SPECIAL ARTICLE

Photoelicitation: A useful tool to investigate management of the vulnerability of homeless women

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Abstract
Aims: The proposal of the manuscript is to provide a methodological reflection on the use of photo-elicitartion as a data gathering strategy to explore vulnerability management among homeless women.

Methods: A grounded theory study was carried out. Photoelicitation was one of the data gathering techniques used between February 2015 and February 2017. Five women were selected through intentional sampling. All of them were over 18 years old and residents in 4 shelters within the Madrid Care for the Homeless network. Participants used disposable cameras or mobile phones to record their experiences living in the shelters or on the street through photographs. An interview was conducted with each participant in order to explore the meaning of the photos after they were developed. Data analysis comprised, firstly, describing the obvious content of the photos and, secondly, comparing it with the latent content provided by participants during the interviews.

Results: Only 3 women finished the task. Through data analysis some theoretical proposals were discovered, which contributed to a deeper knowledge of some previously established categories and subcategories such as: "The good professionals", "The safe places in the street" and "The threats in the street".

KEYWORDS
Homeless; Qualitative research; Women; Photography; Narration; Photo-elicitation

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Introduction

There is a long history of the use of photographs in qualitative research. Their potential for representing reality, condensing information while evoking lived experience has contributed to the development of different data collection techniques using images and, more specifically, those taken by the core participants themselves. Termed ‘participant-generated photography’ or ‘native-image-making’, the aim is to give informants more of a role in the ‘data creation process’, alter researcher-participant power relationships and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, understanding that images (and the debate generated around them) are an exceptional vehicle for achieving this. The visual narratives ‘photovoice’ and ‘photo-elicitation’ have been considered within this group of ‘participatory methods’. This article will focus on this latter technique.

Photo-elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview, and seeks to use images to obtain responses from informants. It is based on the idea that ‘images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words’ enabling aspects to emerge that might not be present in the images. There are different approaches to photo-elicitation; in ‘autodriven-photoelicitation’ or ‘photo-elicitation with autodriving’ the participants themselves are the authors of the images. The technique has been used relatively frequently for studying groups considered vulnerable such as children, battered women and the homeless. It has been used in the area of health to capture the experiences of hospitalised patients, those undergoing chemotherapy, and those with chronic disease or mental illness.

According to data published by the National Statistics Institute in their Homeless Person’s Survey of 2012, there are 4513 homeless women, which constitutes 15% of the population who are in this situation. From this macro-survey, their profile would be 30–44 years of age, Spanish, with secondary education and unmarried. The survey highlighted that women face different challenges when they have no home. Little is known as to how they cope with the vulnerability they feel on the street and in shelters. Within the context of a research study that seeks to explore the management of the vulnerability of homeless women...
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