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## ■ FEATURE ARTICLE

# Occupation and Participation in Everyday Life: Women's Experiences of an Austrian Refugee Camp

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Refugees often spent weeks, months and sometimes years in refugee camps. To gain an understanding of everyday life within refugee camps, an ethnographic study was designed to describe and explore engagement in daily occupations of women living in an Austrian refugee camp. Data gathered through observations and interviews were analyzed using a comparative method. The findings show that women experience their engagement in daily occupations as altered in many ways. The process was described as a struggle between 'being' and 'becoming', where the need to reengage in meaningful occupations was threatened by contextual factors. At the same time, the women seemed to experience the conditions differently, depending on the consequences for resettlement. The two themes "Daily occupations - a struggle against restrictions" and "Travelling towards the future" were intertwined. Though camp life was seen as restricting, constraining conditions were tolerated as long as they did not delimit personal goals for the future. In conclusion, participation in daily occupations within a refugee camp turned out to be a challenge, influenced by a range of factors internal and external to the person.

**Key Words:** Daily occupations, Occupational deprivation, Ethnographic study

The Geneva Convention of 1951 was the critical landmark for the establishment of institutions to protect and assist refugees. It defines a convention refugee as an individual who has crossed a national boundary and has a well-founded fear of persecution in the country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2005). During the application process for asylum, these people have to spend their first weeks, months or even years in refugee camps of the host countries. Whiteford (2004) argued that "too much time, too little to do, a lack of objects and tools, and the effects of trauma, all contribute to a state of occupational deprivation in the short term for refugees living in camps" (p. 234). Similarly, Wicks (2001) emphasized, that refugees experience disruption to their occupational routines and are forced to seek asylum in places where they are deprived of opportunities for meaningful occupation. The WHO (1986), on the other hand, judged occupational participation as central to the process of achieving an equal status in a refugee's country of resettlement.

Since occupational deprivation over extended periods has shown to have a detrimental effect on health, well-being and adaptation (Wilcock, 1998a), great attention must be given to this fact in the case of refugees, especially as many of them have to come to terms with an oppressive and cruel past, which has disrupted their lives. Studies report a high rate of symptom distress among refugees during the asylum period (Silove et al., 1997).

Although the medical and psychological aspects of being a refugee and living in camps have received attention in relevant literature (Bollini & Siem,

1995; Burnett & Pee, 2001; Carballo et al., 1998; Samarasinghe & Arvidsson, 2002; Sundquist, 1995; Sundquist & Johansson, 1997) occupational aspects have been less highlighted. There are several studies about refugees in connection to occupational performance, but they mainly focus on refugees' life in resettlement (Algado, Gregory, Egan, 1997; Kronenberg, Algado & Pollard, 2005; Schisler & Polatajko, 2002; Whiteford, 2005). Just a few studies describing camp life could be found.

Rosenegger (1996) investigated daily life in an Austrian refugee camp in Vienna, to explore a possible association between time use of Bosnian refugees and their psychological well-being. His account titled "Leben im Flüchtlingslager" (Life in a refugee camp) gives a clear description of how the 12 female and 16 male Bosnians used their time. Analysis of observations and interview data showed that daily life was characterised by lethargy and apathy. Loss of self-confidence, increased concentration on the situation and passivity, absence of future perspectives, as well as conflicts among refugees were reported due to the crowded and poor living conditions and the absence of privacy. The study provided in-depth descriptions of daily life within a refugee camp, but did not focus on occupational issues. More recently, Whiteford (2005) explored occupational deprivation, describing camp life and resettlement of refugees from Kosovo living in Australia. In her case study about camp life, aspects of occupational deprivation as a process occurring over time were illuminated. Interviews brought insight into life within an Australian camp, but the results were based on data gathered from refugees who had already left the camp and been resettled. These retrospective descriptions were characterized by valuing the

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extraordinary things, like giving concerts, cooking culturally relevant meals together and other activities organized within the camp. The first year in resettlement was reported to be the most difficult.

To gather deep and broad information about refugees' everyday occupations within the camp, it was decided to conduct an in-depth study on refugees still living in a camp, in order to gain knowledge about their occupational needs and to broaden understanding of people's occupational experiences in a changed environment. The perspective of this study is based on the assumption that humans have an occupational nature and occupational needs (Wilcock, 1998a).

## The Setting

Camp Traiskirchen was built to give shelter to Hungarians who were fleeing en masse to Austria during the Hungarian Crisis in 1956. It is one of two detention centres in Austria, where asylum seekers are brought or have to go immediately after crossing the border. In the whole camp there are between 1000 and 2000 refugees living in different houses, with numbers varying according to irregular floods of refugees. The camp was built within a huge park and there are several places to gather, including playgrounds and sports fields. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided at set times and residents eat in a large shared dining room in House 13.

Paid work is offered within the camp, as asylum seekers are not allowed to get a job. They can clean the house, or work in a quilt group or as translator, e.g. when residents have to visit a hospital or a doctor. Furthermore all of them receive 40 euro pocket money per month.

To leave or enter the camp an identity card, the so-called 'Lagerkarte', has to be shown. With this, security knows who is inside or outside the camp. Residents who are away from the camp more than 24 hours are barred from re-entry. Visitors are not allowed to enter the area without special permission. Additionally regular inspections take place. If refugees are not in their room when it is checked, they have to leave the camp. Staying in the camp is provisional. As soon as asylum is granted refugees are transferred to pensions or houses for refugees in another region of Austria.

The house for women (House 8), which was selected for the study, is one building within the camp along with others for administration, for medical assistance, and storage. There are also the canteen, the kindergarten, the house for families and men, and the house for people younger than 18 years. House 8 is organized and administered by 'SOS-Human rights', and men are not allowed to enter the building. To ensure this, there is a security officer at the entrance around the clock. The building has three floors and on the first floor there is an office that is open 24 hours a day. Six staff members, who speak different languages, can be contacted whenever help or information is needed.

House 8 was built for 80 persons, but sometimes 80 women live there, together with up to 80 children. Each room has up to eight bunk beds, a table, four chairs and four wardrobes, and a refrigerator. There are two kitchenettes and shared bathrooms with hand basins and two showers for each floor. Additionally there is one large room for children to play and a smaller so called living room.

The ethnic background of people living in the house varies on a weekly basis, due to the transfers from the camp to other

accommodation centres. There are Asians (China, Iraq, and India), Africans (Nigeria, Somalia, Republic of Congo) and Europeans (Russian Federation, Georgia, Azerbaijan). Whenever possible, women with the same ethnic background live together, but sometimes they have to be mixed, which means they cannot communicate due to the different languages.

The aim of the study was to describe and explore daily occupations of women, living in a refugee camp in Austria and the following question was designed to guide the investigation: How do women, living in a refugee camp, experience their engagement in daily occupations within the camp?

## Research Design

An ethnographic approach was used in this study to increase understanding of the cultural and environmental influences that impact the experiences under investigation (Patton, 2002). The design of the study involved an in-depth exploration of the life of refugees in the context of a refugee camp.

## Participants

Given the nature of the knowledge to be generated, focusing on a rather small sample was preferable to having a large number of participants. Key-informants were selected by a gatekeeper, to include women who were able to give rich descriptions. Seven participants volunteered to participate. During the 10 months of investigation, two participants were transferred to other places, and two other informants were recruited. Nobody withdrew from the study for other reasons. Recruitment was confined to House 8.

The following criteria were used for selection of the key-informants: Women from the former USSR, between 18 and 60 years old, who had resided at the camp for at least 2 months, so that they would be able to discuss the experience of engagement in occupations in that context. In addition it was expected that they would be staying there for at least several months, were highly educated and had good communication skills in either English or German. Women with severe illness or trauma were excluded. Table 1 represents the demographic information provided by the participants.

**Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants**

Name	Age	No./Age of children	Profession	Country of Origin
Mara	33	1 / 14	accountant	Georgia
Thea	24	pregnant	student	Georgia
Nina	59	2 / 30, 32	cook	Georgia
Lillian	48	1 / 13	teacher	Russia
Sophie	18	pregnant	student	Georgia
Mary	37	1 / 13	journalist	Russia
Tina	47	1 / 18	singer	Azerbaijan

To inform participants about the purpose of the study, the number and duration of data collection procedures and to assure them that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point, an informed consent form, written in a language well known to the participants was used. Confidentiality was enhanced by removing the names of the participants and using pseudonyms.

## Data collection

Multiple data collection methods, including observations and ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) were used for this study. Additional data collected included information concerning rules in

the camp, as well as personal notes of the researcher's thoughts and reflections documented during or immediately after the process of data collection.

Data collection occurred in several inter-related phases. The phase of orientation and overview, including visits, was followed by phases of observations and ethnographic interviews. The observations were open and participatory. In Ethnography, the object is to understand another way of life from the participant's viewpoint through systematic observation (Patton, 1990). Contacts to establish rapport were started, and a person working in the camp, who had the refugees' confidence, initiated most contacts. To become informed about life in the refugee camp, it was necessary to spend some time there to acquire an insight into daily routines and to attain some familiarity with the foreign culture. To take part in the same occupations was also helpful to have time to develop rapport and trust prior to any interviews taking place. Having contact with a person of trust was crucial to this group of refugees. As participant observation could have an influence on the daily occupations of the participants, several observations were initiated, joining participants in different occupations during the day, like cooking, sitting together, or taking a meal. In such situations, observing also other camp residents was unavoidable. Visits to the camp had to be planned and registered, but were done at different times of the day and were of different duration. Visits were made more or less weekly, and the duration varied between 2 and 6 hours and was sometimes even up to 12 hours to attain insight into the daily activities. Data were collected over a 10-month period.

After each visit field notes were immediately taken to document observations, impressions and personal reflections. Observations occurred concurrently with the interviewing and data analysis process. As fieldwork proceeded, observational points became increasingly focused and narrowed. Observation and interviews were combined in order to enhance the validity of the findings, but also to have enough background knowledge for analysis. Observations were helpful to understand the context, see things that might not be mentioned in interviews, and to learn to formulate appropriate questions. Fieldwork notes from participant observation provided the context of the study and contributed to the trustworthiness of the data. However, the findings were derived principally from the interviews.

Ethnographic interviewing was used to understand the values and beliefs that organize behaviour in the camp from the refugees' point of view. As the interviewer is the learner and the person being interviewed the expert, the interview was unstructured and started with global questions about a typical day. To attain the main domains, structural questions followed and then further questions were set, based on the interviewee's response (Spradley, 1979). Data gathering and data analysis were iterative, characterized by a funnel structure (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003). It started with a broad investigation, becoming more focused during the course of the investigation. The first two interviews were used as a pilot test and after adapting the interview guide, no additional main topics were added. It was the informants' choice where the interviews took place: at the camp (three interviews) or outside (four interviews). Six interviews were in English, one was in German. Each interview took approximately an hour, and was conducted by the researcher herself. Saturation was reached after seven interviews, which were tape-recorded to ensure that no data would be lost. Immediately after each interview, reflections and observations, and discrepancies were recorded. These notes were used to facilitate the analysis of the interviews.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis was guided by a comparative method described by Bogdan and Biklin (2003), and Strauss and Corbin (1998). Analysis started immediately after the first interview. Reading and rereading the data to get an overall picture of its content was followed by line-by-line coding (Strauss & Corbin). The codes were organized into categories, to reveal the diversity of the dimensions among the categories (Bogdan & Biklin; Strauss & Corbin). The categories were then compared with each other. Memos were produced which contained all data relating to each code, as well as to each category. Codes and categories were compared with the data to allow themes to be identified. Going back and forth between data and the emerging codes and themes was necessary and challenging. In the final step, the different interviews were brought together. Interpreting the common themes identified in the comparative analysis was done afterwards, to identify overall connections and meaning of the themes. Member checks were conducted after data transcribing and during and after data analysis.

Triangulation was a strategy to increase accuracy in data collection and was put into practice by combining observation and interview, as well as different data sources, so that the information from one source or method could be cross-checked for confirmation from another (Krefting, 1991). In field notes the researcher's behaviour, thoughts and also doubts and conflicts in meaning making and listening to the refugees were reported and brought into consideration in the analysis process.

To present the findings, quotations are used to convey the participants' perspectives, so that the reader is able to imagine the situation being described and have immediate access to the participants' thoughts (Patton, 2002). Transferability was enhanced by reporting background information about the setting and the participants (Krefting, 1991). The complexity of this study was a consequence of the unfamiliar context, the extraordinary experiences of the women and the occupational as well as the social aspects which were under investigation.

### **Findings**

The findings illustrate the continuous difficulties that refugee women engaged in daily occupations experience, facing environmental restrictions and lack of alternatives. Nevertheless, the women put much emphasis on reaching personal goals. Two main themes emerged. The first, Daily occupations: A struggle against restrictions, focuses on the occupational performance the women established to make their time within the camp as tolerable as possible and includes the sub themes losing choice and self-control, losing relations, and losing privacy. The second theme, Travelling towards the future, addresses the strategies the women used in relation to different time perspectives. This theme includes three sub themes, preparing for the future, driving away the present, and being in touch with the past.

#### ***Daily occupations: A struggle against restrictions***

Many circumstances of their former life were reported as a bad experience; nevertheless the situation in the camp was experienced as more dramatic. They had not expected life as a refugee to be so hard, nor to face so many problems and exclusion. Control was experienced in many different situations. To leave the camp, they were required to show their identity card at the gate. Weekly inspections took place, where security personnel checked on every resident. Even to get a meal, they had to show their camp card. These procedures were compared with life in a prison and other

contextual factors, such as how the rooms looked like, increased this feeling.

Life in the camp was experienced as dictated by rules and the ability to engage in meaningful occupations was comprised. Institutional rules had a strong influence on personal decision-making, and allowed little freedom of choice. Daily occupations often lost their meaning as a consequence of the environmental restrictions. Furthermore, the women's situation was characterized by a lack of alternatives for improvement. The following sub themes will elucidate these findings.

### **Losing choice and self-control**

While the camp gave safety, shelter and meals, it also required living within the rules and accepting the circumstances. Institutional rules affected individual choice and self-control in daily occupations. The camp did not always provide adequate resources and facilities for doing things a person needed and wanted to do. Meals, for example, had to be consumed at set times and in certain places. This restriction resulted in dissatisfaction and loss of meaning for the individual. Thea complained:

*We have to get up early, because breakfast is at seven and at eight it is finished. And that is very early. So every morning you have to get out of bed and out of house early in the morning. Even if you have nothing to do during the day you have to get out of bed at 6 o'clock.*

Freedom to decide to do or not to do something was threatened by awareness of the need to be cautious about spending money on extra things. Loss of economic status was a result of being uprooted and living the life of a refugee, particularly the restriction on getting a job outside the camp until the asylum procedure was finished.

Interviews revealed that there was a contradiction between the rhetoric and the reality of possibilities for daily routines within the camp. For example the opportunity to cook was reduced to small and simple dishes due to the limited environmental possibilities. Lillian described:

*My son wants our national dishes, but I always have to tell him: 'Wait a little bit. There are no conditions to cook. I have no clean place in the room, no dishes, no food.'*

Another restriction concerned the choice of food. The meals prepared in the canteen were often unfamiliar. Bread and vegetables, as well as fruits and black tea, which had been predominantly consumed in their home country, were not available. Missing culturally relevant food had a negative influence on the women's motivation for going to the canteen, as Sophie stated:

*Sometimes I decide not to go to the canteen, when I am not in the mood to wait in line and to eat this food, always rice and no bread. But when you don't like the meal, you don't have a choice, only not eating and staying hungry. But sometimes it is so cold outside, that I prefer to stay hungry than to go outside. That's hard.*

On the other side, consciousness about their limited financial resources did not allow them to cook for themselves every day; so the benefit of choice and control had to be weighed up against the consequences, and the interrelatedness of these different aspects was experienced as a stressor. The following sub-theme expresses another stress caused by the loss of their previous social environment and their separation from the population of the host country.

### **Losing relations**

Refugee women had left their families and had to be on their own. The absence of family structures meant a loss of both pragmatic and

emotional support from relatives and forced women to socialize with others. But the social world of refugees was narrowed down to the residents and the staff of the camp, as the difficulties encountered with making contact with the outside world were exacerbated by several factors, including lack of money or language skills. Nina complained:

*When we are sitting together in our room, we are just talking about our problems. It is good to have the Georgian people, but it would be better to have other contact. But if you don't know another language, it is a problem.*

The restrictions on visitors to the camp and the restriction on getting a job outside the camp were other factors that limited contacts to the world outside. The lack of being in the world due to restrictions of the physical and social environment was expressed as a great limitation to one's life. Mara said:

*I was here for 2 months and I did not leave the camp. I did not watch TV, as there is no TV. I do not know what was going on in the world. I am cut off. That's not normal life.*

Living together with people from the same ethnicity and belonging to a group was predominantly experienced as a resource within the camp and improved conditions for occupations in self-care in different ways. Nina explained:

*We go to the grocery shop together. For example, three times five Euros and then we can buy things, but alone it is not possible.*

Dependency on others was obvious in all occupational performance areas, as Lillian argued:

*I need somebody to help me. When I am at work I can ask Nina to look after my son, otherwise I can't do the job... If I can't go on an outing, I can ask her to take him with her. It is helpful for me, because we are alone here and nobody can help us.*

On the other hand, because of the shortage of rooms, the women tried to find possibilities to establish privacy and maintain distance. The following sub-theme reflects the effort the women expended to counteract the negative effects of the camp environment on daily occupations.

### **Losing privacy**

Sharing rooms with people they have not seen before was experienced as rather constraining. The physical environment did not provide privacy. A room of one's own could facilitate the need for privacy, but was unrealistic due to the shortage of rooms. All daily activities were done within one room, like sleeping, dressing, eating, making tea or coffee, sitting together with others. However, all the rooms could be entered by anybody as there were no keys for the door, so that privacy could easily be invaded. In addition, having to share common facilities brought a change of personal routines and habits. Each person had to arrange around what was possible and Thea stated:

*Bathing is a problem. You have to look for a good time. Usually I try to get a shower on Saturdays. When the weather is fine people are outside. Sometimes on Sundays, they are all in Vienna and we have an opportunity.*

Another strategy was to avoid meeting others, and defending familiarity and privacy. Lillian explained:

*When my son takes a shower, I have to stay there like a bodyguard; women come, open the door and come in. They are always in a hurry and they can't wait. Of course he does not want anybody to see him and I do not like that either, when anybody is washing or taking a shower near me. It is a huge problem.*

When talking about their daily occupations in the camp, the women stressed that this was not normal life, but at the same time they seemed to experience the conditions differently, depending on the consequences for life in resettlement. However, the second theme elicits their future orientation.

### Travelling towards the future

Despite all the obstacles, the women's engagement in daily occupations seemed to be driven by hope for a better future. Their flight was the starting point for a new life, and the time between past and future was characterized by waiting for permission to stay in the host country and to leave their past behind. Individual strategies were used when thinking of different time perspectives.

### Preparing for the future

Uncertainty about the future caused stress and had an impact on several aspects of daily occupations. The living community was threatened by the unpredictable duration of their time together. What really mattered was the affordability of life in resettlement. Social relations and language competence were considered to be crucial to social integration and occupational participation. Accordingly, all of them tried to learn the language of the host country, some through books; others through courses offered in the camp. The participants also held personal motives. Lillian, who had been a teacher, confessed that offering a good education to her son was most important to her. Another woman argued similarly:

*Here in the camp, we can do nothing, so better to use time for learning German. I want to live here, so I need to know the language to get a job.*

Daily occupations were strongly determined by the relevance of these occupations or their benefit for future life. To get a kind of 'job' within the camp was considered to be an opportunity to save the money that would be needed in resettlement and brought some extra money for food, clothes or other personal things. The list of women waiting for a paid job within the camp was always long, even when the work offered did not fit their personal competencies.

The stay in the camp was considered as "just transition time", and so less importance was given to matters of the here and now. Personal things were still important, but mostly focused on future needs. Women often went to the storage house to look for some more clothes, shoes or other things. The possessions acquired within the camp without spending money were considered to be necessary preparations for the future.

### Driving away the present

Being a refugee was a new and often negative experience. Women were not allowed or able to do things they used to do in past and Sophie complained:

*I miss life. I am a city girl. I liked to meet with friends, going to the theatre, going to the museum, shopping and things like this. But here is no life.*

Nonetheless, life here and now, and their feelings about it were not given the same importance as life in resettlement. Though camp life was seen as restricting, constraining conditions were tolerated as long as they did not delimit personal goals. To overcome the past and to start the future, the present was tolerated. Daily life was experienced as a time of uncertainty, affected by waiting for permission to stay in the host country. Thea argued that this generated stress:

*I am sitting here and have stress. I don't know what will happen; maybe they will come and tell me that I have to go back to Georgia. I don't know what will be and that's bad. So I need to do something, otherwise these thoughts always come to my mind and make me crazy.*

When the women were not at work, they mostly sat together in their rooms, or lay in their beds, when they had had another night without sleep. Socializing, which had been important in the past, was reduced to being amongst one's 'own' people.

Fears about the future were experienced and handled in different ways. While some women just hung around, others tried to forget their sorrows by looking for diversion. Women who had work within the camp reported that these occupations helped them to forget their problems and to find diversion. Mara talked about her life and job within the camp:

*Everything will turn out well. But I miss everything and when I go to bed I start thinking about my problems. Therefore I do the job in the kitchen. I hate it, but then I don't think.*

### Being in touch with the past

As soon as the women experienced familiarity through memories with the past, they felt both pleasure and sadness. Being reminded of their former lives, brought back memories of the good things in the past as well as the losses they had experienced. Thea remembered:

*There was an excursion to the spa in Baden, but just one time – I enjoyed swimming, it was like being at home.*

For the same reason, watching videos was a favourite leisure activity and Lillian told me:

*In the women's room we have videos and we watch films, maybe concerts, and Russian concerts with Russian songs. We can listen. We can see. It's a good memory. But sometimes I remember my mother. I call her very often and he (her son) often wants to remember, to listen to how it is there.*

Although daily life was experienced as a time of transition, values and habits of the past still influenced daily occupations. Although the women experienced a lack of financial resources, they did not abandon spending money on make-up or hair colouring. These daily occupations for the purpose of expressing one's identity had been valued in the past, and they tried to maintain them in their present life. In addition, strategies from life in the home country were practiced to overcome difficult situations. Thea explained:

*I always think about the future, but when I am cleaning I forget my sorrows because, then I start singing and then it is easier. All the other women look at me, but what should I do, it is a hard life. At home we say: if you are hungry, then sing, if you have stress you should sing, you have to sing, that helps.*

### Discussion

This study explored how women living in a refugee camp experience their engagement in daily occupations. Daily occupations were intrinsically intertwined with the law, social expectations, and the physical and cultural environment and these findings are consistent with findings in Whiteford's study (2005). The participants described that the context had an influence on all aspects of daily life and presented obstacles, requiring additional strategies to construct meaningful routines. Identifying a strategy to overcome these obstacles is comparable with the desire to change something about a situation if that situation does not give meaning to a person, as described by Nelson (1996). Trombly (1995) also emphasised that people see occupations as important when they are meaningful within the context of their lives. Similarly Christiansen alone (1999) and with colleagues (Christiansen, Little, & Backman, 1998) and Ikiugu and Rosso (2005) have argued that consistency of occupations with one's life projects makes occupations meaningful. The women's preparation for the future, observable in learning the language or the building of new contacts, corresponds with these assumptions.

According to Wilcock (1998b) occupation is a synthesis of doing, being and becoming. Being is about being true to ourselves, so driving away the present could be an effort to stay true and to deny

being someone else, being a refugee. Refugee status is seen as something completely new and a negative experience which severs one's ties to the rest of the world. Becoming different was the women's goal and the only way to escape a former life and start a new one. Additionally, drawing on Whiteford's (2000) definition, one could argue that people living in refugee camps experience occupational deprivation. However the findings of this study show that time in the camp was very much experienced as transitional time, and this might lead to two assumptions. The first is that how much people suffer depends on how long they live within these circumstances, how much they suffer. This corresponds with Whiteford's finding (2005) that the needs of refugee groups are not only context dependent, but also relative to the phase in the refugee application process in which they find themselves, where the most constraining effect is uncertainty about the situation within the camp and later resettlement. The other assumption, based on the results of this study, is that depriving conditions seemed to be less relevant as long as they did not correspond with goals for the future. This assumption should be further investigated.

If quality of life relates to the opportunity to enact choices and assert control over one's occupations (CAOT, 1994), the women in this study experienced reduction of quality of their life while living in the camp and their needs have not been respected. Hammell's (2004) claim can also be applied to the issues of refugees, that active needs can only be met if political, social and economic forces enable people to have some sort of meaningful control over their own life. This fact must be given more attention, as even the basic occupations associated with self-care and self-maintenance assumed a radically different form in the environment of a refugee camp.

Townsend and Wilcock (2003) demand four occupational rights: (1) to experience meaning and enrichment in one's occupations, (2) to participate in a range of occupations for health and social inclusion, (3) to make choices and share decision-making power in daily life, and (4) to receive equal privileges for diverse participation in occupations. As this study shows, there is a lot to do to ensure these rights for refugees living in camps.

### Limitations

The findings present the experiences of only seven women, with

similar religious, social and ethnic backgrounds. To get a broader perspective, investigations with other ethnic groups are needed. The informants belonged to an ethnic group who face a relatively lengthy application process, so their needs might not be comparable with other refugees living in the camp for a shorter period. Additionally the language skills of the participants and the researcher might be a limitation. Nevertheless, it is important to include people from other cultures in research; otherwise they might tend to get less support. The fact that only one house of the camp was observed also limits the range and diversity of findings, as well as the consistency of the experiences identified (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003). To confirm the findings, more studies are needed with men, people of different ages and from different countries, ethnicities and languages.

### Conclusion

This research contributes to theory development by providing insights into the subjective experiences of daily occupations as well as the form and function of occupations in society and culture. The findings expand knowledge of occupational deprivation and contribute to a better understanding of occupation. Engagement in daily occupations has been identified as a critical component promoting health (WHO, 1986; Wilcock, 1998a). This study also contributes to what is known about occupation and the influence of the environment. Understanding refugees means understanding their context. This study underlines the importance of engagement in meaningful daily occupations to enhance possibilities of establishing occupational routines in refugees' lives and of participating in all areas of daily life. There is a need to give more attention to issues of refugees and to do more research on conditions of daily life within camps, because as the results of this study show, refugees' participation in daily occupations is severely limited.

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