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An occupational perspective on the lived experience of homelessness

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Exploring the lived experience of homelessness from an occupational perspective.

Aim: To explore the lived experience of homelessness from an occupational perspective with the objective of exploring how homeless people describe their daily occupations. Additionally the study intended to further the occupational science literature in respect of understanding the lived experience of homelessness.

Rationale: Working with populations who are occupationally disadvantaged is a developing area of practice for occupational Therapists (Kronenberg, Pollard and Ramugondo, 2011). To support practice there is a need for research exploring the lived experience of homelessness from an occupational perspective, of which there is currently very little, and none from the UK. **Methodology:** Participants were recruited via a local homeless hostel. Semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation methods were used to gather data. Participants were asked to make a 'photo diary' of their day to day occupations. Photo-elicitation has been found to be particularly useful when researching vulnerable people (Llampaotong, 2007). Analysis was undertaken via interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Results: Themes included strong connections to meaningful occupations that supported participant's health and wellbeing. Consistency of engagement in occupations and a desire to try new ones was noted. A further significant theme was the use of occupation as a means to escape current circumstances; either physically or mentally. The majority of participants held well formulated future occupational goals which were often of an altruistic nature. Despite this barriers to occupational engagement were found. **Conclusions:** It is clear that occupational therapists have a role to play in both supporting, and advocating for, people who are homeless to engage in meaningful and health giving occupations. The results of the study are leading to the development of role emerging placements at the site and hopefully the recruitment of a qualified occupational therapist.

References

Kroneberg, F., Pollard, N. and Ramugondo, E, (2011) 'Introduction: courage to dance politics.' In Kronenberg, F., Pollard, N. and Sakellariou, D. (eds) *Occupational therapies without borders: Towards an ecology of occupation-based practices*. Volume 2. Edinburgh. Churchill Livingstone. Pp 1-16

Lampaotong, P. (2007) *Researching the vulnerable: A guide to sensitive research methods*. London. Sage.

Learning Outcomes

Participants will gain insight into the lived experience of homeless people and their engagement in daily in occupations. Gain knowledge in using photographic methods for undertaking research with vulnerable groups.

Biography

Miranda Cunningham is a Lecturer in Occupational Therapy at Plymouth University. The majority of her time in practice was spent in adult mental health, although she has experience working in oncology, general medicine, and older adult mental health. Her research interests are in emerging practice areas with disadvantaged populations and in occupational justice. She is also interested in occupation for public health and in using occupation in health promotion.