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Understanding lower-income children's needs within a university hospital setting using an occupational therapy critical perspective: assessment dimensions to be considered

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Introduction: In lower and middle-income countries, children living in vulnerable and violent conditions present unique health issues that may result in frequent hospitalizations. Understanding the complexity of children's real needs is essential to design and implement a critical occupational therapy practice in pediatric awards that does not reduce professional role to the identification and development of individual skills.

Objective: To present the assessment dimensions used to identify and understand the complexity of children's needs in a middle-income-country university hospital.

Approach: This practice paper uses a critical perspective that takes into account the complexity of everyday life and the needs of persons, groups and peoples as much as power relations to reflect on and guide occupational therapy practice.

Practice Implications: According to this perspective, during assessment, understanding the complexity of children's needs requires the apprehension of some dimensions: life context and history; support network; care pathway before hospitalization; children's experience and narrative of illness and hospitalization process; children's own perspectives and ways of dealing with medical procedures, bodily conditions, hospital rules and power relations; and quality of relationship among children & caregivers-health team-other children. Thus, it is essential to consider not only children's everyday life, but also their experience in dealing with their health circumstances and with the adult-centred, professional and institutional power typical of hospital settings.

Conclusion: This approach allows occupational therapists to recognize children's real needs, enabling them to deal with illness and hospitalization by using their own resources, and to transform reductionist professional practices.