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ART THERAPY AS A FEMALE EMPOWERMENT DEVICE IN VULNERABILITY WOMEN

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Abstract: The present study consists of an experience report of two specialization students of the Postgraduate course in Art Therapy at Feevale University, facilitators of Art Therapy Workshops in the *Extension project: Ties of Life: well-being of women in vulnerable situations* from Feevale University, in a supervised internship held between March and July 2018. The objective of this report is to demonstrate the importance of Art Therapy Workshops with women in vulnerable situations. The methodology used was a qualitative approach. The Art Therapy Workshops were held at the Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional (APAE) in Ivoti, Rio Grande do Sul (RS), where the facilitators used artistic materials to promote the expression of the women assisted. Art therapy proved to be a device of female empowerment and resignification of life stories. The workshops constituted a space for mutual trust and exchanges about the feminine, awareness of the different types of violence and confrontation, providing a rescue of self-esteem, self-love, self-confidence and self-knowledge among the participants. Confronting psychological violence provided female empowerment.

Keywords: Art therapy. Vulnerability. Female empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a public health problem that points to the difficulties of modifying the rooted patriarchal culture. Women's health care is a challenge for public policies and includes an interdisciplinary range of knowledge that needs to be considered.

A women's health care initiative takes place in an extension project of Feevale University, since 2014, the *Life Ties Project: well-being of women in vulnerable situations*, linked to Psychology and Visual Arts courses and to Post-Graduate courses in Art Therapy and

Cultural Diversity and Social Inclusion. This Project is justified by preventive actions of attention to mental health and expressiveness through Mental Health Groups and Art Therapy Workshops, targeting vulnerable women living in Novo Hamburgo and Ivoti, RS.

The Project aims to promote the construction of autonomy for women in situations of psychological and socioeconomic vulnerability; psychic conditions that contribute to the improvement of emotional well-being; knowledge about the themes: sexuality, violence, gender stereotypes and self-esteem of these women; stimulate expressiveness through art to promote the construction of autonomy and empowerment in the face of vital issues. This report aimed to demonstrate the importance of Art Therapy Workshops with these women.

METHODOLOGY

This report has a qualitative methodological approach, which goes beyond the mere description of results, but adds something new to what we know, in the observation of phenomena as they occur spontaneously.

The workshops were held weekly, two hours long, and were facilitated by two postgraduate students in Art Therapy at the aforementioned University. From March to July 2018, 05 women, aged 32 to 76 years, were assisted in 17 workshops, after screening where signatures were collected on the Authorization for Use of Name and Image, respecting the ethical issues of research with human beings.

The workshops took place in a space provided by APAE, consisting of a large room, large tables, chairs, sink, stereo, air conditioning and a cupboard with material resources: colored pencils, Hidrocor pens, crayons, gouache paints, brushes, glue, scissors, A3 and A4 sheets, brown paper and magazines.

The expressive techniques used were: drawing, painting, *frotage*, folding, tearing, cutting, collage, mixed media, relaxation, body awareness, guided meditation, poem reading and free dancing.

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The concept of health adopted was systemic, integrative and holistic, with the view of the subject as a multidimensional whole (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, environmental, transcendental), with a Transpersonal and Jungian Psychology approach.

For Carneiro (2010, p.84), “Transpersonal Psychology, as well as the recent Positive Psychology, allied to Jungian Psychology, have served as the basis for all therapeutic and art-therapeutic work of those who seek the healthy in human beings, leading towards yourself”.

Art Therapy is a therapeutic process through artistic resources to provide non-verbal communication of the unconscious and the conscious. It uses symbolic expression without worrying about aesthetics, making use of artistic modalities such as painting, drawing, collage, modeling, body expression, poems, sounds, music, free writing, among others, aiming at self-knowledge, expansion of horizons, creativity, awareness of oneself and one's surroundings, being able to act in the prevention and promotion of health (ANDRADE, 2000).

For Urrutigaray (2011),

The experience of working with Art Therapy provides the possibility of rebuilding and integrating a personality, favoring the communication of discomforts and experiences that are difficult to express orally, helping individuals to re-signify experiences, experiences, thoughts, feelings and emotions that cause them discomfort. and anguish providing relief and well-being

(URRUTIGARAY, 2011, p.20).

As of Ordinance No. 849/2017, Art Therapy integrates Complementary Integrative Practices (PICS) into the Unified Health System (SUS). According to the Brazilian Union of Art Therapy Associations (UBAAT):

In line with the assumptions of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is currently encouraging the insertion, recognition and regulation of PICS, its products and its practitioners in the health system, Art Therapy helps in the promotion, rehabilitation and recovery of health, as well as as in the prevention of injuries through the use of art. It is a transdisciplinary field of knowledge and a therapeutic approach that is based on the idea that the creative process and artistic making facilitate the repair and recovery of health by providing non-verbal communication of feelings and conflicts (UBAAT, 2018, p. 2).

Art Therapy provides the expansion of individual and collective health care through the use of art as a creative and expressive possibility. It is the therapeutic use of artistic activity in a professional relationship for those who experience illness, trauma, difficulties in life or seek personal development. Through creating in art and reflecting on the resulting artistic processes and works, the person can expand their knowledge of themselves and others, increase self-esteem, better deal with symptoms, stress and traumatic experiences, develop physical, cognitive and emotional resources. emotions and enjoy the vitalizing pleasure of artistic work (CIORNAI, 2004).

The relationship between emotions and creativity can be explored by various means of artistic expression for therapeutic purposes. For Andrade:

Art is a form of human expression and as such, a form of communication and symbolic language, it is a product of intuition and observation, the unconscious and the conscious, emotion and knowledge, talent and technique, of creativity. Welcoming and

using the modalities of artistic expressions within a psychotherapeutic process, enriches the possibility of a deep knowledge and consequently a greater understanding of the person to be helped (ANDRADE, 2000, p.11).

For therapeutic purposes, the languages to be used can go through plastic and body techniques such as dance and theater, music and writing.

Expressiveness is most important; through it, the art therapist will be able to assess the clinical state of the patient, as well as rehabilitate him, when the artistic resource is the basis of professional-patient communication and the means of his perception. The art therapist “aims to create a sufficiently welcoming atmosphere” (ANDRADE, 2000, p. 142), so that the patient can be involved by the proposed technique and express himself through color, line and movement through the trace.

For Blauth (2005, p.55), “art can contribute significantly to helping the individual in his therapeutic process through integrated work with multidisciplinary teams that aim at the prevention, maintenance or rehabilitation of mental health for a better quality. of life”.

Among the various types of violence against women, the concept of psychological violence:

It refers to any conduct that causes emotional damage and a decrease in self-esteem or that harms and disturbs their full development or that aims to degrade or control their actions, behaviors, beliefs and decisions, through threat, embarrassment, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, constant surveillance, persistent persecution, insult, blackmail, ridicule, exploitation and limitation of the right to come and go or any other means that harm the psychological health and self-determination of women (SOUTO, 2008, p. 20-21)

The repercussions of the Maria da Penha Law demonstrate the difficulty of dealing with strategies that support this group and, in

the case of women in the aging process, the National Health Policy for the Elderly points to the need for “recovery, maintenance and promotion of autonomy and the independence of the elderly [...]” (BRASIL, 2010, p. 23), but they still present difficulties when put into practice.

Regarding the advances made in Brazil:

Brazilian public policies since the last decade have sought to make improvements in providing care to women victims of gender violence, with more effective legal, psychiatric and psychological means that allow for protection, reparation and justice, as well as the recovery of people who go through suffering caused. by violence. Art therapy can help these women in numerous ways, such as regaining self-confidence and self-esteem, socializing, exercising their creativity and exercising their independence and affectivity, in addition to recovering or thinking about new plans for the future (ALBANI, 2017, p.40).

According to Mozer (2010, p.11) “since the advent of patriarchal society, man has positioned himself as a superior being and has made everything revolve around this statement. The masculine principle assumed a prominent position and the feminine was relegated to the background”. The misrepresentation of feminine qualities such as sensitivity, acceptance, serenity, cooperation and emotion, confused with weakness and submission, was a problem arising from patriarchal society, which repressed, gagged, suffocated and hid the feminine, bringing suffering mainly to women. women (MOZER, 2010).

The power that the feminine gives to women has always aroused a certain fear in men. Because of this fact, several atrocities were carried out against them, in all corners of the world. They tried in every way to silence his voice, muzzle his will, smother his participation in the construction of history (MOZER, 2010. p.28-29)

Recently, women began to have access to culture and the right to education, sometimes remaining dependent on men and without space to express their ideas, interests and desires. Gaining space and dignity as workers has caused more suffering and discrepancies in the way women are treated persist. With effort, persistence, struggle and willpower, women have been conquering their place (MOZER, 2010).

Thus, the rescue of the feminine in itself and in art acts as a possibility of access to the sacred and to the power of this feminine in its entirety. Based on the Jungian concepts of anima and animus, Vasconcelos (2015) addresses the female functioning in men and women.

It indicates the capacity for rest, care, conservation, understanding of symbols and messages inscribed in the facts as a way of cultivating the space of mystery that challenges curiosity and the desire to know. It is the source of all life. It is always in search of interior fulfillment, care and conservation. Unlike the male functioning, it is always ready for defensive combat. His travels are inward, always on the path that leads to the heart. Instead of wanting to decipher, he reveres the mystery of life and of God (VASCONCELOS, 2015, p.70).

The path of the heart reveres not only God, but the Goddess, in her archetype of the Triple Goddess (maiden, mother, crone), present in the history of the women participating in the workshops. Access to the sacred makes healing and re-signifying the bodily memories produced in their life stories, finding a particular form of expression of feeling, thinking and acting, bringing a new meaning to life and empowering these women.

According to Pain (2003), the art therapist is looking, listening, affective resonance, the possibility of finding a symbolic order for the disorder of suffering. So, it is understood that the role of the art therapist, regardless of

their previous professional training, has to do with a loving look and caring for the other, according to Lígia Diniz (2018):

To take care of the other is to help him to reconnect to his Source of Life, to find his own path, to rediscover his center. A life without center is a life without meaning. The therapist, therefore, helps the patient to find his own compass. The Self, our Source of energy, is the compass that guides and regulates the psyche through symbols. Symbols, message carriers and healing agents, are guides in the individuation process that extends throughout our journey (DINIZ, 2018, p.28).

In addition, vulnerabilities are perceived as an opportunity to look at oneself, at one's own life story and identify what needs light of conscience, to heal and move on. From the understanding that healing involves the balance between the bodies (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual), this can be achieved by looking carefully and attentively to the wounds of the soul to access love again. Regarding the connection to the heart chakra:

It is through the heart chakra that we feel impelled to seek union with the other through love and, as it is related to the perception of beauty in nature, to the search for harmony, with music and poetry, it enables us to enter in tune with each other and with the world on the basis of respect, consideration and admiration, transforming images, words and sounds into feelings that can be shared. When opened, it is able to radiate unconditional love, which can extend to a loving connection with the divine in us and in the world and this connection even has the ability to heal, dissolving negative feelings, transmuting them into positives and also confers wisdom (BERNARDO, 2013, p.156-157).

Through Art Therapy, it was possible to help the women assisted to look lovingly at their stories and give a new meaning to life and psychic suffering in the process of self-knowledge. According to Bandler and Grinder

(1986), by re-signifying part of their history, the subject assigns a new meaning and changes behavior and responses to vulnerabilities.

According to UBAAT (2018, p.7) “therapeutic groups can also provide a space for welcoming, expressing and resignifying emotions and traumas for women victims of domestic and sexual violence”. The need to humanize and qualify women’s health care involves the recognition of rights and sharing between different types of knowledge.

Group art therapy practices provide a space to share doubts and guidelines, contribute to increasing women’s information about their bodies, expand their ability to make choices appropriate to the context and time of life, and promote their overall health.

EXPERIENCE REPORT

From the first workshop, the participants were informed that during the execution of the artistic works there was no need to be concerned with the result, as the important thing was the possibility of expressing themselves through this non-verbal language. It was also informed that there was no expectation regarding the aesthetics and the use of the technique in carrying out the activities, that is, in Art Therapy there is no judgment of value, “beautiful or ugly”, “right or wrong”.

The facilitators used relaxation techniques, body awareness and/or guided meditation so that the women focused their attention on the present. Afterwards, a reflection on how the women were feeling, followed by the suggestion of an expressive technique with the invitation to plastically represent their feelings. Each woman was invited to share their experiences. At the end, each woman was asked to say a phrase that symbolized the experience of the day, in addition to the collective organization of the physical space.

In the workshops, themes that emerged

in moments of reflection and sharing were worked on, such as: meaning of the name itself, rescue of artistic memories and life stories, violence, gender and other themes that permeated all workshops: health, self-esteem and quality of life. And it was proposed that women carry out a rescue of artistic memories from childhood, remembering their experiences with the arts, such as music, photography, painting, embroidery, among others.

In the workshop “What do I have in my heart?”, after welcoming the women, a guided meditation and sensitization were carried out, proposing a rescue of memories and access to feeling (through the memory of places, songs, poetry, people, experiences that each one kept in her heart) and the plastic representation of this experience through cutting and pasting.

In her collage (Photo 1), Hibiscus (76 years old) represented the need to speak and be heard. In her life story, she was a victim of violence by her husband and cousins. She shared stories from her childhood and adulthood: her father’s dislike of her husband’s family, her grandfather’s abandonment of the family when he left home for work, and the repercussions on family life after the fact. Hibiscus has a family history of somatization of psychic suffering, female struggles in raising children and in survival and postpartum depression, demonstrating its strengths and potential.

The phrases: “only love can” and “don’t take life so seriously” (Photo 1) reflect the role of love in the story of Hibiscus and its ability to rescue a sense of humor in facing its vulnerabilities.

When describing her collage (Photo 2), Violeta (57 years old) stated that, when she feels angry, she becomes “electric and her hair rises to the top of her head”. Violeta mentioned having had a very good childhood, with a time to return home determined by her mother.

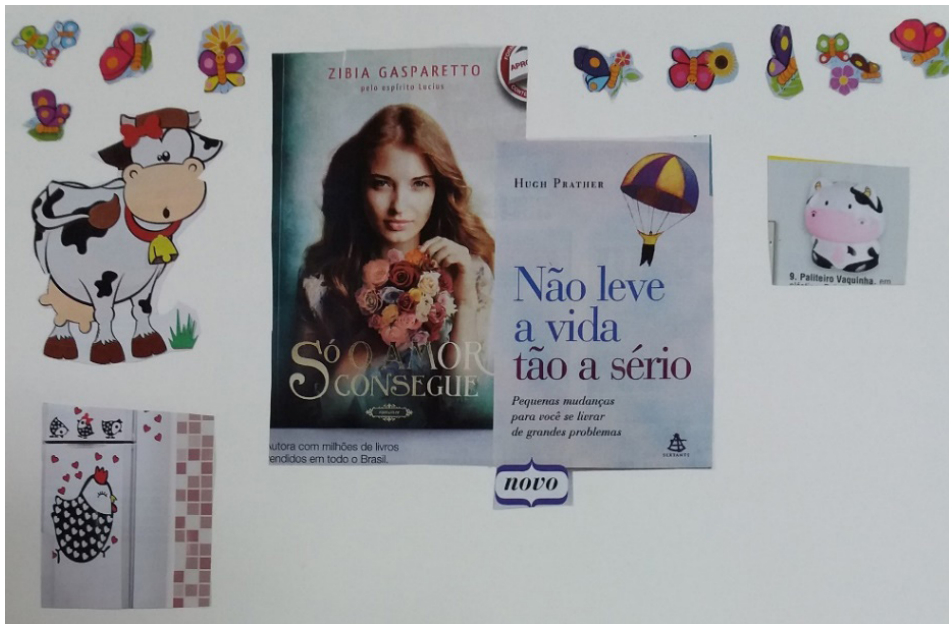


Photo 1. Cutting and collage of Hibiscus. Source: authors' file.



Photo 2. Violet cut and paste. Source: authors' file.

About her youth, Violeta commented: “we try to get it right and see if we can”; “I loved going to dances. Music is therapy”; “have coffee and mate with friends”. Violeta represented adult life with Lya Luft’s phrase: “old age, which takes much longer today than it did decades ago, can be beautiful, joyful and appreciated as long as it is not bitter” and she added: “today the situations are different in our old age”.

Violeta showed respect and admiration for old age, awareness of life as a passage and considered being in middle age. This collage represents the woman that Violeta showed to be throughout the workshops: lived, who values love, the heart, rescuing in her expressive work the joy, her value as a woman, the ability to get it right, comfort, poetry, conversation, the passage of time and its achievements throughout life.

Photo 3 shows the collage of Rosa (32 years old), who remembered her adolescence as a period when she liked to decorate herself with necklaces, claiming to like cats, chickens, food, dresses and watches. She highlighted the image of Iemanjá, referring that, when sad and discouraged, she prays to a “saint” and to Jesus.

Rosa shared with the group two situations experienced. The first, a disagreement with co-workers when she wanted to be alone and was not understood, managing to express that she was not well and wanted to be alone. In the second situation, Rosa presented her mother, who thanked and hugged her. Rosa was touched, because her mother did not show affection and managed to tell her that she misses moments of mother and daughter, to talk, be together and ask questions. Rosa is rescuing her affective relationship with her mother and learning to show what she feels and thinks, at home and at work.

The women reflected on the importance of speaking what they think and feel, not doing anything out of obligation, respecting

moments of being alone, giving and receiving affection, and managing emotional issues. In the workshops, it became evident that the life stories kept in the hearts of these women were awakened, bringing to the surface affective memories and the opportunity to re-signify situations, extracting learning and its potential.

Photo 4 shows the poster on violence against women and ways of coping, produced after the meditation conducted (RUIZ, 2015, p.107-10) and the video of the Campaign against Violence (City Hall of Macapá, 2018). The women listed “solutions for cases of violence”: reporting, seeking rights, family, psychological and spiritual support, not leaving children alone in public places, avoiding bullying, treating the elderly with dignity, public protection measures, guidelines, information about the Law Maria da Penha, the Elderly Statute and the Child and Adolescent Statute. They highlighted peace as a way to face violence, where “education is the first step, it comes from home, parents, family” and they understood it was important to install cameras and prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages in squares.

The workshops provided opportunities for women to express feelings, integration, socialization, empathy, sharing experiences, mutual support, expanding creativity, strengthening self-esteem, re-signification of their life stories and cultural baggage. The women expanded their ability to listen and dialogue, exposed issues that distressed them and sought solutions based on reflections and the appreciation of their experiences.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although this study presents as limitations the small size of the group and the low attendance of the participants in the workshops due to health problems, it was noticed that the women obtained a significant growth through



Photo 3. Clipping and collage of rose. Source: authors' archive.

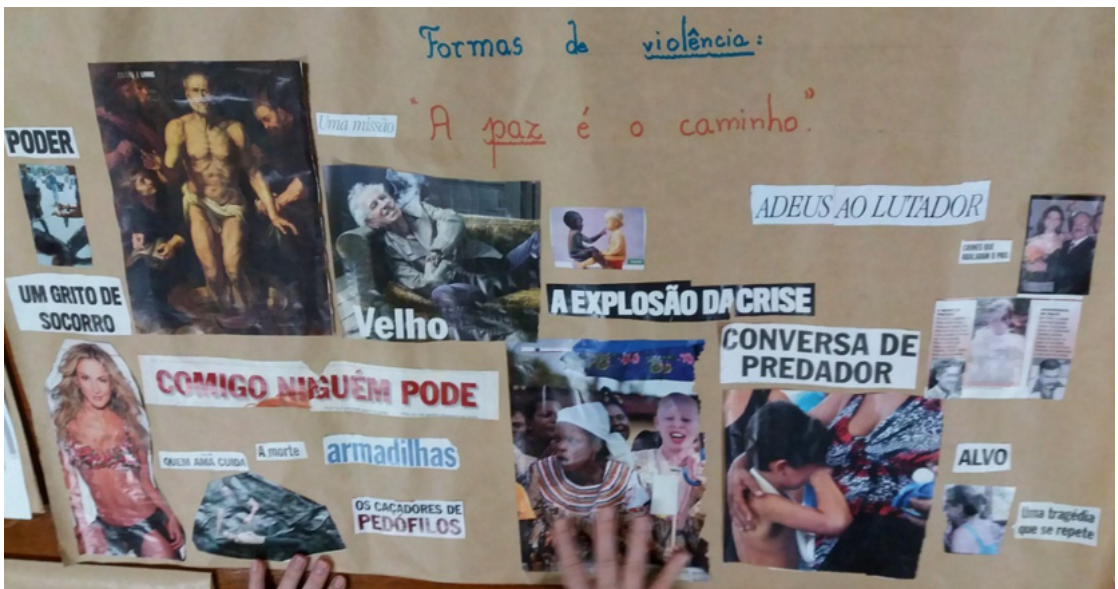


Photo 4. Violence against women and ways of coping. Source: authors' file.

the experiences carried out, expressed in their speeches and materialized in their plastic productions, accessing memories, expanding their expressive repertoire, reconciling knowledge, enriching their life stories.

In the study carried out, the importance of Art Therapy was highlighted as an interdisciplinary device for promoting mental health and female empowerment. The workshops enabled self-knowledge, coping and overcoming vulnerabilities, the appropriation of a space for listening and expression of feelings, conflict resolution and the resignification of violence.

Art Therapy facilitates the creative process and communication of conscious and

unconscious intrapsychic content through expressive languages and can help women identify and understand their emotions, face trauma and vulnerabilities, expand self-care and take ownership of their life story, contributing significantly to comprehensive health.

Therefore, it is necessary to maintain collective spaces for the expression of feelings through art-therapeutic resources among women in situations of psychological and socioeconomic vulnerability, expanding partnerships with other public and private spaces that propose to work with integral health and the female empowerment.

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