

BLACK WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

MULHERES NEGRAS NO MERCADO DE TRABALHO: UMA REVISÃO
SISTEMÁTICA DA LITERATURA

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a systematic review of the literature on Black women in the labor market, focusing on wage inequality, structural barriers, and research gaps. Based on the analysis of 79 articles indexed in Scopus, bibliometric and thematic approaches are combined to identify patterns, theoretical frameworks, and limitations in the field. The findings highlight the centrality of intersectionality and the predominance of qualitative studies focused on discrimination and lived experiences, with limited emphasis on quantitative assessments of wage inequality. The literature also shows geographic concentration and epistemic fragmentation. The study contributes by systematizing existing knowledge and proposing a research agenda grounded in comparative, longitudinal, and multi-level approaches.

Keywords: black women; labor market; wage inequality; structural racism; systematic review.

RESUMO

Este artigo realiza uma revisão sistemática da literatura sobre mulheres negras no mercado de trabalho, com foco na desigualdade salarial, nas barreiras estruturais e nas lacunas de pesquisa. A partir da análise de 79 artigos indexados na Scopus, combinam-se abordagens bibliométricas e temáticas para identificar padrões, estruturas teóricas e limites do campo. Os resultados evidenciam a centralidade da interseccionalidade e a predominância de estudos qualitativos voltados às experiências de discriminação, em detrimento de análises quantitativas das desigualdades salariais. Observa-se, ainda, concentração geográfica e fragmentação epistemológica da produção científica. O estudo contribui ao sistematizar o conhecimento existente e propor uma agenda de pesquisa orientada por abordagens comparativas,

longitudinais e multinível.

Palavras-chave: mulheres negras; mercado de trabalho; desigualdade salarial; racismo estrutural; revisão sistemática.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding and making visible the trajectories, contributions, and persistent inequalities experienced by Black women is not only a scholarly endeavor but also a necessary step toward informing public policy and advancing social justice (Paixão; Gomes, 2008). Despite growing academic attention to issues of race and gender in the labor market, Black women continue to occupy structurally disadvantaged positions shaped by enduring historical and institutional dynamics.

Structural racism constitutes a foundational pillar of social organization, operating as a historically embedded mechanism of stratification that permeates institutions, everyday practices, and collective imaginaries (Laurent et al., 2025; Veazie; Hailu; Riddell, 2025). As highlighted by Zeifert, Wermuth, and Matos (2024), its manifestations extend beyond explicit acts of discrimination, functioning instead through the continuous reproduction of inequalities that legitimize privilege and exclusion. This systemic logic contributes to the persistent marginalization of Black populations, who remain underrepresented in positions of power, overrepresented in precarious forms of employment, and disproportionately exposed to social vulnerabilities. The invisibilization of these outcomes, often reinforced by institutional omission and social indifference, remains one of the most effective mechanisms sustaining structural inequality (Zeifert; Wermuth; De Matos, 2024).

Although vulnerability is an inherent aspect of the human condition, it assumes differentiated and intensified forms depending on the social contexts in which individuals are embedded. Rather than emerging randomly, vulnerability is socially produced through structural inequalities shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, race, class, geographic location, and economic conditions (Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021). These dimensions interact to increase exposure to risks while simultaneously limiting access to institutional protection and opportunities for upward mobility.

Within this framework, Black women occupy a particularly disadvantaged intersectional position, where racial and gender-based barriers overlap and reinforce one another, constraining access to employment opportunities and career advancement (McCluney; Rabelo, 2019). This condition is historically rooted. The labor market participation of Black women has long been associated with low-wage occupations, high levels of informality, and limited social recognition - patterns that can be traced back to the legacy of slavery and the absence of effective post-abolition inclusion policies (Silva; Araujo; Sposato, 2021; Zeifert; Wermuth; Matos, 2024).

Despite normative and institutional advances in recent decades, empirical evidence indicates that Black women remain concentrated in precarious employment positions, characterized by lower earnings and reduced prospects for career progression compared to other demographic groups (Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021). This persistent inequality is sustained by a set of interlocking structural barriers involving race, gender, and class, which operate cumulatively rather than independently (Krieger et al., 2006; Moses, 1985; Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021).

In response to this complex and enduring scenario, this study aims to systematically map, synthesize, and critically assess the scientific literature on Black women's participation in the labor market, with particular emphasis on wage inequality, labor precarization, and structural barriers shaping their professional trajectories. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a Systematic Literature Review based on PRISMA Protocol (Page et al., 2021), supported by bibliometric analysis, following established methodological guidelines (Quevedo-Silva et al., 2016).

By examining the selected body of literature, this review seeks to identify dominant theoretical approaches, methodological patterns, and emerging research gaps. In doing so, it contributes to consolidating a fragmented field of inquiry and advancing a more comprehensive understanding of how structural inequalities are reproduced and studied across different contexts. Ultimately, the study aims to inform both academic debates and the development of public policies oriented toward racial and gender equity in the labor market.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: WHY STUDYING BLACK WOMEN IN THE BRAZILIAN LABOR MARKET MATTERS

The persistence of racial inequalities in Brazil is deeply rooted in a historical trajectory shaped by more than three centuries of slavery. The enactment of the Eusébio de Queirós Law in 1850 (Fundação Cultural Palmares, 2024), which formally ended the transatlantic slave trade, marked a transition that was not accompanied by any structured project of social inclusion for the Black population in the post-abolition period (Zeifert; Wermuth; De Matos, 2024). As a result, the abolition process (both delayed and incomplete) failed to ensure

access to land, education, or formal employment, reinforcing patterns of exclusion that continue to shape Brazilian society.

During and after the slavery period, Black women played a central role in maintaining family structures and cultural continuity, often engaging in strategies of resistance under conditions of extreme coercion (Paixão; Gomes, 2008). Historical accounts indicate that Black women were frequently perceived as “uncooperative” in plantation settings precisely because of their active participation in acts of resistance, including escape strategies and the preservation of cultural identity through language and oral traditions. Even within slave ships, their presence was associated with the instigation of rebellions, which led to systematic separation practices. However, the scarcity of historical records reflects a broader epistemic erasure imposed by colonial perspectives. Only in recent decades have historiographical efforts begun to reconstruct these trajectories through alternative sources such as wills and death records, thereby offering new insights into the lived experiences of Black women (Paixão; Gomes, 2008).

Following abolition, the Brazilian state adopted policies of whitening and modernization that deliberately excluded formerly enslaved populations from full citizenship. This exclusion was not incidental but structurally embedded in nation-building processes, resulting in the persistence of an exclusionary labor system characterized by informality and limited access to social protection (Zeifert; Wermuth; De Matos, 2024). In this context, Black women transitioned from enslaved labor within elite households to poorly compensated domestic work, often under conditions lacking legal recognition or labor rights. Tasks historically associated with enslaved women (such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare) continued to be performed by

Black women in the post-abolition period, frequently in exchange for minimal wages or basic subsistence (Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021).

Importantly, slave ownership in Brazil was not restricted to economic elites but extended to small merchants, professionals, and self-employed individuals, many of whom owned one or two enslaved individuals primarily for domestic labor. After abolition, these labor positions were largely maintained by the same women or their descendants, reinforcing the intergenerational reproduction of occupational roles. This historical continuity is central to understanding the structural vulnerability of Black women within domestic labor, where intersecting dimensions of race, class, and gender converge to produce conditions of marginalization and invisibility (Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021)

Contemporary labor market data reveal the persistence of these patterns. It is estimated that, of approximately seven million domestic workers in Brazil, more than five million operate in informal conditions, and around four million are Black women (Silva et al., 2021). These figures highlight not only the precarious nature of domestic labor but also the enduring legacy of an exclusionary system sustained by insufficient public policies and limited institutional accountability. The literature consistently indicates that this sector remains characterized by low wages, extended working hours, and minimal legal protections, contributing to the social invisibility of workers who remain present in a significant proportion of Brazilian households.

Beyond material inequalities, symbolic dimensions also play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of Black women in the labor

market. The historical sexualization of Black women's bodies (often associated with colonial stereotypes such as the "mucama") continues to influence contemporary perceptions, exposing these women to heightened risks of harassment and abuse, particularly in private work environments (Silva; De Araujo; Sposato, 2021). This racialized and gendered dimension of oppression reinforces patriarchal structures that persist beyond formal institutional frameworks.

Empirical evidence further demonstrates stark disparities in labor market outcomes. Comparative analyses based on data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) show that the white economically active population is predominantly concentrated in formal employment, public sector positions, and higher-skilled occupations. In contrast, the Black population remains overrepresented in informal work, domestic labor, subsistence activities, and low-skilled self-employment. These disparities are even more pronounced for Black women, among whom approximately 75% historically lacked formal labor protections, and a significant proportion were employed in domestic work. Wage inequalities are equally striking, with Black women earning, on average, only a fraction of the income received by white men (Paixão; Gomes, 2008).

Recent literature has expanded the analytical lens beyond material inequalities to examine the role of visibility regimes in shaping workplace experiences. Black women navigate complex dynamics of invisibility, hypervisibility, partial visibility, and precarious visibility, which emerge from the interplay between social belonging and distinction within organizational contexts (McCluney; Rabelo, 2019).

These conditions reflect not individual characteristics but institutional structures that define who is recognized, valued, and granted access to positions of authority. In this sense, visibility operates as a mechanism of power that regulates inclusion and exclusion within the labor market.

Taken together, these historical, structural, and symbolic dimensions underscore the importance of examining Black women's labor market experiences as a distinct and analytically necessary category. Understanding how wage inequality and structural barriers are produced and reproduced in this context requires a systematic synthesis of existing research. By situating this study within the Brazilian socio-historical framework, the present review contributes to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of labor market inequalities, while also engaging with broader debates on race, gender, and structural inequality.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study follows the principles of a Systematic Literature Review based on PRISMA Protocol (Page et al., 2021), supported by bibliometric analysis, in accordance with established methodological guidelines (Quevedo-Silva et al., 2016). The research process was structured into four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies.

The search strategy was conducted in the Scopus database due to its multidisciplinary scope and international recognition for indexing peer-reviewed scientific publications. The search was performed on June 27, 2025, using a combination of keywords applied to the TITLE-ABS-KEY field. Boolean operators were employed to capture relevant

studies addressing Black women's participation in the labor market. The search string was defined as follows:

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TITLE-ABS-KEY ("black women" OR "afro-descendant women" OR "mulheres negras") AND  
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("labor market" OR "job market" OR  
"employment" OR "occupational insertion" OR "workplace"  
OR "trabalho" OR "inserção profissional") AND  
TITLE-ABS-KEY ("historical context" OR "slavery" OR  
"colonialism" OR "racism" OR "intersectionality")
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The initial search yielded 178 records. After applying a document type filter restricted to scientific articles, the sample was reduced to 140 publications. Subsequently, titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened to assess adherence to predefined eligibility criteria. Following this process, a total of 79 articles were included in the final corpus of analysis.

The selection criteria were guided by the PICOS framework, adapted to the scope of this study as follows:

- P (Population): Black women, Afro-descendant women, and women identified as Black or mixed-race;
- I (Intervention/Exposure): labor market participation, wage inequality, institutional racism, and occupational barriers;
- C (Comparator): white women, white men, or studies without explicit comparators, provided that the focus remains on Black women;

- O (Outcomes): wage inequality, barriers to career advancement, and intersectional dynamics between race and gender in the workplace;
- S (Study Type): theoretical or empirical studies with sociological, legal, economic, or intersectional approaches, published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Based on the PICOS framework, the following inclusion criteria were established: (a) studies explicitly focused on Black women in labor or employment contexts; (b) research addressing wage inequality, structural barriers in the workplace, or institutional racism; (c) publications in English, Portuguese, or Spanish; and (d) studies within the health field, provided that Black women are analyzed as workers rather than patients.

Exclusion criteria were also defined to ensure the consistency and analytical focus of the corpus: (a) studies centered on Black women's health as patients (e.g., pregnancy, mental health, chronic diseases); (b) research focusing primarily on physical or sexual violence or femicide, even when approached from an intersectional perspective; (c) studies addressing racial identity detached from labor market outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, spirituality, aesthetics, or hair); (d) works on coaching, empowerment, or leadership without empirical or analytical grounding in labor indicators; (e) studies focused on academic or university insertion without direct relation to employability or income inequality; and (f) personal narratives lacking scientific or analytical treatment.

Of the 140 articles initially screened, 61 were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria. The most frequent reasons for

exclusion included lack of direct connection to labor market participation, emphasis on health-related issues (from a patient perspective), focus on physical or sexual violence, and analyses centered on identity dimensions without linkage to occupational or income indicators. This filtering process resulted in a coherent and analytically consistent corpus, aligned with the objective of examining structural barriers affecting Black women's labor trajectories.

Following the selection process, a database was developed using Microsoft Excel to systematize key bibliometric information, including authorship, publication, journal, country of origin, and area of study. This procedure enabled quantitative analyses related to the temporal, geographic, and thematic distribution of the publications. In addition, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted based on a full reading of the selected articles, allowing the identification of recurring patterns, dominant approaches, and research gaps in the literature on Black women in the labor market.

RESULTS

The analysis of the 79 articles included in this systematic review reveals a complex and still consolidating body of literature on Black women's participation in the labor market. Overall, the findings indicate a predominance of theoretical and analytical approaches, with a strong emphasis on structural racism, intersectionality, and the subjective dimensions of workplace experiences.

Rather than forming a cohesive and cumulative field, the literature is characterized by epistemic dispersion across disciplines. Contributions emerge from sociology, gender studies, psychology,

public health, and organizational studies, indicating that research on Black women in the labor market has developed through a transversal and interdisciplinary trajectory rather than within a single consolidated domain.

Table 1 presents the most cited articles within the final corpus, considering citation counts as an indicator of academic influence. These studies represent the intellectual core of the field, shaping both theoretical developments and empirical approaches to understanding Black women's labor market experiences.

Table 1. Most cited articles within the corpus

	Title	Author / year	Journal	Citations
1	Racial microaggression experiences and coping strategies of black women in corporate leadership	(Holder; Jackson; Ponterotto, 2015)	Qualitative Psychology	181
2	Intersectionality: are we taking enough notice in the field of work and employment relations?	(McBride; Hebson; Holgate, 2015)	Work, Employment and Society	177
3	Social hazards on the job: Workplace abuse, sexual harassment, and racial discrimination -	(Krieger et al., 2006)	International Journal of Health Services	143

	A study of black, Latino, and white low-income women and men workers in the United States			
4	Black women talk about workplace stress and how they cope	(Hall; Everett; Hamilton-Mason, 2012)	Journal of Black Studies	142
5	Measuring Structural Racism and Its Association With BMI	(Dougherty et al., 2020)	American Journal of Preventive Medicine	107
6	Black Women's Perspectives on Structural Racism across the Reproductive Lifespan: A Conceptual Framework for Measurement Development	(Chambers et al., 2021)	Maternal and Child Health Journal	107
7	Navigating the Workplace: The Costs and Benefits of Shifting Identities at Work among Early Career U.S. Black Women	(Dickens; Chavez, 2018)	Sex Roles	96
8	Conditions of visibility: An intersectional examination of	(McCluney; Rabelo, 2019)	Journal of Vocational Behavior	88

	Black women's belongingness and distinctiveness at work			
9	From mammy to superwoman: Images that Hinder Black women's career development	(Reynolds-Dobbs; Thomas; Harrison, 2008)	Journal of Career Development	86
10	Managing hypervisibility: An exploration of theory and research on identity shifting strategies in the workplace among Black women	(Dickens; Womack; Dimes, 2019)	Journal of Vocational Behavior	78

Source: Research data (2025)

#SoEveryoneCanSee:

Table presenting the most cited articles within the final corpus of 79 studies, organized by title, authors, year of publication, journal, and number of citations. The most cited article is *Racial microaggression experiences and coping strategies of Black women in corporate leadership* (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015), published in *Qualitative Psychology*, with 181 citations. Other highly cited studies address themes such as intersectionality in employment relations, workplace discrimination, occupational stress, structural racism, and identity management among Black women. The journals represented are primarily from the fields of psychology, sociology,

gender studies, and organizational behavior. Overall, the table indicates that the most influential studies in the field focus on structural and experiential dimensions of inequality, rather than exclusively on direct measurements of wage disparities.

A closer examination of the most cited studies reveals a concentration of research around four major analytical dimensions:

1. Workplace discrimination and racialized experiences, including microaggressions, harassment, and institutional exclusion;
2. Intersectionality as a central analytical framework, particularly in understanding overlapping systems of oppression;
3. Psychosocial and identity-related processes, such as coping strategies, identity shifting, and experiences of belonging;
4. Structural racism and its broader implications, including conceptual and measurement-oriented approaches.

These findings indicate that the field has developed primarily through critical and interpretative lenses, privileging analyses of lived experiences and structural conditions over strictly quantitative assessments of labor market outcomes. While this has contributed to a rich and nuanced understanding of Black women's experiences, it has also resulted in a relative underrepresentation of studies that directly measure wage inequality or conduct robust comparative analyses across demographic groups.

Another relevant aspect concerns the thematic orientation of highly cited studies. Even when not exclusively focused on labor market

outcomes, several influential articles address broader structural dynamics—such as health inequalities and conceptualizations of structural racism—that indirectly shape employment trajectories. This suggests that the field extends beyond traditional labor market research, incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives that expand its analytical boundaries.

In addition, the concentration of highly cited articles in journals from psychology, sociology, and gender studies reinforces the absence of a single dominant disciplinary core. This dispersion reflects both the complexity of the phenomenon and the challenges associated with integrating different methodological and theoretical approaches within a unified research agenda.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the literature on Black women in the labor market is theoretically rich but methodologically uneven. While substantial progress has been made in conceptualizing intersectional inequalities and documenting lived experiences, important gaps remain in the empirical measurement of wage disparities and in the development of comparative and longitudinal analyses.

The **geographic distribution of the studies** reveals a strong concentration of publications in a limited number of countries, particularly the United States and Brazil, followed by South Africa and a smaller group of countries with low representation. This pattern indicates that scholarly engagement with Black women's labor market experiences is not evenly distributed across regions but instead concentrated in specific national contexts.

Table 2 presents the countries with the highest number of publications identified in the final corpus.

Table 2. Countries with the highest number of publications

Country	Number of Documents	Country	Number of Documents
United States	52	United Kingdom	2
Brazil	11	Canada	2
South Africa	4	Australia	1
Germany	3	Chile	1
Israel	2	France	1

Source: Research data (2025)

#SoEveryoneCanSee:

Table presenting the countries with the highest number of publications in the final corpus of 79 studies. The United States has the largest number of publications, with 52 documents, followed by Brazil with 11. South Africa appears with 4 publications, and Germany with 3. Israel, the United Kingdom, and Canada each have 2 publications. Chile, France, and Australia each have 1 publication. The table shows a strong concentration of studies in a small number of countries, with a clear predominance of the United States and limited representation across other regions.

The concentration of publications in countries such as the United States, Brazil, and South Africa can be partially explained by their

shared historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, and institutionalized racial inequality. These contexts have historically structured labor markets along racial lines, producing persistent inequalities that have become central objects of academic inquiry.

However, this distribution cannot be understood solely through historical determinants. It also reflects broader asymmetries in global knowledge production. Countries with more consolidated academic infrastructures, greater research funding, and established traditions in race and gender studies (particularly the United States) tend to occupy a central position in shaping the scientific agenda on Black women's labor market experiences.

In this sense, the observed pattern reveals not only where inequalities are most visible, but also where they are most systematically studied and documented within indexed scientific literature. While Brazil and South Africa contribute important context-specific perspectives, their lower representation compared to the United States highlights disparities in the international visibility and dissemination of research produced in different regions.

This uneven distribution raises important questions regarding the generalizability of findings and the extent to which the literature adequately captures the diversity of Black women's labor market experiences across different socio-institutional contexts. It also suggests the existence of underexplored regions where similar or even more severe inequalities may be present but remain insufficiently documented in the academic field.

The analysis of **publication outlets** reveals a high level of dispersion across journals. Among the 79 articles included in the corpus, no single journal emerges as a dominant publication venue. Instead, a small group of journals — including *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *JAMA Network Open*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Career Development*, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Sex Roles*, and *Women's Studies International Forum* — each account for only two publications.

This pattern indicates the absence of a consolidated core of journals specializing in research on Black women in the labor market. Rather than contradicting bibliometric principles, this finding aligns with the expectations of Bradford's Law, which predicts a dispersion of scientific production across multiple sources, particularly in emerging or interdisciplinary fields.

The observed distribution suggests that the topic is inherently transversal, spanning multiple academic domains such as sociology, gender studies, public health, and organizational research. While this dispersion reflects the richness and multidimensionality of the field, it also points to a lack of consolidation, which may hinder the cumulative development of knowledge and the formation of a cohesive research agenda.

In this sense, the literature is characterized by both epistemic diversity and structural fragmentation, reinforcing the need for integrative efforts (such as systematic reviews) to synthesize findings and advance theoretical and empirical coherence.

The analysis of **authorship patterns** reveals a high level of dispersion in scientific production. Among the 79 articles included in the

corpus, no author demonstrates a dominant or sustained publication trajectory in the field. Only one author (Danielle D. Dickens) appears with more than one publication, contributing two studies focused on identity dynamics and workplace experiences among Black women.

Danielle D. Dickens is affiliated with Spelman College, a historically Black liberal arts institution in the United States. This detail is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights the role of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in advancing research on race, gender, and labor. The presence of the only recurring author within such an institutional context suggests that knowledge production in this field is not only academically dispersed but also socially and institutionally situated.

All other authors appear only once, indicating the absence of a consolidated group of researchers specializing in the topic. This pattern aligns with Lotka's Law, which suggests that in emerging or fragmented fields, scientific production tends to be distributed across a large number of authors with low individual productivity.

The analysis of **author keywords** reveals a structured yet heterogeneous thematic landscape within the literature on Black women in the labor market. Despite the diversity of topics, several recurring patterns emerge, indicating both areas of consolidation and fragmentation in the field.

First, intersectionality appears as the dominant analytical framework across the corpus. Keywords such as *intersectionality*, *gender and race* are consistently present, suggesting that the field is epistemologically grounded in the understanding of overlapping

systems of oppression. This reinforces the centrality of intersectionality not merely as a conceptual reference but as a guiding lens for empirical and theoretical inquiry.

Second, a significant portion of the literature focuses on structural and institutional mechanisms of inequality. Keywords such as *racism*, *discrimination*, *structural racism*, *sexism*, and *marginalization* indicate a strong emphasis on the processes through which inequalities are produced and reproduced within labor market contexts. This suggests that the field prioritizes explanatory frameworks centered on power relations rather than purely descriptive accounts of inequality.

Third, although labor market outcomes are a central concern of this study, keywords directly related to economic indicators (such as *wage inequality*, *occupational segregation*, and *pay gap*) appear less frequently. This indicates that the literature tends to focus more on the conditions and experiences surrounding work than on the quantitative measurement of labor market disparities.

In addition, the presence of keywords such as *identity management*, *coping*, *stress*, *visibility*, and *belongingness* highlights the importance of subjective and psychosocial dimensions in the analysis of Black women's work experiences. This pattern suggests a strong orientation toward qualitative and interpretative approaches, particularly those centered on lived experiences.

Another relevant thematic cluster relates to leadership, career development, and institutional barriers. Terms such as *leadership*, *glass ceiling*, *career development*, and *promotion* indicate a growing

interest in understanding both the constraints and possibilities associated with professional advancement among Black women.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the literature is characterized by a strong theoretical orientation toward intersectionality and structural inequality, combined with a fragmented and interdisciplinary thematic structure. While this diversity enriches the field, it also reinforces the need for integrative analyses capable of synthesizing dispersed knowledge and identifying coherent research agendas.

RESEARCH AGENDA ON BLACK WOMEN IN THE LABOR MARKET: TOWARD A STRUCTURALLY AND EPISTEMICALLY INTEGRATED FIELD

The systematic review reveals that, although the literature on Black women in the labor market has expanded significantly, it remains theoretically concentrated and empirically fragmented. The dominance of intersectionality as a guiding framework has enabled important advances in understanding overlapping systems of oppression; however, the empirical applications of this framework remain uneven across domains, methods, and contexts. Table 3 synthesized the main future avenues to research.

A first critical gap lies in the limited integration between structural analyses and longitudinal outcomes. While several studies document the presence of racism, sexism, and intersectional discrimination in workplace experiences, fewer investigations examine how these processes accumulate over time to shape career trajectories, income mobility, and long-term well-being. This

suggests the need for longitudinal, and life-course approaches capable of capturing cumulative disadvantage.

Second, the literature shows a strong emphasis on subjective experiences, such as discrimination, coping strategies, identity management, and emotional labor. Although these contributions are essential, there is a relative scarcity of studies that connect these micro-level experiences to meso- and macro-level institutional dynamics, such as organizational practices, labor market structures, and public policies. Future research should therefore advance multi-level analytical models that bridge individual experiences with structural conditions.

Table 3. Future Research Agenda on Black Women in the Labor Market

Research Domain	Identified Gap	Future Research Directions	Suggested Methods
Longitudinal Inequality	Lack of cumulative and life-course analysis	Examine how intersectional disadvantage evolves across careers	Longitudinal datasets; panel data; sequence analysis
Micro–Macro Integration	Disconnection between lived experience and structural analysis	Link identity, discrimination, and coping to organizational and institutional mechanisms	Multilevel modeling; mixed methods
Sectoral Expansion	Overconcentration in health, education, domestic work	Explore tech, digital economy, entrepreneurship, platform labor	Case studies; industry-level analysis; comparative sector studies

Organizational Mechanisms	Limited theorization of how inequality is reproduced	Investigate tokenism, performative diversity, inclusion tax, diversity commodification	Organizational ethnography; experimental designs
Intersectional Measurement	Difficulty operationalizing intersectionality quantitatively	Develop models capturing multiplicative effects of race and gender	Machine learning; interaction models; decomposition techniques
Health and Work Nexus	Limited integration between labor and health outcomes	Analyze how workplace inequality affects mental and physical health	Epidemiological models; longitudinal health studies
Leadership and Mobility	Focus on barriers, not success pathways	Study trajectories of successful Black women and enabling conditions	Narrative studies; career tracking
Global and Comparative Studies	Strong US bias	Compare institutional contexts across countries and regions	Cross-national datasets; institutional analysis
Emerging Inequalities	Limited attention to new forms of exclusion	Study algorithmic bias, remote work, and digital discrimination	Experimental and computational methods

Source: The authors based on research data (2025)

Third, important sectoral blind spots persist. The corpus is heavily concentrated in areas such as healthcare, education, and domestic

work; while emerging and high-growth sectors (such as digital economies, technology, entrepreneurship, and platform labor) remain underexplored. Given the increasing centrality of these sectors in contemporary labor markets, this gap limits the ability of the literature to anticipate new forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Fourth, the findings highlight the need to deepen the study of organizational mechanisms of inequality reproduction. Concepts such as tokenism, diversity commodification, performative inclusion, and “inclusion tax” appear in recent studies but remain insufficiently theorized and operationalized. Future research should move beyond identifying discrimination toward examining how organizations systematically produce, normalize, and sustain inequality.

Fifth, there is a growing but still insufficient body of work linking labor market inequalities to health outcomes, particularly in the context of structural racism and chronic stress. Expanding this line of inquiry is crucial for understanding how labor market experiences translate into broader patterns of physical and mental health disparities.

Finally, the review reveals a significant geographical and epistemic imbalance, with a strong concentration of studies in the United States and limited representation from other regions. This suggests that future research should prioritize comparative and Global South-oriented studies, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how different institutional contexts shape intersectional inequalities.

Taken together, these gaps indicate that advancing the field requires not only expanding empirical coverage but also developing integrative frameworks capable of linking intersectionality to

institutional analysis, longitudinal dynamics, and emerging labor market transformations.

LIMITATIONS

The present study is subject to limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the search strategy and database selection impose important constraints. Although Scopus is widely recognized for its multidisciplinary coverage and indexing of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals, the exclusive reliance on a single database may have limited the comprehensiveness of the review. Relevant studies indexed in other databases as well as regional repositories and non-indexed journals, may not have been captured. This limitation is particularly significant in the context of research on Black women, as knowledge production in this field is often situated in the Global South and disseminated through outlets that are underrepresented in major international databases. As a result, the corpus may reflect existing asymmetries in global knowledge production, potentially underrepresenting context-specific and locally grounded contributions.

Second, the study is constrained by the reliance on search terms and indexing practices. The use of predefined keywords, although necessary for systematic retrieval, may have excluded studies that address Black women's labor market experiences using alternative terminologies or conceptual framings. Given the interdisciplinary and evolving nature of the field, variations in terminology across disciplines and regions may have affected the sensitivity of the search strategy.

Third, despite the adoption of clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the selection process inevitably involved interpretative judgments by the researchers. Although such decisions were guided by theoretical and methodological parameters, they are not entirely free from subjectivity. This may have influenced the composition of the final corpus and the categorization of themes.

Fourth, the study is limited by the heterogeneity of the included literature. The corpus comprises studies from diverse disciplines, methodological approaches, and analytical levels, which, while enriching the analysis, also pose challenges for synthesis and comparability. The absence of standardized measures (particularly for capturing intersectional inequalities) limits the possibility of direct comparison across studies and restricts the ability to draw generalizable conclusions.

Finally, the review focuses primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles, excluding other forms of knowledge production such as books, policy reports, dissertations, and community-based research. Given the historically situated and practice-oriented nature of research on Black women, these alternative sources may contain valuable insights that are not fully represented in the academic literature.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a comprehensive and systematic mapping of the scientific literature on Black women in the labor market. By identifying patterns, gaps, and emerging themes, it contributes to advancing the field and offers a robust foundation for future research, particularly in fostering more inclusive, comparative, and methodologically integrated approaches.

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