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The injustices of forced displacement: How occupational therapy is uniquely suited to promote healing

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Introduction: Worldwide, violence and oppression have forced millions of people from their homes, in unprecedented numbers. Serial traumas and losses, coupled with contextual and legal barriers, conspire to render occupational performance arduous, if not impossible. WFOT asserts that occupational therapists have a unique capacity to address the occupational consequences of displacement.

Objectives: By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Describe how the turmoil of forced displacement can impact healthy occupational engagement in various contexts
2. Discuss how occupational therapists are uniquely suited to address the occupational challenges experienced by people who have survived displacement

Approach: This presentation describes an occupation-based community program that targets displacement survivors (a.k.a. refugees) who have resettled in a large urban center in the United States. Lessons learned in the community are generalized to other settings.

Practice Implications: Regardless of practice setting, or geographical location, occupational therapists are confronted with the cultural, social, and experiential challenges unique to the journey of forced displacement. Occupational injustices are evident at every turn. WFOT asserts that occupational therapists have a professional obligation to confront these challenges and promote healing among people who have experienced forced displacement.

Conclusion: In order to meet this mandate, it is incumbent upon the profession to become educated about the variables contributing to displacement, the challenges faced along the journey, and the occupational consequences.