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Occupational therapy in a refugee camp: The experiences of an occupational therapist working with Iraqi Palestinian refugees.

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Introduction

Occupational therapy is an emerging discipline in international development, particularly in refugee settings. Occupational therapists work with refugees experiencing occupational deprivation in an attempt to facilitate participation in daily life activities. The author's practical experiences working for the United Nations with Iraqi Palestinian refugees on the Syrian-Iraqi border are the basis for exploring the role of occupational therapy in a refugee camp setting as well as international development.

Objectives

The objectives of the presentation are to:

- inform participants about occupational deprivation as experienced by Iraqi Palestinian refugees living in a refugee camp;
- discuss the role of occupational therapy in a refugee camp to remediate occupational deprivation and facilitate participation in activities of daily living; and
- examine the ways occupational therapists can work at a socio-political level in international development to ensure refugees living in camps are not deprived of participation in occupation.

Description/Report

The presenter's experiences working in a refugee camp on the Syrian-Iraqi border illustrate the role of occupational therapy in a refugee setting. The physical, social, political, cultural and environmental causes of occupational deprivation are examined. Interventions to improve quality of life and participation in meaningful, purposeful and culturally-relevant daily life activities will be presented using the principles of clinical reasoning, creativity, advocacy, as well as community-centred and transcultural practice.

Results/Discussion

Occupational therapy is an evolving profession. As therapists continue to examine occupational deprivation, there is a need for therapists to share their practical experiences to inform and develop the capacity of the profession. The presenter's experiences add to the limited research into occupational therapy and refugee populations and provides opportunities for participants to examine the role of occupational therapy in international humanitarian and development work.

Conclusion & Contribution to the Practice

Occupational therapy is a profession that has much to offer both refugees experiencing occupational deprivation and the agencies that are responsible for providing humanitarian aid. The presenter's experiences can inform the profession of occupational deprivation as experienced by refugees and contribute to professional knowledge of occupational therapy practice in a refugee camp setting and the international humanitarian and development sector.