

0069

The value and meaning of a community centre service for refugees and asylum seekers: culture, collectivism and application for occupational therapy practice

Fiona Howlett, Hannah Spring, Claire Connor
York St John University, York, North Yorkshire, UK

Introduction: Asylum seekers and refugees experience substantial barriers to successful transition and inclusion in a new society. The cultural value and meaning of occupation differs between East and West, increasing a sense of dislocation in society. Access to meaningful occupations that provide a sense of well-being are often limited and occupational injustices are common. Exploring the meaning of occupational preferences offers insights into the impact of relocation on asylum seekers and refugees' wellbeing and integration into the host society. This research focussed on a UK based community service offering opportunities for occupational engagement and practical support.

Objectives: To explore and evaluate the value and meaning of a community centre for refugees and asylum seekers.

To identify the occupational preferences of the community centre users.

Method: A phenomenological approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews with refugees and asylum seekers attending a UK based community centre service. 18 people participated from ten countries. Data were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Findings: Occupational preferences centred around community and were strongly motivated by altruism, productivity and integration. Integration with the host nation whilst maintaining culturally specific links was valued. Women and children were identified as being at greater risk of occupational alienation.

Conclusion: Collectivist cultures exert great influence on occupational preferences and motivation. Community and altruism have profound cultural meaning for asylum seekers and refugees and the need to belong and to contribute is paramount. Occupational therapists should use culturally relevant models when working with this group to achieve occupational engagement and social inclusion.