CONTEXTUALLY RESPONSIVE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY working with refugees & asylum seekers
WFOT
May 22, 2018
Capetown, South Africa
WHO IS A REFUGEE?

REFUGEE (internationally recognized, legal definition):

- has a well-founded fear of persecution based on
- race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion
- fled his/her own country and cannot safely return (UNHCR)

Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya
Population: 245,126
GLOBAL MIGRATION-HIGHEST IN DECADES

65.3 million people worldwide are forcibly displaced — roughly the population of France

- 21.3 million Refugees
- 40.8 million Internally displaced people
- 3.2 million Asylum-seekers

Source: UNHCR / 20 JUNE 2016
1 in every 113 people on earth is an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee

Source: UNHCR / 20 JUNE 2016
Flight

- Fear of being caught and returned
- Crossing checkpoints and borders
- Robbery
- Crowded, unsanitary conditions
- Exploitation: bribes, lies, entrapment
- Lack of medical care/untreated conditions
- Malnutrition
- Long waits in centers
- Unpredictable shelter
- Uncertainty about future
- Danger from war/raids
- Gender-based violence
Amnesty International documents over 141 countries as practicing torture.

Many refugees and asylum seekers are survivors of state sponsored torture.

TORTURE
Used systemically and systematically around the globe

The ultimate corruption of human relationships breaks the spirit, silences, shames and is meant to *break bodies and minds* (Stover and Nightengale, 1985)

“Torture as an instrument of political and social control is intended to rob its victims of their "voice" and their agency, to have them serve as abject warnings to the general populace” (Gorman 2001)

Torture creates discord in families, perpetuates fear and distrust among communities, and stifles opposition to the ‘status quo’ fueling a cycle of intimidation, and alienation, ultimately corrupting human connections and creating isolation.

Normal human response to abnormal human experiences
Torture is the pathology not the symptoms
Trauma-Informed Model is Imperative
Judith Lewis Herman, MD

- Safety
- Reconstruction
- Reconnection
Culturally responsive approach

- Awareness of implicit biases
- How we see ourselves may be different than how others see us
- Culture = (not) Race + Ethnicity
- Do not assume you understand
- Be aware of power and privilege
- Approach work with humility
- Consider modifying terminology in medical/mental health settings
- Explanatory models helpful
- Create environments reflective of populations served-collaborate
- Work collaboratively with interpreters ~ “cultural broker”
What environments can best support resilience and minimize risk for this particular child in this family and community?
“We’ve lost something we’re always trying to capture. Where do you find it? In the kitchen! When you get in the kitchen we find it in little pieces, in the food, in the conversation. When you smell that particular herb, you can picture the woman in the market who sells it, what she is wearing- you know where she is from. It takes you back to good places, takes you back home. I still own a culture of food that I can share and that people will accept..."
...In English I can’t capture the experience but I can touch the feeling when we’re creating, when we’re doing. You feel it. It’s alive...The greatest joys are simple. When we’re eating nothing else counts. We’re no longer a survivor. We are celebrating family. We are happy.’
all about acceptance. That is our tradition.

Anthony C. Ibeagha, TASSC member from Nigeria, personal communication, 2008
In the garden you often hear,
"Oh, this smells just like what my mother planted...this brings me home."
Every time I’m there, It’s so interesting to see how one plant can have a connection to different countries…they all know it. I say, “I have this in my country.” “You have this in your country?” And we feel like, oh, we’re related now, you know. We’re family!”
Falling from the leaves, these raindrops are bringing life into the land.

Every raindrop that falls from me, without taking in a breath of air, offers me the ability to continue a life without pain.

A life without torture!
NANCY
Une Communauté inattendue
/ An Unexpected Community, 2014

Coming from far away lands, we never thought we would find ourselves in this place: despite our differences in color, language, culture, and religion, we can live hopeful lives here now and rediscover the peace that was lost in the hardships of our homeland.

I chose this photo because I feel that waves exude a certain tranquility after they break on the sand. We find ourselves together today like different grains of sand on the beach. Living together gives us the sustenance to carry on despite our problems—much like the waves that continue their perpetual movement—so that we can have hope for our future.

So many organizations bring peace and hope to those who live here in Chicago.
You are dealing with people who are not giving up, so why should you?’

Ayman Gharibeh, UNHCR working in Yemen