Finding Purpose Through Altruism

The potential of 'doing for others' during asylum

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Wide ranging need – everyday essentials to 'higher needs' (Burchett and Matheson, 2010; Stephenson et al. 2013).

Limited access to dignified and meaningful occupations (Bishop & Purcell, 2013; Huot et al. 2016)

Focus on low challenge

Occupations (Jonsson & Persson 2006; Kronenberg, 2011)

Multiple negative outcomes (Andersson,

2013; Farias & Asaba, 2013) including occupational

deprivation (Morville & Erlandsson. 2013; Crawford et al. 2016; Mayne et al. 2016)

The right occupation has the potential to...

- Help manage transition, acculturation and liminality and precarity (Adrian, 2013; Murray, 2013)
- Maintain health, wellbeing and coping skills (Lunden, 2012; Mondaca and Josephsson, 2013)
- Preserve identity and skills (Werge-Olsen & Vik, 2012; Gupta & Sullivan, 2013; Huot et al. 2016)
- Promote human flourishing or 'eudemonia'

(WFOT 2006; Hayward & Taylor, 2011; Royeen et al. 2017)





Participants in my study all sought occupations which they felt had a higher purpose.

They prized altruistic occupations, done for the benefit of others.

Despite their own challenges, they supporting others through voluntary work, charitable acts, mentorship and community support.

Altruism is defined as intrinsically motivated actions undertaken for the benefit of others (Draguns 2013)

Generated by feelings of empathy (Batson 2011) and notions of kinship (Madsen 2007).

Altruism is acknowledged as being beneficial to well-being, social capital, life satisfaction and purpose (Salvati, 2008; Wright, 2013).

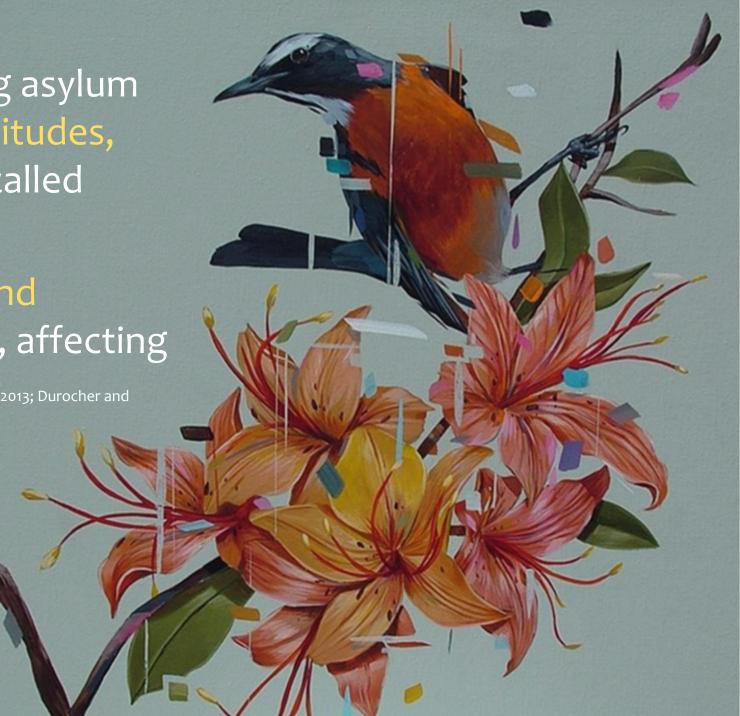
In this study the value lay in a sense of human worth at a time when they felt they had little other value.



Refugees and people seeking asylum are routinely devalued by attitudes, policies and practicality - so called 'hostipitality' (Galvaan, 2014; McFadyen, 2016).

Their personhood, identity and opportunity are undermined, affecting their sense of self worth (Burnett, 2013; Durocher and Gibson, 2013).

The link between devaluation and occupation is possibly cyclical...





The deliberate exclusion of refugees from occupations is common place – and is an act of wilful cruelty.

However, it also tells us how powerful occupation can be in embedding people into society and helping create a good life.

I would argue that this tells us that occupation, correctly harnessed, can push back against devaluation, allowing people to rediscover their worth and express their best selves.



If you would like to know more please get in touch:

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or read the article:

Smith. H.C. (2017) 'Finding purpose through altruism: the potential of 'doing for others' during asylum', Journal of Occupational Science, 25(1), pp. 87-99.



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