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The Impact of Marginalization, Armed Conflict and Longitudinal Stress on the Health and Wellness of Children: Exploring Vulnerabilities, Resiliency and how Occupational Therapy can help

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Populations marginalized from geographical isolation, chaos, armed conflict, and environmental disasters incur physical and mental scars that destabilize their wellbeing. These stressors impede civil liberties, travel, basic services (e.g. utilities, sewage, healthcare), and engagement in occupations. Children are vulnerable in unstable regions, and their ability to learn, socialize and explore play is severely hampered. Shadowy figures exploit these vulnerabilities by trafficking adolescents who receive no representation by their parents or from a lawless state.

Occupational Therapy leverages knowledge in holistic care and assists with normalizing displacement, occupational uncertainty, emotional distress, building networks in refuge shelters, and offering opportunities where children can play and learn. In unstable areas, boys and girls are exposed to different forms of health-related violence. Boys are conscripted into armed militias and girls are subjected to sexual abuse and present with higher rates of mental health disturbances. Occupational Therapists need to understand these nuances, when developing intervention strategies. Occupational Therapists who combine psychosocial intervention with life-skills (e.g. self-esteem, stress management) allow displaced individuals, and entire populations to regain function and normalcy within a region immersed in chaos.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the destabilizing forces that impact the wellbeing of individuals and populations.
2. Illustrate the vulnerabilities of children immersed in environmental disasters and armed conflicts.
3. Explore the normalization of displaced populations who are impacted by occupational uncertainty, emotional distress and diminished support networks.
4. Exploit the comingling of psychosocial intervention with life-skills to assist a displaced population in regaining function and normalcy.