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Transition in Occupations of Refugees During Resettlement

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INTRODUCTION



(UNHCR, 2018)

Background: Limited research has been conducted in the United States focusing on the refugee experience; furthermore, there is a significant gap in research regarding the impact of the refugee experience on the occupations of refugees as they transition to living in the U.S. One of the only occupational science studies in the U.S. focused on weaving as a meaningful occupation for Karen refugees. (Smith, Stephenson & Gibson-Satterthwaite, 2013)

Purpose: This study seeks to capture the experience of refugees & the impact of country transition on a broad array of occupations. Second, this study's purpose is to add to the occupational science literature regarding the occupational impact of the refugee experience, as well as to aid in addressing issues of occupational justice. (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004)

Research Question: How do people who are refugees experience their occupations through transition to the U.S.?

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

Methods
This research is a qualitative-descriptive study which utilized semi-structured interviews. Questions were guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model, addressing personal & cultural values, environments, & occupational patterns to identify changes in meaningful occupations due to the refugee process. Two participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Interviews were coded using thematic analysis to generate common themes across cases. Rigor was strengthened through member checks, peer review, & consensus coding.

(Law, et al., 1996; Braun & Clarke, 2006)

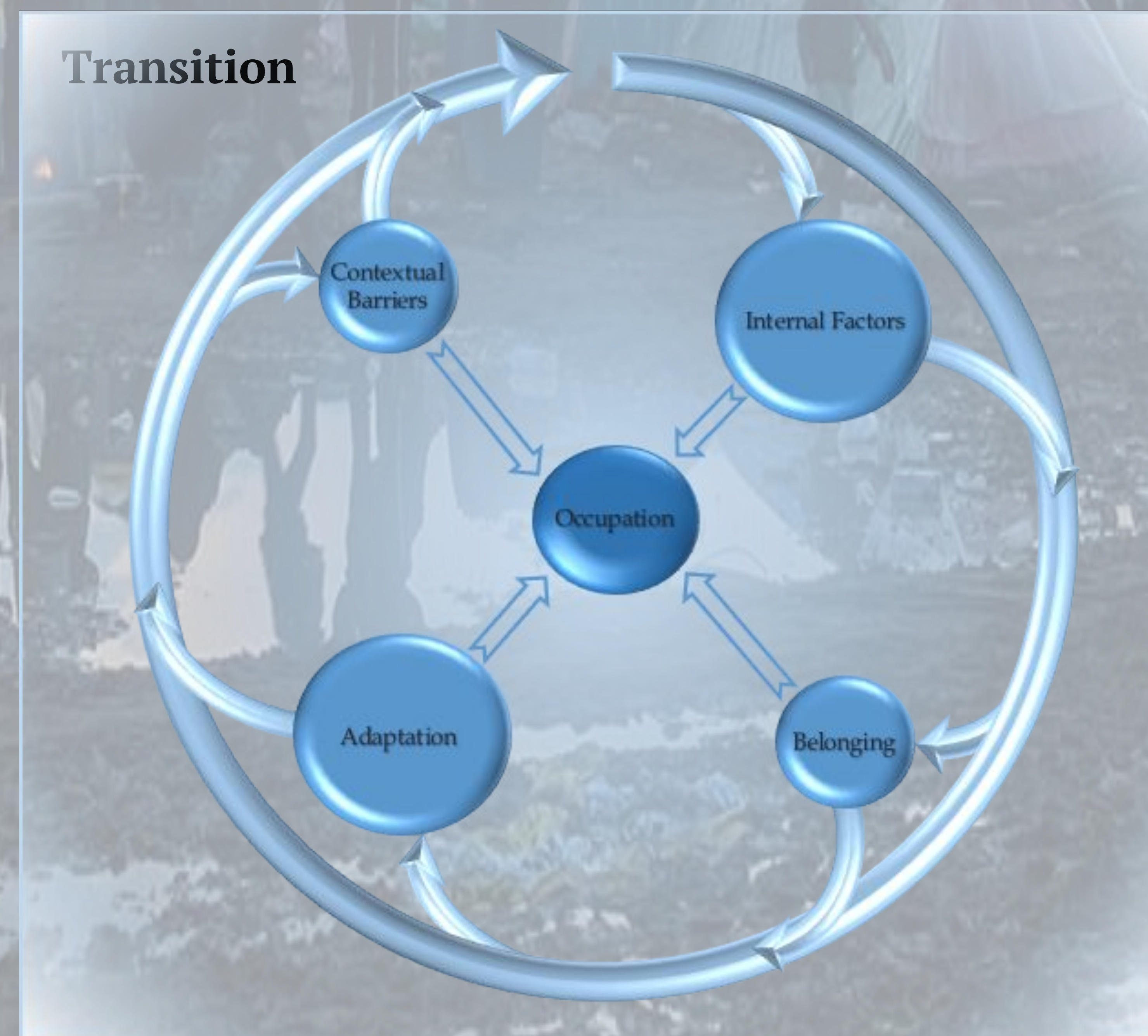
RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

Participants: Participants were required to have legal status as refugees, have been in the U.S. between one & five years, resettled in Northern California, & are at least 18 years old. Participants were not limited by ethnicity, country of origin, or gender. Participants were both recruited as a result of researcher attendance at a nonprofit fundraising event for a coffee company in the San Francisco Bay Area that trains & employs refugees.

	Pseudonym*	Age	Sex	Country of Origin	Ethnicity	Years in U.S.
Interview 1	Jawid	25-30	M	Afghanistan	Afghan	2
Interview 2	Javad	20-25	M	Iran	Afghan	1

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

"P: I needed to speak in another language and it's very difficult to connect with people in another language, for example, you can't make jokes [laughs] because the culture is different so if I make a joke you will, wouldn't understand or sometimes when people here, for example, make a joke, we don't understand why people are laughing because the culture is different the cultural references and jokes are different, and also you can't easily express your feelings in another language [laughs] ... you need a lot of vocabulary for that, so that's another difference." [Int 1]



"P: It's different from here, here people live separate from their parents, yeah? In Afghanistan people live with their parents. So I would see them every day." [Int 1]

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Discussion: Refugees arrive with a set of meaningful occupations that may or may not fit in their new context, creating the need to discard or adapt occupations. Barriers potentially catalyze adaptation, which then eliminates the barrier. This feedback loop allows for goodness of fit of occupations in the new context. Adaptation may change internal factors, such as identity. Likewise, internal factors may create adaptation. A sense of belonging may be positively or negatively affected by adaptation, internal factors, & contextual barriers. (Schkade & Schultz, 1992)

"P: But when you are in Indonesia ... I'm just really regret of those times. When you are there, you can, for example, do some online courses or things, but when you are there in that situation ... you just cannot focus on anything. Yeah, you just ... ah, I have some friends who suicide themselves themselves because of the stress." [Int 2]

Limitations: Study limitations include that large organizations in the U.S. that aid refugees do not generally partner with researchers; therefore, recruiting participants was difficult. The number of participants is much lower than the ideal. One interview is not sufficient to build rapport with participants; a follow-up interview may have been helpful.

IMPLICATIONS

This study aims to add to occupational science knowledge. Findings can potentially better inform occupational therapy interventions for future refugees experiencing issues of occupational transition.

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*Participants chose their own pseudonym.