

STASH, Vol. 19(2) - Photovoice: Latine individuals sharing their recovery journey through imagery to promote social change

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In 2021, Latine¹ individuals made up [12.8% of the Massachusetts population](#) but represented [38% of opioid-related deaths](#) in the state. Factors including lack of access to culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate services and stigma related to drug use might have contributed to this disproportionate harm. One way to counteract these factors is to engage Latine individuals in the addiction research process. Research approaches such as [photovoice](#) amplify the voices of marginalized populations. This week, STASH reviews a [study by Jordana Muroff and colleagues](#) that examined the use of photovoice to engage Latine, Spanish-speaking individuals in recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD) by using photography and narration to illustrate their experiences and promote policy change.

What was the research question?

What was the outcome of the photovoice project that emerged as a result of collaboration among Latine, Spanish-speaking individuals in recovery from SUD?

What did the researchers do?

The authors recruited a [non-probability sample](#) of 13 adult, Spanish speakers from [CASA-CHESS](#), a Boston University program adapted for Latine, Spanish-speakers that used a smartphone application (i.e., mHealth) to promote health, wellness, and recovery among adults with SUD. Participants engaged in 3 sessions over a 6-week period with a goal of creating a photovoice demonstration, highlighting factors that influenced their recovery outside the treatment setting. Participants (1) took photos of aspects of their life that they felt most influenced their recovery, (2) reflected upon the images and analyzed themes that emerged, and (3) constructed a narrative that gave meaning to each image. Finally, the group determined a name for the photovoice project, a medium for presenting it, and brainstormed stakeholders to share the project with.

What did they find?

Participants entitled their photovoice “Nuestra Recuperación” or “Our Recovery,” representing their sense of community connection and hope. Participants also devised four narratives, one for each photo (see Figure), finding that motivation, hope, and community were primary themes across their recovery narrative. Participants went on to share more specific thoughts about recovery, including the importance of housing, family/friends, a sense of responsibility and hope, and faith-based community support (see Figure). Participants chose to disseminate their finished photovoice project by (1) printing out the photos and corresponding narratives and hanging them in their local community health center and (2) sharing a slideshow of the results on the mHealth app to reach a broader audience. This project was not only successful in empowering individuals by giving them the opportunity to share their recovery experiences with one another and the broader community but also resulted in organizational change within the community. Specifically, since this project, more providers at the participant treatment clinic have introduced photovoice as a therapeutic tool.

PHOTOVOICE NARRATIVES	QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS
<p>Photo 1 of a bedroom: Security, Motivation, Strength, Progress, Community, Quality of Life, Responsibility, Order, and Discipline</p>	<p>● "I just got approved for a studio 1 bedroom. So, things keep getting even better. And ... it just reminds me of the person I was, in the vice/addiction. and I don't want to go back where I was. I feel happy, happy, my whole family is happy."</p>
<p>Photo 2 of various house of plants: Life, Health, Motivation, Hope, Faith, Responsibility, and Humility</p>	<p>● "And look and the-and the branch (tree) that my son gave me, I feel so happy because he gave it to me. And he asks me, and when he calls me Mommy you like this? And I say: yes son. Wow mommy, you have a good hand! That small plant/cutling has, since I am in recovery, the small plant/cutling is with me."</p>
<p>Photo 3 of a bridge and tunnel: Darkness, Fear, Obstacles, Light at the end, New Changes, Clarity, Hope, and Fight/Struggle</p>	<p>● "Because I grew up here and wherever I go, they are friends ... and-and they are not positive friends, everyone is using." and "For me I see it, if I wanted the clarity behind ... I have to go through that bridge, in the long run I am going to cross that tunnel-that tunnel I am going to cross and there are going to be wonderful things."</p>
<p>Photo 4 of a church: Religion, Protection, Unity, Motivation, Peace, Love, Faith, and Hope</p>	<p>● "When you're in church you don't want to do bad things because you know that God doesn't like those things. And that always keeps me- is- I have God present, but always keeps in that- focused. I know that if I get out of there, I will go to the street again."</p>

Figure. Photovoice narratives established by participants along with quotes from participants that expand upon their reasoning for choosing these narratives. The photos used in this project can be found in the original (open access) research article, [Muroff et al. \(2023\)](#). Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Substance use research tends to focus on individual factors that impact recovery,

such as an individual person's history of mental health concerns. Though these individual factors are important, the photovoice project teaches us that it is equally important to pay attention to community- and structural-level recovery resources, such as churches, housing supports, and community centers, especially among groups of people who highly value collectivism. Towns and cities should form paid advisory boards to learn more about their community members' recovery and wellness needs.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?

The [sample](#) size was small with only 13 people. Before partaking in this study, participants might have already been familiar with one another. Because of this and the discussion-based nature of the project, participant responses were subject to [response bias](#), reflecting back what they thought others were already thinking rather than contributing their original thoughts.

For more information:

If you are worried that you or someone you know is experiencing addiction, the [SAMHSA National Helpline](#) is a free treatment and information service available 24/7. For more details about addiction, visit our [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— Nakita Sconsoni, MSW

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

[1] Latine (pronounced la-'ti-ne) is a gender-neutral form of the words "Latino" and "Latina" and we are using it here to be inclusive of all gender identities, including non-binary people. The words "Latine" and "Latinx" can be used interchangeably, but Latine is a more natural pronunciation for Spanish and Portuguese speakers.