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## **Who is 'at risk' in occupational therapy and science?**

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### **Introduction:**

Within Western societies, risk reduction has become a key guide for individual and collective behavior and practices, including occupations. Although risk is often implied to be an inherently neutral, objective and impartial concept, social theorists have pointed to risk as a mechanism of social power and 'othering'. How 'risk' is conceptualized is based on the values of those who have the power to define 'risk', such as achieving cost-efficacy, increasing safety, promoting individual responsibility, or adhering to particular moral principles. Those individuals who become to be defined as being 'at-risk' are often excluded from participating in risk conceptualization, even though the practices that are shaped by these conceptualizations impact on their lives and occupations.

### **Objectives**

This paper explores who is defined as being 'at-risk' in occupational therapy and occupational science, seeking to promote reflection on the values that guide our participation in the social construction of risk in relation to occupation.

**Description/Report:** Drawing on literature of risk theorists from different fields as well as from occupational therapy and occupational science, this paper demonstrates why it is relevant for occupational therapists and occupational scientists to critically reflect on definitions of risk that implicitly or explicitly inform their practice and research.

### **Results/Discussion**

Risk constructions often operate via defining the risky subject and risky occupations as those which are outside what has come to be taken-for-granted as normal or acceptable. In aiming for normalization, they have the potential to be implicitly racist, classist, sexist and ableist, neglecting diversity and difference that enriches human lives and occupations.

### **Conclusion:**

A theoretical perspective which understands risk discourses as strategies of normalization and focuses on processes of 'othering' might provide a helpful lens for occupational therapists to value differences and diversity in occupations and create possibilities for new forms of practices with those whose occupations fall outside the 'norm'.

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

This paper will contribute to recent calls for inclusive occupational therapy practice and knowledge production. It is intended to raise awareness that the daily practices of occupational therapists and occupational scientists are not value free.