“The Challenges I Face”: Occupational Injustices of Women with Disabilities in Sierra Leone

Department of Occupational Therapy, New York University
Valerie Aziegbe, OTS, Kimberly Byrne, OTS, Daniel Min, OTS, Jillian Mongiove, OTS, Crystal Mulligan, OTS, Courtney Thomas, OTS, & Janet Njelesani PhD, OTR/L

Introduction

Being in a romantic relationship is an integral part of social participation and an anticipated occupation for many women with disabilities. In Sierra Leone, societal attitudes prevent women with disabilities from participating in meaningful relationships. The denial to participate in a meaningful romantic relationship is a matter of occupational justice.

Aim

The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of being in a relationship for women with disabilities in Sierra Leone from an occupational justice perspective.

Theoretical Framework

An occupational justice lens identifies individuals as occupational beings and recognizes that each individual has their own unique occupational needs, wishes, and habits that are based on their own capacities and circumstances. Each individual requires varying occupational opportunities in order to optimize their participation (Durocher, Gibson, & Rappolt, 2013).

Methods

The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of being in a relationship for women with disabilities in Sierra Leone from an occupational justice perspective.

Findings

Even When They’re Small describes how the occupational needs of women with disabilities living in Sierra Leone are met, often this person is their child.

Deserve to Be Loved addresses the occupational wishes of the women. They desire to fulfill roles that are important to them, it is their wish to become a mother and wife.

Breaking the Cycle of Injustice speaks to the occupational injustices women with disabilities faced in Sierra Leone. Women talked about going through a cycle of injustices that included abandonment, use, abuse, and then leaving.

Discussion

The cycle of injustice the women faced occurs because of the stigmatization of disability and cultural barriers that prevent them from participating in equal, consensual relationships. Limited accessible government assistance and the lack of opportunity for inclusive education also contributes to the cycle of injustice. From an occupational justice lens, the women’s breaking of the cycle of injustice is important because it focuses on their return to engaging in meaningful occupations such as being a mother, taking care of their family, and finding a meaningful relationship.

Implications for Occupational Therapy

The cycle of injustice the women faced occurs because of the stigmatization of disability and cultural barriers that prevent them from participating in equal, consensual relationships. Limited accessible government assistance and the lack of opportunity for inclusive education also contributes to the cycle of injustice. From an occupational justice lens, the women’s breaking of the cycle of injustice is important because it focuses on their return to engaging in meaningful occupations such as being a mother, taking care of their family, and finding a meaningful relationship.

References