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A Fight for Health Rights: Women of Color and The Public Health SUS System in Brazil

I. Abstract

There has been a longstanding battle in Brazil when it comes to providing basic human rights to Black Women. A history of discrimination, racism and even more barriers have made it difficult for women of color to access the health services that they need. Unfortunately, this exclusion women of color has resulted in poor health outcomes. The Brazilian Public Health System called Sistema Único de Saude (SUS) provides universal healthcare for the whole Brazilian population. In Brazilian culture, racial discriminations are based on phenotype and not ancestry, which makes it different from the United States. For this project, I looked at the relationship between Black Women and the public health SUS system. The problem is that Black Women in Brazil receive poor healthcare because of the strong presence of racism and discrimination in healthcare. I will be analyzing the challenges that Black Women face when they encounter the public health system. This is important to understand because racism in Brazilian society goes back a many years and is affecting the Afro-Brazilian population in terms of health, access, quality, and cost. Most communities have demanded better, especially Black women, but the government fails to acknowledge what the people want due to Brazil being a new democracy. Policies and systems including SUS have been put into place working against the minority population in two ways—negligence and inefficiency. Most communities have demanded better, especially Black women, but the government fails to acknowledge what the people want due to Brazil being a new democracy. Policies lack inefficiency because once those policies are put into place, they do not function for the purpose it was created. The government is powerful, and they are using system as source to slowly get prevent minorities speak out and take away a basic right human right of everyone having healthcare.

This is relevant because we must understand the social injustices in Brazil because we normally do not look into the world politics around us. We tend to focus our attention on the social and political factors in our own countries. There has been a huge gap when it comes to treatment based on race among the Black population compared to Whites. When going to Brazil in fall 2017, I did not understand positionality or intersectionality and how I would be able to fit into Brazilian civilization. Getting the opportunity to do a month long research with the women at ODARA Institute for Black Women located in Salvador has opened my eyes to see who I am as a woman of color. Understanding the similarities, we face as Black Women has allowed me to connect with them. We tend to ignore so much of the world around us and fail to realize that other places are dealing with far worse conditions when it comes to obtaining basic human rights. Researching with these women inspired me to want to share the information that I obtained after a month of learning and speaking with them. I want to be the voice for the women at the organization that I worked with. Advocating for communities that face injustices especially in other countries is important to talk about in discussions.