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# Exploring the Refugee Occupational Experience Across the Socioecological Model

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## Background

- A refugee is a person outside his or her country of nationality who is *unable* or *unwilling* to return to his or her country of nationality because of *persecution* or a *well-founded fear of persecution* on account of *race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion* (The Department of Homeland Security, 2017).
- In 2017, there were 25.4 million refugees worldwide.
- The United States historically receives high numbers of refugees each year (over 3.5 million since 1975).
- 80% of Arizona's refugees resettle in Maricopa County.
- Refugees arrive with a number of barriers limiting their occupational participation, including language skills, employment, mental and physical health, maternal and reproductive health, integration, aging, and roles and identity.

## Purpose

- To map refugee occupational needs across the socioecological model to determine the role of occupational therapy in facilitating cross-cultural integration.

## Methods

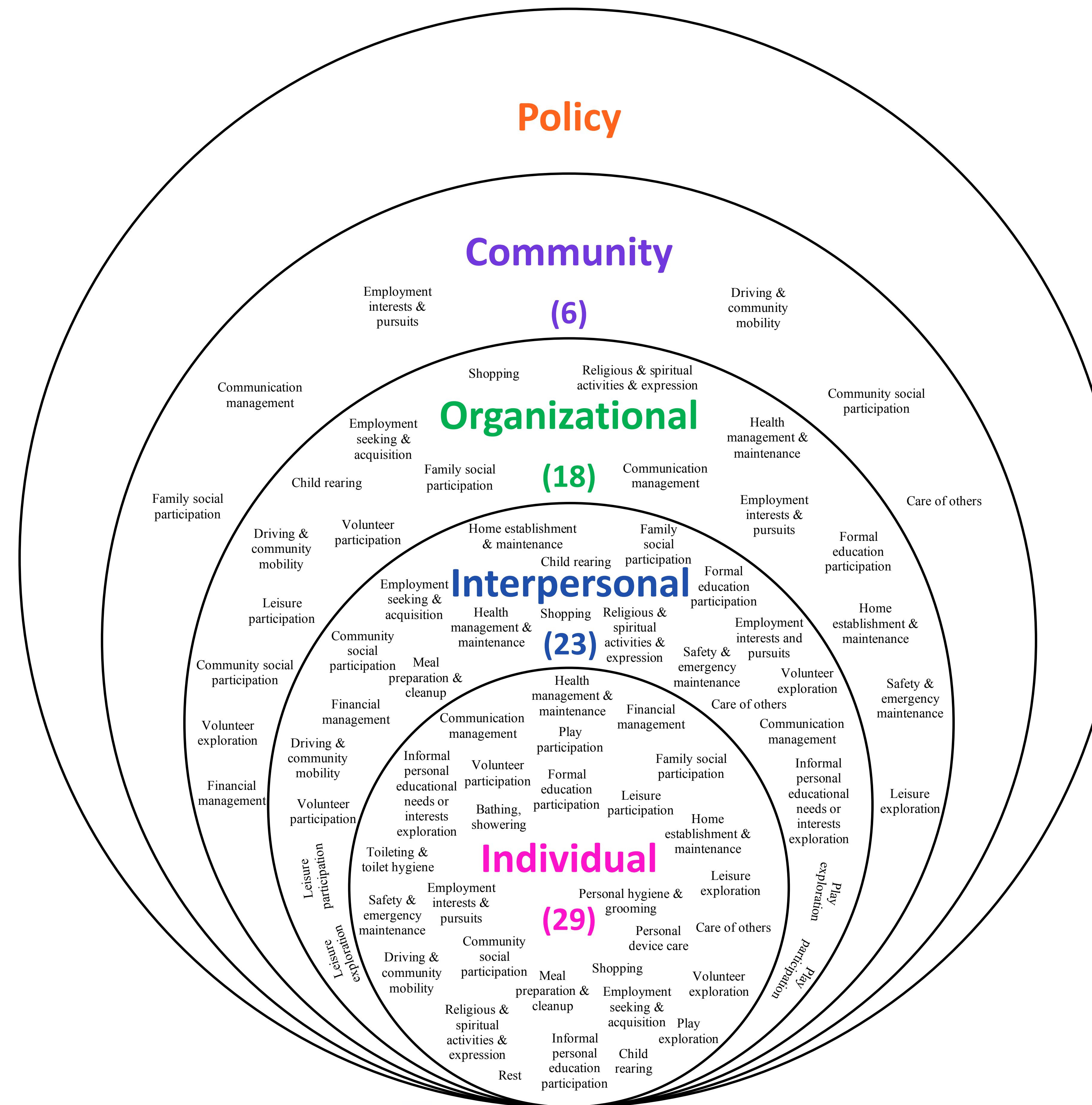
- Data collection took place January-April 2019, in Salt Lake City, UT. Service delivery sites were clients' homes and various community settings. Clients were seen 1-4 times a week, for 45-180 minutes.
- A systematic scheme was developed to map and categorize client experiences across information sets.
- The Person-Environment-Occupation model and Occupational Therapy Practice Framework were used as conceptual frameworks (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2014; Law et al., 1996).
- Participants (n=8) were referred for occupational therapy services from International Rescue Committee and Utah Health and Human Rights.

### Participants Demographic Information

Age	Country of Origin	Time in United States	Religion	Other
<b>FEMALES</b>				
38	Tanzania	3 mos.		Familial dwarfism
45	DRC	4 mos.	Jehovah Witness	TBI
59	Sudan	15 yrs.	Muslim	Former activist
35	DRC	4 yrs.	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	Retail training
<b>MALES</b>				
54	Sudan	2 yrs.		Mechanic
40	Sudan	3 yrs.	Muslim	Chef
5	U.S. (Sudanese parents)	5 yrs. (life)		Attending preschool
60	Syria	3 yrs.	Muslim	Paralytic, OT advocate



**Clinical Bottom Line:** Occupational therapists' training in holistic analysis is critical to successful multi-level, intervention-led integration, and key to mutual thriving and symbiotic success for both refugee culture and host culture.



## Results

- Occupational barriers were identified in 4 of the 5 socioecological model levels.
- The individual level had a total of 29 occupational needs, the interpersonal level 23, the organizational level 18, the community level 6, and the policy level 0.
- Eight of the eight OTPF occupational categories were documented as being experienced by the participants (100%). Twenty-nine of the forty occupational activities were documented (72.5%).

Occupation	Activity	Occupational Need(s)	Client Factors	Context and Environment	Intervention
Activities of Daily Living	Showering	Differentiating shampoo, conditioner, soap; accessing water; drying	Dwarfism and hip contractures; eagerness to care for self and family	Cultural context, physical environment	Shower sequence; faucet manipulation; towel techniques
Instrumental Activities of Daily Living	Community Mobility	Accessing and navigating bus system	Memory, language, desire to maintain independence	Physical and social environments	Small address cards; roleplaying
Rest and Sleep	Rest	Overworked homemaker; stress, anxiety	Elderly, determination to manage stress and meet demands	Cultural and personal contexts; physical environment	Diaphragmatic breathing, falls prevention exercises
Education	Informal personal education participation	Participation in multiple ESL classes	Low English language skills, desire to integrate	Cultural context, physical and social environments	Education on accessing community resources; time management
Work	Employment interests and pursuits	Desire to return to preferred work setting	High mental functions, high endurance	Physical and social environments	Education on career exploration; appropriate behavior for tour and interview
Play	Play exploration	Following play norms, cooperating, taking turns, listening	High energy, high mental functions	Physical and social environments	Games to learn and practice appropriate play behaviors
Leisure	Leisure exploration	Meaningful activities	Fear of venturing in public, lack of activities to fill time	Personal context, physical and social environments	Established balcony garden; crocheting
Social Participation	Community social participation	Lack of confidence to socialize, try new things	Strong desire to integrate, high mental functions	Personal context, social environment	Education on appropriate behavior; roleplaying

## Key Findings & Conclusions

- Occupational therapy interventions that addressed refugees' immediate needs also help with long-term integration.
- Occupational therapists are trained to educate and adapt, and analyze the person, environment, and occupation. They are well-suited to promote refugees' long-term successful integration.
- Future direction should:
  - Explore policy-specific occupational needs.
  - Establish occupational therapy-service delivery with organizations serving refugees in AZ.

### Key References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2014). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (3rd ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 51-548. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2014.682006>
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