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Understanding the impact of secondary homelessness: A narrative from South-Africa

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Introduction: Homelessness is causing concern worldwide, even more so in developing countries like South-Africa. Occupational therapy has focused mainly on services provided in shelters. Little acknowledgement has yet been made to secondary homelessness (individuals moving frequently between different dwellings). There are various reasons for secondary homelessness, such as unaffordable rent, unemployment, and poor housing. A description of the impact on occupational engagement of this marginalised population is needed to guide practice.

Objective: The objective of this qualitative inquiry was to describe the occupational engagement of adults in a secondary homelessness context in a developing country.

Method: Through purposive sampling, eight eligible secondary homeless adults were selected. Data was gathered by using photovoice, semi-structured interviews (open questions) and field notes. Data saturation was achieved. Data was analysed through inductive coding principles and triangulation.

Results: By focussing on the story of one of the contributors, this presentation portrays the lived experience within a secondary homelessness context. Themes yielded are barriers and enablers towards occupational engagement. Issues such as loss of human dignity, hunger, poor living circumstances, altruism and developing resilience are discussed. The findings provide evidence of social and occupational justice issues that must be addressed within this population.

Conclusion: Co-construction of knowledge with people who experience secondary homelessness has the potential to serve as a foundation for future research and to inform social change. This paper provides insight into possible occupational therapy action and intervention. Secondary homelessness is an area in which occupational therapy as profession could be actively involved.