

## **A Case Study Exploring Forensic Mental Health Care Users' Experience of Occupational Engagement During the Forensic Leave of Absence Process in Eastern Cape, South Africa**

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Forensic mental health operates at the interface of law and psychiatry, with the dual objective of treating and rehabilitating mentally ill offenders, in order that they may safely integrate into community living. International studies highlight the occupational risk factors to which the forensic mental health care user (FMHCU) population is exposed in the context of health establishments, particularly occupational deprivation and occupational imbalance. In South Africa, the community context to which many FMHCUs return is characterised by pervasive poverty and inequality, rendering this population similarly vulnerable to occupational risk factors. Objectives: To explore FMHCUs' experiences of occupational engagement; as well as barriers and facilitators thereof - during the forensic leave of absence (LoA) process of transitioning from a secure forensic health establishment to continue living in a community for a predetermined period in Eastern Cape, South Africa. Method: The study is epistemologically located within the social constructivist theoretical framework. A qualitative research approach, utilising an exploratory case study design, is employed. The participants in this study are FMHCUs from a forensic health establishment in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, as well as their custodians and the clinical MDT. Sources of data include semi-structured interviews, national and institutional policy, and observations made in their respective communities. Conclusion: The FMHCU population is amongst those particularly vulnerable to experiences of occupational deprivation and occupational imbalance. The significance of this problem is highlighted by the assertion that recovery is fundamentally an occupational process, unfolding in the context of the everyday occupations of a person.