended The goal, defined by the World Health Organization through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-03), is not limited to the prevention and treatment of diseases, but encompasses everything from developing healthy lifestyles to improving the living and working conditions of individuals and communities (WHO, 2016).

Therefore, recognizing that research in this area can inform the creation of university strategies and public policies that prioritize the mental health of university students and provide adequate resources to support student assistance and retention in higher education, we ask: what are the interrelationships between Student Assistance and mental health care strategies aimed at students at Brazilian Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES)? Based on this observation, and with the aim of answering the proposed question - although without the intention of exhausting it - this study, based on an integrative literature review, aims to describe the interrelationships between Student Assistance and health care promotion strategies aimed at university students at Federal Higher Education Institutions in Brazil.

1.1 History of student assistance in Brazil: evolution, challenges and perspectives

Looking at the historical context, the trajectory of Student Assistance in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (IFES) is marked by distinct phases and sociopolitical contexts. In the 1920s and 1930s, pioneering initiatives emerged, such as the creation of the Brazilian Student House in Paris in 1928 and the implementation of housing and food support programs (Costa, 2010). In 1931, through the Francisco Campos Reform, which established the Organic Law of Higher Education by Decree No. 19,851/1931, during the Getúlio Vargas administration, education began to be recognized as a public right, establishing support measures for low-income students, a milestone in the history of Student Assistance in Brazil (Vasconcelos, 2010). Over time, in the 1950s, there was no

evidence of a specific Student Assistance or mental health policy aimed at university students at Brazilian Federal Universities, even with the presence of designated bodies, such as Student Provost's Offices (Gomes *et al.*, 2023).

During that decade, student support initiatives were conducted according to the budgetary availability, interests, and individual approach of each Federal Higher Education Institution (Leite, 2015). Furthermore, health services for these students focused primarily on the physical dimension (Figueiredo; Oliveira, 1995), lacking "initiatives to promote mental health in the community, allowing for a multidisciplinary approach involving various professionals in the areas of health and education" (Hahn; Ferraz; Giglio, 1999, p. 82).

In the 1970s, there was a significant increase in the number of places available at public universities, driving the creation of more comprehensive and structured Student Assistance programs at higher education institutions (IFES) (Vasconcelos, 2010). These actions were supported by the 1971 Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB), which reinforced the role of IFES in promoting Student Assistance, recognizing it as a student right and establishing the mandatory provision of Student Assistance services in all education systems (Brasil, 1996). In 1976, based on demands from the student movement, the Student Assistance Department (DAE), linked to the Ministry of Education and Culture, was established, consolidating Student Assistance as a national public policy. In the late 1980s, the DAE was closed, resulting in the fragmentation of Student Assistance actions at each educational institution, which led to a dispersion and scarcity of resources for student assistance (Imperatori, 2017).

In the context of mental health, the 1990s represented a milestone, with the growing institutionalization of psychology services in IFES (Santos *et al.*, 2015). This change reflected the recognition of the importance of mental health for student academic performance and well-being, in line with the guidelines of the World Health Organization (2016). As noted by Silva Junior and Sguis-sardi (2009), in the context of higher education, since the mid-1990s, Brazilian public universities have undergone administrative and academic restructuring processes, which have impacted both the intensification of teaching work and the dissemination of a culture oriented towards mercantile logic.

According to Soares and Amaral (2022), such processes give rise to several implications, such as: expanding the scope of action; emphasis on multidimensionality; promoting emancipation; innovation; adaptation and citizenship training, which demand a more comprehensive, inclusive and adaptable action on the part of Student Assistance to meet the integral needs of students and prepare them for the challenges of the contemporary world.

Therefore, in the view of Osti *et al.*, (2023), in addition to the renewed role of Higher Education Institutions in contemporary times, the transition period that involves entering university represents, in addition to a time full of discoveries, a significant period of change, adaptation, and challenges for many students, including pressure for high academic performance, competitiveness, workload, and the emergence or worsening of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Thus, this period of transition, adaptation, and interaction during the academic experience tends to entail a series of ups and downs, often accompanied by anxiety and psychological distress (Soares *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, as evidenced in studies by Kraft (2011), Hartley (2011), Beiter *et al.*, (2015), Pedrelli *et al.*, (2015), Castro (2017), Ariño and Bardagi (2018), Barros (2021), and Ariño *et al.*, (2023) indicate that the university population is vulnerable to developing mental disorders, particularly anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and suicidal ideation.

Research conducted by Silva (2020) indicates that, for university students, entering university is perceived as a crucial moment, marked by the definition of professional and personal aspirations. Furthermore, social issues, especially related to ethnic-racial and gender dimensions, permeate the experience of these individuals, along with factors linked to the academic experience, such as power dynamics, sense of belonging, performance expectations, the establishment of connections, competitiveness, and workload. Thus, the demand for Student Assistance policies intensified, driven by the expansion of Higher Education, the increase in the number of vacancies in IFES, and the growing need to guarantee access and retention for students in situations of economic vulnerability (Silva; Marques, 2022).

Therefore, in 2010, the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) was established by Decree No. 7,234/2010, unifying and expanding Student Assistance actions in IFES, contemplating various modalities of support, with the objectives of democratizing the conditions for young people to remain in federal public higher education, minimizing the effects of social and regional inequalities on the retention and completion of higher education, reducing retention and dropout rates, and contributing to the promotion of social inclusion through education (Brasil, 2010).

2 METHOD

The approach adopted in this study is qualitative research, along the lines of an integrative literature review, with a descriptive and exploratory approach, covering the last five years (2019-2024). According to Botelho, Cunha, and Macedo (2011), an integrative review is based on the following steps: identifying the topic and selecting the research question; establishing eligibility criteria; identifying studies in scientific databases; evaluating selected studies and critically analyzing them; categorizing the studies; evaluating and interpreting the results; and presenting the data within the framework of an integrative review. Therefore, the following guiding question was formulated: What are the interrelationships between student assistance and mental health care promotion strategies for university students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions?

The methodological process was organized as highlighted by Moher *et al.*, (2009) and Page *et al.*, (2021) and Galvão, Tiguman, and Sarkis-Onofre (2022), in accordance with the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Therefore, the operationalization of this research began with a consultation of the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) through the Virtual Health Library (VHL); and the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) of

the National Library, to learn about universal descriptors. The following virtual databases were adopted, taking into account the scope and updating of the materials: VHL-Psi, Lilacs, CAPES Journals, and SciELO, using the following combinations of descriptors and Boolean operators, in Portuguese and English: assistência aluno/student assistance and saúde mental/mental health; assistência aluno/student assistance and bem-estar/well-being.

It should be noted that these databases were chosen due to their greater representation of scientific production related to Brazilian federal higher education institutions (FEIs). However, it is recognized that the exclusion of broader international databases, such as Scopus or Web of Science, and gray literature repositories, may favor coverage and publication biases. Furthermore, the thematic focus restricted to Brazilian FEIs implies limitations on the generalizability of the results to state and private institutions, which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Therefore, the following inclusion criteria were defined: peer-reviewed scientific articles, published in full, available electronically, in Portuguese and English, whose results emphasized aspects of the relationship between student assistance and the promotion of mental health care for university students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions. On the other hand, duplicate articles, those that did not meet the proposed theme and criteria, and, finally, those that did not have results or conclusions related to the theme in their abstracts were excluded.

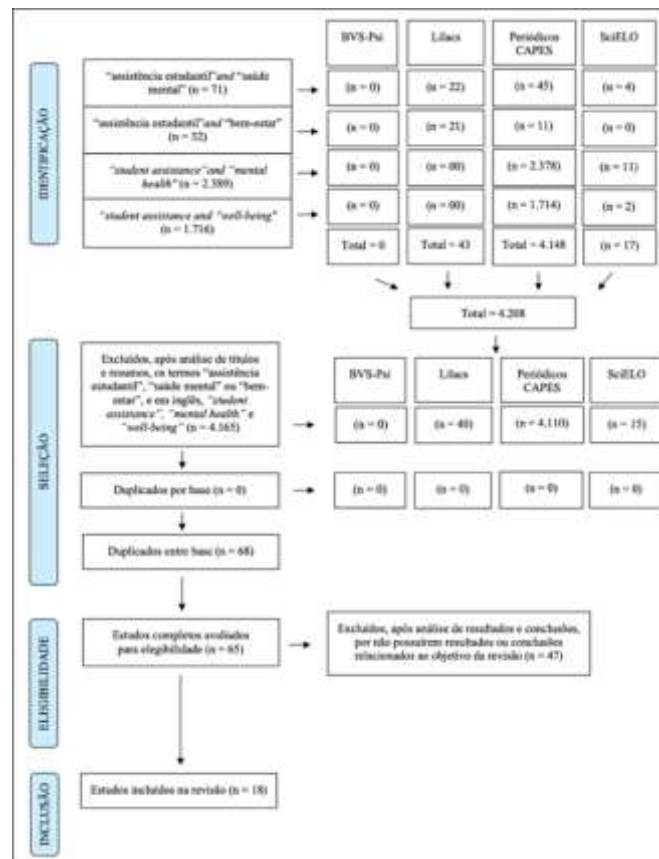
In an orderly fashion, the search and analysis of the productions were carried out in two stages, from January to June 2024. The first stage consisted of an advanced search in the databases, detailing the number of articles, and the process of selecting, identifying, screening, and determining the eligibility of articles that met the established inclusion criteria, after reading all titles, abstracts, or summaries. Therefore, in the second stage, the entire text was read and the flowchart shown in Figure 1 was completed, along with the instrument containing the following information: title, author(s), journal, country, year of publication, objectives, methodology, and research results. These are summarized in Table 1. This was based on the analysis methodology recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Peters *et al.*, 2015) for data extraction. The topics were adapted for better understanding of the content and subsequent analysis, according to the objective of this research.

It is also noteworthy that the deduplication procedure was conducted in a bipartite process, ensuring methodological rigor in the identification and removal of redundant studies. Therefore, the first phase consisted of an automated process, in which the total set of records identified in the selected databases was imported into the Rayyan software, a platform that employs specialized algorithms for the systematic comparison of multiple metadata fields, including title, authorship, year of publication and Digital Object Identifier (DOI), allowing for efficient primary screening (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016).

Subsequently, a second phase of manual verification was implemented to examine the remaining list of titles and authors, with the express goal of identifying and capturing any residual duplicates that were not detected by the automated

algorithm. Such cases are common when the same studies are indexed in different databases with slight variations in their metadata. The criterion established for selecting the record to be retained in the event of a duplicate was to prioritize the one that presented the most complete and comprehensive set of information, considering the presence of an abstract, DOI, year of publication, title, and authorship.

Figure 1 – Flow of the process of selection, identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion of studies in the review



Source: Adapted from PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

3 RESULTS

A total of 4,208 records were obtained using the selected descriptors from the BVS-Psi (n = 0), Lilacs (n = 43), CAPES Journals (n = 4,148), and SciELO (n = 17) databases. After the screening process, according to the criteria adopted for titles and abstracts, and for duplicates within and between databases, 65 articles were evaluated for eligibility, of which 18 studies were included in the review.

Table 1 presents an overview of the eighteen selected publications, highlighting the study characterization, according to the recommendations of the Joanna Briggs Institute (Peters *et al.*, 2015), in: title, author(s), year of publication, journal, country, objectives, and results of the listed articles.

Table 1 - Distribution of references included in the integrative review, according to the BVS-Psi, Lilacs, CAPES and SciELO databases, in order of year of publication

TITLE	AUTHORSHIP	YEAR	JOURNAL	COUNTRY	OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
The mental health of university students in the health field: an integrative literature review.	Costa <i>et al.</i>	2023	Peer Review	Brazil	Analyze the main national and international publications on the mental health of university students in the health field.	The results indicated that the majority of students who sought help complained of depression, anxiety or difficulty concentrating.
Senses and repercussions of student assistance on the eating practices of students from a Brazilian public university during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Mota; Santos; Campos.	2023	Frontiers in Public Health	Brazil	To identify the meanings attributed by students at a federal public university to student assistance and the relationship between mental health and their eating practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.	The study revealed the presence of food insecurity among students, highlighting that the Student Assistance Program (PNAES) contributed emergency grants, but its isolated actions were insufficient to meet all the needs of vulnerable students. Although many valued the assistance, there was a call for more investment in the program and attention to factors that impact academic life, such as the difficulty of balancing studies and work, especially during the pandemic.
Impact of students assistance policies on quality of life and mental health.	Brito <i>et al.</i>	2023	Frontiers in Public Health	Brazil	To assess the quality of life and the presence of minor mental disorders in 1st to 4th year medical students at a public university in Brazil, comparing beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of student assistance.	The study indicated a decline in perceived quality of life scores and environmental domain among students receiving student assistance. Those at risk of mental disorders showed a lower quality of life compared to those without. Thus, student assistance policies may present vulnerabilities in promoting quality of life and mental health, especially with regard to the environment.
Experiences of being a university student during the pandemic: changes, adaptations, and shared perspectives.	Marinho <i>et al.</i>	2023	Educação e Pesquisa	Brazil	To understand the experiences of university students in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, considering the transformations in their routines, difficulties related to learning processes and mental health.	The results demonstrate the relevance of student assistance as a fundamental support for university students during the pandemic, highlighting the importance of strategies for welcoming, monitoring, and promoting mental health in the academic environment.

Student mental health assistance actions in Brazilian federal higher education institutions.	Araújo; Morais; Pires.	2023	Diálogos Interdisciplinares	Brazil	To understand mental health care actions in the context of psychological distress among undergraduate students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES).	Student assistance focused on mental health is essential to reducing students' psychological distress. It is recommended that this assistance go beyond the PNAES (National School of Education and Training Program), being institutionalized in official documents such as the Institutional Development Plan and internal regulations. This will allow for continuous and planned actions, independent of the institution's management.
Mental health at university: actions and interventions aimed at students.	Gomes <i>et al.</i>	2023	Educação em Revista	Brazil	To identify and analyze mental health interventions at the Federal University of Alagoas aimed at students.	The mental health interventions carried out at Ufal are recent, still scarce and were driven by democratization policies, suggesting that they are developed, for the most part, by the student assistance sector, from a prevention perspective.
Profile of student assistance teams at Brazilian federal universities in providing mental health care to students.	Menda <i>et al.</i>	2022	Avaliação (Campinas)	Brazil	To understand the profile of the teams, the services offered to students, the working conditions and the training needs of Brazilian federal universities in relation to mental health care.	The results show the complexity of the work of student assistance teams and their regional and institutional differences, as well as the need to implement professional qualification policies to improve the quality of services offered to university students.
The importance of Student Assistance in times of pandemic: a report of experiences from the Educational Development Center of the Federal University of Pampa - Uruguayan Campus.	Cunha <i>et al.</i>	2022	Research, Society and Development	Brazil	To problematize the relationship between socioeconomic vulnerability and the challenges brought about by the pandemic, specifically the period of social isolation and Emergency Remote Education (ERE).	The results showed that Student Assistance initiatives (financial assistance for supplemental meals, rent, and internet infrastructure) have contributed to the benefit of the students receiving assistance. The assistance was also expanded to cover emergency needs (Digital Inclusion Assistance) to improve access to the ERE (Regional Education Program), promoting student retention, even amid the COVID-19 crisis.
Student assistance to university students on medical leave: a case study.	Vieira <i>et al.</i>	2021	Ciência, Cuidado e Saúde	Brazil	Understand how the student assistance process for university students on medical leave occurs.	There are delays in processing cases, differences in case management practices, a lack of credibility regarding students' health conditions and the need for flexible

						learning, and little awareness of the right to student assistance during sick leave. This right needs to be better publicized and procedures within the institution systematized.
Student assistance work processes in higher education: a perception of social workers at the University of Brasília (UNB).	Sant'anna; Almeida.	2021	Administração Pública e Gestão Social	Brazil	Analyze the work processes of social workers in student assistance at UNB.	The results of this research indicated that there are few positive factors in the work processes of student assistance at UnB, suggesting the need for interventions in different aspects, in order to keep up with the transformations that have occurred in Brazilian public universities.
(About) experiences, mental health and coping with the pandemic of university students in socioeconomic vulnerability.	Carvalho; Silveira	2021	Research, Society and Development	Brazil	To characterize the psycho-emotional repercussions, main stressors, and coping strategies used by university students supported by student assistance at a public university during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Most students evaluated remote learning negatively, facing difficulties adapting. They reported that student support during the pandemic was crucial to their continued university experience. Coping strategies included approaches focused on both problems and emotions. The results indicate that the pandemic and remote learning negatively impacted the experience and mental health of socioeconomically vulnerable students served by the PNAES.
Implementation of telemental health care for medical students during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Liberal <i>et al.</i>	2021	Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica	Brazil	To analyze the implementation of telemental health care for UFRJ medical students during the pandemic, for the continuity of remote mental health care, which began at the end of March 2020.	Telecare represents a potential for learning and change in the ways in which access to care is offered, with the prospect of bringing benefits to students' mental health, even after the current pandemic period, with the goal of expanding these services to other UFRJ courses.
On the paths of student assistance: thinking about student mental health at UERJ.	Azevedo <i>et al.</i>	2021	Cadernos Cajuína	Brazil	To present the work developed by the multidisciplinary team of the Department of Reception, Psychosocial Health and Well-being, of the State University of Rio de Janeiro, and the reflections precipitated in the daily life of the service that led to the construction of	Considering mental health in student support is crucial, but creating spaces dedicated to the care and support of students experiencing mental health issues is complex and involves several variables. The professional training environment demands specific care, requiring a multidisciplinary team that cannot be limited to clinical professionals alone.

					care strategies regarding student assistance at the aforementioned University.	
Psychology in contexts of inequality: actions under debate in student assistance.	Oliveira; Gomes.	2020	Psicologia Política	Brazil	To analyze the role of Psychology in supporting and promoting mental health for students at Brazilian Federal Universities.	The study highlights the landscape of psychology in student support in Brazil, highlighting changes in practices over the years, which have evolved from individual approaches to include group practices and, more recently, research with psychologists working in the field. The results reveal a diversity of practices, but with a predominance of traditional approaches focused on individual student care.
Risk factors for suicidal ideation among university students attended by a student health assistance service.	Machado <i>et al.</i>	2020	SMAD, Rev. Eletrônica Saúde Mental Álcool Drog.	Brazil	To identify risk factors for suicidal ideation among university students treated at the student health assistance service of a Federal University in the state of Minas Gerais.	The study identified five risk factors for suicidal ideation among university students treated by the Health Division: psychotropic medication use, previous suicide attempts, non-suicidal self-harm behavior, alcohol abuse, and living in Uberlândia, a large urban center compared to other campuses. These findings can inform suicide prevention strategies and aid in the formulation of public health policies addressing this issue.
Mental health and sleep quality among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: experience of a student assistance program.	Coelho <i>et al.</i>	2020	Research, Society and Development	Brazil	To present the experience of a group of university professors and a tutor in the construction, implementation, and consolidation of an extension project on mental health and sleep quality, during the COVID-19 pandemic, among undergraduate students.	The experience of professors and tutors during the project reflected the uncertainty surrounding the return to in-person classes and the options for online classes. Despite this, the conversation circles generated gratifying feelings, with many reports of well-being among both students and professors after the activities.
Mental health at university: the perspective of university students on student retention.	Garcia; Capellini; Reis	2020	Colloquium Humanarum	Brazil	To analyze the opinions of university students on student retention on how the university could support them in their psychosocial experiences and mental health.	As a result, it was found that the students' speeches converge to highlight the importance of psychological care during the university period, as part of the student assistance service.

The mediating effect of academic experience on the relationship between personal resilience and satisfaction of students enrolled in student assistance.	Costa <i>et al.</i>	2020	Research, Society and Development	Brazil	To verify the impact of personal resilience and academic experience on the satisfaction of students registered in student assistance at a Federal University.	Personal resilience has a positive impact on students' academic experience, which, in turn, also contributes to their satisfaction with the university. However, resilience does not directly affect satisfaction, but rather indirectly, mediated by the academic experience, which plays a crucial role in this relationship.
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Source: Prepared by the author.

4 DISCUSSION

Promoting mental health care for university students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions is a multifaceted topic that is emerging as a central concern and requires the integration of student assistance policies, psychological interventions, suicide prevention strategies, and social inclusion practices in light of the challenges faced by this population (Santos, 2022). According to Araújo, Morais, and Pires (2023), student assistance should be expanded to encompass not only socioeconomic issues but also the needs of students facing mental disorders, even if they do not meet the low-income criteria.

Consistent with the study by Menda *et al.*, (2022), student assistance departments at Brazilian higher education institutions (IFES) offer a variety of services, such as screenings, individual and group counseling, and referrals to other services. The most common services are for other staff members, the Unified Health System (SUS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUS), and other university departments. Furthermore, the authors highlight worrying gaps in student mental health care at Brazilian federal universities, pointing to a lack of training for student assistance teams to handle the demands of this area, coupled with precarious infrastructure that hinders the proper development of activities. Consequently, Vieira *et al.*, (2021) highlight other aspects such as delays in processing cases, differences in case management practices, a lack of credibility regarding students' health status and flexibility in content, as well as limited knowledge about the right to student assistance.

In the research by Costa *et al.*, (2023), which addresses the mental health of university students in the health field, focusing on the influence of academic and emotional factors on their well-being, found that during their academic training, students often face disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression, which can harm their educational experience and future professional practice. Furthermore, as pointed out by Coelho *et al.*, (2020), difficulties faced by students during their academic experience were identified, such as changes in routine and sleep problems. It is noteworthy that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these problems, leading to an increase in the prevalence of mental health problems among Brazilian university students (Cunha *et al.*, 2022; Leão; Goto; Ianni, 2021).

The influence of the university experience on students' career paths reveals significant correlations between their level of involvement in institutional activities, the development of attitudes, and the results obtained in their academic development (Astin, 1993; Martins; Ribeiro, 2017). In this sense, the concept of student engagement is based on two central pillars: (i) the premise that learning is a process actively constructed from the experiences students have throughout their higher education journey; and (ii) the recognition that institutional policies, structures, and practices play a decisive role in qualitatively and quantitatively influencing the degree of this engagement within the university environment (Hirt, 2005).

Thus, it is understood that student engagement transcends the individual sphere, permeating and being permeated by the entire organizational culture of the educational institution. This multidimensional construct manifests itself in the quality and frequency of interactions established between student peers, as well as in the relationship between students and faculty. Additionally, engagement is directly impacted by the level of psychosocial and academic support that the institutional environment is able to provide, configuring itself as a collective and systemic responsibility (Kuh, 2009; Marti, 2009; McClenney; Marti; Adkins, 2012). Therefore, the implementation of psychological interventions and support programs in HEIs is essential to address mental health problems. Therefore, psychological counseling services, social skills workshops, conversation circles, and mindfulness programs have been effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety that affect university students (Azevedo *et al.*, 2021; Ramos *et al.*, 2018).

That said, Araújo *et al.*, (2023) investigated the effectiveness of the National Student Assistance Program in providing mental health support, highlighting the scarcity of resources that limits its ability to fully serve students. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of institutionalizing mental health actions, the need for specific public policies for university students, the identification of risk factors for suicidal ideation, and students' vulnerability to mental health problems. Furthermore, the research by Gomes *et al.*, (2023) highlights the scarcity of coordinated actions across different sectors regarding the promotion of student mental health. Despite some initiatives, such as the participation of student assistance psychology professionals in academic events and "Yellow September" campaigns, the study identified challenges in the lack of joint projects focused on student mental health and considering the institutional reality.

Like Oliveira and Gomes (2020), they also unravel the predominance of individual activities of psychology professionals in student assistance, but they also point to the evolution of practices, including group interventions and research on the work of psychologists in this field. Based on reflections on the implementation of public policies to democratize higher education, the authors highlight the need to expand the role of psychologists in this context, questioning individualized practices and proposing more collective and critical approaches.

According to Romanini and Gumucio (2023), there is an urgent need to develop proposals for the prevention and promotion of university mental health, expanding the

possibilities for psychologists' work and highlighting the need for more comprehensive strategies to meet the mental health needs of university students, aiming at the well-being and integral development of these individuals in the academic context. Furthermore, Sant'anna and Almeida (2021) argue for the need for interventions in various areas to keep pace with the transformations occurring at Brazilian public universities.

In the study conducted by Mota *et al.*, (2023), the authors explore the impact of student assistance programs on the eating habits of students at a Brazilian public university during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study reveals that many students experienced food insecurity, with changes in their eating habits driven by economic challenges and limited access to quality food. Despite assistance through emergency grants, students struggled to maintain a healthy diet. In this sense, the importance of strengthening student assistance policies in developing the psychological well-being of students is highlighted, such as the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), essential for providing financial support, housing, food, transportation and access to cultural and sports activities, which can contribute significantly to the mental health of students (Silva; Nunes; Pacheco, 2023).

The study by Machado *et al.*, (2020), which addresses the risk factors for suicidal ideation among university students served by a student health service at a Brazilian public university, identified five main risk factors: psychotropic drug use, previous suicide attempt, non-suicidal self-harm behavior, alcohol abuse, and studying at the Uberlândia campus. Furthermore, the research highlights the need to develop public health policies aimed at preventing suicide in this vulnerable population and suggests understanding the risk factors for suicidal ideation among university students, with early identification, prevention, appropriate intervention, and stigma reduction being of utmost importance. Therefore, the promotion of mental health care in HEIs should include suicide prevention strategies, such as awareness campaigns, staff training, and the creation of support networks, as fundamental approaches to preventing university student suicide (Barbosa *et al.*, 2021).

It is also emphasized that student assistance should also address issues of social inclusion and diversity. Students from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds face specific challenges that can affect their mental health (Bernadino-Costa *et al.*, 2018). Araújo *et al.* (2019) highlight the effectiveness of student assistance as an essential mechanism that tends to impact student retention at university and provides conditions for students to face socioeconomic and educational challenges, promoting equal opportunities, inclusion in higher education, and completion of studies at HEIs. Therefore, programs that promote equity and respect for diversity are crucial to creating a healthy and inclusive university environment (Gaiotto *et al.*, 2022).

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions undertaken, supported by the analysis of scientific literature, this work presented the relationships between student assistance and the context of promoting mental health care among university students at Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions. Furthermore, the research also fostered knowledge of the work of student assistance teams and psychology professionals, providing scientific and social feedback through the contribution and impact of this study on understanding the processes in this field.

As pointed out in the work, to formulate effective student assistance actions and strategies, it is essential to go further, unraveling the dynamics, relationships, perceptions, and experiences that intertwine within the university context. In other words, understanding the promotion of mental health care for undergraduates requires a kaleidoscopic, collaborative, and active listening perspective that takes into account the diverse factors and social, historical, cultural, institutional, political, and economic processes that influence this reality. It is worth noting that student assistance is an emerging research topic, with increasing production within databases.

Further research is considered relevant for the study of other characteristics. In short, it is hoped that studies like this will bring greater visibility to the issues of student assistance and mental health in Brazilian higher education institutions (FIHEs) and serve as a basis for the formulation of public policies aimed at preventing and promoting health within universities. Thus, such policies should benefit students, faculty, and staff, contributing to the creation of a physical and social environment that prioritizes the health and biopsychosocial well-being of the university community.

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Authorship contribution

Rafael Anuniação Oliveira – Research conception, investigation, methodology design, data collection, data analysis, and writing (original text).

Renata Meira Vêras – Faculty advisor of the research project, contributing to data interpretation, analysis, proofreading, and editing.

Tânia Maria de Araújo – Faculty co-advisor of the research project, contributing to data interpretation, analysis, proofreading, and editing.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with the article "Student assistance and mental health promotion in Brazilian federal universities: an integrative review".

Data Availability

All underlying materials that support this study are included in the manuscript.

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