

## Analysis of images of adolescent suicide prevention campaigns: qualitative study

*Análise das imagens de campanhas sobre prevenção do suicídio na adolescência: estudo qualitativo*

*Análisis de las imágenes de campañas sobre la prevención del suicidio en la adolescencia: estudio cualitativo*

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze the images conveyed in suicide prevention campaigns carried out by representative bodies in the health area of Latin American countries. **Methods:** descriptive research with a qualitative approach anchored in the perspective of image analysis. The textual corpus were posters of suicide prevention campaigns by governmental and non-governmental organizations representing Latin America. Data were collected and organized in light of the image analysis stages. **Results:** six posters were analyzed, which led to the emergence of 9 sub-themes that built a single theme: Suicide prevention, which is the principle of widespread knowledge. **Conclusion:** the messages conveyed approach the main issues involving the theme and important points to be worked on by nursing and other health professionals through iconic, plastic and linguistic signs that dialogue with the audience of adolescents, contributing to the construction of future posters of suicide prevention.

**Keywords:** Poster; Suicide; Primary Prevention.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar as imagens veiculadas nas campanhas de prevenção do suicídio realizadas pelos órgãos representativos da área da saúde de países da América Latina. **Métodos:** pesquisa descritiva de abordagem qualitativa ancorado na perspectiva da análise de imagem. O corpus textual foram cartazes de campanhas de prevenção ao suicídio de organizações governamentais e não governamentais representativas da América Latina. Os dados foram coletados e organizados à luz das etapas da análise de imagem. **Resultados:** foram analisados seis cartazes que fez emergir 9 subtemas que construíram um único tema: Prevenção ao suicídio, sendo esse o princípio do conhecimento difundido. **Conclusão:** as mensagens veiculadas abordam os principais assuntos que envolvem a temática e pontos importantes de serem trabalhados pela enfermagem e demais profissionais de saúde através de signos icônicos, plásticos e linguísticos que dialogam com o público de adolescentes, contribuindo para a construção de futuros cartazes de prevenção do suicídio. **Descritores:** Pôster; Suicídio; Prevenção Primária.


### RESUMEN


**Objetivo:** analizar las imágenes vehiculadas en las campañas de prevención del suicidio de organizaciones representativos del área de la salud en países de Latinoamérica. **Métodos:** estudio descriptivo de abordaje cualitativo basado en la perspectiva del análisis de imagen. El corpus textual se constituyó de afiches de campañas de prevención del suicidio de organizaciones gubernamentales y no gubernamentales representativas de Latinoamérica. Los datos se colectaron y organizaron a través de las etapas del análisis de imagen. **Resultados:** se analizaron 6 afiches, lo que llevó a la emergencia de 9 subtemas, los cuales constituyeron un único tema: Prevención del suicidio, el principio del conocimiento difundido. **Conclusión:** los mensajes vehiculados abordaban los principales asuntos que envuelven la temática y puntos importantes para a trabajar por las enfermeras y otros profesionales de la salud por medio de signos icónicos, plásticos y lingüísticos que dialogan con los adolescentes, contribuyendo a la construcción de futuros carteles de prevención del suicidio.


**Descriptores:** Cartel; Suicidio; Prevención Primaria.

Thaíssa Fernandes de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>  
 [0000-0001-8374-1274](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8374-1274)

Nathalia Manoela Condeixa  
 Corrêa<sup>1</sup>  
 [0000-0001-6767-7348](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6767-7348)

Rosane Cordeiro Burla de Aguiar<sup>1</sup>  
 [0000-0003-2956-9252](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2956-9252)

Joseph Dimas de Oliveira<sup>2</sup>  
 [0000-0001-8105-4286](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8105-4286)

Ana Luiza Dorneles da Silveira<sup>1</sup>  
 [0000-0003-4126-7919](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4126-7919)

<sup>1</sup> Escola de Enfermagem Aurora de Afonso Costa-EEAAC, Universidade Federal Fluminense-UFF, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Regional do Cariri: Crato, Ceará, Brasil.

#### Corresponding author:

Rosane Cordeiro Burla de Aguiar  
**E-mail:** [rcburla@yahoo.com.br](mailto:rcburla@yahoo.com.br)

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is marked by intense physical, emotional and psychological changes of extreme importance for the individual, such as the development of self-esteem and self-criticism<sup>(1)</sup>. As it is a period marked by several changes, usually accompanied by conflicts and anguish, adolescents are a group at greater risk for suicide<sup>(2)</sup>.

In recent decades, there has been an increase in reports of self-inflicted violence in both sexes, both in the general population and in the young population aged 15 to 29 years, including different educational levels and in all social strata, pointing out that suicide affects the entire society and which can be prevented<sup>(3)</sup>. It is a serious public health problem worldwide, becoming, in 2012, the second leading cause of death, among individuals aged 15 to 29 years and with greater presence in low and middle-income countries<sup>(4)</sup>.

Suicide is a deliberate and conscious act through which an individual performs an action that causes his own death<sup>(4)</sup>. It is a phenomenon that involves sociocultural, historical, psychosocial and environmental issues, with multiple and complex determinations. Some situations can contribute to suicidal behavior, such as having difficulty dealing with acute or chronic life stresses, experiencing gender-based violence, child abuse or discrimination<sup>(3,4)</sup>.

In the period from 2011 to 2018, 339,730 cases of self-inflicted violence were reported and 154,279 (45.4%) occurred in the age group of 15 to 29 years. According to sex, 103,881 (67.3%) cases were registered with women and 50,388 (32.7%) with men. In ten records the sex of the person was ignored. Of the total reports of self-inflicted violence among young people in this age group, 34% of the cases were classified as suicide attempts<sup>(3)</sup>.

Given the scenario presented, suicide prevention campaigns were developed by representative bodies in the health area and disseminated in the media and social networks through posters, pamphlets and other advertising materials. All of them were developed with a focus on screening and monitoring risk factors for suicidal behavior and its prevention<sup>(5)</sup>.

In this context, nurses assume a privileged role for being part of the primary health care teams and of the Health Program at School and, with this, can perform actions to promote mental health and suicide prevention with adolescents in different scenarios, for example, school, home, basic health units and outpatient clinics. Due to professional characteristics, nurses are able to articulate intersectoral actions and strategies between health, education and social assistance<sup>(6)</sup>.

The campaigns, in addition to the role of disseminating information, were designed to develop the role of health education and establish forms of prevention and promotion using image and linguistic signs<sup>(7)</sup>.

The image is a visual representation, the result of processes of production of meaning in cultural contexts. It constitutes a message for the other,

which influences the process of understanding and interpretation of the readers as builders of meanings; it is a kind of facilitator in the process of reflection on a certain theme. In this way, it is considered relevant resources that explore the meaning and produce meaning of the images conveyed in suicide prevention campaigns. Image text is composed of a distributed relationship between shapes, colors and verbal and non-verbal themes<sup>(7,8)</sup>.

In the health area, particularly in the theme of suicide prevention, the images present in the posters should reflect cultural, sexual, ethnic-racial diversity, gender issues and human rights in a way that adolescents feel attracted and represented by written texts and texts image acting in the empowerment of adolescents<sup>(8)</sup>.

Thus, this study aimed to analyze the images conveyed in suicide prevention campaigns carried out by representative bodies in the health area of Latin American countries.

## METHOD

This is a descriptive research with a qualitative approach anchored in the perspective of image analysis<sup>(8)</sup>.

Image analysis comprises the selection and analysis of written and image texts, with the aim of investigating the elements of meaning and, with that, identifying the particularities that compose it, that is, articulating the texts (written and image) to the sociocultural context and discover how they produce meaning<sup>(7,8)</sup>.

To perform the image analysis there are five stages: The first one is the choice of images or textual corpus. The second, called the denotative phase, is characterized by identifying the elements that make up the material, such as texts, images, and cataloging the literal meaning of the material. It is important at this point to report the types of images, whether photographs, drawings, engravings, or illustrations<sup>(8)</sup>.

The third stage, called the connotative phase, is characterized by meaning. From the elements raised in the previous stage, the analyst begins the process of interpreting the content of the message transmitted and to whom it is intended. In the fourth stage, the analyst recognizes the themes presented. In the fifth stage, the principle of disseminated knowledge that supports the sociocultural construction of the image is identified<sup>(7,8)</sup>.

In this research, the textual corpus was the posters of the suicide prevention campaigns of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Ministry of Health of Brazil, Chile and Mexico. The choice of PAHO is justified because it is the specialized health agency of the inter-American system, which works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of their populations, offering technical cooperation in health to its member countries. The Ministry of Health of some countries was chosen because it is responsible for the elaboration of public policies aimed at the

prevention, promotion and assistance to the health of the population.

The search for the images was carried out from September 2019 to February 2020 on Google Images, using the search field on the website itself, using the expressions “campaign”, “suicide”, “campaña prevención del suicidio en la adolescencia”, “campaña like a la vida”, “campaña prevención del suicidio en la adolescencia chile”, “global day of prevention of suicide in adolescencia”.

As a data collection instrument, a table was created with all five phases related to the stages of image analysis. Then, meaning was attributed to the written texts and images, relating them to each

other. The data were discussed in the light of the concept of health prevention and the scientific literature on the topic of suicide in adolescence.

As it is not a research with the use of data or with a direct approach with human beings, this research was not submitted to the Ethics and Research Committee, according to Resolutions number 466/12 and 510/16.

**RESULTS**

Six images were selected, one (01) from Brazil, two (02) from PAHO, one (01) from Chile and two (02) from Mexico. The images are presented in the following mosaic (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Suicide prevention campaign posters in Latin American and PAHO countries. Rio de Janeiro, 2021.



Source: Own elaboration, 2020

Figure 2 presents the results of the stages of analysis of the selected images with the respective description of each stage

Figure 2 - Summary of the analysis of the images on the posters of suicide prevention campaigns in Latin American countries. Rio de Janeiro, 2021

N	Denotative description	Connotative description	Sub-themes	Widespread knowledge
01	Designs Colors: yellow, orange, brown, white, beige.	Two drawings of human figures. Three dialog box drawings. An intertwined ribbon design. All drawings are located in the lower half of the image. Linguistic sign: “Suicide. Knowing, Acting and Preventing.”	- Suicide prevention - Support, reception - Dialogue - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention

(continue)

N	Denotative description	Connotative description	Sub-themes	Widespread knowledge
02	Illustration Colors: pink, blue, yellow, white and black	One (01) illustration of a representative human figure of a young man. Three (03) linguistic signs: "Suicide Prevention" "#Let's Talk"; "Myth" "Those who talk about suicide do not intend to commit it."; "False"; "Truth" "Those who talk about suicide may be asking for help or support. A significant number of people contemplating suicide experience anxiety, depression and may feel that they have no other option." At the bottom of the image you can see the symbol of the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization.	- Suicide prevention - Talking about suicide - Link between suicide and depression - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention
03	Illustration Colors: green, red, blue, black, yellow, white and brown.	One (01) drawing of a representative human figure of a young woman. Three (03) linguistic signs: "Suicide Prevention" "#Let's Talk"; "Myth" "Most suicides happen suddenly, without warning."; "False", "True". At the bottom of the image you can see the symbol of the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization.	- Suicide prevention - Suicide warning signs - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention
04	Photography Colors: green, white, red, black.	A photograph with two human figures with their backs to the lens looking at a window. Fuzzy photography background. Linguistic sign: "When and where to refer a young person with suicidal ideation?"; "These and other issues are raised by the new guide with Recommendations for the Prevention of Suicidal Behavior in Educational Establishments" At the bottom of the image there is the logo of the Ministry of Health of the Government of Chile; "Chile we all do it"; "Mental Health Line attended by psychologists and health professionals"; "Call health"; "Answer" "600.360.7777"; "Health professionals answering your questions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week	- Suicide prevention - Suicidal ideation - Support, reception - Dialogue - Refer young people with suicidal ideation - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention
05	Designs Colors: pink, blue and white.	Drawing of two dialog balloons. At the top there is the symbol of the #like for life campaign. Linguistic signs: "help and guidance service"; "Embrace them"; "love them"; "But above all, listen to them. Suicide does not apply"	- Suicide prevention - Support, reception - Dialogue - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention.
06	Designs Colors: pink, purple, blue, green, orange and white.	10 drawings of human figures, 06 drawings of furniture, 03 drawings of medicines, 02 drawings of a clock, 01 drawing of a thought bubble, 01 drawing representing alcohol and drugs, 01 drawing of a car, 01 drawing of a box, 01 drawing of a letter, 01 drawing of a hanging rope, 01 drawing of a brain, 01 drawing of a heart. At the top there is the symbol of the #like for life campaign. Linguistic signs: "Warning signs to consider within a person's behavior"; "change of schedules and dynamics of his routine habits, especially in sleep, food and hygiene; "Self-criticism, self-humiliation"; Mexico City symbol	- Suicide prevention - Suicide warning signs - Suicidal ideation - Suicide prevention campaign.	- Suicide prevention.

Source: Own elaboration, 2020

In the denotative phase, three types of images were identified, two illustrations (2 and 3), 37 drawings (1, 5 and 6) and a photography (4). Regarding the colors, the posters were very different from each other. A total of 11 colors were used, with white being present in five posters, blue in four, yellow, pink and black in three posters, orange, red, brown and green in two, and beige and purple on one poster each. Three posters had only one (01) color as a background. One (01) poster presented three colors, one (01) five colors as a background and the poster that brings the photograph has a blurred background, making it impossible to identify any type.

In the connotative phase, it was possible to observe that even the posters presented the combined use of images and linguistic signs. Among the elements present in the posters, it was possible to identify 11 human figures in drawings (1 and 6), two in illustrations (2 and 3) and two in photography (4), 21 objects (6), seven dialog balloons (1, 5 and 6), three symbols of suicide prevention campaigns (1, 5 and 6), five symbols of governmental institutions (4, 5 and 6) and four non-governmental ones (2 and 3).

The human figures present in the posters when presented in drawing format did not have any form of representation, whether age, sex, race/ethnicity and social class. The two illustrations



of human figures were well delimited with distinction of male (poster 2) and female (poster 3) sex. The single photography does not allow for many interpretations since the human figures have their backs to the camera lens, and it is only possible to say that they are two human figures.

The analysis of the posters revealed nine (09) sub-themes: suicide prevention (in 6 posters), suicide prevention campaign (in 6 posters), support and reception (in 3 posters), dialogue (in 3 posters), signs of alert and suicidal ideation (in 2 posters), talk about suicide, relationship between suicide and depression and refer young people with suicidal ideation (in 1 poster each sub-theme). From these sub-themes, a single theme emerged: suicide prevention, which is the principle of widespread knowledge. The messages conveyed in the campaigns are very close and are related to important points to be worked on with the population and health professionals.

## DISCUSSION

The image has always been one of the main means of communication in human history. Before the discovery of writing, man communicated through images carved in rocks and caves. Although, for a long time, writing surpassed it in importance, today we live in a hyper visual world, where the image plays a fundamental role of identification, of socialization. They produce feelings, meanings, memories, announce or denounce a reality, evoke personal memories and worldviews<sup>(9)</sup>.

In the denotative description, it was possible to observe the predominance of drawings, be they human figures, objects and symbols. Drawings are visual representations; they resemble what they represent, imitate, visually schematizing people and objects in the real world. They lead to the association with mental images produced from human experiences, for example, human silhouettes reduced to two overlapping circles and four traces for the limbs, are sufficient and necessary visual traits to recognize this drawing as representative of a human figure<sup>(10)</sup>. But without any kind of identification, whether this identification of gender, race, color or culture.

In smaller numbers we observe illustrations and photographs. Illustrations are expressions that delve into informative details, with colors, shapes and textures<sup>(8)</sup>. Photographs are considered to be perfectly similar images, pure icons. They give life, they are copies of something or someone produced as an image, they are documentary and affective links that perpetuate memory<sup>(8,11)</sup>. The photographic image is polysemic, that is, it is subject to various meanings and interpretations. The receivers of these images will interpret it influenced by their mental images and by all their cognitive, cultural, ideological, religious and political apparatus that are part of their life. These influences mean that the same photo can suffer different types of interpretation when seen by different receptors<sup>(11)</sup>.

In the connotative phase, it was possible to analyze all the elements that composed the posters (imagery elements and linguistic signs) and how they related to each other. It is important to note that all posters had images and linguistic signs in their composition in equivalent quantities. Because it is polysemic, most images are accompanied by written text. The text helps to remove the ambiguity of the image, directs the reader's reading and interpretation. Text and image together contribute to the full meaning of the message to be transmitted, allowing its insertion in a given context<sup>(8,11)</sup>.

This is clearly demarcated in poster 6, where all the images are accompanied by texts that complement them. Poster 5 is also possible to make this association because the image of two dialogue balloons and the most prominent text refer to the message of attentive listening. Fundamental premise for the establishment of a dialogue and a successful therapeutic conduct<sup>(4,12)</sup>. In poster 4, the text can help in the interpretation of the photograph, since the image is not very clear. In contrast, in the other posters it is possible to notice the non-congruence between the linguistic signs and the images. The first ones point to the power of speech, of dialogue, but the images refer to silence, isolation, introspection.

The composition of the visual message is one of its fundamental plastic tools. In any image, its construction plays an essential role in the hierarchy of vision and in the orientation of the reading of the image. The reader's eye follows the paths that were prepared for him in the work, contradicting the unfairly spread idea of a global reading of the image<sup>(10)</sup>. Therefore, when the image is composed of an illustration of a young person who occupies a third of the poster followed by a text with information about the warning signs to be observed in people with suicidal ideation, it directs the reader's interpretation. He will be able to associate image and text and arrive at the final message: we need to be aware of these points in suicide prevention.

When comparing the imagery elements that make up the posters, human figures (15) and objects (21), the predominance of objects is perceived, which are always related to the main points in the discussion of the theme of suicide prevention. The images mainly represent support, reception, dialogue and warning signs of suicidal ideation, which is in accordance with the recommendations of the WHO/PAHO. For suicide prevention, it is necessary to invest in actions that promote healthy relationships and expand knowledge about personal, environmental and social risks associated with suicidal intentions with young people and adolescents, such as: previous attempt; mental disorder (depression, anxiety); use of licit/illicit drugs; conflicting interpersonal relationships; hopelessness; exposure to violence in the family (physical and sexual abuse) and in the community (bullying and homophobia), among others<sup>(12,13)</sup>.

The linguistic signs that accompany the images are sometimes presented with verbs in the infinitive or imperative; sometimes they invite the reader to dialogue, sometimes they bring relevant information

for the transmission of the final message. Most posters try to get closer to the reader by pointing out attitudes, practices and behaviors that can harm the adolescent's health<sup>(14)</sup>.

The prevention of health problems aims to predict, anticipate the appearance of events that are not desirable among populations considered statistically at risk<sup>(14)</sup>. It is understood that suicide is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon; when analyzing this phenomenon in a contextualized way it is possible to understand the situations of greater risk. The stigma related to suicide prevents the search for help, which could prevent deaths<sup>(3)</sup>.

The use of verbs in the infinitive and imperative reinforces the message of imposing standardized behaviors and attitudes<sup>(7)</sup>. Prescriptive actions have little effectiveness in preventing health problems. Health care for people with suicidal behavior requires an expanded approach, taking into account the mediation of social conditions, the context and the participation of a family and community support network<sup>(14)</sup>.

Regarding the colors, it was possible to observe that the posters were colorful, with strong and vibrant colors, which contributes to the transmission of the message, attracts the reader's attention. Only one poster prioritized the yellow color palette, a reference to the Yellow September suicide prevention campaign. Colors can be considered symbols of various elements in any culture. In this case, the color yellow translates the symbolism of the campaign.

The production of meanings from an image can be carried out implicitly and casually by the reader, without following the interpretative path provided for in the systematized analytical process. Interpretation depends on prior knowledge and experience influenced by history, culture, context and other social aspects. It is essential to take these influences into account in order to understand the attributions of meanings produced by the images in the readers. Contextualization reduces possible ambiguities and favors the understanding of the images, considering that they are polysemic and iconically complex<sup>(10)</sup>.

Suicide prevention is not an easy task given its multifactorial nature and its impact on families, schools, communities and health services where people are inserted. Therefore, for suicide prevention, it is necessary to act on several fronts with effective public policies that meet all these demands<sup>(4,13)</sup>.

It is known that suicide is directly related to mental health problems, and consequently to its determinants, which include individual, social, cultural, economic, political and environmental issues. Preventing young people from being exposed to these situations and reducing access to lethal means of suicide, such as pesticides, alcohol, drugs and firearms is imperative in preventing suicide<sup>(12,13)</sup>. From the analysis of the posters, it is possible to affirm that three of them (2,3,6) dialogue with these premises defended by the WHO.

Information and discussion on suicide prevention and all its risk factors must be present, reducing the taboo and giving visibility to the subject, the greater the knowledge about depression and suicide, the greater the chances of prevention<sup>(6)</sup>. The participation of family members and close people in the prevention of suicide of people in distress is relevant, being attentive to the signs, with the possibility of intervening in the complaint. This is because the support network is able to assist health professionals in the early detection and management of patients at risk<sup>(5)</sup>. All posters analyzed corroborate this information and somehow try to convey these messages.

Primary care health professionals have the potential to develop strategies and actions that facilitate the early identification and intervention of people at risk of suicide. Primary care is the gateway to the health system and, therefore, must welcome, promote bonding and meet the needs of people seeking care<sup>(6)</sup>.

Even though it is one of the main causes of death among adolescents and young people, and despite the WHO indications related to its prevention, suicide has a low priority in public health, receiving little financial and human investment. Therefore, the need for actions, strategies and public policies to prevent suicide associated with the promotion of mental health in the population most affected by this phenomenon is evident<sup>(4)</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Suicide is the outcome of a complex and multifactorial process that involves interpersonal relationships and the contexts in which adolescents are inserted. When analyzing the images published in suicide prevention campaigns, it was possible to observe that they directly or indirectly address the main issues involving the theme. They use linguistic signs and colors that dialogue with the audience of adolescents and young people.

The image as a visual representation needs to be understood within a social context for the production of meaning. It announces and denounces a reality. And in this sense, the posters of the campaigns fulfilled their role, all of them had suicide prevention as their central theme and, consequently, as widespread knowledge.

Because it is a phenomenon that affects the entire world population and although it is a serious public health problem, prevention is imperative by expanding spaces for discussion in schools, universities, health services and in families. It is necessary that prevention actions and strategies, such as campaigns, bring information, alerts and directions in order to help people in suffering. These campaigns can be tools for the empowerment of adolescents, young people, teachers and health professionals in order to know the factors and signs of a person with suicidal ideation and thus enable a direct intervention, in an early way, supported by a team of trained professionals for reception and care.

This study contributes to the science of nursing by pointing out the strengths and

weaknesses of the messages conveyed in suicide prevention campaigns and how these can be worked on in the construction of future posters, thus enabling the reduction of the incidence of suicide.

As a limitation of the study, it should be noted that posters from Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and PAHO were included because they are available in the virtual environment. The results point to the need for further studies to identify and assess the impact of these campaigns on the adolescent population.

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