

**0416**

## **Restoration of the Occupation of Weaving for Karen Refugee Women in the U.S.**

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### Introduction

Many Karen women arrive in the U.S., after spending a decade or more in Thai refugee camps, without the supplies to continue their traditional practice of weaving. This practice is important to them in a variety of ways; in particular, they have expressed a great desire to maintain their cultural traditions. The women create clothing for everyday wear and traditional celebrations. When possible, they earn money to help support their families. This presentation will describe a weaving project for Karen women designed to overcome occupational deprivation with the restoration of this culturally meaningful activity.

### Objectives

This study looks at what weaving means to the Karen women and provides a comparison of their thoughts on periods of time when weaving was a part of their daily lives, the impact of lack of access to this occupation in the U.S., and their thoughts regarding the restoration of this occupation.

### Methods

A physical space was secured for the women to come together for social support while participating in weaving for personal satisfaction and economic profit. Needed supplies were provided to help them get started. A qualitative constructivist grounded theory design was used along with participant-observation. Researchers helped secure materials and space for the project and interviewed six women.

### Results

The development of this opportunity resulted in the formation of a Karen women's group initiated by the Karen community. Results from qualitative research will be provided describing how this project has had a positive impact on social engagement and mental health and has given these women hope that their migration to the U.S. will be successful and that their cultural heritage will survive.

### Conclusion

Numerous positive outcomes for refugees migrating to a Western country can result from access to participation in traditional practices. Occupational therapy is a profession well-suited to address the complex array of issues that occur with forced migration.

### Contribution to the evidence/practice base of occupational therapy

This presentation provides an evidence-based example of how occupational therapists can use engagement in meaningful activity as a therapeutic medium in non-traditional community settings.