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## Oral History and Memories: Contributions in the Historical Research in Nursing and Health

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The historical research consists in the systematic collection of data that are related to past occurrences, allowing the obtaining of information, to interpret and to understand past events that can give answers to certain questions raised in the present<sup>(1)</sup>.

Although less expressive, the historical research has subtly gained ground in nursing and health research. The option for the historical research does not mean that one should think about research, with traditional and orthodox schemes. The conception of history must, above all, take into account the human experience and the historian, and it should not be unaware of this fact, since it values the human activity, with a history, a past, memories that can be constructed and related to the rest of this past<sup>(2)</sup>.

In the reflections regarding the memory, be it individual or collective, the central principle of the memory is the preservation of the past, which survives through the memories evoked in the present. The expansion of the debates about memory and its approach to history has offered keys to a new perception of the past<sup>(3)</sup>.

In this sense, the choice of historical research in nursing and health studies is based on the understanding that when we look at the past, we do it with the eyes of the present, considering that this is the time experienced by the researcher<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the methodology of a historical research, the technique for data collection occurs from the investigation of historical, oral, and/or documentary sources. The oral sources include the OH, which can be defined as a method of scientific investigation, as a source of collection, or as a technique for the production and treatment of recorded interviews<sup>(4)</sup>. In the historical nursing research, the OH is used as a source to obtain the data, and it has the objective of knowing and deepening the knowledge about a certain reality, from the accomplishment of interviews with people that focus important memories in their lives. Still, as a source-method for data collection, it allows us to build the history from the words of those who have experienced, witnessed, and participated in events, conjectures, and worldviews, which we are trying to investigate<sup>(4)</sup>.

In addition, it should be highlighted that among the main characteristics of the OH, there is the position with respect to the history and socio-cultural settings that privileges the recovery of what has been experienced, as conceived by those who have experienced it and, in this sense, emphasizing that one cannot think in oral history without memory<sup>(3)</sup>. However, the past and the rescue of the memory are not fully recovered; and what can be obtained are interpretations of this past, permeated by the

present-day experiences and often influenced by the questions raised by the interviewer<sup>(5)</sup>. In this way, “we must abandon the idea that we are going to reconstruct the past as it has happened but, at the same time, make the past a reading in terms of recent references that cover the present and the present moment”<sup>(1:577)</sup>. Our memory is in permanent construction, as when we remember the events of the past, as we forget them, and/or when we relate them to the experiences of the present. For when we remember, we do, at the same time, an interpretation of the events of the past, and sometimes we readjust them by considering what we are today<sup>(3)</sup>. However, remembering and rescuing the memory of a past event is a way of ensuring its continuity in time, as an essential element to identity<sup>(5)</sup>.

However, the OH in historical research in nursing and health enables subjects/interviewees to be heard, making room in history for those who have had no voice over their own history through their memories. Since memories are stored in their own memories, and when recovered they allow us to understand the past in the light of the personal perspective of each human being, and not only under the social, political, economic, and cultural context of period to which they refer<sup>(3)</sup>.

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