


Photography in mental health: a look at the subjective


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Objective: to identify which mental health actions are taken from photography. **Method:** an integrative literature review, conducted between 2010 and 2019 in the LILACS, PubMed and SciELO databases. The following controlled descriptors were used: “mental health”, “psychiatry” and “photography”. **Results:** a total of 9 articles were analyzed, demonstrating different actions in mental health from photography: photography workshops, research with photovoice and photo-elicitation and photographic samples. It was observed that the populations of the studies were individuals in psychological distress, as well as people on the street, victims of violence and other vulnerable audiences. The photographic actions encouraged the deconstruction of stigmas, strengthened bonds and gave new meaning to their experiences. **Conclusion:** photography can be seen as a device for promoting mental health by allowing individuals to share their experiences and feelings, which are usually hidden in conventional methodologies. There was scarcity of studies that addressed photographic actions in mental health, demonstrating the need to deepen the knowledge about this tool.

Descriptors: Mental Health; Photography; Psychiatry; Review.

How to cite this article

Ribeiro LS, Bragé EG, Rocha DG, Ramos DB, Lacchini AJB. Photography in mental health: a look at the subjective. SMAD, Rev Eletrônica Saúde Mental Álcool Drog. 2022 Jan.-Mar.; 18(1):87-94. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1806-6976.smad.2022.170033>

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A fotografia em saúde mental: um olhar para o subjetivo

Objetivo: identificar quais ações em saúde mental são realizadas a partir da fotografia. **Método:** revisão integrativa de literatura, entre os anos de 2010 a 2019, nas bases de dados LILACS, PubMed e SciELO. Utilizaram-se os descritores controlados: "saúde mental", "psiquiatria" e "fotografia". **Resultados:** foram analisados 9 artigos, os quais demonstraram diferentes ações em saúde mental a partir da fotografia: oficinas fotográficas, pesquisas com fotovoz e foto-elicitación e mostras fotográficas. Observou-se que as populações dos estudos foram indivíduos em sofrimento psíquico, bem como pessoas em situação de rua, vítimas de violências e outros públicos vulneráveis. As ações fotográficas incentivaram a desconstrução de estigmas, fortaleceram vínculos e ressignificaram suas vivências. **Conclusão:** a fotografia pôde ser vista como um dispositivo de promoção da saúde mental ao permitir que os indivíduos compartilhem suas experiências e seus sentimentos, os quais, comumente, ocultam-se em metodologias convencionais. Verificou-se a escassez de estudos que abordassem ações fotográficas na saúde mental, demonstrando a necessidade de aprofundar os conhecimentos acerca dessa ferramenta.

Descritores: Saúde Mental; Fotografia; Psiquiatria; Revisão.

Fotografía en salud mental: una mirada hacia lo subjetivo

Objetivo: identificar qué acciones en salud mental se realizan a partir de la fotografía. **Método:** revisión integradora de la literatura, realizada entre los años 2010 y 2019 en las bases de datos LILACS, PubMed y SciELO. Se utilizaron los siguientes descriptores controlados: "salud mental", "psiquiatría" y "fotografía". **Resultados:** se analizaron 9 artículos, que demostraron diferentes acciones en salud mental a partir de la fotografía: talleres fotográficos, investigación con fotovoz y fotoelicitación y muestras fotográficas. Se observó que las poblaciones de los estudios eran sujetos con problemas psicológicos, así como personas en situación de calle, víctimas de violencia y otros públicos vulnerables. Las acciones fotográficas fomentaron la desconstrucción de estigmas, fortalecieron los lazos y dieron un nuevo significado a sus experiencias. **Conclusión:** la fotografía puede verse como un dispositivo para promover la salud mental al permitir que las personas compartan experiencias y sentimientos que, en líneas generales, permanecen ocultos en las metodologías convencionales. Se detectó escasez de estudios que abordaran acciones fotográficas en salud mental, lo que demuestra la necesidad de profundizar el conocimiento sobre esta herramienta.

Descriptor: Salud Mental; Fotografía; Psiquiatría; Revisión.

Introduction

After the overlapping of the Brazilian Health Reform and Psychiatric Reform, the materialization of the psychosocial model of mental health care to the detriment of the mental asylum is noticed. With this change in the scenario, there is an increase in the engagement, mainly, of health professionals in humanization actions, which aim at comprehensive attention to the subjects' physical and emotional demands⁽¹⁾.

It is known that there are factors that limit the conduction of humanized actions in mental health, such as the persistence of the hospital-centered model, preventing the appreciation of life stories and users' perceptions. In addition to that, it is emphasized that quality of care is directly linked to comprehensive and equitable assistance. Breaking with the stigmas of centuries of isolation, detention and silencing by means of artistic actions, including photography, resignifies the subjects' relationship with society, as well as with the health services and professionals⁽¹⁾.

Photography allows projecting this reflective perspective by creating a subterfuge, relating the subjects to the world that surrounds them remotely, without pretensions, allowing for the individual interpretation of the person who sees it. Using photography in mental health sets up this appreciation of what was previously marginalized and excluded by exposing its facets and daily lives, highlighting the singularities⁽²⁾.

In this sense, photography emerges as a powerful instrument for reflection, collaborating both for promoting mental health and for the treatment, based on the empowerment of the subjects. The conduction of photographic workshops is configured as a resource for coping with psychological distress, allowing the subjects to approach their daily lives to that of the population in general, them being those who photograph or let themselves be photographed in these actions⁽³⁾.

Studies in this area are important to qualify mental health care by basing therapeutic approaches that value the subjectivity of the individuals. Therefore, this paper aims to identify which mental health actions are carried out based on photography.

Method

An integrative literature review about the use of photography in mental health was carried out. The integrative review is an instrument of the Evidence-Based

Practice, which allows conducting the synthesis and analysis of the knowledge produced on the theme under study. It is a research technique with methodological rigor that increases the reliability and depth of the review's conclusions⁽⁴⁾.

This study was carried out according to the following stages: definition of the inclusion and exclusion criteria; definition of the information to be extracted from the selected studies (categorization of the studies); data analysis and interpretation; evaluation of the studies included in the integrative review; and presentation of the review.

The search occurred in the following databases: LILACS (*Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde*), PubMed (Public/Medline) and SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online). The inclusion criteria for the articles were as follows: complete article, available for free in the databases, with publication date between 2010 and 2019, in Portuguese, Spanish and English. The exclusion criteria were the following: repeated articles, literature reviews, dissertation, thesis, book chapter, book, editorial, review, comment or criticism.

The following controlled descriptors were used for the search: mental health, psychiatry and photography, separated by the Boolean operators *and* and *or*. Initially, 2,257 studies were identified and, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 2,227 studies were excluded. The reading of the titles and abstracts was undertaken, which resulted in 30 articles in the pre-selection. After reading them in full, 21 were excluded for not answering the guiding question: *Which actions are performed in mental health from photography? Thus, 9 studies were selected and analyzed in full, 3 from LILACS and 6 from PubMed (Figure 1). The analysis was based on an instrument built by the authors, containing the following items: database, title, journal, year, authors, and objectives. The results were categorized into: mental health actions performed from photography, target audience of the actions, and effects of photography on the participants' mental health. The discussion of the information from the articles was done descriptively.

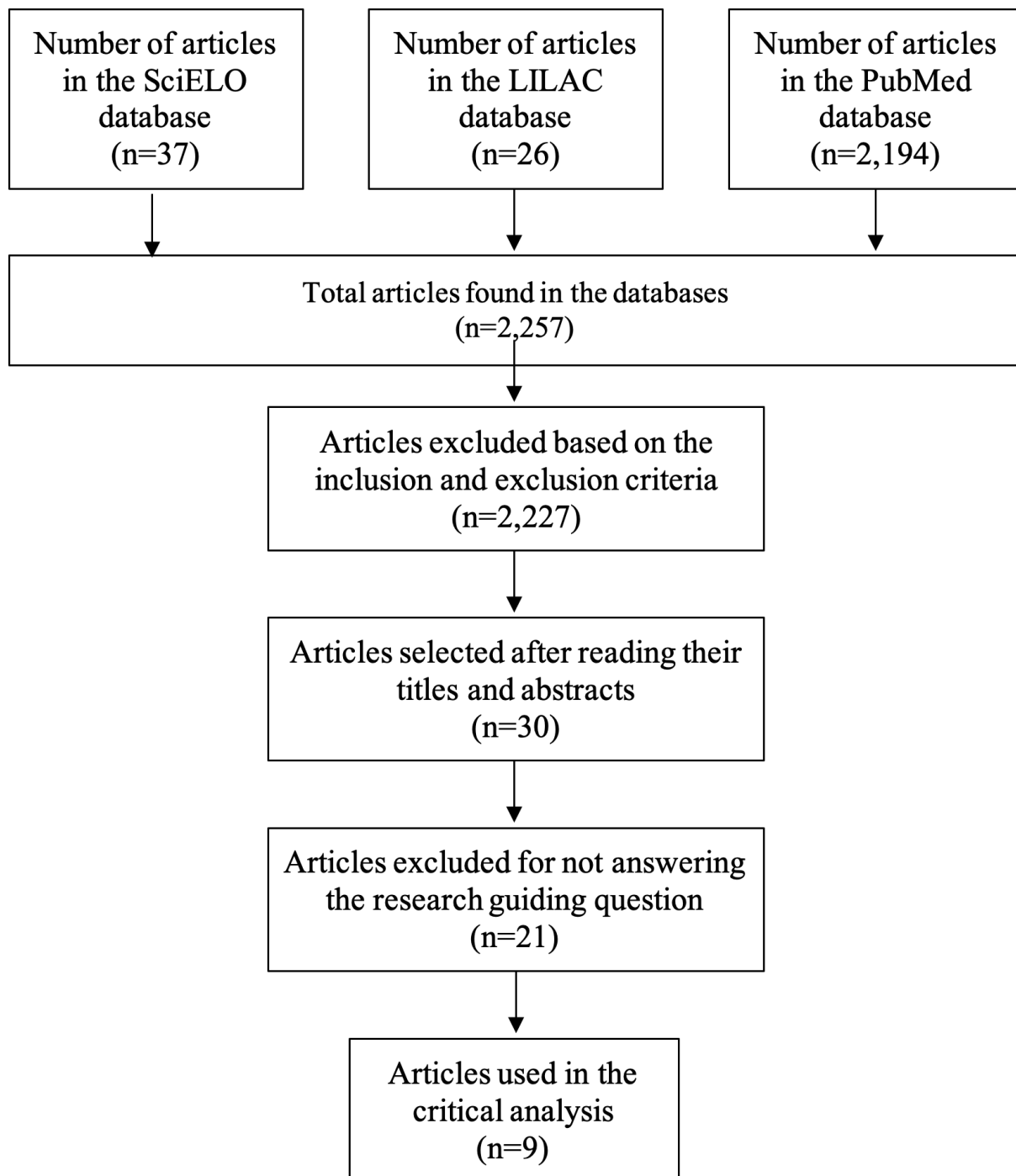


Figure 1 - Flowchart for the selection of articles on the use of photography in mental health

Results

In relation to the journals, the 9 papers selected were published in different fields of scientific knowledge, with predominance of those in the field of Psychology (n=6), followed by multidisciplinary content journals (n=2) and by a journal on harm reduction strategies (n=1). The prevalence of Psychology, to the detriment of the other spheres of health, can be considered unsurprising, due to the fact that the new approaches to mental health are a strand of interest rooted in that field of the knowledge.

The studies selected for this review were published in Qualis A2 (3), B1 (1), B2 (1) and B4 (2) journals; however, it was not possible to find the classification of two journals. Regarding the country of origin of the publications, six were from the United States and three from Brazil. The publications are in English (n=6) and in Portuguese (n=3). Regarding the year of publication, (n=8) were published from 2015 to 2019 and only one of the articles was published before that time interval (2013). Figure 2 displays the analysis of the selected articles that make up this integrative review.

Database	Title of the article	Journal	Year	Author(s)	Objective
LILACS	<i>A terapêutica de um "CAPS AD" em um coletivo de fotografia</i>	<i>Fractal Revista de Psicologia</i>	2018	Virgínia Lima dos Santos Levy	To reflect on the creation and implementation of therapeutic workshops, through the course of a specific workshop (the Photography Workshop).
LILACS	<i>Fotografia e Pesquisa-intervenção: construção de estratégias para uma produção acadêmica inventiva</i>	<i>Revista Polis e Psique</i>	2015	Vanessa Maurenre	To discuss about photography regarding the research-intervention strategy based on three considerations.
LILACS	<i>Significados Construídos acerca das Instituições Socio-educativas: Entre o Imaginado e o Vivido</i>	<i>Psico - USF</i>	2016	Andréa Sandoval Padovani; Marilena Ristum	To understand how adolescents who committed an offense, and who are serving a socioeducational hospitalization measure, mean such hospitalization.
PubMed	<i>Perceptions of Resilience and Coping Among Gender-Diverse Individuals Using Photography</i>	<i>Transgender Health</i>	2019	Jessamyn Bowling; Victoria Schoebel; Chloe Verduyse	To explore the subjective perceptions of resilience among individuals belonging to different genders.
PubMed	<i>Violence as a Health Disparity: Adolescents' Perceptions of Violence Depicted through Photovoice</i>	<i>Journal of Community Psychology</i>	2018	Megan Bennett Irby; DeWanna Hamlin; Lynn Rhoades; Nathan Ross Freeman; Phillip Summers; Scott D Rhodes; Stephanie Daniel	To understand the adolescents' perspectives about violence, its causes, consequences and potential solutions to reduce this event.
PubMed	<i>Portraits of Well-Being: Photography as a Mental Health Support for Women With HIV</i>	<i>Journal of Creativity in Mental Health EUA</i>	2017	Michelle Teti; Bryana French; Allison Kabel; Rose Farnan	To explore the effects of a photography project on the mental health of women with HIV/AIDS.
PubMed	<i>A Picture Is Worth ... ? Photo Elicitation Interviewing With Formerly Homeless Adults</i>	<i>Qualitative Health Research</i>	2013	Deborah K. Padgett; Bikki Tran Smith; Katie-Sue Derejko; Benjamin F. Henwood; Emmy Tiderington	To understand the progress of people in recovery processes from the use of drugs and their experience with mental disorders from interviews with photo-elicitation.
PubMed	<i>Promoting Positive Affect through Smartphone Photography</i>	<i>Psychology Well-Being</i>	2016	Yu Chen, Gloria Mark, Sanna Ali	To investigate how photographs taken with smartphones can help people to enhance their positive affects.
PubMed	<i>"We don't get much of a voice about anything": perspectives on photovoice among people who inject drugs</i>	<i>Harm Reduction Journal</i>	2019	Mari-Lynn Drainoni; Ellen Childs; Katie B. Biello; Dea L. Biancarelli; Alberto Edeza; Peter Salhaney; Matthew J. Mimiaga; Angela R. Bazzi	To explore the interest and acceptability of photovoice as a potential research method to give voice to the people who use injectable drugs.

Figure 2 - Distribution of the articles according to database, title, journal, year, author(s) and objective

The article referred to as "A terapêutica de um "CAPS AD" in a photography collective", which held a photography workshop to learn photographic techniques and to create a space for conversations and coexistence among the users of the Center for Psychosocial Care - Alcohol and Drugs, found that the development of this activity provided the union between users and the deconstruction of the pejorative burden of consumption of psychoactive substances. In addition to that, it enabled the subjects to be valued as autonomous citizens, with aspects of psychosocial attention being appreciated⁽⁵⁾.

A photographic exhibition with the users and staff of a psychiatric hospital aimed to understand how they perceived the place⁽⁶⁾. It was found that, when analyzing the reports on the photographs, it was possible to develop discussions and problematize the way of seeing the psychiatric hospital and the "mental illness", emphasizing the prison character of the treatment.

The researchers sought to understand how adolescents who committed an offense, serving a socioeducational measure of hospitalization mean such hospitalization⁽⁷⁾. In this study, the photovoice technique was used, in which the participants photographed the reality experienced by them and were subsequently interviewed to complement the reflection on the photographs. The adolescents identified ambiguous senses and meanings in relation to the physical structure of the hospitalization, which, on the one hand, maintains aspects of a "prison" and, on the other hand, has aspects related to beauty and pleasure, such as the wooded square and the wide open leisure spaces.

"Perceptions of Resilience and Coping Among Gender-Diverse Individuals Using Photography"⁽⁸⁾ reports photo-elicitation interviews conducted with people belonging to different genders to assist in defining the concept of resilience. The participants sent 5 photographs that

answered the following question: "How strong are you (or not) and what does strength look like?" This activity allowed us to understand that most of the participants were in psychological distress, but used several coping strategies to minimize the effects of adversity, promote resilience and improve mental health.

Adolescents who were victims of violence were able, through the photovoice method used for 12 weeks, to show their perceptions about the types of violence faced and the effect they have on their family contexts and on their physical and emotional health⁽⁹⁾. The vulnerabilities of a specific population, in which women affected by HIV/AIDS captured images of their experiences and challenges and, later on, discussed the symbology in individual or group sessions⁽¹⁰⁾. Photography played an important role in the empowerment of these women, being an artifact to manage the suffering and traumas already experienced.

Homeless men and women with severe mental disorders took up to 18 photographs to visually portray positive and negative aspects of their lives, and later narrated the meaning of the photos in an individual interview⁽¹¹⁾. The authors concluded that the photo-elicitation interview offers a viable and rewarding means of understanding the sensitive aspects and less tangible aspects in the lives of vulnerable populations. Through this method, the participants were able to reflect critically on significant aspects of their lives.

A study⁽¹²⁾ carried out in 4 weeks, in which university students kept their daily activities and took pictures of themselves, of objects that brought happiness and of other people to investigate how to smile, reflect and do good can affect the mood of the individuals, points out that, after taking photographs daily for 3 weeks, the participants became more positive and established a connection with family members and friends, which helped to relieve stress.

The research study entitled "We Don't Get Much of a Voice About Anything: Perspectives on Photovoice Among People Who Inject Drugs"⁽¹³⁾ aimed at exploring the interest and acceptability of photovoice as a potential research method to give a voice to people who use injectable drugs. In this sense, interviews were conducted with the use of photovoice with 33 people who used injectable drugs about perceptions in relation to Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). The participants reported that visually describing their everyday experiences would give them a voice to tell their own stories.

Discussion

It was observed that photography has its possible application in various mental health contexts. Essentially, the use of photography in this context is related to the deconstruction of the stigmas associated with mental disorders, by valuing the subjects as autonomous

beings who are able to fully exercise their citizenship⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾. Photography works beyond the simple act of taking photographs; therefore, it is associated with the constitution of the subject's identity and assists in the production of meaning about their own life story⁽⁵⁾.

In this perspective, the use of this instrument in research is also a way of enabling individuals in psychological distress to express and share experiences, in contrast to productivist models and traditional models, being considered a form of resistance, as shown in one of the articles that made up this review⁽⁶⁾. In addition to that, the use of photographs proposes to highlight the positive aspects of an experience, to the detriment of negative aspects such as oppression, stigmatization, depersonalization and exclusion, encouraging the subjects to build new meanings⁽⁷⁾.

The photovoice methodology was widely used by the analyzed articles^(7,9,13). The authors⁽⁷⁾ emphasize the importance of photography techniques combined with the interview in the interpretation of the narratives. The adolescents who participated in the aforementioned study identified, from the photographs, the significant aspects of the hospitalization they experienced: hospitalization as a punishment, suffering, social isolation and family detachment. In the meantime, they also managed to give visibility to the positive aspects, such as care, or respect, the possibility of studying and of becoming professionals.

In the population of adolescents victims of violence⁽⁹⁾, it was found that they captured images that visually represented the types of violence in their communities and also abstract images of how violence, in various ways, affected them personally. Thus, in this study, photovoice enabled adolescents to creatively share their experiences and perceptions of violence, oppression, and adverse life circumstances, which helped to identify risk factors related to violence at the individual and community levels. Another important aspect of photovoice that was identified⁽¹³⁾ was the use of this tool to provide visibility to the individuals who use injectable drugs and enable the sharing of their experiences, since this instrument provided a comfortable environment and aroused in the members the desire to help other people who were in similar situations. As a methodology, photovoice showed to be pertinent to be used in marginalized and vulnerable populations, because it promotes the deconstruction of stigmas and social reinsertion, in addition to showing an approach that allows the participants to describe the realities in which they are inserted.

Added to this, the photographic activities proved to be a driver for structural and welfare changes. A number of studies⁽⁶⁻⁷⁾ revealed the participants' perspectives on the psychiatric hospitalization environment, which highlighted the stigma associated with these institutions, as well as their isolation, punishment and similarity with prisons.

From these views, it is possible to reflect on the practices and the environment, allowing for the development of improvements and strategies that promote a respectful service, which guarantees the autonomy and subjectivity of the individuals.

Another strategy to be used was photo-elicitation, applied in two of the selected articles, being employed in qualitative interviews with the use of photographs to capture the emotions and perceptions of the interviewee, ensuring the reading of the subjects' non-verbal language. The authors⁽¹¹⁾ used photo-elicitation while interviewing people on the street who had severe mental disorders. After the interviews, the participants were invited to take photographs, allowing them to discover their daily trajectories and challenges. With the photographic records in hand, they were again interviewed, bringing in reports about people and situations they did not show in the first survey. While in the article called "Perceptions of Resilience and Coping Among Gender-Diverse Individuals Using Photography", the photographs taken by the participants made the concept of resilience something more concrete, generating moments of reflection in which they could learn about their individual resilience strategies⁽⁸⁾. In both studies, photo-elicitation allowed for the self-perception of the studied population, proving to be a valuable tool in research that addresses abstract situations or feelings that are difficult to challenge.

It was found that the photographic tool is configured as an ally in the empowerment and promotion of the subjects' well-being. When analyzing the articles^(10,12), it can be seen that this tool was essential to elaborate reflections on lived experiences and to build means to overcome daily adversities. Photography constituted itself as a means to relive and re-signify traumas, such as the types of violence suffered, sexual abuses, stigmas and rejection for having HIV, as well as the suicide attempts practiced⁽¹⁰⁾. When taking photographs, women had the opportunity to view different perspectives on themselves and their lives, allowing them to develop new goals and focus on the positive aspects of their daily lives. Likewise, when capturing images of their daily lives and situations that made them happy, the university students⁽¹²⁾ felt less anxious, promoted their own well-being, and valued and attributed meaning to the little things in their lives. In this sense, the potential of the artistic activities is evidenced, especially photography, in coping with psychological distress in different populations and social contexts.

Conclusion

The photographic actions presented themselves as powerful strategies in mental health care and in facing mental distress, since they encourage the deconstruction of stigmas, strengthen bonds, and allow the target audience to give meaning and redefine their experiences.

In addition to that, they stimulate the process of reflection and introspection, culminating in creating new perspectives for their lives.

Photography could be seen as a device for promoting mental health by allowing the individuals to share their experiences and feelings, which are commonly hidden in conventional methodologies, as in isolated interviews. Thus, through the images captured, the subjects are able to project their perceptions about the context that surrounds them. It is observed that using photography is relevant as a way of giving visibility to those who are often on the margins of society, such as the participants in the studies that were part of the review.

A limitation was the scarcity of studies that addressed photographic actions in mental health, demonstrating the need to deepen the knowledge about this tool. It is suggested that future literature reviews include articles from other databases, in order to find different references on the theme. It is expected that this study may contribute to the constitution of new approaches and methodologies for research studies in mental health, which contemplate the precepts of psychosocial care and guarantee the subjects' autonomy.

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Author's Contribution


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All authors approved the final version of the text.
Conflict of interest: the authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

Received: Nov 10th 2020

Accepted: Feb 17th 2021

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