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Conference Theme - The Nature of Human Occupation

Title: Occupational Wellbeing of People Experience Homelessness: Survival, Self Identity and Socialisation

Authors: Yvonne Thomas, Marion Gray and Sue McGinty

Introduction

A growing area of for the occupational therapy profession is the needs of people experiencing occupational injustice within our societies. Distinct from social justice, occupational justice focuses on 'occupational equity, occupational fairness, occupational empowerment, occupational rights and responsibilities, occupational enablement, expression and opportunity, occupational satisfaction and occupational wellbeing' (Wilcock, 2006, p. 247).

Objectives

This study aimed to understand the occupations of people experiencing homelessness and to contribute to occupational perspectives of health through exploring occupations that influence subjective perspectives of well-being in for people experiencing homelessness.

Method

This constructivist case study explored the lived experience of people who were homeless using observation and interviews with consumers of homeless services. A strengths-based approach to data collection prioritised the voices of participants and elicited situated accounts of occupations of meaning.

Results

Thirty-five in-depth conversational interviews explored the strengths, resilience, agency and capacity of participants to sustain wellbeing during homelessness. People who are homeless aim to achieve and sustain subjective wellbeing through occupation of survival, self identity and socialisation. Limited opportunities for occupational engagement due to poverty and marginalisation result in situations of occupational injustice for people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

Despite limited occupational opportunity resulting in occupational injustice, acts of personal autonomy and agency guard against descending into despair and afford a sense of satisfaction with life.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

An occupational perspective of subjective wellbeing is supported by this study, which challenges the appropriateness of universal definitions of wellbeing for all. Interpretive findings propose an expansion of the theoretical basis of occupational justice. The multiple meanings of human occupation are intricately affected and shaped by the social and cultural context and consistent with the gendered and cultural norms.

Refs

Wilcock, A. (2006). *An Occupational Perspective of Health* (2nd Ed). Slack: Thorofare.

