

**Getting real: a unique experience in the treatment of gangsters. “I was never taught how to treat gangsters”**

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**Introduction:** “I have a great passion for the work I do, the everyday, the hands I treat, and...the gangster.” Gang related activities affect the lives of thousands of people in Cape Town, South Africa alone. We are trained to be professional at all times, but considering the contextual factors, could this look different from what we have thought professionalism to be. Protocol after protocol is applied meticulously, but will they accept our step-by-step guide for their road to recovery? Do we understand the person on the other side of the splint?

**Objectives:** This paper attempts to share the experience of an Occupational Therapist working in a busy hand clinic in Cape Town, South Africa, and the approach that is often warranted when working with gangsters and the related injuries.

**Approach:** Clinical experience

**Practice Implications:** Therapy protocols are not often written with the gangster in mind. How do we change our approach when uncomfortable contextual factors like occupation, race, culture, stereotypes and assumptions are all lying on the table, but the main objective remains the hand?

**Conclusion:** We have to adapt to patients, no matter how far removed their realities are from ours. It’s not a question of whether we agree with their values, but it’s crucial that we have a better understanding of the individual and the contextual factors, in order to have the desired outcome of our therapy. It’s the approach and how we position ourselves towards the individual that will determine the impact Occupational Therapy will have.