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Spirituality in the Occupational Therapy Community Fieldwork Process: A qualitative study in the South African context

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Introduction: Spirituality is an integral part of communities; it is influenced by the environment and provides meaning and purpose to occupations. However, spirituality has been a controversial concept within the profession of occupational therapy and is the cause of much debate with a range of viewpoints emerging among students and educators practising in communities. However there has been limited research carried out on spirituality in the community fieldwork process in a South African context.

Objective: This study explored occupational therapy educators' and students' perceptions regarding spirituality in the community fieldwork process.

Methods: An interpretive worldview with exploratory-descriptive qualitative approach was used; data was collected through the use of focus group discussions which were thematically analysed using the Atlas.ti 7.

Results: Three themes emerged: students' exposure to spirituality in community settings, community development strategies and perceived enablers of spiritual occupations. The results indicated that community entry, asset-based community development and empowerment strategies of locality development seemed to assist students in their exposure to spirituality in communities. These strategies enhanced students' understanding of the role of spiritual occupations in which community members collectively engage in order to improve their social participation and connectedness.

Conclusions: The findings provided an understanding of and insight into spirituality in the occupational therapy community fieldwork process. These findings may help us to understand the significance of experiential learning regarding spirituality in communities. Likewise, the findings from this study provide rich insights into occupational therapy educators' and students' perceptions of spirituality in diverse communities.