

Research Space

Journal article

Reflections on occupational science in 2022

Simaan, J. and Stanley, M

This is the author's accepted version of the article published as:

Stanley M, Simaan J. Reflections on occupational science in 2022. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2022;0(0). doi:10.1177/03080226221135374

Reflections on occupational science in 2022

Mandy Stanley and Juman Simaan

The discipline of occupational science originated in the late 1980s as developed by an Emeritus Professor Betty Yerxa at the University of Southern California and concurrently by Professor Ann Wilcock in Australia. In this editorial, we have been asked to provide our perspectives on where occupational science is now and to articulate some of the current key developments and relevance for occupational therapy. The collective experience of a global pandemic over the last two and a half years with restrictions on occupational engagement and daily life has brought concepts from occupational science to the fore. COVID-19 has brought significant occupational disruption, and the initial public health responses involved occupational deprivation, and marginalisation with associated ill effects on health and well-being.

Positioning the authors

Before sharing our views, it is important to position ourselves as the writers of this editorial to give some context. Associate Professor Mandy Stanley is a white female who is an Australian occupational therapy academic and Dr Juman Simaan is a Palestinian able-bodied man living in the UK and an occupational therapy academic. Both authors contribute to the discipline of occupational science through teaching, research and involvement with the *Journal of Occupational Science*. Our observations of the current developments in occupational science outlined in the editorial are our personal views which have been informed by our backgrounds.

Recent developments

The growth and relevance of occupational science is well evidenced by the success of the *Journal of Occupational Science* and the growth of groups of occupational scientists in different regions of the world, for example Occupational Science Europe. Here we outline three key recent developments from our perspectives as individual occupational scientists.

1. A call for a more inclusive science extending from the current dominant Western perspective

Concepts such as occupation, health and well-being, occupational (in)justice and related terms have all been theorised by Western scholars and practitioners; research on these constructs' applications has been done mostly with individuals and communities in the Global North ([Simaan, 2020](#)). In the last two decades, there has been important work coming out of South America, Africa and Asia, and from indigenous scholars in Australia, New Zealand and North America, to critique these concepts and create a more relevant and inclusive occupational science that speaks to the more communal and pluriversal ways of life in the Global South ([Guajardo et al., 2015](#); [Magalhães et al., 2020](#)). Concepts such as 'collective occupation' and 'occupational consciousness' are examples of constructs created as a result of work in South Africa, and have been helpful in highlighting the socio-political aspects of occupations for marginalised communities ([Ramugondo, 2015](#); [Ramugondo and Kronenberg, 2015](#)). Those communities resist structural barriers they face in their daily lives by taking part in daily activities that influence their individual and communal health and well-being. Some scholars, practitioners and activists are questioning the utility of concepts such as occupation and occupational justice, which were created in a world dominated by neoliberal capitalist systems motivated by profit making rather than by human liberation. Is it time to think of alternative terms and practices that can resist and counteract these oppressive structures? And can practitioners, including occupational therapists, be a part of this movement to liberate people's everyday lives and celebrate the vast diversity of ways of doing meaningful and purposeful activities in a more just and self-determined world? These are the questions that occupational science scholars need to be

studying in the third decade of the 21st century to work towards correcting 500 years of Euro-centrism, systematic racism and injustices imposed on marginalised communities everywhere.

2. Movement to a more social transformative practice

One of the current developments is a move to a more politically and socially transformative practice where occupational science meets occupational therapy, a meeting that opens up possibilities for occupational therapists to engage with communities to create a more just society in which everyone can live well. Occupational therapists working in health and social care could benefit from raising their awareness of the political aspects of daily lives and in promoting marginalised communities' means to challenge structural barriers to their meaningful occupations. For example, occupational therapists are working collaboratively with people seeking refuge, homeless people and disabled activists who engage in collective activities such as lobbying government bodies to provide more resources and access to daily occupations.

3. Development of theoretical concepts within occupational science relevant to occupational therapy practice

Various concepts within occupational science including occupational deprivation, occupational balance and occupational justice have direct relevance to occupational therapy practice. The developmental stage of occupational science concepts is quite varied depending on the amount of academic attention received. Occupational adaptation is one area which has advanced in conceptual development and is worth drawing to the attention of occupational therapy practitioners. [Walder and Molineux \(2017\)](#) conducted a rigorous synthesis of qualitative studies of the experience of adjusting to chronic disease or a significant health event. The grounded theory synthesis generated a theory about an underlying process of reconstructing an occupational identity. People living with chronic disease or who have experienced a significant health event experience turmoil and loss. They use the processes of developing competence, finding motivation and becoming confident to achieve occupational adaptation and to reconstruct their occupational identity. Each of these processes comprises sub-categories related to mastery and acceptance, adjusting to change, building hope, a sense of belonging and feeling needed, making a contribution, overcoming fear, and forming routines. The synthesis shows that reconstructing one's identity and finding new purpose and meaning in life are vitally important to occupational adaptation and occupational well-being. It is evident that occupational therapists need to focus on the link between the client's occupational identity and occupational adaptation. Understanding who the client is and their values and priorities becomes even more important to enable occupational adaptation.

Conclusion

In this editorial, we have provided our perspective on current developments within occupational science. Our perspectives are informed by our active involvement in occupational science scholarship and our work with the *Journal of Occupational Science*. Occupational science knowledge is a form of research evidence which can be drawn upon to inform occupational therapy practice and thus the health and well-being of the people that we work with.

References

Guajardo, A., Kronenberg, F., & Ramugondo, E. L. (2015). Southern occupational therapies: Emerging identities, epistemologies and practices. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(1), 3–10.

<https://doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2015/v45no1a2>

Magalhães, L., Farias, L., & Malfitano, A. (2018). The development of occupational science outside the Anglophone sphere: enacting global collaboration. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 10.1080/14427591.2018.1530133

Ramugondo, E. L. (2015). Occupational consciousness. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 22(4), 488–501. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2015.1042516>

Ramugondo, E. L., & Kronenberg, F. (2015). Explaining collective occupations from a human relations perspective: Bridging the individual-collective dichotomy. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 22(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2013.781920>

Simaan, J. (2020). Decolonising occupational science education through learning activities based on a study from the Global South. *Journal of Occupational Science*.

DOI: [10.1080/14427591.2020.1780937](https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1780937).

Walder K, Molineux M (2017) Occupational adaptation and identity reconstruction: A grounded theory synthesis of qualitative studies exploring adults' experiences of adjustment to chronic disease, major illness or injury. *Journal of Occupational Science* 24: 225–243.