

### The effects of genocide and occupational therapy

Elizabeth Cara, Kourtney Flagg, Christine Maeda, Megan Veneman, Rebecca Ankerberg, Carolyn Glogoski  
*San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, United States*

"Our professions' commitment to the cross-cultural extension of occupational therapy necessitates an awareness of the effects and methods of treating trauma in global settings" (Short-deGraff & Engelmann, 1992, p. 29).

**Introduction:** This presentation advocates for education, demonstrates research, and suggests practice regarding the global effects of trauma on individuals and societies. The objective of this research was to determine the effects of genocide and needs that could be addressed by occupational therapists. The **methods** included a critical analysis of the literature, an historical review of Rwandan politics and conflict (Gouervitch, 1998; Staub, 2006), and interviews with occupational therapists who had worked in Rwanda. **Results** indicated that the effects of genocide include adverse political problems including those of refugees, post-genocidal governments, national and international prosecution; damaged, impoverished economies; impoverished or loss of spirituality; gender inequality, marginalization and sexual violence against women, orphaned and vulnerable children, and restricted participation in occupation. Results also indicated that Rwandans are clearly experiencing many occupational injustices (Algado & Burgman, 2005; Baines, 2001; Gouervitch, 1998; Pham, Weinstein, & Longman, 2004; Staub, 2006; Thurman et al., 2006; Veale and Dona, 2003). The loss of spirituality and positive identity exemplify occupational alienation; occupational marginalization has existed throughout Rwandan history; and occupational imbalance is apparent in both individual and community contexts. As an example of post genocidal needs, Rwanda's needs fall into the occupational therapy scope of practice. They include access to basic resources; activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living and leisure participation; basic healthcare; mental and physical disabilities services; services for widowed women and victims of sexual violence; services for youth and women-headed households, community development and education. Furthermore reconciliation is a long-term project. This research **concludes** that occupational therapy has a role in assisting victims of genocide, not least in part due to the contextual aspects of human performance and adaptation and occupational therapy's holistic approach. **Contribution:** It is a professional responsibility of occupational therapists to expand our profession across cultures in an effort to support healthy living in all people, including those who live in extreme political situations (Algado & Burgman, 2005).