

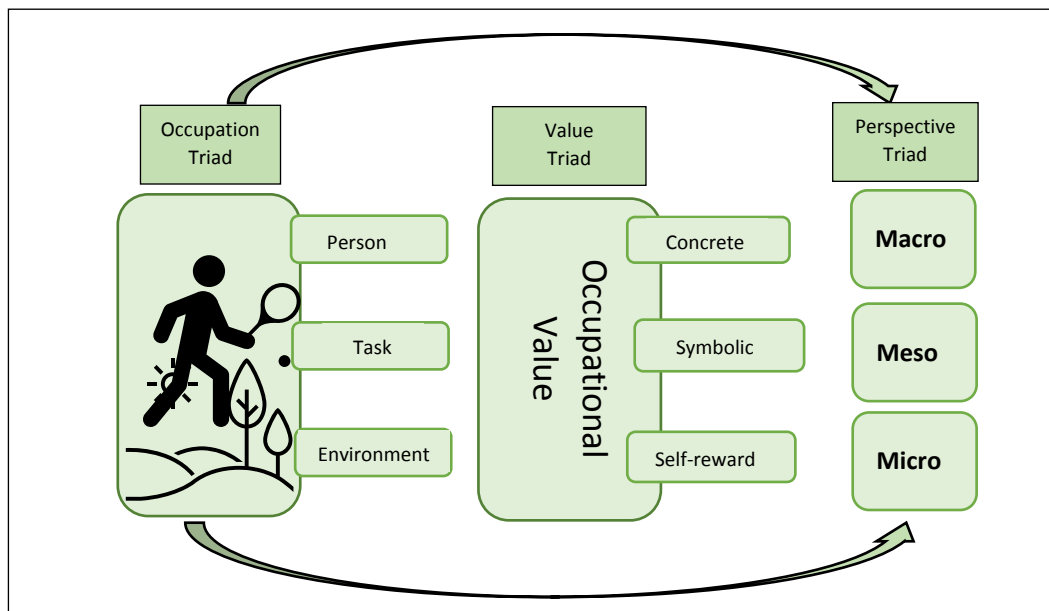


**The experience of meaning and value in occupations for forced migrants seeking asylum, and factors that facilitate occupational engagement: A meta-ethnography using a strength-based approach. - no FIFO**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Journal:         | <i>British Journal of Occupational Therapy</i>   |
| Manuscript ID    | BJO-039-Feb-2022-CR.R1   |
| Manuscript Type: | Review   |
| Key Areas:       | Theory and Philosophy, Research Methods and Methodology, Adult Psychosocial < Clinical   |
| Keywords:        | Asylum-seekers, Forced migrants, Occupational engagement, Value, Meaning, Strength-based   |
| Abstract:        | <p>Introduction: Asylum-seekers face significant barriers to meaningful occupation, leading to negative health and wellbeing outcomes. This study provides a strength-based approach to enhance understandings about the meaning of occupation for those seeking asylum.</p> <p>Method: A systematic search of the literature identified seven qualitative research studies. A meta-ethnographic approach was used to synthesise the findings.</p> <p>Results: Examination of the selected studies generated three third-order interpretations as follows: keeping busy as a coping mechanism; maintaining continuity with past life by preserving identity, roles, values, and culture; and building a new future with a drive to be a productive member of society. The study also identified factors that support meaningful occupational engagement during asylum.</p> <p>Conclusion: This study shows that occupations are essential to existence for asylum-seekers. They help preserve identity and life-continuity; help people make sense of disorder in their life; and provide opportunity for reflection, leading to motivation toward goal-directed occupation. Finally, engaging in occupation helps people adjust and cope with trauma. The study highlights that a lack of meaningful occupations may limit the long-term benefits of occupational engagement while seeking asylum. Recommendations are made for further research to challenge restrictive policies and promote the rights and wellbeing of this population.</p> |

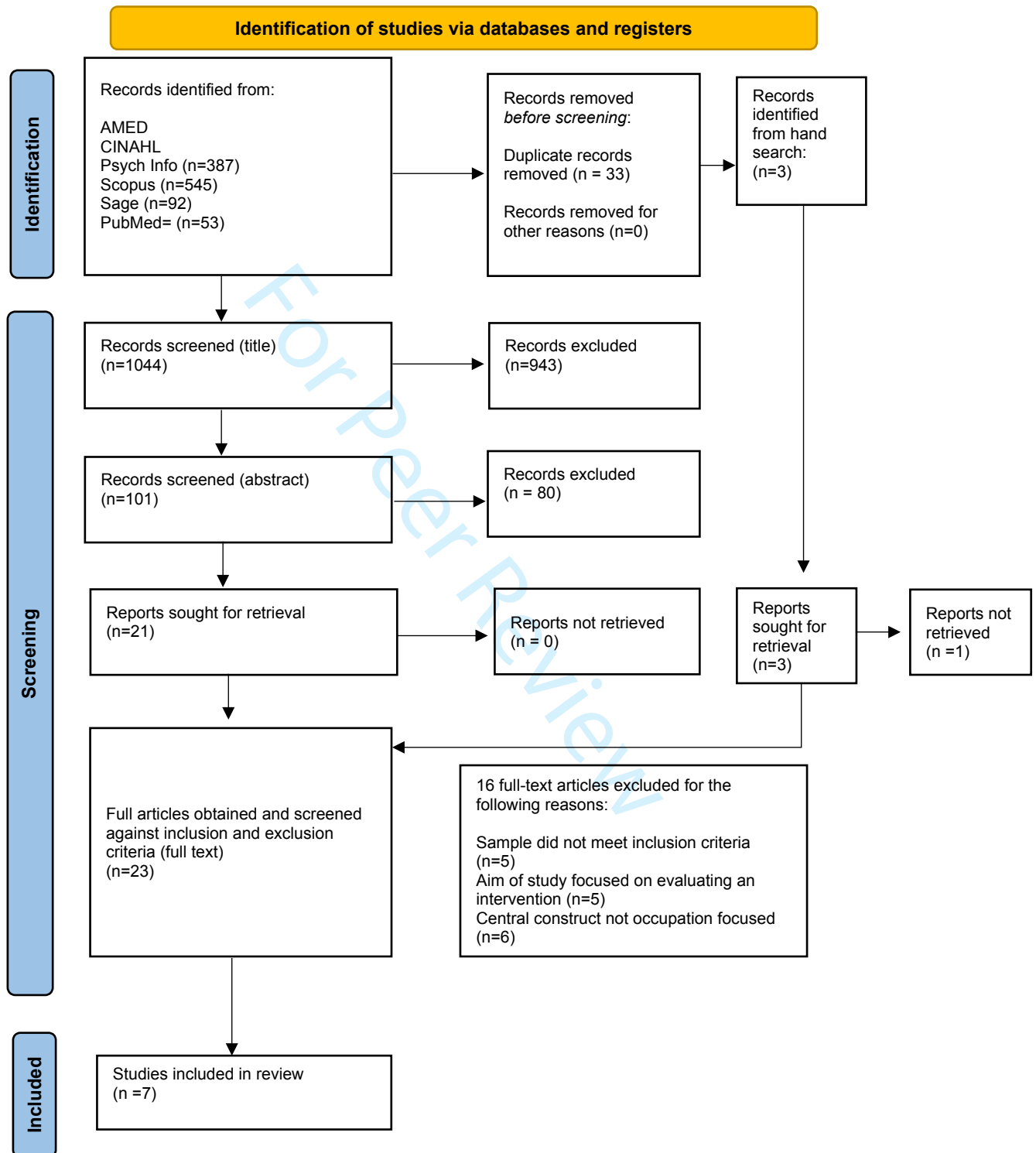
Tables and Figures

**Figure 1:** The three triads in the Value, Meaning and Occupation (ValMO) model, describing different perspectives of occupation. Adapted from Persson et al., (2001).



Review

**Figure 2.** Number of studies identified and screened. Based on the PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2020).



**Table 2. Synthesis: concepts, second and third-order interpretations**

| Categories  | Second-order interpretations  | Third-order interpretations (themes)  |
|---|---|---|
| Filling time  | 'They performed these occupations to pass time, as one put it "to kill time", but not necessarily because the activities fulfilled their need to do something meaningful' (Ingvarsson et al., 2016, p. 421)   | <b>Keeping busy as a coping mechanism</b>   |
| Coping mechanism                                    | 'Physical activity was important for some asylum seekers coping with ongoing uncertainty and no right to work. Physical activity was found to help fill time, alleviate stress, and help physical and mental health.' (Hartley and Fleay, 2017, p.1194 )<br><br>'The participants' motives for participating in occupations were related to their experience of distress and knowledge of the effects of insufficient occupations. They stated that they used occupations as diversions and tried to keep busy to avoid falling into depression.'(Morville & Erlandsson, 2013, p.217)   | Participants focused on filling their days with activities to find structure, routine and meaning. In many cases, the activity itself held little meaning, but within the context of seeking asylum, served as a way of distracting them from challenging experiences. Some participants found activities held soothing effects, providing momentary escapism and a method of coping with anxiety and emotional distress.   |
| Doing to create structure and purpose in daily life | 'Despite the mental distress that the participants were enduring, many were trying to structure their days with some of the very few activities available and affordable to them, including participating in free courses, visiting local public libraries, and connecting with other community members.' (Heartley & Fleay, 2017, p.1195)  |   |
| Doing to help others                                | 'They each identified altruistic drives, showing investment in their connections – actively supporting others and developing mutually beneficial relationships, voluntary work roles and community support' (Smith, 2015, p.619)  | <b>Maintaining continuity with past life by seeking to preserve identity, roles, values, and culture</b>  |
| Drawing on past occupations                         | 'Pinar had studied literature in university, and she loved to read; thus, reading served at first as a pastime and, then, when she got increasingly anxious, as a way to relax.' (Robleda, 2020, p.87)  | Despite experiencing little control over occupational choice, participants sought opportunities to adapt their occupations. Many drew on education and existing skills to creating opportunities. Some found value in supporting others. Engaging in pre-migration hobbies, interests, and cultural practices- such as cooking and eating rituals-helped preserve identity.   |
| Using skills and experiences                        | 'Being well-educated assisted the participants to build a structure around the routines and opportunities in the centre, whereby they used their occupations as diversions and a way to enable life.' (Morville & Erlandsson, 2013, p.221)  |   |
| Spirituality as a source of comfort and guidance    | 'they often resorted to their religious beliefs and practices, in particular to prayer, to maintain hope whenever they felt depressed and disheartened' (Robleda, 2020, p.89)   |   |
| Identity and roles                                  | 'People strive to move beyond simply 'keeping busy' to find occupations of real meaning that foster connections and purpose, and in particular feed their need to feel valued. Participants managed to build a structure and tried to cope by using occupations as a diversion and a way to maintain an identity' (Smith, 2018, p.87)   |   |
| Desire to work                                      | 'Having a job not only helps to recreate a sense of normality, but also a sense of control over one's life... It contributed to peace of mind; secondly, it allowed a broadening of the radius of action; and thirdly, it helped to promote social integration (Lintner and Elsen, 2018, p.82).   | <b>Building a new future and a drive to be a productive member of society</b>   |
| Social connection                                   | 'For participants who had been in the UK for the longest, and whose claims had failed, there was far less connectivity with others and no contact with family. They felt they had less to offer to others, and less energy to bring to occupations involving others.' (Smith, 2018, p.92)<br><br>'Living in Reykjavik, conversely, afforded more feelings of control and possibilities to enact choices. It eased the men's integration into society, and provided them with opportunities to participate in social events and to do volunteer work for charity organizations. Within this larger and more diverse community, they also felt less visible as foreigners, less marginalized, and even had some feeling of belonging.' (Ingvarsson et al., 2016, p.421) | Value was attributed to occupations that were considered to contribute to future lives, beyond their existence as asylum seekers. Consistent in the findings was a desire to work. Social connection held different value- some wanted to connect with others for support whilst others sought social connection as a tactic for building connections and skills to help them move forward. Ultimately people wanted to have control over their lives, this is largely related to economic resources and meaningful time use. |

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

| <b>Table 1. Summary of Included studies</b>            |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Author, year, country</b>                           | <b>Aims</b>  | <b>Method</b>  | <b>Participant characteristics</b>   | <b>Findings</b>  | <b>Summary of usable data</b>  | <b>Limitations and CASP score</b>  |
| <b>Smith (2015)<br/>UK</b>                             | To capture the refugee experience, as it occurs through the medium of occupation.                      | Informal conversational interviewing.  | 4 women and 6 men aged between 25 and 45.<br><br>From a range of nations in Africa and the Middle East.<br><br>Had lived in the UK for between 1 and 8 years, with a mean of 5 years 4 months.<br><br>X2 refugee status<br>X3 seeking asylum<br>X5 failed asylum claims  | Phenomenological approach to analysis reflecting principles of 'doing, being, belonging and becoming.'<br><br>Participants strive to move beyond simply 'keeping busy' to find occupations of real meaning that foster connections and purpose, and in particular feed their need to feel valued.  | Occupations undertaken for the benefit of others tap into culturally appropriate collectivist ideals, using the desire to be altruistic to promote 'doing, being, belonging' and 'becoming'.   | Small-scale study and is limited not only by the number of participants, but the inherent lack of homogeneity of people within the asylum process.<br><br>Only 3 of the 10 participants were in the process of seeking asylum. |
| <b>Morville and Erlandsson (2013)<br/><br/>Denmark</b> | To explore how and if asylum seekers experienced occupations as occupations in a Danish asylum centre. | Narrative interviews, observations, and everyday conversations.<br><br>Thematic analysis approach. | 3 asylum seeking men from Iran and Afghanistan living in an asylum centre.<br><br>Aged 25, 28 and 30.<br><br>25, Iran, Literature student at university, book seller and student. No religion.<br><br>30, Iran; MSc sports sciences, teacher and journalist. No religion.<br><br>28, Afghanistan, doctor, translator and teacher. No religion. | Data analysis using a thematic analysis approach.<br><br>Participants experienced occupational deprivation, even though they did have occupations.<br><br>Their occupations were to some extent based on earlier occupations but seemed to be used as a coping tool more than a meaningful way to fill time.<br><br>Despite occupational deprivation, participants managed to build a structure and tried to cope by using occupations as a diversion and a way to maintain an identity- | Being well-educated assisted the participants to build a structure around their routines and opportunities in the centre, whereby they used their occupations as diversions and a way to enable life.<br><br>Although occupations had value in the immediate context, this did not necessarily mean that daily occupations provided meaning in the longer term.<br><br>Their occupations were to some extent based on earlier occupations but seemed to be used as a coping tool more than a | Small sample of 3 male participants.<br><br>Criteria of participants included ability to speak English to college level.   |

|   |  |   |  |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
|   |  |   |  | ability to do so may be due to educational background.   | meaningful way to fill time.  |   |
| <p><b>Heartley and Fleay (2017)</b></p> <p><b>Australia</b></p> | To explore engagement in physical activity as a potential coping strategy for asylum seekers living in the Australian community without the right to work. | Semi-structured, in-depth interviews.     | <p>Asylum seekers living in the community whilst awaiting decision regarding their application for asylum. Participants did not have the right to work.</p> <p>29 adult asylum seekers: 23 men and 6 women.</p> <p>10 participants were from Afghanistan.</p> <p>7 participants were from Sri Lanka.</p> <p>12 participants were from Iran.</p> <p>The length of time that participants had been living in the community after their release from immigration detention and without the right to work ranged from 2 weeks to 9.5 months.</p> | <p>Living without the right to work and with minimal financial support made it difficult to fill each day with activities. Most participants spent waking hours with very little to do.</p> <p>Despite the mental distress that participants were enduring, many were trying to structure their days with some of the very few activities available and affordable to them, including physical exercise.</p> | <p>Physical activity was important for some asylum seekers coping with ongoing uncertainty and no right to work.</p> <p>Restrictive government policy, such as limited welfare support, hindered some asylum seekers' access to physical activity.</p> <p>In the face of restrictive policy, programmes enabling asylum seekers' engagement in physical activity may foster positive health and wellbeing. Physical activity was a coping strategy that was utilised by nine of the participants, an additional six participants highlighted several barriers that prevented them from using it as a coping tool.</p> | <p>The participants' physical activity in their country of origin was not ascertained, and future research might seek to address this limitation.</p> <p>As only six women were interviewed, the gendered nature of physical activities could not be gauged.</p>                        |
| <p><b>Smith (2018)</b></p> <p><b>UK</b></p>                     | To examine the meaning of occupation for asylum seekers. In particular, why asylum seekers choose altruistic occupations.                                  | In-depth interviews with 10 participants. | <p>Participants were accessed via local refugee support agencies.</p> <p>All were over the age of 18 and had sought asylum within the past 5 years.</p> <p>5 participants spoke English as a first language, 3 others spoke English with varying degrees of fluency and only 1 elected to use an interpreter.</p>  | <p>Five main themes relating to altruism emerged from the analysis: Occupational opportunities; finding meaning through altruism; drivers for altruism, which has four subthemes; intrinsic gains; and being the recipient.</p>  | <p>Participants most purposeful occupations tended to be ones they did for the benefit of others. Doing for others may help asylum seekers deal with the difficulties associated with transitioning into a new society. Occupations that foster altruism may provide opportunities for consistency with life narrative and identity, leading to positive wellbeing and health outcomes.</p>   | <p>Lacks a clear statement of the aim of the study.</p> <p>The UK asylum process is unique, and different nations present different challenges.</p> <p>Small sample size- refugees are not a homogenous group and their diverse experiences and backgrounds limit generalisability.</p> |

|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|   |  |  | At the time of the interviews, participants had lived in the UK for between 1 and 8 years (with a mean of 5.6 years).  |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Ingvarsson, Egilson &amp; Skaptadottir (2016)</b></p> <p><b>Iceland</b></p> | To gain an understanding of the experience of living as an asylum seeker in Iceland.   | Semi-structured interviews. A constructivist grounded theory approach was applied to categorize and synthesize data. | <p>6 participants from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq and were 23–38 years old.</p> <p>All had lived outside their country of origin for 5–18 years and in Iceland for 6–30 months.</p> <p>2 participants lived in Reykjanesbær when first interviewed, and due to a change in their living conditions a second interview was added. The other 4 lived in Reykjavik, sharing an apartment with 2–4 other men.</p> <p>The men typically had 3–6 years of formal education except for one who had attended college in his home country but not graduated.</p> <p>Most spoke English at intermediate level as a minimum.</p> | <p>Four major categories emerged that reflected the participants' experience of seeking asylum in Iceland: "It's the worst place", "Nothing to do", "This is survival, not living the life", and "I want a normal life like everyone else".</p> <p>Living conditions were experienced as being categorised in four main ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Lack of opportunities for participation</li> <li>2) Lack of belonging and feelings of powerlessness.</li> <li>3) The long processing time of their applications was enormously stressful</li> <li>4) Not being in charge of one's life, living conditions, or income.</li> </ol> | <p>Participants sought opportunities to do occupations that enabled them to fulfil productive roles, practice culturally valued occupations relating to their home such as church and work.</p> <p>Participants sought opportunities to be in the city where there were more opportunities to connect with others and blend into society.</p> <p>Participants sought opportunities to fill time, even if it was not through meaningful occupation.</p> | <p>All participants were required to speak basic English which limits the generalisability of the findings but also meant participants may have been limited in how they expressed their feelings about the topic. However, this was justified by the researcher as all participants were able to answer and respond to questions. Furthermore, the researcher argued that the lack of interpreter made for enhanced relationship between interviewees and researcher enhancing ethical strengths.</p> <p>Small sample size.</p> <p>Findings were predominantly focused on negative impacts of restrictive environment, rather than meaningful engagement or facilitating factors.</p> |
| <p><b>Lintner &amp; Susanne Elsen (2018) Italy</b></p>                            | To examine the role of social dimension of wellbeing in the context of asylum seekers. And to examine how work as a meaningful occupation is | Data were collected via narrative interviews, informal discussions, and semi structured interviews.                  | <p>Snowball sampling 25 asylum seekers in South Tyrol, Italy.</p> <p>Asylum seekers were living in refugee houses in South Tyrol.</p>  | Data analysis was based on the grounded theory coding processes described by Strauss and Corbin and involved three levels of analysis: open  | Opportunities to work were perceived to be a central element in promoting social integration and wellbeing.  | Based on a sample in Italy where the asylum policy allows asylum seekers to work after 3 months of waiting for application to be reviewed.   |

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

|                                     |  |   |   |  |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|
|                                     | <p>seen as a key element of social integration.</p>  |   | <p>All interviewees had reached Italy by boat.</p> <p>15 came from Nigeria, 5 from Gambia and 5 from Somalia.</p> <p>All had requested asylum in Italy and were currently waiting for a decision on their asylum application.</p> <p>Aged between 22-38 years old and had fled from their homeland because of different forms of persecution:<br/>10 for religious/political persecution, 5 for sexual persecution, and 15 to escape from family/traditional obligations.</p> | <p>coding, axial coding and selective coding.<br/>Themes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spatial isolation and its impact on wellbeing.</li> <li>- Enforced passivity in the context of asylum seekers.</li> <li>- The meaning of work in the context of asylum seekers.</li> </ul>   | <p>Work was found to be more than a rational and economic activity for asylum seekers, but an important human occupation necessary for improving wellbeing. Work promotes a sense of self, identity, agency and identity which helps overcome social and spatial isolation in society.</p>                          | <p>Did not include a 'limitations' section.</p> <p>No acknowledgement of researcher/interviewee power dynamic or about language barriers and how this may or may not have impacted results. Just states interviews were carried out in English.</p> <p>No statement of ethical approval.</p>  |
| <p><b>Robleda (2020) Norway</b></p> | <p>To explore the everyday life of women seeking asylum and living in asylum centres in Norway. It aims to answer the question of what everyday tactics they use to deal with their challenges and what empowers or constrains the development of these.</p> | <p>Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with asylum-seeking women.</p> | <p>Ethnographic study following nine women while they lived in an asylum centre.</p> <p>The women were aged between 23 and 45 years and had various national, ethnic and religious backgrounds as well as different educational levels and family circumstances.</p>  | <p>The authors analysis suggests that although asylum seekers find themselves in situations of serious repression, there are still sparks of agency in the form of everyday tactics.</p> <p>Tactics employed depend on the 'field of power' they are in. There are factors that shape the kinds of tactics that they are able to draw on including family circumstances, their educational level, the structure of the asylum centre and opportunities for bridging and bonding as well as their religious background and religiosity.</p> | <p>People use daily activities to find meaning in life, enhance wellbeing and reject stereotype associated with being a refugee/asylum seeker.</p> <p>The participants are well educated and have social capital from their old lives which appears to help them in their transition into their new situations.</p> | <p>This study includes limited direct quotations therefore much of the 'data' is formed of secondary constructs i.e. interpretations of the author.</p> <p>Sample size is only women.</p> <p>Only two people are included in the in-depth interview therefore difficult to generalise the findings.</p> <p>No statement of ethical approval or clear statement acknowledging power dynamics and position of researcher.</p> |



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

For Peer Review

1  
2  
3 The experience of meaning and value in occupations for forced migrants seeking asylum,  
4 and factors that facilitate occupational engagement: A meta-ethnography using a strength-  
5 based approach.  
6  
7  
8

9 **Key words:** Asylum-seekers, forced migrants, occupational engagement, value, meaning,  
10 strength-based, ValMO model.  
11  
12

13  
14  
15 **Abstract**  
16

17  
18 **Introduction:** Asylum-seekers face significant barriers to meaningful occupation, leading to  
19 negative health and wellbeing outcomes. This study provides a strength-based approach to  
20 enhance understandings about the meaning of occupation for those seeking asylum.  
21  
22

23  
24 **Method:** A systematic search of the literature identified seven qualitative research studies.  
25 A meta-ethnographic approach was used to synthesise the findings.  
26  
27

28  
29 **Results:** Examination of the selected studies generated three third-order interpretations as  
30 follows: keeping busy as a coping mechanism; maintaining continuity with past life by  
31 preserving identity, roles, values, and culture; and building a new future with a drive to be a  
32 productive member of society. The study also identified factors that support meaningful  
33 occupational engagement during asylum.  
34  
35  
36

37  
38 **Conclusion:** This study shows that occupations are essential to existence for asylum-seekers.  
39 They help preserve identity and life-continuity; help people make sense of disorder in their  
40 life; and provide opportunity for reflection, leading to motivation toward goal-directed  
41 occupation. Finally, engaging in occupation helps people adjust and cope with trauma. The  
42 study highlights that a lack of meaningful occupations may limit the long-term benefits of  
43 occupational engagement while seeking asylum. Recommendations are made for further  
44 research to challenge restrictive policies and promote the rights and wellbeing of this  
45 population.  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## Introduction

Human displacement is the enforced departure of people from their homes because of war, persecution, civil unrest, and disaster (World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), 2014). Globally, the number of people forcibly displaced is rising. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021a) there are at least 82.4 million displaced people worldwide. This population face many occupational challenges, intensified by restrictive migration policies. In response to this growing social injustice, the WFOT (2014) advocate for research and practice to help those affected.

Human displacement is complex, and terminology used across disciplines and sectors is varied. In this article the terms 'forced migrant and displaced person' are used interchangeably, referring to individuals subjected to any kind of displacement or involuntary movement, both across international borders and within a country. This systematic review focuses on the experiences of asylum-seekers, individuals who are not yet legally recognised as a refugee and are therefore not entitled to the same economic and social support (UNHCR, 2021b). Asylum-seekers are often excluded from paid work, face prolonged periods of waiting and segregation from society leading to a lack of choice and control over occupational engagement (Gupta and Hocking, 2018).

Existing occupational science research has demonstrated how displacement impacts upon human occupation and has helped guide occupational therapy practice (Trimboli et al., 2019). Research has focused on: the impact of being excluded from work (Burchett & Matheson, 2010); challenges relating to resettlement (Mirza, 2012, Mayne et al., 2016) and the experiences of living in a refugee camp (Darawsheh, 2019). These studies found that displacement caused profound occupational deprivation, loss and disruption. This evolving evidence base of predominantly qualitative research presents the experiences of marginalised people and helps advocate policy change. However, these studies are small and limited to the specific social and legal context of the host countries, making findings difficult to generalise. They also focus on the experiences of refugees, or forced migrants as a general population, rather than examining the distinctive experiences of asylum-seekers;

1  
2  
3 therefore, identifying a need for evidence synthesis to generate new conceptual insights  
4 about asylum-seekers. Studies by Steindl (2008) and Morville and Erlandsson (2013)  
5 provided insights about how people adapt their occupations and cope with daily life in  
6 asylum centres. By drawing on their personal histories, values, capabilities, and future  
7 hopes; participants were able to create daily life-structures to manage distressing  
8 experiences and restrictive environments. The findings from these studies lacked  
9 generalisability due to the similarity of the participants; all highly educated and selected  
10 based on having good communication skills in either English or German. To gain a broader  
11 perspective, further studies are needed with greater diversity reflected in participants.  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22

23 The importance of an occupational therapy perspective on trauma and the psychological  
24 impact of being forcibly displaced is increasingly emphasised within the literature (Morville  
25 and Erlandsson, 2017). Morville et al. (2015) investigated the correlation between torture  
26 experience and Activities of Daily Living (ADL) function of asylum-seekers living in an asylum  
27 centre. They found that exposure to torture can be linked to a severe decline in ADL skills.  
28 The small sample of 17 participants limit the generalisability of this study. However, the use  
29 of standardised measures, including the Assessment of Motor and Process Skills (AMPS)  
30 (Fisher et al., 2014) which is sufficiently powered to detect change and widely used within  
31 healthcare settings, enhance the credibility of the findings, making them applicable to  
32 practice. This study makes a strong case for occupational therapy in supporting people  
33 affected by displacement and trauma and for further research about ADL and suitable  
34 interventions for this population. Similarly, Trimboli et al. (2019) emphasised the suitability  
35 of occupational therapy for addressing the needs of forced migrants. As the profession  
36 builds a united stance for helping displaced people, further research could be instrumental  
37 to lobby for the improvement of conditions and treatment of this population and argue the  
38 case for provision of occupational therapy.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

55 To develop theories and explanations that can be used to improve the experiences of  
56 asylum-seekers, reviews and evidence synthesis are needed. Several scoping reviews  
57 already exist (Huot et al., 2016, Siddique et al., 2019; Cipriani et al., 2020). Huot et al.  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 (2016) underlined the resiliency of forced migrants and ability to draw on existing skills and  
4 experience to adapt and cope with change. The breadth of geographical area covered, and  
5 the generic characteristics of the process within the context of forced migration, make the  
6 findings rather broad and over-generalised. In fact, Huot (2016) identified a need for a  
7 systematic review to provide a deeper understanding of experiences of occupational issues,  
8 which this study aims to address.  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16

17 Systematic reviews are integral to evidence-based healthcare practice. Whilst quantitative  
18 systematic reviews are arguably a more established research tool, their purpose is used to  
19 determine what works, from a positivist standpoint, whereas qualitative systematic reviews  
20 explore how something works in more depth, from a phenomenological perspective (Boland  
21 et al., 2017). Qualitative systematic reviews are widely used to explore the perspectives of  
22 marginalised groups (Marshall et al., 2019) which is imperative for informing person-centred  
23 practice and a priority for occupational therapy (RCOT, 2020).  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

33 Traditional occupational science theory risks perpetuating predominantly western-centric  
34 ideas about what occupations are considered meaningful or valued, particularly regarding  
35 the over-simplistic categorisation of occupations into domains of productivity, leisure, and  
36 self-care (Hammell, 2009). Research that reflects diverse cultures (Hammell, 2017) and  
37 conveys the perspectives of marginalised groups is needed to enable occupational  
38 therapists to provide effective, client-centred interventions (Trimboli et al., 2019). Beyond  
39 identifying barriers to participation, understanding the meaning of occupation during the  
40 asylum-seeking experience and the factors supporting engagement, can pave the way for  
41 strength-based approaches that draw upon the resilience and capabilities of people from  
42 forcibly displaced communities. This approach avoids views that perpetuate 'other' or  
43 'deficit-discourse' perspectives (Yeo, 2020).  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55

56 Occupational therapy research is duty-bound to expose and challenge human rights  
57 violations to live up to its philosophy of enabling *all* people to live full and meaningful  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 occupational lives (WFOT, 2019). Occupational value and meaning can only be fully  
4 understood when considered in relation to one another (Persson et al., 2001). This review  
5 aimed to explore how asylum-seekers experience meaningful occupational engagement and  
6 what factors facilitate their participation, asking the question: *'how do forced migrants*  
7 *experience meaning and value in their occupations during the process of seeking asylum?'* It  
8 utilised a strength-based approach to identify how people use agency, despite limited  
9 opportunities and disadvantage, to engage in occupations that facilitate meaning and  
10 wellbeing. The Value and Meaning in Occupations model (ValMO) (Persson et al., 2001)  
11 provided a theoretical lens to explore the relationship between the value and meaning of  
12 occupation. Figure 1 demonstrates the three interlinking triads that comprise ValMO. A  
13 meta-ethnographic approach enabled the development of new theoretical insights,  
14 responding to calls for occupation-focused research to develop a strong theoretical  
15 knowledge base that can support this emerging area of practice and research (Delaisse and  
16 Huot, 2020).  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

### 30 **Method**

31  
32 A qualitative systematic review informed by PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) was  
33 conducted to capture existing interdisciplinary literature exploring the perspectives of  
34 asylum-seekers relating to occupational participation. The interpretative method of meta-  
35 ethnography was used to synthesise data from the selected studies to generate new insights  
36 (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Meta-ethnography is a well-established method for synthesising  
37 qualitative research in healthcare because it can enrich understandings of client experiences  
38 and was selected as an appropriate method for this study (Cahill et al., 2018). The research  
39 was guided by a critical realist paradigm which acknowledges multiple perspectives of a  
40 shared external reality (Edgley et al., 2016). This approach enabled capturing the way in  
41 which the phenomenon of being an asylum-seeker is experienced which is aligned with the  
42 meta-ethnography approach. Critical realism provides the basis for the analysis of social  
43 problems as a means of identifying solutions for social change, an approach compatible with  
44 this study (Fletcher, 2017). An awareness of the role of the researchers in co-constructing  
45 the research outcomes was adopted within this review (Noblit and Hare, 1988). To increase  
46 awareness and address bias, a reflexive diary was kept by the first author throughout the  
47 research process as recommended by Kralik (2005); and discussed by both authors.  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## Search Strategy

Four electronic databases: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Allied and Complementary Medicine (AMED), PsycINFO and PubMed were searched for articles relating to the occupational experiences of asylum-seekers. A second search identified additional articles within migration and sociology journals and led to the inclusion of SAGE and Scopus databases, ensuring an exhaustive search to identify all relevant articles published in accordance with Noblit and Hare's (1988) guidelines. Additionally, reference lists of included papers and relevant scoping reviews were examined for relevant literature as suggested by Boland et al. (2017). The search terms contained terms related to 'asylum-seeking', combined with 'occupation' and 'meaningful' activities. Search syntax were adapted in accordance with the unique features of each database to ensure searches identified the relevant data, as recommended by Dundar and Fleeman (2017).

Since Huot's (2016) scoping review of the 'occupational experiences of forced migrants', there has been an increase in research on the occupational experiences of forced migrants. Furthermore, the past ten years have seen an increase in the number of people forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2021a). Therefore, the search was limited to publications between 2010-2021 to ensure evidence is current and less likely to overlap with earlier reviews.

## Study Selection

An inclusive strategy was adopted throughout the selection process to ensure that any studies where relevance was unclear were taken forward to the next stage to avoid eliminating papers of potential value to the review (Butler et al. 2016). This review only included primary data from peer reviewed journals to enhance the credibility of research. Studies presenting secondary data were not selected due to the risk of misinterpreting original findings. To maintain a focus on the occupational experiences of asylum-seekers, evaluations of interventions were excluded.

## Quality Assessment

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (2019) for qualitative literature was used to assess the methodological quality of included studies. The tool aided the recording of key findings as well as strengths and limitations of the studies, [see Table 1 below](#). However, the checklist was not intended to be used to exclude studies from final selection. [Figure 2](#) shows the articles retrieved at each stage of the search using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2020).

## Data Analysis

The analysis was principally inductive; however, literature relating to the occupational experiences of asylum-seekers informed the analysis of studies by orienting the researcher to potential themes. Noblit and Hare's meta-ethnographic approach (1988) was followed. This involved selecting a topic of interest, carrying out a systematic search of the literature to identify relevant articles and then identifying salient concepts within each study. Data was collected in the form of first order evidence; quotes from participants in the studies, and second order evidence; the researcher's description of the participant's experience. Where participant quotes were limited, authors' descriptions were used as first order evidence. The concepts from the various studies were amalgamated to identify reciprocal or refutational categories (Britten et al., 2002). Finally, the translations were synthesised into a line of argument to explain the conceptual categories, [see Table 2 below](#). The ValMO model was then used as a lens to discuss the findings.

## Results

The search generated 1047 papers, which were reduced to seven for inclusion in the review (Figure 2). Two papers (Smith, 2015, Smith, 2018) used overlapping data from an ethnographic study, but as both had different aims and interpretations of findings they were



1  
2  
3 treated as two separate sets of data with repetition excluded. Of the seven papers, four  
4 included asylum-seekers as their sole participants, one included a combination of asylum-  
5 seekers and refugees, and two studies included participants whose application for asylum  
6 had been refused. Aside from Smith's (2015; 2018) UK-based studies, each article focused  
7 on the experiences of people seeking asylum in different countries, specifically Norway,  
8 Australia, Denmark, Iceland and Italy. All studies described the specific socio-political  
9 context to their study and acknowledged this as a limitation to the generalisability of their  
10 findings. One study was based on a sample of exclusively female participants (Robleda,  
11 2020), and another, only men (Morville and Erlandsson, 2013). The rest of the studies  
12 included a mixed sample and represented a range of cultural backgrounds. The CASP tool  
13 (2019) showed all the selected studies to be of high quality which supports the reliability of  
14 findings. Reasons for slightly lower scores were due to unclear reporting on study limitations  
15 and/or a lack of consideration of the relationship between the researcher and the  
16 participants.  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31

32 An initial reading of the studies produced 20 concepts across the data, many of which  
33 shared similarities. The concepts were then translated into 10 categories which represented  
34 the broad findings of the studies. These translations were then further analysed for  
35 connections and structured into three clearly defined themes or 'third order interpretations'  
36 incorporating the 10 categories (Table 2).  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

### 45 **1. Keeping busy as a coping mechanism**

46  
47 Within this theme, participants used occupations as a means of distracting themselves from  
48 their problems, and to help cope with the lack of opportunity to participate in personally  
49 meaningful occupations. Participants filled their days with activities to find structure,  
50 routine, and purpose. For many, the activity had little intrinsic meaning, but within the  
51 context of asylum-seeking, served as a distraction from challenging experiences. Some  
52 participants found activities had soothing effects, providing momentary escapism to cope  
53 with anxiety and emotional distress.  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

### ***Filling time***

Some participants acknowledged the effects of insufficient occupations and the importance of keeping busy. In many cases participants reported that their activities were instrumental in distracting them from negative emotions and helped to avoid depression.

*'...if I don't do something, I will go crazy'*

(Morville and Erlandsson, 2013 p.217)

### ***Coping mechanism***

Some participants used activities to regulate emotions and alleviate stress.

*'...when I wake up, I go to the gym and I take out all the stress out of my body, out of my mind, lifting heavy weights. That's how pretty much I spend my day.'*

(Hartley and Fleay, 2017, p. 1194)

### ***Doing to create structure and purpose in daily life***

Participants focused on living day-by-day, filling time so as not to allow the lack of meaningful occupation and existence in liminal space weigh them down.

*'It was the small routinised activities of cooking, doing grocery shopping, preparing the children for school, [etc.] that seemed to help Pinar maintain a certain stability and purpose.'*

(Robleda, 2020, p.87)

## **2. Maintaining continuity with past life by seeking to preserve identity, roles, values, and culture**

Participants experienced significant imposed occupational deprivation due to lack of meaning and relevance in their daily occupations (Morville & Erlandsson, 2013). However, despite the restrictions to occupational choice, they endeavoured to move beyond simply 'keeping busy'. Participants sought occupations that fostered connection with identity, provided a sense of purpose, and fulfilled their need to feel valued.

### ***Doing for others***

Many participants were motivated to engage in occupations to benefit others, linking these with cultural ideals and their own desired outcomes of value and purpose.

*'I always like volunteering, since when I was young ... in places where there are under-privileged people ... they brought us up like that, try doing something for people'*

(Smith, 2015 p.91.)

### ***Past occupations***

Many maintained customs and occupational choices which enabled continuity with past life and an assertion of sense of self and identity.

*'Every Sunday, they would have pancakes and a big breakfast, just like they did 'back home' before moving to Norway...following the same family customs... can be seen as a tactic through which Pinar seeks to maintain normality and familiarity for her family in such unstable and foreign circumstances'*

(Robleda, 2020, p.88).

### ***Using existing skills***

Drawing on past interests and experiences enabled some participants to establish new roles despite challenging context and limited choice.

*'Mohammad maintained his earlier occupations... writing articles for the centre's weekly paper, and other media about the situation in the centres and in his homeland. He considered it important and a continuation of his work against the dictatorship in Iran'*

(Morville and Erlandsson, 2013, p.218)

### ***Identity and roles***

Some participants used engagement in activity to resist stereotypes and express identity and self-worth.

*'When I start working, I will be a normal person, not the poor refugee girl. I will be a*

1  
2  
3 *normal person. You don't want someone to pity you, this is not a good feeling you*  
4  
5 *know?'*

6  
7 (Robleda, 2020, p.90)  
8  
9

### 10 ***Spirituality as a source of comfort and guidance***

11  
12 For many, religion and spirituality were important in guiding occupational habits and helped  
13  
14 to make sense of their difficult circumstances.  
15

16  
17 *'The Islamic practice of praying five times a day gave her several opportunities a day to reflect on her*  
18  
19 *situation...consulting the Qur'an would provide her with guidance on how to deal with her*  
20  
21 *circumstances, in this way, she was able to regain hope and motivation through this particular*  
22  
23 *religious practice.'*

24  
25 (Robleda, 2020, p.89)  
26  
27  
28  
29

### 30 **3. A drive to build a new future and be a productive member of society**

31  
32 This theme is the value attributed by asylum-seekers to occupations considered to  
33  
34 contribute to their future lives  
35

#### 36 ***Work***

37  
38 Work was perceived as a valuable occupation, improving the subjective wellbeing of asylum-  
39  
40 seekers through connecting and contributing. Although most participants were restricted  
41  
42 from paid employment, they all chose to engage in work-like occupations including  
43  
44 volunteering, education, and helping others which they associated with opportunities to  
45  
46 learn skills and improve their sense of self-worth.  
47

48  
49 *'When you are working, you'll gain more experience. You will be meeting foreign people. You*  
50  
51 *always go out. You always learn more. You improve in a language. You improve in a respect.*  
52  
53 *You improve in a manner'*

54  
55 (Lintner and Elsen, 2018, p.83)  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

### **Social connection**

Engaging in occupations that facilitated social connection were valued by asylum-seekers. Opportunities to interact with people from host communities were deemed important for integrating within the new society, developing language skills and gathering social capital that would support their endeavours to build a future.

*'It helps me, at least you socialize with the people around the shop, and I can practise Icelandic.'*

(Ingvarsson et al., 2016, p.420)

For others, connecting with people with shared experiences provided opportunities for emotional support, helping them to share and cope with difficulties.

*'knowing that she had a friend whom she could write to when she needed it and meet for a coffee once in a while was essential.'*

(Robleda, 2020, p.88)

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the meaning and value of occupations during the process of seeking asylum. The results show that asylum-seekers experience meaning and value in occupation, despite having little choice or control over occupational engagement. The meaning gained from occupational engagement supported wellbeing in the short-term, but due to lack of choice and control over occupational engagement, the long-term benefits of meaningful occupational engagement are questionable. Without employment rights, people's lessened ability to contribute to society was damaging to their self-worth, identity, health, and wellbeing. Despite this, participants found meaning through engaging in occupations within the context of asylum-seeking. These included: drawing on past skills and experiences related to education and work to adapt occupations, and creating relevant and purposeful opportunities; channelling personal and cultural values to shape adapted occupations. These were focused on occupations that contributed to future goals; and applying insight about the intrinsic benefit of keeping busy for maintaining health and

1  
2  
3 wellbeing. The most meaningful experiences were related to occupations that involved  
4 drawing on personal experiences and skills to help others.  
5

6  
7 The ValMO model (Figure 1) was used as a lens to interpret the results with an occupational  
8 focus. The results are presented within the three dimensions of value: concrete, symbolic  
9 and self-reward. These support the analysis of how occupations are experienced as  
10 meaningful contributions to personal life-narratives from micro, meso and macro  
11 perspectives (Persson et al., 2001). Finally, the person-occupation-environment triad will be  
12 used to discuss the factors facilitating occupational participation.  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20

### 21 ***Concrete Value***

22 Concrete value represents the tangible outcomes resulting from engaging in occupation.  
23 The results suggest that many of the occupations performed by asylum-seekers hold  
24 predominantly concrete value, as in the theme: 'doing to fill time and as a coping  
25 mechanism'. Due to limited occupational choice and lack of control over time-use, many  
26 perceived their occupations as essential for survival. Here, the value attributed to  
27 occupation is related to the avoidance of negative consequences. This reflected other  
28 research which shows the potential for occupations to provide relief and distraction from  
29 pain (Millar and Warwick, 2019). Other occupations that appeared to hold concrete value  
30 included those relating to the skill-acquisition to help move beyond asylum. Language  
31 learning, volunteering and opportunities to integrate with host societies can be understood  
32 as holding concrete value, as depicted most clearly in the theme 'building a life for the  
33 future'. These perspectives support the importance of occupations in a pursuit for a life  
34 beyond asylum (Steindl et al. 2008).  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 Many occupations were a means to forget and cope with distress, and not necessarily  
52 valued and meaningful in themselves. However, when performed regularly within the  
53 specific circumstance of seeking asylum, they formed routines, which generated purpose  
54 and meaning in daily life. Thus, occupations can be considered from a meso perspective  
55 (Persson et al., 2001). Alternatively, the value attributed to skill-development and time-  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 filling that supported a new future can be interpreted from a macro perspective. Therefore,  
4 these occupations can be considered as a pathway out of and beyond asylum, reflecting  
5 personal identity, continuation of culture and personal narrative (Persson et al, 2001).  
6  
7  
8  
9

### 10 11 12 ***Symbolic Value*** 13

14 The symbolic value of an occupation opens opportunities for communication with others  
15 (Persson et al., 2001). The results show that people valued occupations that enabled them  
16 to communicate hidden aspects of themselves. For example, through volunteering and  
17 doing occupations for the benefit of others, people expressed values of altruism, community  
18 and collectiveness (Ingvarsson et al., 2016, Smith, 2018, Morville and Erlandsson, 2013,  
19 Smith, 2015). In doing so, they asserted some agency and refuted the imposed identity of  
20 'asylum-seeker'. The symbolic value of occupations that enabled a positive expression of self  
21 was important. At the personal level this supported the expression of personal values and  
22 identity; at the cultural level it connected to past cultural values and customs. At the  
23 universal level, certain occupations, such as helping others or participating in sport, are  
24 valued and recognised as positive across cultures.  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

35 Hammell (2020) states that occupational choice is largely shaped by the social environment.  
36 In most instances, occupations conformed with the cultural norms and values of the host  
37 nations, including seeking opportunities to learn the native language and gain employment.  
38 However, whilst people wanted to be able to perform occupations that conformed with the  
39 host nation's norms and values, such as work and education, restricted rights and  
40 opportunities prevented them from doing so. Consequently, they needed to draw on the  
41 symbolic value of the norms and values inherent in their lives prior to seeking asylum,  
42 achieved through identification with sub-groups such as family, church, or profession. This  
43 conflicted between wanting to maintain continuity with their established culture and  
44 adapting to new environmental demands. The theme 'building toward a future' reflected  
45 occupation choice that can be linked to 'symbolic value'. People drew on existing skills and  
46 values to communicate a sense of self but also to demonstrate a willingness to conform and  
47 adapt to their new environment.  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Another symbolic dimension of occupational value is the concept of 'catharsis' (Persson et  
4 al., 2001), meaning temporary relief from inner pressures. For some, engaging in physical  
5 activity, listening to music, reading and prayer provided brief opportunities for cathartic  
6 relief from the constant worry about their past, present and future.  
7  
8  
9

10  
11 Occupations providing symbolic reward closely aligned with a macro perspective of  
12 occupation and are represented, notably within the themes of 'maintaining continuity with  
13 past...' and 'building towards the future'. This finding supports the importance of  
14 occupations that reflect interests, culture, and life-stories (Kielhofner, 2008). Occupations  
15 associated with altruistic ideals (e.g. volunteering) were apparent across all studies,  
16 supporting the idea that a sense of belonging, through connecting and contributing, is  
17 integral to wellbeing. However, the aim of working, studying and earning to build a future  
18 life were considered more desirable. This reflects the economic, social and wellbeing  
19 outcomes associated with work and education (Marmot, 2010).  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

### 31 ***Self-Reward Value***

32  
33 This value dimension focuses on the experience of immediate rewards, such as enjoyment  
34 and pleasure, when engaging in occupations. This was only described in a few accounts of  
35 reading, listening to music, and exercise, possibly due to limited opportunities for this  
36 experience. This echoes Morville and Erlandsson's (2013) conclusion that despite these  
37 occupations holding some value, they were not seen as intrinsically valuable and  
38 meaningful.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

48 By examining the results of this systematic review through the ValMO model, there was an  
49 imbalanced relationship between the concrete, symbolic and self-reward values in the daily  
50 occupations of asylum-seekers. For occupational engagement to provide health and  
51 wellbeing benefits in the long-term, there should be a balanced relationship between the  
52 three value dimensions (Persson et al., 2001). From this research, many occupations  
53 appeared to hold concrete value but there was a scarcity of self-reward and symbolic value  
54 attributed to daily occupations. The findings show that although people experienced value  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 and meaning in occupations during asylum, the long-term health and wellbeing benefits of  
4 occupational engagement may not be achieved due to limited occupational choice, long  
5 periods of waiting and enforced passivity.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10  
11 This discussion has shown it is not the occupation itself, but rather the context and purpose  
12 it serves that provide value and meaning. Therefore, although the model was helpful for  
13 conceptualising the results, its usefulness was limited by the complex and subjective nature  
14 of human occupation.  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19

### 20 21 22 ***Factors Facilitating Occupational Engagement*** 23

24 A further aim of this study was to identify factors that supported occupational engagement  
25 for asylum-seekers. Most participants had high levels of education and qualifications  
26 enabling them to apply skills and experience to their circumstances. For example, the men  
27 in Morville and Erlandsson's (2013) study sought out opportunities to work in roles that  
28 matched their experience: working as translators, teachers, sports coaches, and in  
29 journalism. Participants also understood the importance of keeping busy, exercising, and  
30 social interaction to promote health and wellbeing. Some participants highlighted  
31 spirituality as important for guiding them through difficult times and finding meaning. Their  
32 religion presented other opportunities including volunteering, social interaction, routine,  
33 and rituals.  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45

46 Facilitating factors relating to the social environment included opportunities to participate  
47 in productive occupations such as volunteering, work and education. Lintner and Elsen  
48 (2018) found that work provided significant value and meaning for their participants who  
49 were allowed to do so. Supportive relationships with others reinforced meaningful  
50 engagement in occupation, provided opportunities to share problems, express personal and  
51 cultural identity and fostered a sense of belonging. For participants in Ingvarsson et al's  
52 (2016) study, living in the city was preferred because of more opportunities to volunteer  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 and join social groups, enabling them to blend in and disassociate with the label of ‘asylum-  
4 seeker’.  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9

### 10 **Implications For Practice And Research**

11  
12 This review has shown that opportunity to fill time with meaningful occupations is severely  
13 restricted for asylum-seekers. Considering a person’s occupations in the context of meaning  
14 provides some understanding of occupation beyond the confinements of self-care, leisure,  
15 and productivity. This has the potential for occupational therapists to: develop a more  
16 significant relationship with the client; expose the possibility of outcomes beyond function  
17 and performance; uncover the potential for working with people and communities that do  
18 not fit into the medical model; and help clients to maintain a sense of identity and meaning  
19 in contexts that are perceived to be out of control (Reed et al., 2011). This study also raises  
20 considerations for other practitioners, policy makers, healthcare providers about how  
21 asylum-seekers cope with ongoing uncertainty while they wait for their refugee claim to be  
22 finalised, and the types of coping strategies they may engage in.  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34 To reduce the influence of researcher/participant power dynamic for more authentic  
35 results, future studies conducted in the first language of participants are needed.

36  
37  
38 Ethnographic studies completed by asylum-seekers/forced migrants, might provide a more  
39 nuanced and deeper exploration of the occupational experiences of this population and  
40 could lead to more targeted interventions.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45

### 46 **Strengths And Limitations**

47  
48 The inclusive search strategy and scope of databases, leading to the selection of relevant  
49 studies and an extensive representation of perspectives was a strength of this study. It has  
50 identified facilitating factors, promoting a strength-based approach to supporting asylum-  
51 seekers and contributed insights to the existing literature, which has predominantly focused  
52 on the barriers to meaningful occupation. Additionally, utilising the ValMO model to  
53 interpret the results offers unique occupation-focused insights from a multidisciplinary  
54 evidence base.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6 A limitation of conducting a qualitative systematic review is the risk of misinterpreting the  
7 primary data. To mitigate this, a high number of quotes and extracts from articles were  
8 included. The decision to exclude studies published in languages other than English should  
9 also be noted. Additionally, accessing first-order evidence was difficult because data  
10 extracts included in the primary papers was already selected from the full dataset by the  
11 study authors. These extracts do not therefore reflect the totality of participant experiences.  
12 Schutz's (1971) notion of first, second and third-order constructs were used in the analysis  
13 to provide more insight by explaining the phenomena observed. However, the level of  
14 interpretation offered in some of the papers was minimal, with many papers highly  
15 descriptive in nature. This made it difficult at times to distinguish first from second-order  
16 interpretations.

## 27 28 29 **Conclusion**

30  
31 This review has illustrated some of the multifaceted meanings that occupations hold for  
32 asylum-seekers. Notably, occupations are an essential element to existence for asylum-  
33 seekers in their various forms and contexts. They helped to preserve identity and continuity  
34 of their life-narrative; helped people make sense of disorder in their life, provided  
35 opportunity for reflection leading to motivation toward goal-directed occupation; and  
36 provided soothing effects, enabling momentary escapism to cope with anxiety and  
37 emotional distress. However, the ValMO model has highlighted an imbalance between  
38 construct, symbolic and self-reward value in the occupations during asylum-seeking. This  
39 suggests that although providing some meaning in context, the long-term benefits might not  
40 be achieved. The profound and multifaceted human occupational injustices experienced by  
41 asylum-seekers is highlighted, calling for further research and policy review to address this  
42 humanitarian crisis. In light of the current situation in Ukraine, it is likely that the future  
43 needs of all asylum-seekers will be an important challenge for occupational therapists in the  
44 coming months and years. The authors hope that this paper will provide a useful and  
45 relevant contribution to those affected by displacement.

46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

### Key findings:

Despite being subjected to significant occupational deprivation, asylum-seekers seek meaning and purpose in life by engaging in occupations that help cope with distress, promote sense of identity and support future goals.

### What the study has added:

- Synthesis of available evidence about the occupational experiences of asylum-seekers using the ValMO model.
- Identification of factors supporting occupational engagement for asylum-seekers.
- Identification of future research and practice implications.

### References

- Boland, A., Cherry, M.G. & Dickson, R. 2017. *Doing a systematic review: a student's guide*, Second edn, SAGE, London.
- Butler, A., Hall, H. & Copnell, B. (2016), 'A Guide to Writing a Qualitative Systematic Review Protocol to Enhance Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing and Health Care', *Worldviews on evidence-based nursing*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 241-249.
- Britten, N., Campbell, R., Pope, C., Donovan, J., Morgan, M. & Pill, R. 2002. Using meta ethnography to synthesise qualitative research: a worked example. *Journal of health services research & policy*, 7, 209-215.
- Burchett, N. & Matheson, R. 2010. The need for belonging: The impact of restrictions on working on the well-being of an asylum-seeker. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 17, 85-91.
- Cahill, M., Robinson, K., Pettigrew, J., Galvin, R. & Stanley, M. 2018. *Qualitative synthesis: A guide to conducting a meta-ethnography*, SAGE Publications, London, England.
- Cipriani, J., Davis, M., Gralinski, E., Monforte, S. & Strausser, J. 2020. 'Examining the Occupational Needs and OT Intervention Strategies Used with Refugee Populations: A Scoping Review'. *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 74, 7411505183.
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. 2019. Available online at: [https://casp-uk.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CASP-Qualitative-Checklist-2018\\_fillable\\_form.pdf](https://casp-uk.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CASP-Qualitative-Checklist-2018_fillable_form.pdf), (Accessed 10 March 2021).
- Delaisse, A., C. & Huot, S. 2020. 'Using theory to inform understandings of occupation in a migration context'. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 27, 359-375.

1  
2  
3  
4 Dundar, Y., & Fleeman, N. 2017. Developing my search strategy & applying inclusion criteria. In A.  
5 Boland, M.G. Cherry R. Dickson (Eds.), *Doing a systematic review: A student's guide*, (2nd ed., pp.37-  
6 59). London: SAGE.

7  
8  
9 Erlandsson, L.-K., Eklund, M. & Persson, D. 2010. Occupational value and relationships to meaning  
10 and health: Elaborations of the ValMO-model. *Scandinavian journal of occupational therapy*, 18, 72-  
11 8.

12  
13 Fletcher, A. J. 2017. 'Applying critical realism in qualitative research: methodology meets method'.  
14 *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20, 181-194.

15  
16 Darawsheh, W. B. 2019. Exploration of Occupational Deprivation Among Syrian Refugees Displaced  
17 in Jordan. *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 73, 7304205030p1-7304205030p9.

18  
19 Gupta, J. & Hocking, C. 2018. Special Issue: Occupation, Well-being and Immigration. *Journal of*  
20 *Occupational Science*, 25, 1-3.

21  
22 Fisher, A. G. & Bray Jones, K. 2014. Assessment of Motor and Process Skills, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, Three Star  
23 Press, Fort Collins, CO.

24  
25 Hammell, K. W. 2009. Self-care, productivity, and leisure, or dimensions of occupational experience?  
26 Rethinking occupational "categories". *Canadian journal of occupational therapy (1939)*, 76, 107-114.

27  
28 Hammell, K. W. 2017. Opportunities for well-being: The right to occupational engagement. *Canadian*  
29 *Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 84, 209-222.

30  
31 Hammell, K. W. 2020. Making Choices from the Choices we have: The Contextual-Embeddedness of  
32 Occupational Choice. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 87, 400-411.

33  
34 Hartley, L., Fleay, C. & Tye, M. E. 2017. Exploring physical activity engagement and barriers for  
35 asylum-seekers in Australia coping with prolonged uncertainty and no right to work. *Health & social*  
36 *care in the community*, 25, 1190-1198.

37  
38 Huot, S., Kelly, E. & Park, S. J. 2016. Occupational experiences of forced migrants: A scoping review.  
39 *Aust Occup Ther J*, 63, 186-205.

40  
41 Ingvarsson, L., Egilson, S. T. & Skaptadottir, U. D. 2016. "I want a normal life like everyone else":  
42 Daily life of asylum-seekers in Iceland. *Scandinavian journal of occupational therapy*, 23, 416-424.

43  
44 Kielhofner, G. 2008. *Model of human occupation: theory and application*, Baltimore, Md, Lippincott  
45 Williams & Wilkins.

46  
47 Kralik, D. 2005. *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences*, Blackwell  
48 Science Ltd, Oxford, UK.

49  
50 Lintner, C. & Elsen, S. 2018. Getting out of the seclusion trap? Work as meaningful occupation for  
51 the subjective well-being of asylum-seekers in South Tyrol, Italy. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 25,  
52 76-86.

53  
54 Mayne, J., Lowrie, D. & Wilson, J. 2016. Occupational Experiences of Refugees and Asylum-seekers  
55 Resettling in Australia: A Narrative Review. *OTJR (Thorofare, N.J.)*, 36, 204-215.

56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4 Marmot, M. 2010. *Fair Society Healthy Lives (The Marmot Review)*, Institute of Health Equity,  
5 Available online at: [https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-](https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report-pdf.pdf)  
6 [lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report-pdf.pdf](https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report-pdf.pdf). (Accessed 20 May 2021).  
7

8  
9 Marshall, C.A., Boland, L., Westover, L.A., Wickett, S., Roy, L., Mace, J., Gewurtz, R., Barbic, S. &  
10 Kirsh, B. 2019. 'Occupational experiences of homelessness: A systematic review and meta-  
11 *aggregation*', *Scandinavian journal of occupational therapy*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp. 1-14.  
12

13 Mirza, M. 2012. Occupational Upheaval during Resettlement and Migration: Findings of Global  
14 Ethnography with Refugees with Disabilities. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 32, S6-S14.  
15

16 Morville, A., L. & Erlandsson, L. K. 2017. 'Occupational deprivation for asylum-seekers.' In:  
17 Sakellariou, D. & Pollard, N. M. (Eds), *Occupational therapies without borders: integrating justice*  
18 *with practice*, Edinburgh, Elsevier.  
19

20  
21 Morville, A.-L. & Erlandsson, L.-K. 2013. The Experience of Occupational Deprivation in an Asylum  
22 Centre: The Narratives of Three Men. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 20, 212-223.  
23

24 Morville, A.-L., Erlandsson, L.-K., Danneskiold-Samsøe, B., Amris, K. & Eklund, M. 2015. Satisfaction  
25 with daily occupations amongst asylum-seekers in Denmark. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational*  
26 *Therapy*, 22, 207-215.  
27

28  
29 Noblit GW and Hare RD. 1988. *Meta-ethnography: Synthesizing Qualitative Studies (Vol. 11)*.  
30 *Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications*.  
31

32 Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L.,  
33 Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu,  
34 M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., McGuinness, L. A., Stewart, L. A., Thomas,  
35 J., Tricco, A. C., Welch, V. A., Whiting, P. & Moher, D. 2021. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated  
36 guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71.  
37

38  
39 Persson, D., Erlandsson, L.-K., Eklund, M. & Iwarsson, S. 2001. Value dimensions, meaning, and  
40 complexity in human occupation—a tentative structure for analysis. *Scandinavian journal of*  
41 *occupational therapy*, 8, 7-18.  
42

43 Reed, K. D., Hocking, C. S. & Smythe, L. A. 2011. Exploring the Meaning of Occupation: The Case for  
44 Phenomenology. *Canadian journal of occupational therapy (1939)*, 78, 303-310.  
45

46 Robleda, Z. W. 2020. Re-Inventing Everyday Life in the Asylum Centre: Everyday Tactics Among  
47 Women Seeking Asylum in Norway. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10.  
48

49  
50 Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2020), *Top 10 priorities for occupational therapy research*  
51 *in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/rcot.co.uk/top-10>. (Accessed 10 August 2020).  
52

53 Schutz A: *Collected Papers* . (1971), The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1: 361  
54

55 Siddiqui, S.M., Said, E., Hanna, B., Patel, N.H., Gonzalez, E.L., Garrett, S.L., Hilton, C.L. and Aranha, K.,  
56 (2019). 'Addressing Occupational Deprivation in Refugees: A Scoping Review'. *Journal of Refugee &*  
57 *Global Health*, 2(1), p.3.  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Smith, H. C. 2015. An exploration of the meaning of occupation to people who seek asylum in the  
4 United Kingdom. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 78, 614-621.

5  
6 Smith, H. C. 2018. Finding purpose through altruism: The potential of 'doing for others' during  
7 asylum. *Journal of occupational science*, 25, 87-99.

8  
9  
10 Steindl, C., Winding, K. & Runge, U. 2008. Occupation and participation in everyday life: Women's  
11 experiences of an Austrian refugee camp. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 15, 36-

12  
13 Trimboli, C., Rivas-Quarneti, N., Blankvoort, N., Roosen, I., Simó Algado, S. & Whiteford, G. 2019. The  
14 current and future contribution of occupational therapy and occupational science to transforming  
15 the situation of forced migrants: Critical perspectives from a think tank. *Journal of occupational  
16 science*, 26, 323-328.

17  
18  
19 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2021a. *Figures at a Glance*. Available from:  
20 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>, (Accessed 10 August 2021).

21  
22  
23  
24 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2021b. *Asylum-seekers*. Available from:  
25 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-seekers.html>, (Accessed 10 August 2021).

26  
27  
28 World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). 2019. *Position statement, Occupational  
29 Therapy and Human Rights (revised)*. Available from:  
30 <https://www.wfot.org/assets/resources/Human-Rights.pdf> (Accessed 10 January 2020).

31  
32  
33 World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). 2014. *Human Displacement*. Position Paper  
34 Revised. Available at: <http://www.wfot.org/resourcecentre.aspx>. (Accessed 20 July 2020).

35  
36 Yeo, R. 2020. The regressive power of labels of vulnerability affecting disabled asylum-seekers in the  
37 UK. *Disability & Society*, 35, 676-681.

38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60