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Occupational marginalisation in everyday life from fear of gender-based violence

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Abstract

Introduction: Women are known to experience fear of gender-based violence (GBV) and change their behaviour in response, though occupational science has done little to research this. Criticism has been levied against occupational science for failing to critically situate occupation within socio-political systems to illuminate drivers of everyday inequality and exclusion.

Purpose: This primary research study aimed to understand the impact of fear of GBV on occupational participation.

Methods: Using descriptive phenomenology, data from 8 semi-structured interviews (7 women, 1 non-binary participant) were analysed according to Colaizzi's method.

Findings: Fear of GBV was ubiquitous for participants and came with a range of associated emotions. Participants spoke of the process of socially learning fear of GBV - internalising fear articulated in social discourse, media and in conversations with friends and family. Fear of GBV limits occupational participation as people change when and how they do things, and introduce risk mitigating behaviours.

Implications for Occupational Science: This study supports the idea that occupational injustice does not always arise from overt forces. Participants appear to experience occupational marginalisation, their occupational choices narrowed through social norms and attitudes. Participants' occupations are inseparable from the context they are part of. Equally, the way people participate in everyday occupations may inadvertently perpetuate fear, marginalisation and oppressive social structures or be the site of resistance. This study furthers efforts to move beyond individualism and person-environment dualism in occupational science. This occupational perspective on fear of GBV may be harnessed to raise awareness and advocate for social transformation.