

Refugee settlement workers' perspectives of refugee home safety during settlement in Australia

Merrill Turpin, Emma Campbell

The University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia

Introduction

Approximately 13 000 people obtain humanitarian program grants for settlement in Australia each year (Department of Immigration & Citizenship, 2009). Settlement services are available throughout Australia, largely funded by the Australian Government Department of Immigration & Citizenship under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy. Services offered under this strategy include on-arrival reception, initial orientation and assistance with accommodation and basic household goods. Home safety requires particular attention during the initial settlement process, as refugees have higher rates of emergency hospital admission than the general population (Correa-Valez, et al, 2007). Health professionals such as occupational therapists need to be aware of home safety risks facing refugees.

Objectives

Settlement workers are familiar with the home safety issues facing refugees during settlement. This research aimed to identify settlement workers' perceptions of these home safety issues and explore how they tailored their services to the needs of this diverse group.

Methods

Sixteen employees of an Australian settlement service participated in individual interviews. Observation of a case worker performing an on-arrival reception and initial orientation was also undertaken. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, combined with fieldnotes from the initial orientation and analysed inductively into themes.

Results

The three themes relating to refugee home safety during settlement were: safety issues that workers consider, factors influencing home safety, and the importance of sensitivity to culture. Each of these themes is discussed in detail.

Conclusion

Being aware of the issues and factors influencing refugee home safety during settlement could assist occupational therapists facilitating the occupational performance and participation in daily life tasks of diverse clients.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

This research contributes the knowledge base about client diversity that underpins practice and presents a systematic qualitative research methodology and inductive analysis process.

References

Correa-Valez, I., Sundararajan, V., Brown, K. & Gifford, S.M. (2007). Hospital utilisation among people born in refugee-source countries: An analysis of hospital admissions, Victoria, 1998-2004. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 186(11), 577-580.

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