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Background

- **Colorism**, defined as differential treatment based on skin tone within racial/ethnic groups, reflects internalized and structural hierarchies rooted in historical racial stratification.
- Prior research demonstrates that darker skin tone is associated with lower socioeconomic status, including disparities in education, employment opportunities, and perceived social value.
- Emerging evidence links darker skin tone with adverse health outcomes, potentially mediated by chronic psychosocial stress and discriminatory experiences.
- While discrimination is widely recognized as a social stressor that negatively affects mental and physical health, appearance-based discrimination related specifically to skin tone remains understudied.
- Because many studies examine race and skin tone simultaneously, it remains difficult to isolate the independent effects of colorism on health outcomes.

Purpose

To address the gaps in colorism research by assessing the influences of colorism on psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation.

Methods/Procedures

- A scoping review was conducted following PRISMA-ScR guidelines and established methodological frameworks for evidence mapping.
- Comprehensive database searches were performed in Embase (n=718), Web of Science (n=509), PubMed (n=462), and CINAHL (n=186).
- Additional records were identified through citation chaining and grey literature searches, yielding 3,351 total records.
- Records were imported into Covidence for de-duplication and screening; 1,205 duplicate records were removed.
- Title and abstract screening was conducted to assess relevance to colorism and mental health outcomes, resulting in 1,809 exclusions.
- Full-text screening was conducted using standardized eligibility criteria by trained UROP undergraduate research assistants under faculty supervision.
- For the presenter's assigned subset (n=40 articles), 8 studies met inclusion criteria, while 32 were excluded based on prespecified criteria.
- Included studies underwent data extraction and thematic synthesis to identify patterns in the relationship between colorism and mental health outcomes.
- Discrepancies were resolved through consensus and adjudication by a senior investigator.

Limitations

- Limited international evidence may constrain generalizability across global populations.
- Existing studies primarily focus on Black populations, with underrepresentation of other racial and ethnic groups.
- Measurement of colorism remains limited, particularly in distinguishing skin tone discrimination from broader racial discrimination.

Results

Results (Preliminary – Subset Analysis)

- Preliminary findings indicate that colorism is associated with psychological outcomes, including depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and self-esteem.
- Among older African Americans, darker skin tone was associated with greater psychological distress and depressive symptoms, particularly following experiences of discrimination.
- Among young to middle-aged African Americans, darker skin tone, especially among women, was associated with lower self-esteem, feelings of rejection, and increased depressive symptoms.
- Some studies suggest lighter-skinned African Americans reported feelings of rejection related to exclusion from their racial group, rather than perceived inferiority.
- Among Puerto Rican populations, darker skin tone was associated with greater discrimination and poorer mental health outcomes, although findings were less consistent among younger individuals.
- Evidence suggests the impact of colorism varies across cultural and racial/ethnic contexts, indicating that its influence on mental health is context-dependent.

Discussions

- Findings are consistent with prior literature demonstrating links between discrimination-related stress and adverse mental health outcomes.
- Evidence suggests colorism contributes to psychological distress and self-perception, particularly among African American populations.
- Variation in findings across Puerto Rican youth and other populations indicates that colorism may operate differently across cultural and racial/ethnic contexts.
- The review highlights the need for validated measures that distinguish colorism from broader racial discrimination.
- Future research should examine more diverse racial and ethnic groups and incorporate context-specific measures of colorism and discrimination.
- Advancing this work may improve mental health assessment by capturing intra-racial experiences of discrimination beyond traditional racial categories.

References

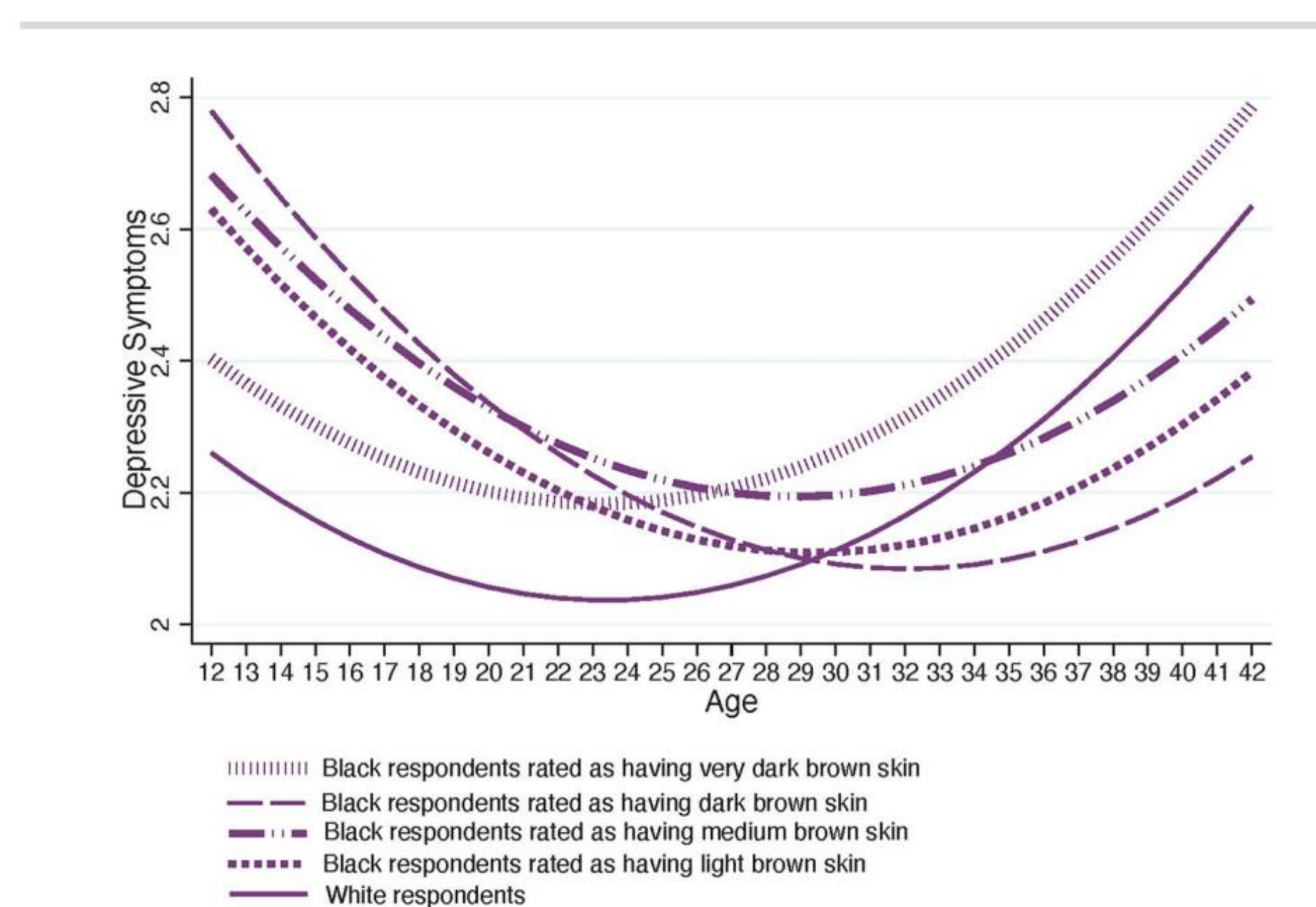
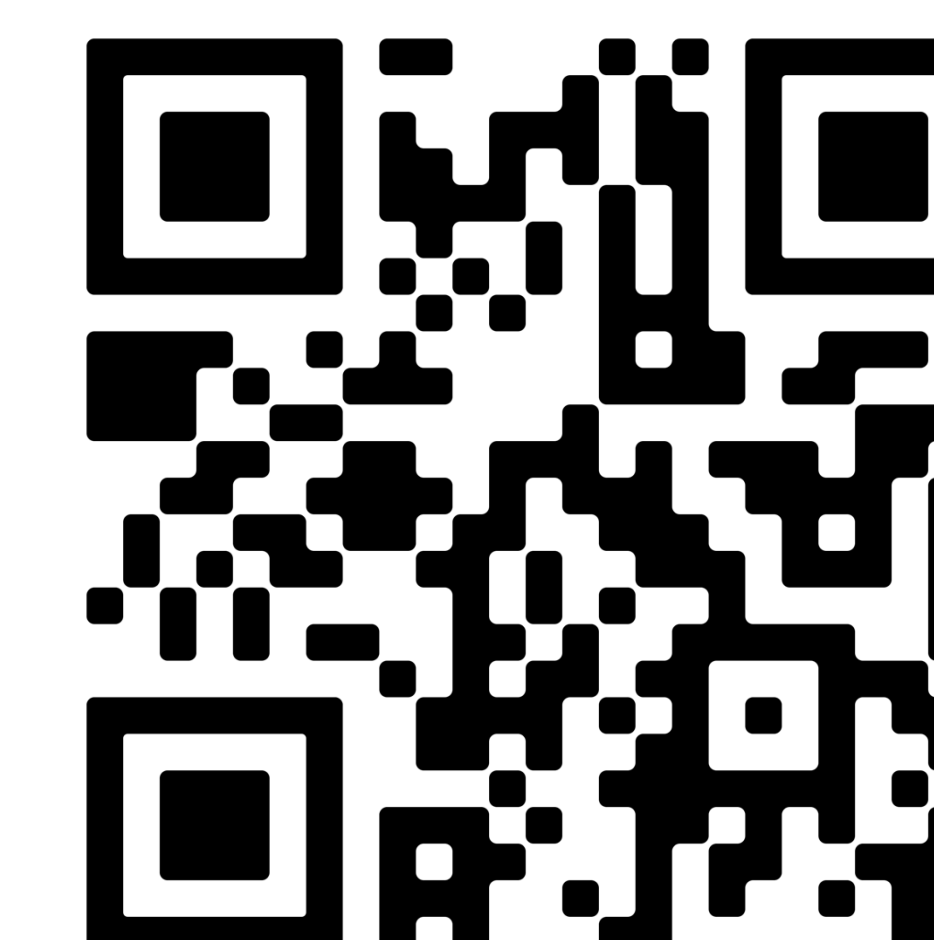
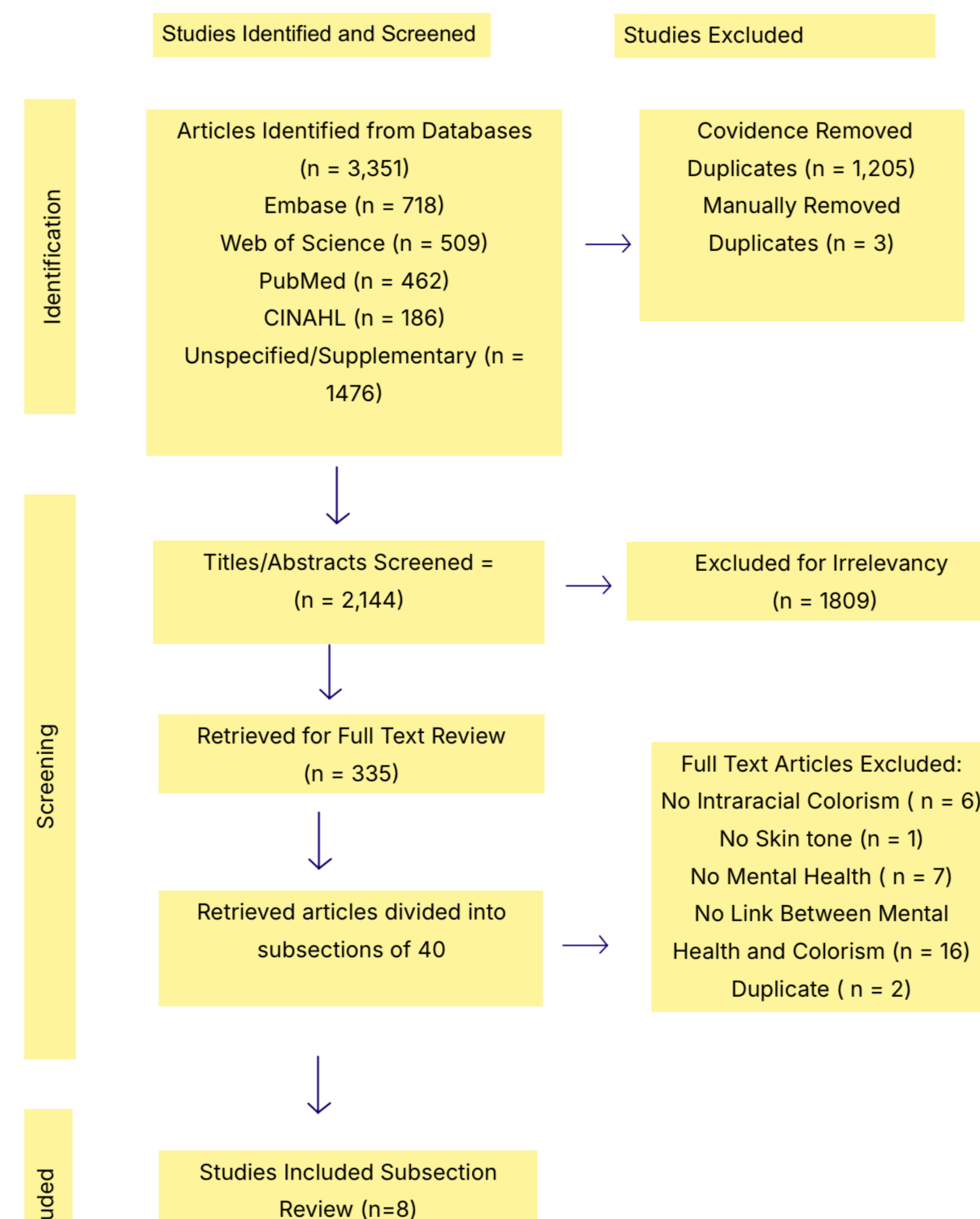


Figure 2. Age-trajectories of depressive symptoms among respondents attending high proportion Black schools, by interviewer-rated skin tone.

Chart from "Race, Skin Tone, School Context, and Mental" pg. 1413 and depicts "dark brown" skinned individuals with higher rates of depressive symptoms in adolescence and "very dark brown skin" with higher rates of depressive symptoms into adulthood.



PRISMA Flowchart describing Article Screening and Inclusion Process