

Permanence Policy in the Brazilian University: Psychology and Social Insertion through Education

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ABSTRACT – Social access and permanence policies changed the profile of Brazilian graduate students, and new demands have required physical and human investments from the federal government. This study aims to discuss the implications of the permanence policy for the practice in psychology in federal higher education institutions, specifically in the context of student assistance in the Northeast of Brazil, using 88 documents from the websites of nine of the 63 federal universities. The interpretative results indicated four Meaning Nuclei: the presence of psychology in student healthcare; the development of teamwork; staff who contribute to the loss of students; and focus on the actions on the student body. These provide topics for further reflection by managers and student assistance professionals, in social insertion actions through education.

KEYWORDS: Higher education, student assistance, psychology, university

Política de Permanência na Universidade Brasileira: Psicologia e Inserção Social pela Educação

RESUMO – Políticas sociais de acesso e permanência modificaram o perfil do estudante brasileiro de graduação e novas demandas exigiram investimentos físicos e humanos, do governo federal. Objetiva-se discutir as implicações da Política de Permanência para a prática em Psicologia no ensino superior federal, especificamente, no contexto da assistência estudantil no Nordeste brasileiro. Utilizam-se 88 documentos *online*, nos *sites* de nove das 63 universidades federais. Os resultados interpretativos indicaram quatro Núcleos de Significação: a presença da Psicologia na atenção à saúde do estudante, o desenvolvimento do trabalho em equipe, um quadro de psicólogos/as deficitário e foco das ações no corpo discente. Esses apontam reflexões para gestores e profissionais da assistência estudantil, em ações de inserção social, através da educação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino superior, assistência estudantil, psicologia, universidade

For many years, higher education was considered elitist in Brazil. In order to break with this history of exclusion, several access policies were implemented in higher education, such as the *Programa de Apoio a Planos de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais* (Support Program for Federal Universities' Restructuring and Expansion Plans, or REUNI), the *Sistema de Seleção Unificada* (Unified Selection System, or SISU), and the *Lei de Cotas* (Quota Law). These proposals made it possible to change the profile of *Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior* ("Federal Institutions of Higher Education," or IFES) and demanded the need for investment in permanence-directed activities. Thus, in 2010, the Student Assistance Policy was legalized

as an action that allowed direct investments for low-income students and the expansion of human resources. These aimed to guarantee the reduction of dropouts and promote better retention at this level of education. Before that, student assistance at universities was already present, but it was used in the interests of each IFES and as its budgetary resource.

According to Kowalski (2012), student assistance in Brazil has a long history, but from 2007 onward it gained more specific contours through the launching by the federal government of the *Plano Nacional de Assistência Estudantil* (National Student Assistance Plan, or PNAES). According to the author, student assistance can be divided into three distinct phases to help understand its historical process in Brazil. The

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first phase started with the creation of the first university and extended to the country's political democratization. The second phase was marked by debates that resulted in the new configuration of the Student Assistance Policy, now active in universities. Finally, the third phase, comprising the process of expansion and restructuring of the IFES, as well as the process of regulating student assistance, continues to this day.

PNAES was created in 2007 through Ordinance No. 39, and was sanctioned as Decree-Law 7,234, in July 2010, under the name of *Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil* (though it kept the same acronym, PNAES). The decree appears with the objective of combating social and regional inequalities in higher education, being a fundamental instrument for the materialization of the democratization process of this level of education. Therefore, it aims to expand the permanence conditions of low-income students enrolled in onsite undergraduate courses, with priority given to students from the public basic education network, or with a *per capita* family income of up to one and a half times the minimum wage (Brazil, 2010).

For Gonçalves (2011), PNAES is considered a social policy, as it proposes a standard of equity. In order to make this effective, the decree points out ten strategic areas that could be developed by the IFES: student housing; transport; food; healthcare; digital inclusion; culture; sports; nurseries; pedagogical support; and the access, participation, and learning of students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, and high abilities and giftedness. Vasconcelos (2010, p. 609) points out that this proposal “transits all areas of human rights,” as it encompasses the resources required for the survival of the student (housing, food, transportation, and financial resources), to actions focused on ideal health

conditions, and the pedagogical support that is important for professional training.

This time, actions have been implemented that have changed the profile of the Brazilian undergraduate student and, as a consequence, new demands have arisen, which required investments in physical and human resources by the federal government. It is important to highlight that, according to Decree 7,234, the IFES have the autonomy to manage their own actions regarding student assistance, as well as to assemble their own teams. Likewise, the actions must consider “their specificities, the strategic areas of teaching, research, and extension, and those that meet the needs identified by their student body” (Brasil, 2010). In this direction, each IFES will be able to conduct its own actions, according to the needs of the students, available budget, as well as the concept adopted by the professionals who manage student assistance.

By listing several areas to be developed, different professional categories may comprise student assistance, with psychology being one of them. According to a survey carried out in 2016, the presence of 201 psychology professionals was identified in this context (Cêpeda, 2018). Given the above, some questions permeate our concerns: what are the implications of democratization policies, specifically student assistance, for the performance of psychology professionals in federal higher education? Are there directions, from the insertion in this context, for the practice in psychology? Thus, this article aims to discuss and reflect on the implications of the permanence policy for the practice of psychology in federal higher education in the Northeast of Brazil, specifically, in the context of student assistance.

METHOD

Qualitative research, using the technique of document analysis as an empirical subsidy to investigate psychology in student care, since our interest turned to the exploration of documents available on the websites of federal universities (considered primary sources), as they have not yet received analytical treatment (Lakatos & Marconi, 2001). In institutions, “the documents are intended to record institutional routines and, at the same time, to record the information necessary to legitimize the way things are done in these routines” (Flick, 2009, p. 235). Thus, the procedure for searching and analyzing the documents used the stages of metasynthesis, developed in the research group *Psicologia e a Ciência Psicológica-CNPq* (“Psychology and Psychological Science-CNPq”): Exploratory, Crossing, Refinement, Description, and Interpretation (Oliveira, Lima & Morais, 2016; Oliveira et al, 2017; Oliveira & Bastos, 2017; Oliveira, Bueno & Rocha, 2019). The investigation advanced the development of the interpretation phase, through the meaning nuclei procedure as support for the interpretation

of the findings (Gomes, 2020). According to Aguiar et al. (2015), this methodological proposal aims to apprehend the meanings formed by the subject, from their relationship with the surrounding reality, and uses the following steps: survey of pre-indicators; systematization of indicators; and systematization of the meaning nuclei.

In view of the significant production of documents available on the websites of 63 Brazilian universities, identified in the exploratory phase and carried out between the months of October and November 2018, we selected the following types of documents from the Northeast Region: institutional management reports, student assistance documents, and information on psychology in student assistance, which totaled 474 documents. These went through the floating reading procedure (Bardin, 2011), using the terms “mental” and the radical “psi,” and in the end, we identified 149 documents that presented the presence of psychology in student assistance. IFES that did not have all types of documents were excluded. In the end, 88 documents, from

nine IFES, made up the investigation corpus. These were described and interpreted. It is noteworthy that the interpretive phase allowed the identification of two Meaning Nuclei: the implications of the permanence policy for work in the subject of psychology in student care, and actual psychological care in student care: activities in focus.

The reflections discussed here are part of the intranuclear analysis carried out, and part of the dynamic process of

the meaning nuclei that is, they come from the discussion between the indicators, listed in the systematization of the pre-indicators. We thus obtained the meaning nuclei composed of the following indicators: psychology in student healthcare; multiprofessional teamwork; a deficiency in the number of professional staff; and student services versus low-income students, which will be developed below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially, the PNAES proposal (Decree 7.234), as mentioned above, is aimed at undergraduate students, with priority given to those in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability, mainly due to the limited resources made available to each IFES. The objective of the program is to guarantee the reduction of regional inequality. The actions must reach the difficulties presented by the student body in a way that makes it possible for them to remain in higher education institutions (Brasil, 2010).

It is also important to consider that the surveys carried out from 1994 on the profile of undergraduate students in Brazilian IFES allowed the *Associação Nacional dos Dirigentes das Instituições Federais* (“National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions,” or ANDIFES) and the *Fórum Nacional de Assuntos Comunitários e Estudantis* (National Forum on Community and Student Affairs, FONAPRACE) to list, in 2010, the 10 areas that could be developed, which should be associated with teaching, research, and extension activities in the IFES. For this purpose, each IFES, considering budgetary resources and autonomy, develops specific strategies and interventions through a team composed of technicians from different professional categories, supported by Decree 7,234 of 2010.

The results presented here discuss, in particular, the implications of democratization actions aimed at federal higher education in the Northeast of Brazil, especially the PNAES, for the presentation of psychology in student assistance.

Psychology in Student Healthcare

In the PNAES base text, launched in 2007, the terms “emotional crisis” or “emotional difficulties” were located in the topic referring to health. In this topic, the use of public health services by students with greater social vulnerability is also mentioned, as well as the visit to the dentist and the identification of “some topics considered challenging and which demand specific health programs: the prevention of STD/AIDS; family planning; chemical dependency, oral health, and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases” (Andifes, 2007).

In 2019, the most recent survey, the V National Survey of Socioeconomic and Cultural Profile of Graduates of IFES—2018, carried out by FONAPRACE, mental and emotional health remains in the related topic “health and quality of life of students.” This topic aimed to point out student habits related to food, medical, and dental care, as well as life situations that could affect the academic path (Andifes, 2019).

In this direction, and according to the documents mentioned above, psychology seems directed toward the topic of health and quality of life in the student policy, so that it makes interventions in emotional issues, mental health, or situations that may interfere with academic life or that may promote the reduction of retention and evasion resulting from mental illness. However, other studies are needed to identify whether interventions in this area have reduced dropout and retention rates, as proposed by PNAES.

This direction seems to be in line with the results of our study. We found that the present indicators are directed toward psychology, presented in the documents, with a tendency to be located in the area of attention to student health. We also found that psychology, in student assistance in the Northeastern Region of Brazil, is a specific sector in eight institutions. These sectors were linked to a coordination of student health or quality of life, in four IFES, with the following names: “student healthcare coordination” (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte - UFRN); “sports and health coordination” (Universidade Federal Rural do Semi-Árido-UFERSA); “student healthcare coordination” (Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira - UNILAB); and “student quality of life coordination” (Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia-UFSB).

Explicitly, in three IFES (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco-UFPE, Universidade Federal de Alagoas-UFAL, and Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia-UFSB), the psychology professional, working in student assistance, was named as a health professional. In the attributions of the psychologist appointed by UNILAB, in 2018, the health disease process was mentioned, in which the role of the psychologist was “to build spaces for listening and for the expression of feelings, meanings, and experiences related

to the challenges of everyday academic life, as well as the health process, disease-care, and paying attention to its relationship to cultural practices.”¹

In addition, while not linked to the health sector, psychology professionals developed projects and programs aimed at student health. For example, in 201 UFAL initiated the *Programa Integrado de Atenção à Saúde do Estudante* (Integrated Student Healthcare Program, or PIASE), which aimed to “plan, coordinate, and carry out actions within the scope of the protection and promotion of the health of university students.” It is important to highlight the fact that this IFES had previously flagged psychology as a specialty within the health policies concerning student assistance.

At UFPE, the *Núcleo de Atenção à Saúde do Estudante* (Student Healthcare Center, or NASE) was a sector focused on student health, and the *Programa de Bem-Estar Mental* (Mental Wellness Program, or PROBEM) provided the student with “healthcare through psychological and/or psychiatric follow-up”. At UFRN, a university in which psychology was linked to a coordination of student healthcare, the Student Mental Healthcare Program was active in healthcare. The institution stated that its actions were focused on “healthcare in its medical, dental, psychological, and psychosocial aspects.” The Universidade Federal do Piauí (UFPI) stated that the psychological care provided had “as its main objective, the promotion of health.” It also stated that in 2017 there would be advances and improvements in healthcare services, including psychology and dentistry.

In another direction, of the nine IFES, only two did not point to projects or were not linked to health sectors (Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco-UFRPE, and Universidade Federal do Cariri-UFCA). This time, the findings suggest that psychology is focused on student healthcare in most of the IFES, as the psychologist is considered a health professional in this context.

In our view, this indicator reflects historical markers, since the psychologist, like other professionals, was considered a health professional, as of March 6, 1997, through Resolution No. 218 of the National Health Council (Brasil, 1997). It was, therefore, a proposal that came from the health area, since, at that time, it intended to assist the subject in an interdisciplinary perspective. In this direction, some contradictions arise. Psychology presents itself as an area of knowledge, linked to the greater area of human sciences, as defined by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) and the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPq). This apparent contradiction sometimes implies debates that diminish the importance of the theoretical and methodological diversity of psychology as a science and of its practice as a profession, which is often inconsistent with the demands of the context of action.

It is important to highlight that healthcare, historically well established in the Brazilian Ministry of Health, brings new and necessary challenges to higher education, assuming a transversal characteristic. Therefore, healthcare is not an objective of MEC to be developed in the IFES, but one of the ways to provide a reduction in the number of dropouts (Bleicher & Oliveira, 2016). In other words, it is understood that we are facing a multi-determined subject, and that several factors can be responsible for the increase in retention and a decrease in the dropout rate (Bardagi & Hutz, 2009; Basso, 2013), with health being one of them. According to Carissa Etiene, director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), health permeates and is impacted by various sectors such as education, housing, sanitation, and water resources, etc., as health is transversal (Conselho Nacional de Secretarias de Saúde, 2019). Furthermore, according to the Pan American Health Organization, as it is a broad concept, “Health is not the exclusive responsibility of the health sector, but of other sectors as well” (Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde, 2018, p. 5).

As we have a healthcare policy in this country, where is education in the issue of student healthcare, specifically as it applies to student assistance? At what level should it act, and what is its relationship to the health policy? We believe that clear delimitation would facilitate the attributions of professionals who work in this context. Discussions between the different sectors is highlighted as fundamental to conducting more satisfactory interventions, but it does not seem wise for education to replace the other services that make up the psychosocial network. However, it is essential to establish a dialogue with it, at its various levels.

Guzzo (2011, p. 33) noted that psychology professionals who work in education should take action to promote student health, engaging in “activities that allow students to succeed in their life, reducing the course of violence, school failure, and early pregnancy, among other behaviors considered to be at risk for healthy development.” Accordingly, Patias and Abaid (2014) point out that these actions must be implemented to promote the quality and effectiveness of the educational process, as well as to involve the institution and its interactive networks. Here, the range of intervention is expanded, no longer focusing only on the student, but aimed at the institution and the network in which it operates.

We have also identified, to a lesser extent, the participation of psychology in different areas of health, such as in the selection of scholarships and grants (UFRPE, 2016; 2017, 2018; UFPI, 2015, 2016; UFRSA, 2018), and in pedagogical support (UFPI, 2011, 2012, 2013; UFRSA, 2018; UFAL, 2017), both performing work with other professionals, as established in the indicator below. Locating psychology in specific fields of knowledge becomes more complex in what has been identified as the second indicator in the meaning process: the multidisciplinary relationship in the student care team.

¹ This information and other quotes that appear throughout the text are contained in the documents of each named IFES, available on their websites, which were analyzed in detail in Gomes (2020).

Multiprofessional Teamwork

We understand “multiprofessional teamwork” as actions, based on the juxtaposition of different areas of knowledge, in which the same theme is approached through different perspectives: each professional, according to their perspective, develops their own methodology (Galván, 2007). Therefore, we can affirm that psychology in student assistance develops multidisciplinary teamwork.

This statement can be seen in the actions of the UFPI when highlighting the fact that the activities developed are “under the responsibility of a multidisciplinary body of professionals, among which are educators, social workers, pedagogues, nutritionists, dentists, and psychologists,” and that the objective of the psychological service provided was to develop multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary actions in the context of student assistance. However, we found that, in 2015, the Psychosocial Service, which provided psychological and pedagogical care, became the Psychological Support Service and Pedagogical Service. This “dismemberment” may indicate a changing context, which suggests the need to improve specificities without losing its multidisciplinary aspects.

At UFAL, according to PIASE launched in 2018, the psychologist formed a team also composed of social workers and educators “which can be expanded at any time to include other health professionals.” In another program in this same institution, also established in 2018, the *Programa de Apoio e Acompanhamento Pedagógico ao Estudante* (Student Support and Pedagogical Monitoring Program, or PAAPE), it was pointed out that it was up to the “multiprofessional team to identify and monitor the pedagogical, psychological, social, and other situations that may lead to retention or dropout situations.” Regarding the monitoring of students in the university residency program, a multidisciplinary team was responsible for psychosocial and pedagogical monitoring. Therefore, two professional categories, together with psychology, seem to stand out in student assistance: social work and pedagogy. We also note that, although our findings do not show it, the place of the technician in educational affairs may be part of the team in solving situations that involve students, since educators also compete for this position (Pontes, 2014; Sanseverino; & Gomes, 2017). These are issues that deserve to be investigated.

In another IFES, something similar was observed: at the UFPE’s NASE, “outpatient care in the areas of clinical medicine, nutrition, nursing, psychology, psychiatry, and social work” was provided. At UFSB, a healthcare team worked “intra- and interdisciplinarily, promoting health actions aimed at the community” and individuals. Meetings between psychology and nursing were held in 2015 focusing on the “multidisciplinary work plan.” At UNILAB,

psychology developed activities with social workers and nutritionists, according to a 2013 report.

At UFCA, to carry out the psycho-pedagogical appointments, “turns between the psychologist and the pedagogue were required,” since there was only one room in which appointments could be conducted. At UFRPE, the *Coordenadoria de Apoio Psicossocial* (Psychosocial Support Coordination, or COAP) is active in the teaching–learning process, identifying problems and obstacles that interfere with the students’ integration into student life, planning actions in the pedagogical, psychological, and social areas.” Actions to support pedagogical activities and participation in the execution of a student assistance program were developed by the psychology department at UFERSA. Finally, UFRN states that “through social work and psychology, it offers assistance and guidance to teachers and family members about how to deal with students.”

In line with other studies, the presence of a multidisciplinary team in student care is highlighted (Siqueira et al., 2017; Oliveira & Silva, 2018; Cêpeda, 2018). For Oliveira and Silva (2018), teamwork is one of the factors that constitute student assistance, which may be related to the complexity of the demands that can affect the students’ permanence in higher education institutions. According to ANDIFES (2007, p. 17):

The elaboration and implementation of programs linked to student assistance within the scope of the IFES is related to the integrated work of professionals working in different areas of knowledge. It is essential that efforts be made to ensure the formation of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams that are responsible for the construction and execution of student assistance programs that involve, among other aspects, social and economic assessments.

By pointing out several areas that can be developed by the IFES, through a multi- and interdisciplinary team, to help the student stay in higher education institutions, psychology is directed toward teamwork. This result reinforces the findings of Oliveira (2016), in a study carried out with student assistance professionals from public federal universities in the state of Minas Gerais, in which he identified teamwork as a structuring factor for the identity of psychology in this context.

In this sense, the demands presented by the students, summarized in the areas presented by PNAES, which are related to the reduction of the dropout rate, requires the presence of a technical body, as indicated by ANDIFES, and it is possible to affirm from this indicator that, in student assistance from the IFES, the role of psychology develops primarily in a multidisciplinary team. However, we observe that the human resources of psychology are far from meeting the demands of the student and institutional body in the IFES. This led us to the following indicator in the analyzed texts.

A Deficient Professional Staff

According to the results of the survey, four IFES pointed to weakness in relation to the staff of psychology professionals. In 2014, UFAL suggested not having psychology professionals in one of its teaching units, located in the interior of the state:

Another challenge faced by social services at the Sertão campus is the issue of medical and/or psychological referral, since in those municipalities (Delmiro and Santana do Ipanema), the public health situation is precarious and/or nonexistent and is not even able to attend to local demand.

This same information was again pointed out the following year, which suggests that the deficit in the professional staff remains. The quote above shows that the psychology proposal is related to individual student care and requires a reconfiguration of the idea of health professionals in the municipalities. Similarly, at UFRPE in 2014, there were few professional psychologists on the staff, so the departure of a professional created a deficiency in the services offered: “In the academic units of Garanhuns and Serra Talhada, the psychologists asked to be discharged from their positions, this service being deficient since 2014; however, new professionals are already being called to fill the vacancies.”

Through data analysis, we found that psychology professionals in student assistance have assumed the role of managers. However, in this context, and due to the reduced number of professionals, assuming leadership may be associated with the commitment of the professional’s specific performance. This shows an apparent contradiction, given that, as a manager, I could request the hiring of more professionals in the area. However, in a public service organizational environment, a sort of embezzlement in the area has been identified. It was observed at the UFPI the reduction of appointments in psychology, due to the professional having assumed the leadership role:

One aspect that must be considered is that the psychologist was the temporary head of the sector from October 2016 to June 2017, a period in which she had a reduction in her activities as a psychologist, due to the impossibility of meeting all the demands accumulated by the position.

According to a document from this institution, the results of a survey conducted internally with students also showed that “the psychological and pedagogical support programs for students are not yet adequate to the demands and social context.” According to UFRN, “despite the finding of growth in assistance actions for students in this period, the staff is quite deficient, especially in the psychological care sectors.” This information is from 2011, but in later years (2015, 2016, and 2017) the numbers reflect the deficit of professionals in psychology. In one of the programs developed by IFES, there

were volunteers in the areas of psychology and pedagogy. The actions of another program were intended only for “students identified as priority according to the PNAES criteria, given the great demand and the existence of few effective professionals.”

These results are in line with the conception of several authors (Mancebo et al., 2015; Guerra, Machado, & Rocha, 2019; Trevisan & Torres, 2020), who point out that REUNI was not able to achieve its goals, as the increase in the number of students was not accompanied by an increase in the number of technical professionals. Mancebo et al. (2015) also add that the resources earmarked for the construction of the physical structure proved to be insufficient for expansion, which compromised the quality of academic life and the support work for students provided by technical servers. In this sense, the authors point out the existence of discrepancies related to investments in the private and public sector.

In practice, the number of psychology professionals is lower than that of other student assistance professionals, such as social workers (Cêpeda, 2018), which may point to the emphasis given to actions developed in this context, with priority for scholarships and various aids, in the areas of housing, food and transport, as indicated in literature (Leite, 2015; Santos et al., 2015). In this sense, PNAES seems to assume an excessively specific, compensatory, and welfare profile (Leite, 2015). The difference in the number of professionals in student care can generate ambivalence in the stance taken by psychology. It can lead to an emphasis on assistance to needy students, due to the lack of effective professionals, as pointed out by one of the IFES, and not because it advocates that the intervention is aimed only at this target audience.

We understand that these issues involve the inclusion process sought by student assistance in federal higher education institutions. The emphasis on needy students, associated with compensatory and welfare practices, suggest the reinforcement of practices that maintain ethical political suffering, a psychological political process that reproduces the inequality arising from the “relationship between the threats arising from social inequality and the affective responses of those who subject themselves to it” (Sawaia, 2009, p. 370). In line with this thought, a study by Machado and Pan (2014, p. 194) points out that the Student Assistance Policy, by guaranteeing the right to remain at the university, also allows the student “a discursive place that is also marked by the inequality that constitutes it in the university: the university with ‘economic weakness.’”

It is in this sense that we agree with Oliveira and Silva (2017), for whom democratization is still under construction. For this to occur, it must associate university access policies and the provision of permanence conditions (Pereira, May, & Gutierrez, 2014), including physical and human resources consistent with institutional demand. Only in this way will it allow the reduction of the effects of social inequalities

and a reduction in dropout rates, ultimately reaching social inclusion through education.

It is important to include in this discussion the lack of “specific regulation for the actions directed by the PNAES” (Bleicher & Oliveira, 2016, p. 546), which can generate uncertainty for the actions developed in student assistance that, associated with the limited budget resource, implies that each institution and manager can conduct student assistance, according to a more specific or expanded conception. These overlaps bring us to the last indicator.

Student Service Versus the Low-income Student

According to Decree 7,234, priority is given to “students from the public basic education system or with a *per capita* family income of up to one and a half times the minimum wage, without prejudice to other requirements set by federal higher education institutions” (Brasil, 2010). The quote shows us that the program — aimed at undergraduate students, with a focus on income — is the main variable for delimiting the actions of the Student Assistance Policy. The study carried out by ANDIFES (2019) on the profile of students in federal higher education pointed out that “the percentage of students belonging to families with monthly *per capita* income of ‘up to one and a half times the minimum wage’ jumped from 44.3% in 1996 to 66.2% in 2014, reaching 70.2% in 2018, the highest level in the historical series.”

This means that, if we consider the criteria of Decree 7,234 (Brasil, 2010), more than half the Brazilian IFES students present themselves as the target audience for student assistance. However, guaranteeing attendance in student assistance programs is a priority, as only students who can prove a *per capita* income of up to one and a half times the

minimum wage can, depending on the number of available places, be awarded a scholarship or assistance.

According to the results of our study, psychology prioritizes serving low-income students in only two IFES (UFPE, UFRPE). At the same time, it was possible to identify priority cutouts in other IFES, but in these IFES, it occurred in previous years (UFERSA only presented in 2010 and 2011), or it turned into the specific IFES program (UFRN, UFAL). It is important to point out that it was these IFES’s purpose to serve low-income students (UFPI provided services to the academic community — including students); the data were found at the end of the actions, which may be related to the high number of students in situations of vulnerability in the institution. UFRN said that the priority indicated in one of its developed programs was justified due to the high demand of students associated with the reduced number of psychology professionals.

In general, psychology, in most of the IFES — that is, in seven of them — has its actions aimed at the student. These findings are in accordance with studies already carried out (Oliveira, 2016; Moura & Facci, 2016; Bisinoto & Marinho-Araújo, 2011; Serpa & Santos, 2001). In this sense, it is necessary to question whether the condition for expansion of the public, adopted by psychology professionals in student care—without the priority of a target audience, whether undergraduate and/or those of low socioeconomic status — is related to the expressive contingent of students in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability, according to data presented by FONAPRACE (Andifes, 2019). However, it is not always covered by the transfer of grants and scholarships. One should also question whether the concept of student assistance, adopted by psychology professionals, covers all students and/or the entire university community and adopts a broader look at the actions of student assistance in higher education. In this direction, future research is needed to support such concerns and reflections.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the indicators listed above, psychology, in the context of student assistance at IFES in the Northeastern Region of Brazil, allows us to state that public education policies, implemented in higher education, bring complex implications and challenges for the use of psychology in student assistance. Our analysis suggests that psychology, in student care, was called upon to act in direct assistance of the specific demands of student healthcare, one of the areas in PNAES, a program developed in the context of higher education, into which education and educational processes are inserted. In this context, psychology turns its actions toward undergraduate students, through an understaffed group of professionals who develop their actions in a multidisciplinary team.

The method used allows advances in metasynthesis through the use of specific phases in document analysis, with relevant contribution from the meaning nuclei in the interpretation of the findings and in future studies by the research group. The important collaboration of the IFES websites is noteworthy, which allows us to know the dimensions and scope of Brazilian public policies and constitutes a decisive element in the dissemination of actions at the university level and with society in general.

In relation to the practice of psychology, it can be said that the access and permanence policies broaden the range of psychology performance in higher education, but they do not define the attributions of the professionals who work in this context. At the same time, the results indicate that

the implications of these policies - legislation and research carried out by ANDIFES -, associated with the possibilities of intervention in student care, highlight team performance, with relevance mainly attributed to the health aspects of undergraduate students. In the educational context, the use of psychology should focus on health promotion and prevention actions, which facilitate the educational process, so that not only the student, but the institution and its surroundings as well, are considered in the intervention. In addition, the articulation of these actions with research, extension, and teaching activities should be considered, as recommended by PNAES.

Finally, we highlight the relevance, on the part of psychology professionals, of the theoretical basis of research and its execution, which can support interventions, based

on the understanding of the reality of the institution and its actors. At the same time, the results listed here are relevant for student care managers and professionals, as they denote the trajectory of student care and the realization, through the actions of psychology, of its main objective: social inclusion through education.

It is important to consider, in this context, the autonomy of the IFES which is associated with the way which the policies for access and permanence in higher education were implemented as well as the investment destined for them, opening possibilities for both priority and non-exclusivity of actions. It has implications for the composition of the psychology professional staff, with choices that affirm their relevance and help define psychology's target audience in this context.

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