

The value and meaning of a community centre service for refugees and asylum seekers: culture, collectivism and application for occupational therapy practice



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Background and Rationale

- Asylum seekers and refugees experience substantial barriers to successful transition and inclusion in a new society
- Access to meaningful occupations that provide a sense of well-being are often limited and occupational injustices are common.
- The cultural value and meaning of occupation differs between East and West, increasing a sense of dislocation in society

Background and Rationale

- Exploring the meaning of occupational preferences offers insights into the impact of relocation on asylum seekers and refugees' wellbeing and integration into the host society
- Numerous services operate in the UK to support asylum seekers and refugees (many focussed on learning English)
- Findings by Smith (2015) identified asylum seekers and refugees value highly services that offer practical and emotional support and offer occupationally focused opportunities

Background and Rationale

- At the time of completion we had found no evidence considering the value and meaning of such services, or how they are received
- This research focussed on a UK based community service offering opportunities for practical support and occupational engagement for asylum seekers and refugees

Origins of service users

County	Attendees	County	Attendees
UK	8 (Volunteers)	Guinea	1
Eritrea	40	Congo	5
Sudan	16	Sri Lanka	1
Pakistan	2	Sierra Leone	1
Albania	6	Cameroon	2
Kurdistan	2	Ethiopia	3
Syria	17	Niger	1
Iraq	3	Gambia	1
Iran	16	Vietnam	1
Cuba	1	Uganda	1
Ghana	1		

Background and Rationale

- Study aims
 - To explore and evaluate the value and meaning of a community centre for refugees and asylum seekers
 - To identify the occupational preferences of the community centre users

Methods

- Phenomenological approach exploring the lived experience of attending a drop-in service for asylum seekers and refugees
- Semi-structured interviews
 - Audio recordings and transcribed verbatim
 - Full team debrief after each interview session
- Interpretive phenomenological analysis
- Ethics approval granted by York St John University School of Health Sciences ethics committee

Cultural Considerations and the Rationale for Cake



Origin	Religion	Status	Age
Pakistan	Christian (R.C.)	Asylum Seeker	Not Given
Afghanistan	Muslim	British Citizen	Not Given
Iraq	Christian	British Citizen	51-60
Albania	Atheist	Refugee	31-40
Iran	Zoroastrian	Refugee	41-50
Syria	Sunni Muslim	Refugee	18-24
Iran	Christian	Asylum Seeker	31-40
Nigeria	Christian (R.C.)	Asylum Seeker	61-70
Zimbabwean	Christian	Refugee	61-70
India	Atheist	Asylum Seeker	31-40
Afghanistan	Sikh	Asylum Seeker	41-50
Afghanistan	Sikh	Asylum Seeker	31-40
Iran	Christian	Asylum Seeker	25-30
Iranian	Muslim	Asylum Seeker	18-24
Sri Lanka	Atheist	Refugee	41-50
Iran	Christian	Refugee	31-40
Syria	Atheist	Asylum Seeker	25-30
Uganda	Christian	Asylum Seeker	41-50

Findings & Interpretation

The need to experience community and to make a contribution (altruism)

“Makes you feel like you belong to something, you know you come here, you see people, people you can interact with, talk with and feel welcomed in the community”

“People from other countries, can’t speak English proper, I can interpret. [...] I can help them yeah, but not very, I’m not saying very good, but I can help them as much as I can.”

‘You go outside, you walk alone.’

Findings & Interpretation

The need for integration and meaningful occupation

“I come here so that I can come and understand the world and come to learn some English and how to talk to people.”

“We can get familiar with other ideas, other opinion and if we make mistake they can tell us, you know..”

Findings & Interpretation

The need for integration and meaningful occupation

“So that gives me time, you know a routine in my daily life, you know to come here to help. Yeah to have a routine in life because you kind of get bored when just staying at home.”

“I am coming here[...] I say em..like cut hair..volunteer here. I am two years working in this drop in.”

Implications for Research, Practice and Service Development

- **Appropriate Cultural Approach:** Western-trained therapists could use the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2006), designed specifically for use with clients from collectivist cultures
- **Scaffold integration and cultural exchange:** To preserve dignity, respect and cultural safety alongside integration

Implications for Research, Practice and Service Development

- **Use Occupational Therapists:** Dual-trained in mental and physical health, with the skills to address life transitions, occupational and environmental adaptation
- **Occupational Justice:** Making the case for service provision at local and national level, and lobbying for change in policy and legislation

Strengths and Limitations

- Strengths
 - Group size and diversity within the research team
 - Gatekeeper relationship
- Limitations
 - Findings may have limited transferability

References

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