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Occupation and participation in everyday life: The experiences of women living in a refugee camp.

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Abstract

Refugees often spent weeks, months and sometimes years in refugee camps. Whiteford (2004) argued: "Too much time, too little to do, a lack of objects and tools, and the effects of trauma, all contribute to a state of occupational deprivation in the short term for refugees living in camps".

To gain an understanding of everyday life within refugee camps, an ethnographic study was designed to describe and explore engagement in daily occupations of women living in an Austrian refugee camp.

Data gathered through observations and interviews were analyzed using a comparative method. The findings show that women experienced their engagement in daily occupations as altered in many ways. The process was described as a struggle between 'being' and 'becoming', where the need to reengage in meaningful occupations was threatened by contextual factors. At the same time, the women seemed to experience the conditions differently, depending on the consequences for resettlement. The two themes "Daily occupations-a struggle against restrictions" and "Travelling towards the future" were intertwined. Though camp life was seen as restricting, constraining conditions were tolerated as long as they did not delimit personal goals for future.

In conclusion, participation in daily occupations within a refugee camp turned out to be a challenge, influenced by a range of factors internal and external to the person.

Implications for occupational therapy

Occupational therapy's task is enabling meaningful daily occupations to enhance possibilities of participating in all areas of daily life. Occupational therapy can give support on an individual and collective level for refugees to reconstruct a new life.

- Strategies for promoting social participation in the case of refugees were identified through the study and these results can support occupational therapists to enlarge their practice in the social field.

Key Words

Human Rights

Occupational Justice

Culture and Daily Life