



POSITION STATEMENT

Occupational Therapy and Human Rights

Statement of the position being taken

Occupational therapists are concerned with human rights in pursuing occupational justice for all. Occupational justice requires universal rights to occupation, broadly defined and recognising differences related to the cultural, social, political (current and historic) and geographical context. Occupational justice is the fulfilment of the right for all people to engage in the occupations they need to survive, define as meaningful, and that contribute positively to their own well-being and the well-being of their communities.

Occupational justice requires occupational rights for all to:

- **Participate in a range of occupations** that support survival, health and well-being so that populations, communities, families and individuals can flourish and realise their potential, consistent with the Ottawa Charter¹
- **Choose occupations** without pressure, force, coercion, or threats but with acknowledgement that with choice comes responsibility for other people, lifeforms and the planet
- **Freely engage in necessary and chosen occupations** without risk to safety, human dignity or equity.

Statement of significance of position to occupational therapy

Occupational injustice is an abuse of occupational and human rights, as defined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)² and protected by the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)³ and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)⁴.

Occupational therapists around the world are obligated to promote occupational rights as the actualisation of human rights. This obligation encompasses addressing occupational injustices, initially named in 2000 as occupational deprivation, occupational imbalance, occupational marginalisation, and occupational alienation. An early addition was occupational apartheid.

Occupational rights are secured by identifying and addressing the capabilities⁵, opportunities, and freedom of choice for individuals, communities and populations to participate in society.

Occupational therapists are obligated to enact our client-centred aspiration by collaborating with those experiencing abuses and with diverse partners to eradicate abuses that undermine occupational justice.

Statement of significance of position to society

WFOT fully endorses the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and aligns the protection of occupational rights with the protection of human rights. Actions to promote occupational and human rights must counter occupational injustices that are aggravated by social problems, significantly persistent poverty, economic restrictions, disease, social discrimination, displacement, natural and man-made disasters, armed conflict, historic disadvantage, and physical and mental ill health.

Summary and conclusion

Protecting people's occupational rights to participate in a health-giving range of occupations, choose occupations that are meaningful to them, and freely engage in necessary and chosen occupations is the foundation of just and inclusive societies. Abuses of occupational rights are abuses of human rights and such abuses undermine occupational justice.

References

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