Thematic Dossier "Methodological Challenges in Psychology: Contributions to Academic Practice and Training"

Implementation of Participatory Research in Vulnerable Context: Methodological Strategies and Challenges

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Abstract: Participatory methods contribute to scientific rigor by highlighting the contextual needs, especially of underrepresented populations, making them protagonists in the process of social change. This article aims to present the application of a participatory research method, called *Community-Based Participatory Research* (CBPR), in a context of social vulnerability in southern Brazil. It seeks to discuss the challenges and strengths of the method, which provides ecological validity for the development of public policies appropriate to the context, while empowering the participants. The research has been carried out since 2019 and, among the inherent challenges, has also faced the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the application of this method in Brazil, the importance of involving participants throughout the research process has been identified, so that policies are developed to meet the needs of the community and are sustained by those most interested.

Keywords: community engagement, participatory research, public policies

Implementação de Pesquisa Participativa em Contexto de Vulnerabilização: Estratégias e Desafios Metodológicos

Resumo: Métodos participativos contribuem para o rigor científico ao evidenciarem demandas do contexto, especialmente com populações sub-representadas, tornando-as protagonistas do processo de transformação social. Este estudo objetivou apresentar a aplicação de um método participativo de pesquisa, a *Community-Based Participatory Research* (CBPR), em um contexto de vulnerabilização social no sul do Brasil. Busca-se discutir os desafios e as potencialidades do método, que oferece recursos de validade ecológica para o desenvolvimento de políticas públicas próprias ao contexto, ao mesmo tempo em que empodera seus participantes. A pesquisa vem sendo realizada desde o ano de 2019 e, dentre os desafios inerentes, também enfrentou as dificuldades impostas pela pandemia de Covid-19. A partir da aplicação deste método em contexto brasileiro, identificou-se a relevância de se envolver os participantes ao longo do processo de pesquisa, a fim de que as ações sejam desenvolvidas em coerência com as demandas trazidas pela comunidade, e mantidas por aqueles que são seus maiores interessados.

Palavras-chave: participação comunitária, pesquisa participante, políticas públicas

Implementación de la Investigación Participativa en un Contexto de Vulnerabilidad: Estrategias y Desafíos Metodológicos

Resumen: Los métodos participativos contribuyen al rigor científico al destacar las necesidades del contexto, especialmente de las poblaciones subrepresentadas, haciéndolas protagonistas del proceso de cambio social. Este artículo pretende presentar la aplicación de un método de investigación participativa, denominado *Investigación Participativa Basada en la Comunidad* (IBCB), en un contexto de vulnerabilidad social en el sur de Brasil. Busca discutir los desafíos y fortalezas del método, con validez ecológica para el desarrollo de políticas públicas, al tiempo que empodera a los participantes. La investigación empezó en 2019 y, entre los desafíos, también se ha enfrentado a las dificultades planteadas por la pandemia de Covid-19. A partir de la aplicación de este método en el contexto brasileño, se ha identificado la importancia de involucrar a los participantes en el proceso de investigación, para que se desarrollen políticas que respondan a las necesidades de la comunidad y sean mantenidas por los más interesados.

Palabras clave: participación comunitária, investigación participante, políticas públicas

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Participatory research methods have been gaining ground in the scientific scenario, especially in the last decade, covering different contexts, cultures, and audiences (Blumenthal, 2011; N. Brown, 2022; Duea et al., 2022; Wallerstein et al., 2017). However, there are numerous challenges to implementing the method, considering its proposal to bring together, in the same practice, different

experiences and perspectives. Participatory research is a tool that aims to equalize the relationship between researchers and the public through partnerships and involvement with individuals to work toward mutual interests and common objectives. One of the primary potentialities of this method is the integration between the theoretical-methodological knowledge of researchers and the knowledge of the protagonists in the context (Wallerstein et al., 2020).

In the case of underrepresented or marginalized groups, the participation of the main actors contributes to understanding the multiple determinants of inequality and the development of actions appropriate to the demands (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Jumarali et al., 2021). Joint action with the community to produce significant changes in the social reality differs from traditional research methods, which tend only to require access to a particular location or permission to collect data (N. Brown, 2022).

The participatory method has as its fundamental principle, in addition to knowledge for action, social justice, and self-determination (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), a subtype of the vast "umbrella" of participatory research, is one of its most widespread tools worldwide.

CBPR is a methodology based on community participation in all stages of research, thus providing engagement for change and coherence of information. The objective is to involve and strengthen the community from the beginning, focusing on their needs by giving voice to topics relevant to those involved in the problem (Collins et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2020). Its focus is to integrate community partners, stakeholders, and researchers, preventing stereotypes, stigmatization, or other research practices that have historically placed communities in subjugation (Darroch & Giles, 2015). This research model is based on emancipatory, decolonizing, and post-structuralist propositions, as it is developed in cooperation with the community in which it operates to reduce inequalities and promote autonomy. Instead of focusing only on problems or barriers, CBPR seeks to highlight community resilience through resources and opportunities for positive growth. In this sense, the community is a unit capable of developing action based on identifying and directing its potentialities (Wallerstein et al., 2017, 2019). This study aimed to present the application of a participatory research method, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), in the context of social vulnerability in southern Brazil.

Participatory Research and Relevance for Social Justice

Participatory research has shown promising results in terms of reducing inequalities (Duran et al., 2019; Wallerstein et al., 2019), as it brings together two movements to enhance contexts: the relevance of social and ecological validity for the development of more effective public policies (Cargo & Mercer, 2008), and the encouragement of decolonizing practices that expand the translation of public knowledge, to the detriment of the imposition of knowledge historically reproduced by the scientific field (C.S. Brown et al., 2019; Wallerstein et al., 2017).

Participatory research aims to respond to a demand in the field of knowledge construction, incorporating social determinants and the closest translation of scientific knowledge into more effective actions adapted to the context (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Dias & Gama, 2014). The fundamental difference between participatory methods and others lies in the power relations established throughout the various stages of the research process. Power and trust relations are particularly delicate for marginalized or underrepresented populations, as they already suffer the consequences of hierarchization and data exploitation (Rodriguez Espinosa & Verney, 2021). Equalizing participation methods promote community empowerment in favor of their needs and priorities, increasing the sense of leadership and diligence in the process (Dias & Gama, 2014).

In Brazil, social participation has become a strategy for consolidating rights, questioning the oligarchic and unequal social structure imposed by colonialist history. For example, Paulo Freire's ideas, which brought emancipatory learning and attentive and deep listening to community needs and desires, building collective actions for social transformation, were disruptive (Wallerstein et al., 2017). Freire postulates that awareness-raising is a process of working with people to discover their knowledge, construct their conception of reality, and create their strategies for change (Freire, 1974).

Furthermore, there is a growing scientific interest in collecting and interpreting data based on their contextual specificities to get them closer to real problems. The recent emphasis on knowledge translation highlights the importance of considering social and ecological validity to assess research relevance and community engagement (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Such aspects make it possible to increase scientific rigor, demonstrating that the use of participatory methods enables cultural and linguistic approaches to the public in question and the identification of participants and social networks capable of assisting in the dissemination of the study (Dias & Gama, 2014; Duea et al., 2022). These points increase the communities' adherence and trust in the investigative process, making the data closer to reality and enabling the development of public policies to incorporate priority issues for members (Brown et al., 2019). Furthermore, participatory research stimulates the receptivity of communities to adopt subsequent practices and interventions, as they feel part of the solution to the problem (Collins et al., 2018).

Methodological Challenges and Opportunities for Action in Contexts of Social Vulnerability

Even though it is a widely disseminated and recommended method, the adoption of participatory research presents a series of challenges. One of the crucial points for its development is the relationship between the research team and community members. There has been increasing concern with the implementation of research

and how to understand power-sharing practices for creating procedures. To achieve this, researchers must first be willing and interested in understanding the context and its socio-historical aspects. It is assumed that the researcher, even with specific knowledge and skills for scientific work, does not have greater knowledge about the community than its members. Furthermore, even immersion techniques in the context and the genuine commitment to joining the territory will not make the academic become "one of them" (Lucero et al., 2020).

Some difficulties highlighted in this process refer to the equitable involvement of different partners and sharing in decision-making. A challenge is to ensure that, regardless of diversity in implementation, research remains coherent with the principles that guide the processes and results of a participatory method, contributing to increased knowledge and benefiting communities (Israel et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is a paradox: the relevance and specificity of the investigation can make it difficult to generalize the results, while the recommendations resulting from more traditional research are often inappropriate for communities, which are often underrepresented (Blumenthal, 2011; Cargo & Mercer, 2008).

When it comes to people in situations of social vulnerability, this task becomes even more challenging (Jumarali et al., 2021). Academic efforts have been directed toward studies on stereotypes, discrimination, and social inequalities, especially in the last three decades. Despite this, the themes of equity and social justice tend to be highlighted in some sections and exceptional volumes, demonstrating that they are not yet one of the leading research focuses (Brown et al., 2019). In the field of human development, in addition, there is a bias in the search for individual psychological mechanisms, involving primarily white people who are more easily accessible, ignoring cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic influences and also generalizing data from privileged sections of the population (Brown et al., 2019).

There is also a concern with statistical generalizations to the detriment of cultural diversity, which could enhance scientific findings and make them effectively valid. Researchers interested in producing science focusing on equity and social justice must be concerned with why and how inequalities are associated with development, which requires exploring different methodological modalities beyond classic positivist approaches. Mixed and participatory methods have already been suggested to overcome the limits imposed by traditional methods in an attempt to get closer to cultural realities and the specificities of contexts (Brown et al., 2019; Cargo & Mercer, 2008).

This is a break with a centuries-old logic in research, starting to see the community not as a form of data exploration but as working collaboratively with its partners, involving them in surveying the demands of their interests, questioning sensitive topics, checking whether the measures designed are culturally appropriate, and constantly offering findings to their stakeholders (Brown et al., 2019).

CBPR as a Participatory Strategy

Among the existing participatory methods is Community-Based Participatory Research, or CBPR, one of the most recognized and applied worldwide (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). CBPR is a methodology based on community participation in all stages of research, thus providing engagement for change and coherence of information. The objective is to involve and strengthen the community from the beginning, focusing on their needs by giving voice to topics relevant to those involved in the problem. However, it seeks to establish a partnership between academic and community members to connect around a topic of common interest (Parker et al., 2020).

This research model is based on emancipatory, decolonizing, and post-structuralist propositions, as it is developed in cooperation with the community in which it operates, intending to reduce inequalities and promote autonomy (Wallerstein et al., 2017). CBPR, therefore, distinguishes itself from traditional and positivist approaches by adopting a more reflective, interpretative, and dialectical perspective (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Some movements described in the literature as fundamental to its implementation are detailed to make CBPR a method closer to Brazilian scientific practice. It generally starts from a selected problem, or one of fundamental importance, for the community, which is evidenced by the involvement of its members, called stakeholders, or key people (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Collins et al., 2018; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Based on this premise, this study aims to present the application of a participatory research method, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), in the context of social vulnerability in southern Brazil. The aim is to discuss the method's potential, which offers ecologically valid resources for developing public policies specific to the context while empowering its participants. It also intends to discuss challenges and possible ways of becoming more flexible based on practices.

Example of CBPR Use in Brazil

The birth of the idea: role of stakeholders and community bond

The research began in 2019, aligning with an extension project to take Psychology beyond the university walls. With this, the Community Psychology nucleus of a school service in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre began. To this end, dialogue was established with municipal managers in meetings involving the health, education, and social assistance departments, in addition to the mayor. The aim was to combine existing public policies with a new proposal for mental health promotion and prevention. In the dialogues, a specific territory was suggested for the work, chosen for its high rates of poverty and violence and the strength of the community leaders.

In the same year, intending to get to know the territory in more depth, participatory research began. The idea was to map risk and protective factors that could be related to the development of families living in the territory. The research would initially function as a needs assessment, enhancing the community's voice on the challenges faced and the resources recognized by its members. One of the great strengths of participatory research is to integrate the theoretical-methodological knowledge of researchers and the real-world knowledge of non-academics in a collaborative relationship (Cargo & Mercer, 2008), aiming to equalize power between researcher and researched (Wallerstein et al., 2017).

With the help of researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the participatory method was designed using Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as its principle. As one of the most recognized and used participatory research tools, CBPR assists the investigative process as it is committed to principles of mutual learning and equity (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Furthermore, the

aim was to design an investigation using mixed methods to aggregate numerical data and narratives to understand the territory in a complementary way (Brown et al., 2019; DeJonckheere et al., 2019).

The first design (Figure 1) envisaged a study with a mixed sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2015). This model proposes a first phase of collecting and analyzing quantitative data to describe and explore initially defined variables, then collecting qualitative data to detail (or explain) aspects highlighted in the previous phase. In this first model, a quantitative survey of risk and protective factors would be carried out, considering variables from different layers of the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) to delve into more salient aspects through qualitative data collection. In this case, it was thought to guide focus groups with the most highlighted themes in the first phase. Establishing a parallel between mixed methods and CBPR, the first step would be defining these variables and the quantitative study with the community and its stakeholders.

Figure 1
Initially proposed explanatory sequential mixed design
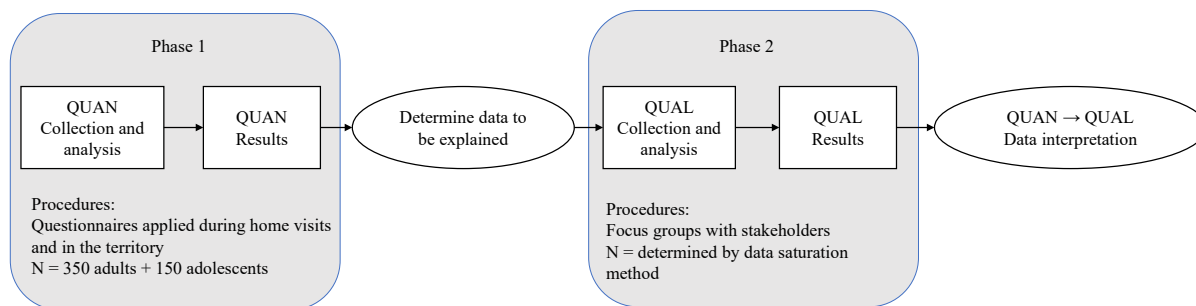
Note. Source: Creswell, 2015.

The research team sought out institutions and associations in the territory to define the stakeholders. The engagement of the community and its stakeholders can be defined as the involvement of key people as partners in all phases of the research, requiring the construction of a relationship based on trust and respect, especially regarding the experiences and knowledge of each party. However, as the definition of the community goes beyond geopolitical aspects, defining who its stakeholders are is equally challenging, which can impact the development of the entire investigation (Duea et al., 2022).

The research was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculdade INEDI - CESUCA (CAAE No.: 12411719.9.0000.5665). Ethical care was necessary regarding formalization with public institutions in the territory that would assist in prospecting families and collecting data. To this end, in addition to a formalization contract with the city hall, the Family Health Strategy (ESF) and the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS) signed

the Terms of Agreement. Furthermore, all adults who agreed to participate in the research should sign the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The Informed Assent Form was also presented for minors and the ICF for legal guardians.

Several visits were made to institutions representing the areas of health, education, and social assistance: municipal and state schools, the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS), and the Family Health Strategy (ESF) responsible for the territory. In addition, three residents' associations and third-sector organizations were contacted. In these meetings with employees and volunteers, aspects considered risks were raised, such as access to public services, social inequality, violence, drug use and involvement in trafficking, sexuality and school dropout among young people, and resources, such as access to public services and support network for the development of families in this territory. From these initial surveys, a questionnaire was developed for data collection.

The questionnaire was prepared in two versions for adults and adolescents aged 12 and over. The collection with adults would cover residents and workers of the territory to accommodate the demands of those who were daily involved with the community's problems. The research was extended to teenagers due to concerns raised by stakeholders about what they had been observing regarding their involvement in drug trafficking and cases of violence and self-injurious behaviors.

The first version of the questionnaire was presented to stakeholders, who made notes and suggested improvements regarding the themes, mainly the cultural and orthographic presentation, making the text more accessible. After the reformulations, it was agreed with the partner institutions to start the applications, which would take place during visits to the community. The first collections, defined as a pilot, were carried out with teachers from one of the schools, community health agents from the ESF, CRAS employees, and a group of older people attending a residents' association.

These first collections indicated some difficulties and the need for modifications in the collection process. The questionnaires, designed to be self-administered, were read by an interviewer, avoiding misunderstandings, participant embarrassment, and missing data. The order of some items was also modified, enabling the development of the initial bond in preparation for more delicate questions about mental health and trauma, for example. Some redundant items were also removed to reduce the already extensive protocol. This first stage was also relevant for the training of the applicator team since their insertion in the community goes beyond a specific application. It is the entry of researchers into the space of their residents and workers. It requires investment in building trust and empathy, respecting and valuing popular knowledge in a dialectical construction. Trust is a central element for developing the relationship between researchers and the community and requires academics to be open and engaged, although it is not enough to acquire it (Collins et al., 2018; Jumarali et al., 2021; Lucero et al., 2020). It is also essential that the investigation team demonstrates to the community a perspective focused on its strengths and resources instead of a position focused on deficiencies (Duran et al., 2019). This means being present in the community, listening to its members, and consistently showing willingness to go beyond the investigation, such as participating in its events and activities (Collins et al., 2018).

Adjustments on the route: the richness of the participatory method.

The first year of the research was dedicated to the initial process of approaching and establishing partnerships with stakeholders, identifying needs, defining variables, and initial collections to adjust form and content. The first collections took place in institutional spaces, considering the proximity already formed between the community and services. In addition to employees, teachers, and community health agents, the questionnaires were applied to existing therapeutic groups, such as the group of older people organized by the ESF and people who attended CRAS and the healthcare unit. At the beginning of the following year, in 2020, visits to the territory were intensified, seeking participants in spaces other than partner institutions. There was an active search for families, with the help of community health agents and CRAS workers, professionals with pre-established links with the community. Collections also began to take place during home visits, which broadened the researchers' view of the problems faced by the community. The proximity to the most vulnerable region made it possible to reach other families that would probably not have been covered by the previous collection method.

An even more significant challenge emerged: the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulties went beyond the necessary social distancing, preventing data collection in the territory. Social aggravating circumstances called on the team and institutions for emergency actions, typical of the non-neutrality stance inherent to the participatory method (N. Brown, 2022), while at the same time imposing distancing. The closure of schools, the increase in unemployment, the deprivation of access to treated water, basic sanitation, and public health services, the difficulty in obtaining social benefits, and food insecurity, in addition to the widespread contagion by COVID-19 and the experience of mourning, were some of the risks that increased during the pandemic (Segatto et al., 2022). Being a participatory method and considering the links already built with the community, it was unfeasible to just "stop data collection," as could happen when adopting a traditional research method (Brown, 2022; Collins et al., 2018).

It was necessary to pause collections, not only because of concerns about social distancing and contamination of the team and residents but also because this was a time for action, given the tremendous and urgent demands of that context. It is worth noting that the participatory method has equity and social justice as its principle. Involvement with the community is inherent to participatory research and, more specifically, to CBPR, to the detriment of the neutrality imposed by conventional research methods (Brown, 2022; Cargo & Mercer, 2008).

The research team sought to join the existing support network to join efforts with the community. A list of families most vulnerable to the situation was created in partnership with schools, residents' associations, third-sector institutions, ESF, and CRAS. Through private incentives, municipal support, and popular mobilizations, donations of food, hygiene and cleaning products, and masks were distributed to families during periods of most significant risk of the pandemic. Thus, collections were interrupted numerous times. When possible, they were carried out in open spaces, using masks and distancing, respecting everyone's safety.

Ethical aspects were considered throughout the investigative process, especially during the pandemic, considering the imminent risk to participants' lives. However, it was necessary

to consider the community's survival, and invisibility, which was already at stake, could be aggravated if the research team's absence continued for an extended period, worsening the territory's vulnerability. There were numerous ethical impasses, but a way to continue the investigation was found with the help of institutions and families. Everyone's safety and hygiene were prioritized, and donations of food and sanitary materials, such as masks and hand sanitizers, were added.

Constant becoming: co-construction in practice.

There were many design and data collection adjustments. These were only possible through practice, evidenced by doing, as envisaged by the participatory method. The dialectical process of methodological construction gives participatory research, more specifically to CBPR, ecological validity (Cargo & Mercer, 2008), as community dynamics permeate it and invite the investigation protagonists to dialogue at all stages (Collins et al., 2018).

One of the flexibilities imposed by the research-in-context dealt with the schedule and expected completion of the stages. This is a challenge reported in the literature as one of the obstacles to adopting participatory methods. It is essential to consider temporal, financial, and human resources when planning the participatory method since it becomes common, and even expected, to relativize time to "respect" contextual dynamics (Blumenthal, 2011; Cargo & Mercer, 2008). In this case, in addition to the expected flexibility, the investigative process culminated in a pandemic period, an unexpected element that imposed a route change. Even so, it allowed the research team to be close to a vulnerable community during one of modern society's most delicate historical periods. This circumstance made it possible to maintain ties and pay attention to needs, fundamental aspects of generating protective actions for families (Duran et al., 2019).

Another point observed was the difficulty in accessing adolescents. Initially assessed as a way of meeting at home, the closure of schools proved a significant obstacle to data collection. In many home visits, they were not present or announced their departure when the team arrived. In other cases, the family or the teenager themselves refused to participate. The family environment was noted as a possible hostile or indifferent space to the adolescent's participation, resulting in this collection stage's withdrawal. Hypotheses for this sample loss include possible family secrets, failure to recognize the relevance of the adolescent's narrative by the family, feelings of shame or fear on the part of the adolescent, and lack of interest in the topics covered, among others. Evidence indicates the low involvement of children and young people in participatory studies, whether due to researchers' choice or due to contextual limitations, such as difficulty in "giving voice" to these age groups in communities or silencing them as a form of disempowerment (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018).

Finally, the investigative design needed to be adapted since the sequential explanatory design no longer fit with what was being developed in the field. The basic design evolved into an advanced design (Figure 2), defined by Creswell (2015) as Social Justice Design, and also called transformative or emancipatory design. This design is an alternative for improving the lives of individuals in society. It seeks to promote specific changes by adopting a theoretical perspective favoring underrepresented or marginalized groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). It indicates greater circularity between the demands observed along the way and the research progress by suggesting adjustments throughout the process, from structuring the problem to data collection and analysis, as participants, or stakeholders, provide information on the topic and the context in question. Therefore, in the end, specific actions are recommended to improve the social conditions of those involved (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

For example, the team of visitors identified that the questionnaire developed was not sensitive to a series of relevant data observed in scientific practice. The families' reactions, the community dynamics, the "unspoken" or "between the lines" information, the dialogues that contextualized the directive responses, and many elements, as or more relevant than the item answered, were being lost. The experience of insertion in the community and the relationship with its members is permeated by content that is not always measurable. This made us aware of the need for a qualitative method concomitant with applying the protocols. A decision was made to use the field diary the visitors wrote shortly after going to the community. Each registration is equivalent to a visit, and this can be completed individually or collectively, depending on the number of researchers in the field.

Furthermore, the occurrence of the pandemic in the investigation process was not anticipated during the research planning period, when stakeholders were contacted, and data collection plans were drawn up. Therefore, the instruments established for this stage were not sensitive to assessing the impacts and effects of the pandemic on the participants' lives. By identifying the reports of several residents and employees about changes in the territory and the lives of families due to this macrosystemic condition, it was understood that including a new stage of qualitative data collection was essential. This time, a decision was made to carry out semi-structured interviews with territory residents. It is essential to use negotiation as a strategy to define action priorities and incorporate dialogue between the parties (Wallerstein et al., 2020). The study intended to interview women with different lengths of residence to understand the impacts of the changes on those who had been living for more or less than two years during which the pandemic took hold. The interviews were also designed to replace the initial plan of holding focus groups since the pandemic and the extension of research time made the formation of groups unfeasible. This is an example of the Social Justice Design, as the initial design was changed to accommodate new demands observed by social actors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

Figure 2
Mixed social justice design carried out
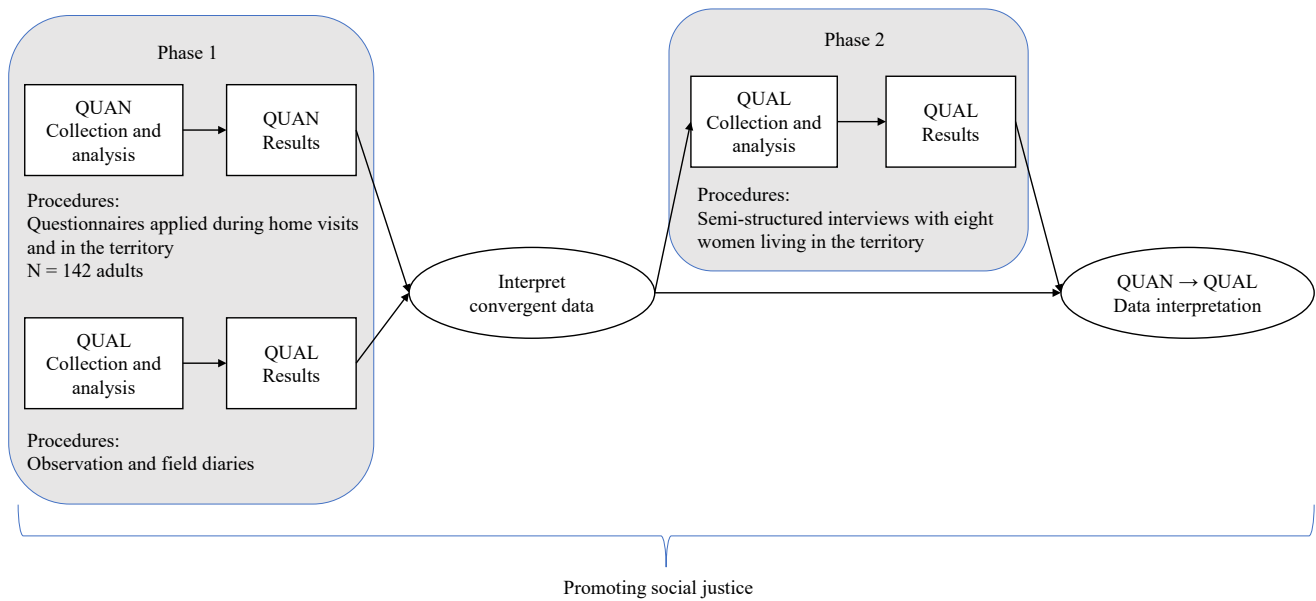
Note. Source: Creswell, 2015.

Data collection was temporarily stopped in March 2022. Even though the initially intended number of participants was not reached, the decision was made to interrupt as it was understood that it was necessary to analyze the data achieved so far. The new situation in the territory was also considered, with the return of most face-to-face activities, more widespread vaccination, and the reorganization of families with the resumption of schools. In addition to data filled in field diaries from 85 visits to the territory, one hundred forty-two adult questionnaires and eight qualitative interviews were collected.

A broad discussion at a global level has been arguing strategies to promote social and economic equity. This debate has also gained strength in the academic world, especially regarding the authentic participation of people most interested in social changes and the development of public policies based on a bottom-up logic rather than top-down interventions (Wallerstein et al., 2019, 2020). In recent years, decolonizing movements regarding the way of doing research have boosted participatory methods, especially those centered on the community (Brown, 2022). As one of the most recognized and used participatory research tools, CBPR aims to integrate community partners and researchers to prevent stereotyping, stigmatization, or other research practices that have historically placed communities in a position of subjugation (Darroch & Giles, 2015).

This article sought to illustrate the challenges and potential of applying a participatory research method, CBPR, in the context of social vulnerability in southern Brazil. The investigation identified difficulties in planning imposed by the pandemic and specificities of the territory for ecological insertion. In this sense, some steps in the initial design needed to be changed, such as not holding focus groups. Also, the research time was extended, respecting the most critical periods of social isolation during the pandemic and, equally, valuing methodological quality. As another limitation of the study, it is worth highlighting the difficulty of collecting data from adolescents, as only four received authorization from their guardians. This impossibility seemed to be related to parents' concern about exposing their young people in synchrony with parents' hypervigilance over their children in an environment of violence and drug trafficking.

Even with adjustments to be made throughout the process, this demonstrates the richness of participatory research, as it offers flexibility to accommodate demands observed within the community throughout the investigation. One of the highlights of the research presented was offering participants communication channels about the vulnerabilities brought to the territory by the pandemic, which had not been foreseen at the beginning of the process. These adjustments, such as the inclusion of interviews with women living in the territory, made it possible to monitor the needs of the context "in real-time," bringing scientific work closer to promoting social justice.

Participatory research is a complex method and is still little explored in the Brazilian context. The multiple challenges, such as community engagement and necessary adjustments throughout its implementation, seem to deter interest in further research. Added to this is the frequent disparity between members of academia and subjects involved in the context (Blumenthal, 2011). Despite the challenges and the need to make pre-determined research designs more flexible, participatory methods, especially

CBPR, prove to be essential tools for connecting academia and underrepresented populations. The use of consolidated scientific practices, which guarantee ecological validity, makes it possible to bring the field of knowledge of Psychology closer to the formulation of more effective public policies capable of translating social needs.

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