

Human Occupation & Health HES-SO – Feb 2024

Occupational justice concepts as applied in occupational therapy (and beyond)

Michael P. Sy PhD

Occupational therapist, Occupational scientist, & health professions educator

Senior Researcher, Institute of Occupational Therapy
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland)
Social media: @drmikesyot

(C) Michael P. Sy PhD | 2024 | Michael.Sy@zhaw.ch



Aims

1. Discuss the evolving concept of **occupational justice** from a **developing world** perspective.
2. Introduce the ***Occupational Justice Health Questionnaire*** as a tool for practice in occupational therapy, disability work, public health, and justice work.
3. Share **examples** of how occupational justice concepts can be translated into **practice application** within and beyond occupational therapy.

Disclaimer

The knowledge that you will acquire from today's webinar is inspired by creative, critical, and innovative occupational therapists around the world and underpinned by my personal and professional experiences and scholarly works in the past 15 years.

I am very open to discourses, questions, and critiques to further this work on occupational justice to revolutionize occupational therapy and occupational science in the 21st century.




Defining occupational justice

- OJ is the access to and participation in the full range of meaningful and enriching occupations afforded to others, including opportunities for social inclusion and the resources to participate in occupations to satisfy personal, health, and societal needs (AOTA, 2020, p. 79).
- OJ expands on the concept of social justice which overlooks injustices related to participation in daily life occupations – injustices related to doing rather than having. OJ recognizes that equality or sameness can produce injustices because of human, social, and occupational differences (IAG:OS 2005, in Wicks 2012).
- We need to be aware that the current definition of OJ is colonizing and largely underpinned by Western values.



Purpose of OJ

- OJ highlights people as occupational beings who can achieve health by living in a *just society* where they can have diverse opportunities and equitable resources towards occupational participation in varied contexts (Wilcock & Townsend, 2014).
- However, the concept of occupational justice remains *ambiguous* for many occupational therapists (Gupta, 2016) due to its evolving nature (Bailliard, 2024).



Just and equitable society?



OJ: **Relevance** to occupational therapy

- **Occupation** is a determinant of health, well-being, and justice (Patel, 2014).
- The occupational therapy profession is fundamentally purposed to address injustices to facilitate occupational participation and justice (Kronenberg, Algado & Pollard, 2005).
- "It is essential for occupational therapy students and practitioners to understand how inequitable social structures determine the range of occupations that are realistically available to individuals and communities..." (Hammell 2021, p. 369)

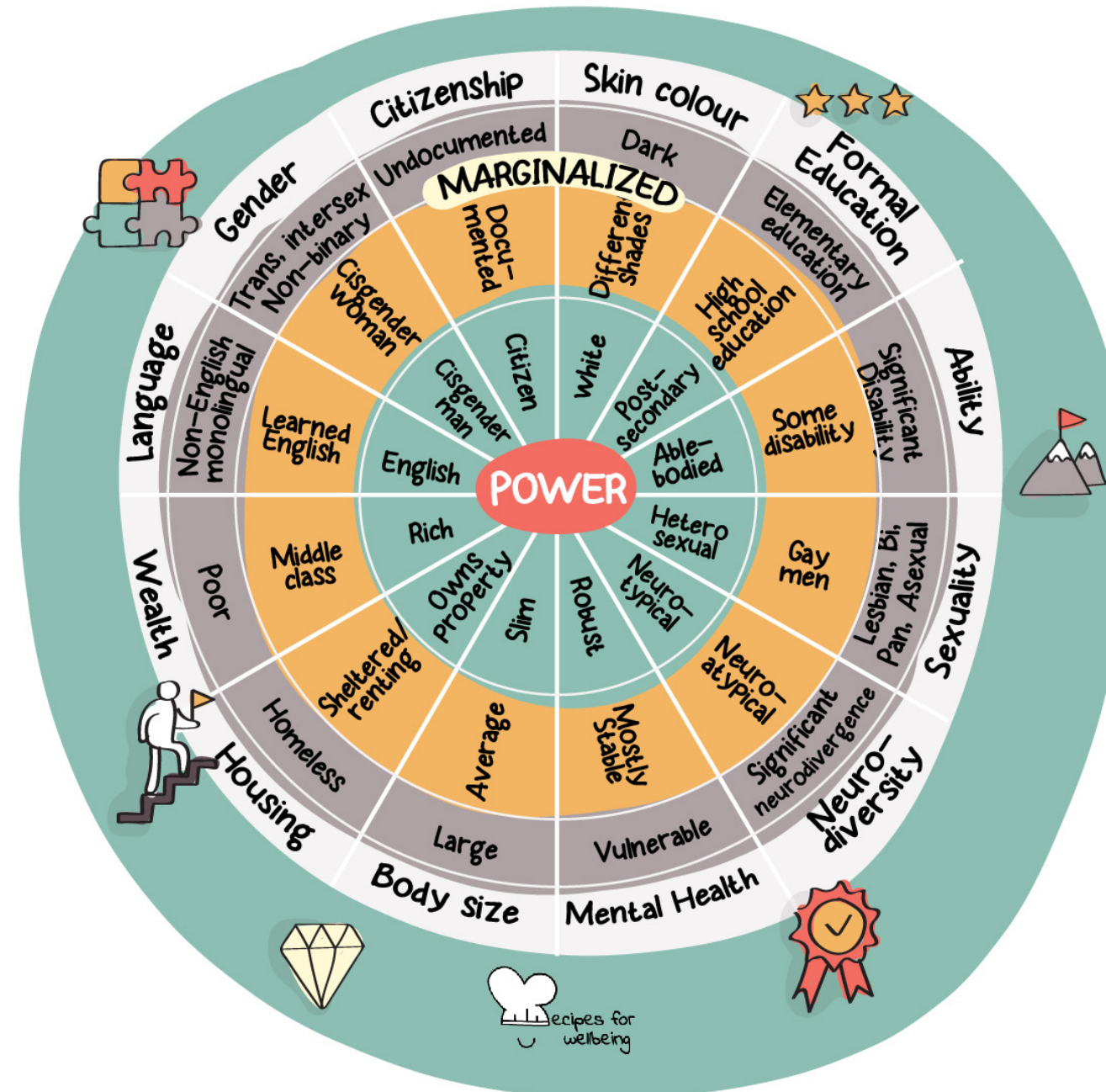
Reflective Exercise:

Intersectionality: Wheel of Privilege

(Adapted from Sylvia Duckworth, Canadian Council for Refugees, and Olena Hankivsky)

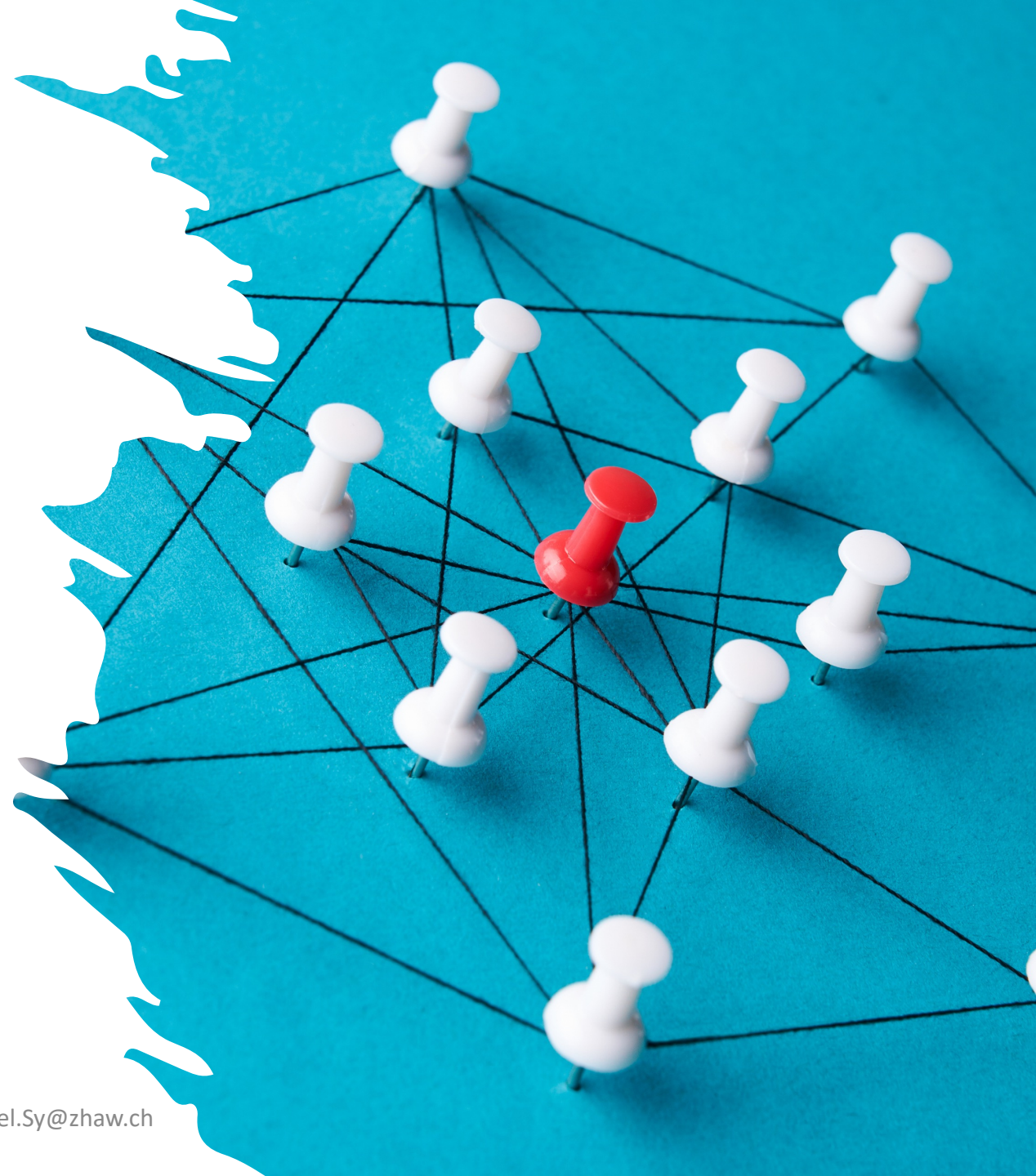
Quick task:

1. Take a look at the “wheel”.
2. Mentally mark how you describe yourself per identity category.
3. See and reflect if you are leaning towards ‘privileged/powerful’ or ‘marginalized’ group.



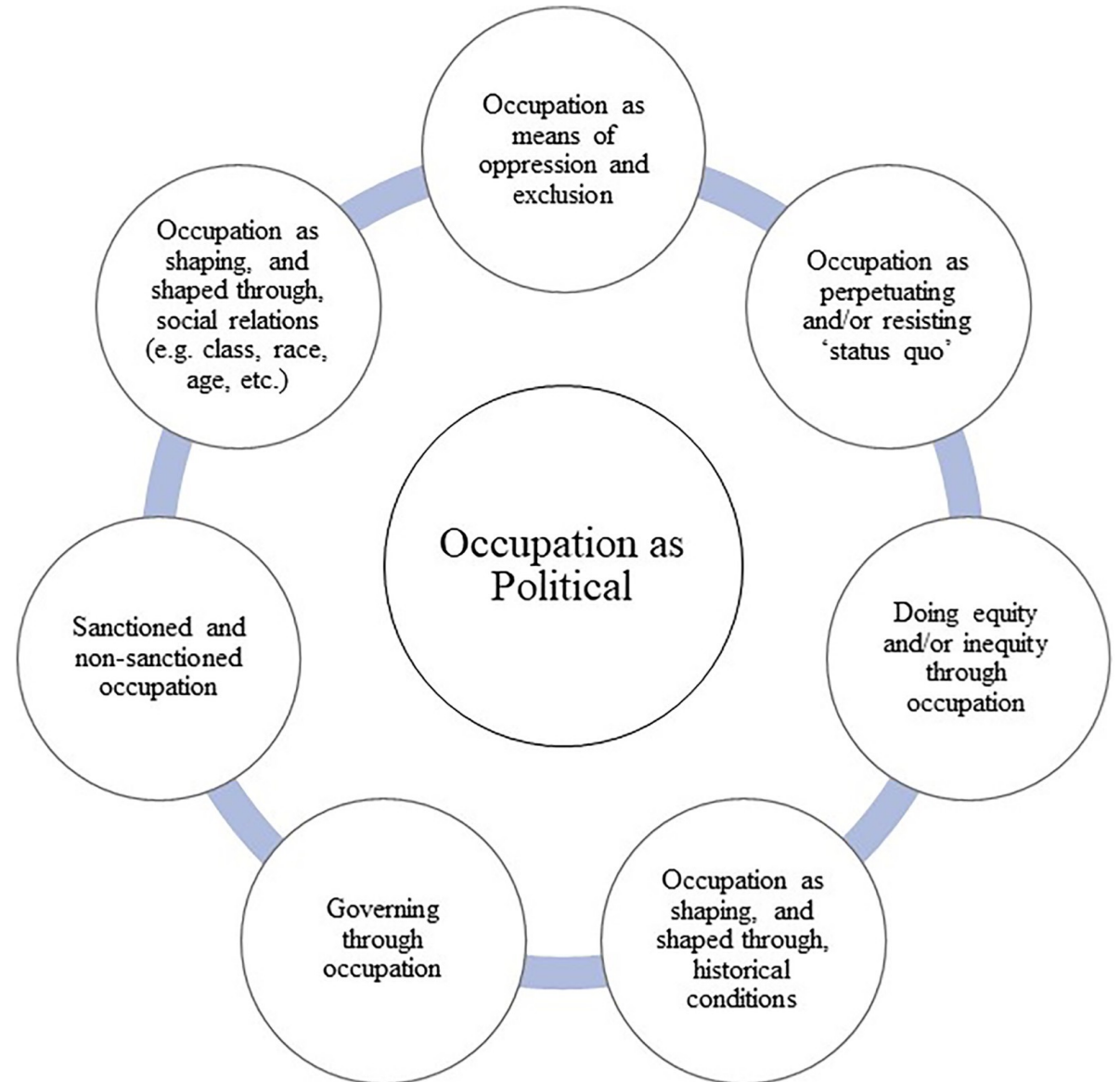
Conceptual models used in situating OJ

- Politicizing occupation (Laliberte Rudman, 2010)
- Framework of Occupational Justice (as cited in Stadnyk 2007, Lewis & Lemieux 2021)
- Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford & Townsend 2011)



Ways in seeing occupation as political

(Laliberte-Rudman, 2021)



Framework of Occupational Justice

(Stadnyk 2007)

- FOJ offers an occupational perspective of justice or injustice on everyday occupations.
- **Beyond individual factors affecting people's health, the FOJ highly considers social determinants to determine health outcomes.**
- This framework emphasizes on the inclusion of every individual in an occupationally just world.

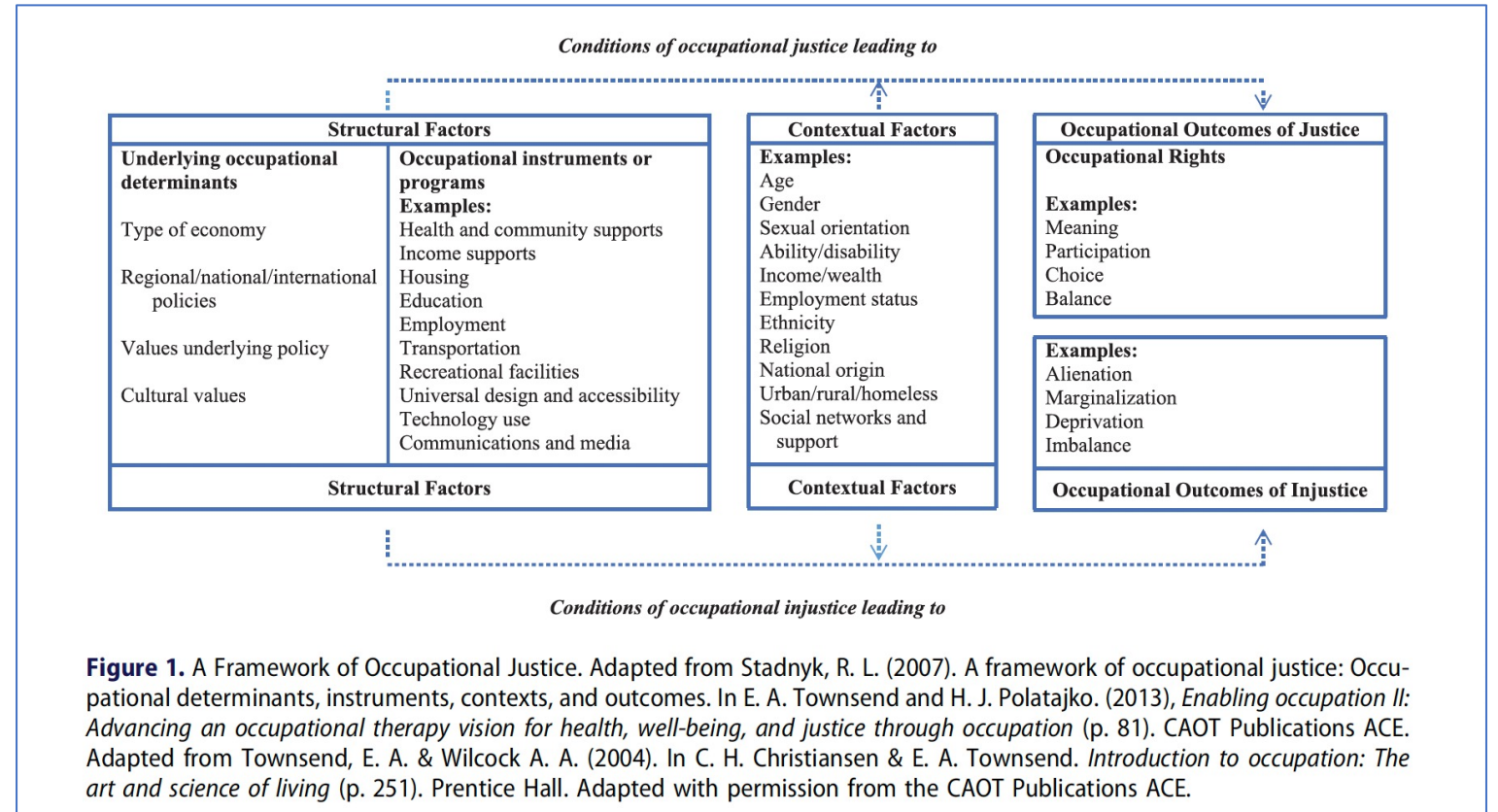


Figure 1. A Framework of Occupational Justice. Adapted from Stadnyk, R. L. (2007). A framework of occupational justice: Occupational determinants, instruments, contexts, and outcomes. In E. A. Townsend and H. J. Polatajko. (2013), *Enabling occupation II: Advancing an occupational therapy vision for health, well-being, and justice through occupation* (p. 81). CAOT Publications ACE. Adapted from Townsend, E. A. & Wilcock A. A. (2004). In C. H. Christiansen & E. A. Townsend. *Introduction to occupation: The art and science of living* (p. 251). Prentice Hall. Adapted with permission from the CAOT Publications ACE.

Framework of Occupational Justice

(Stadnyk 2007)

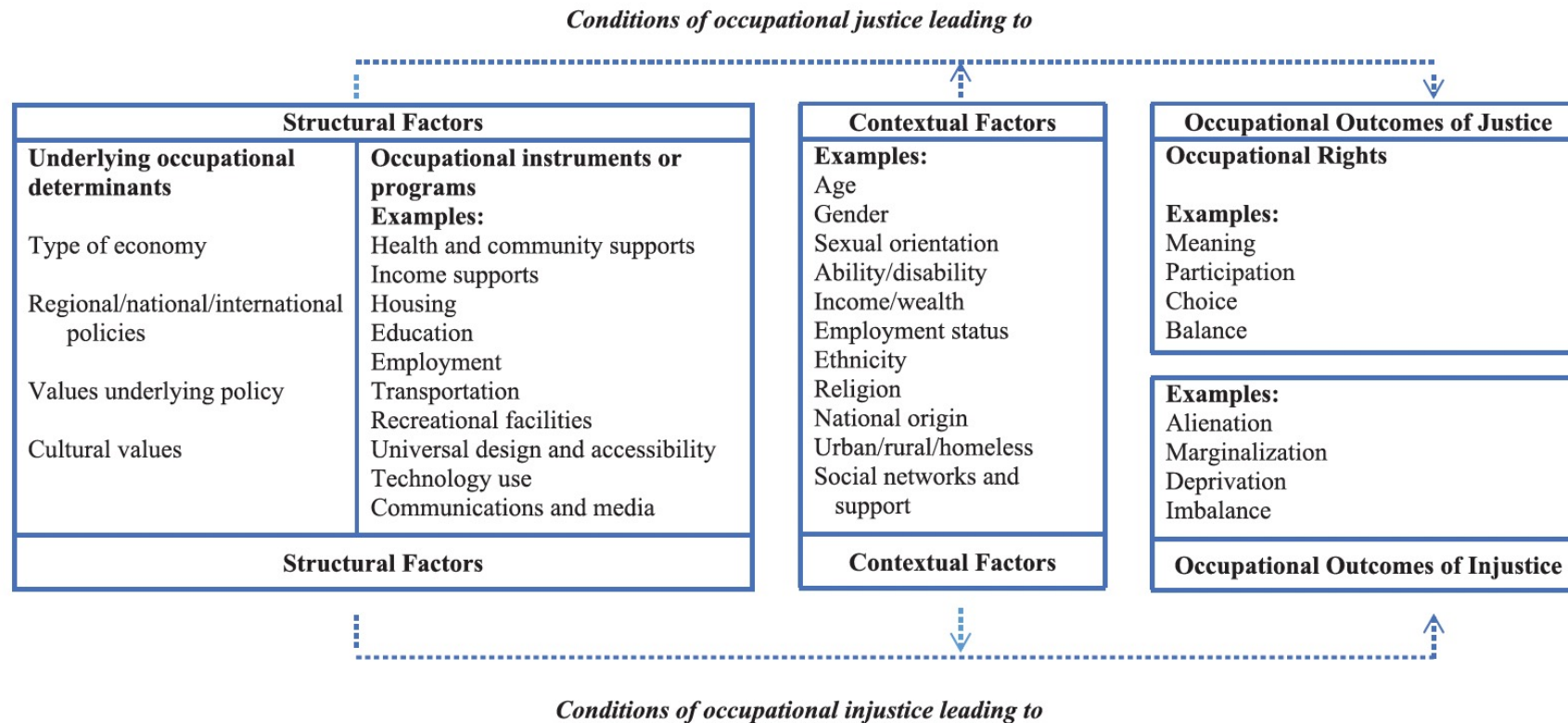
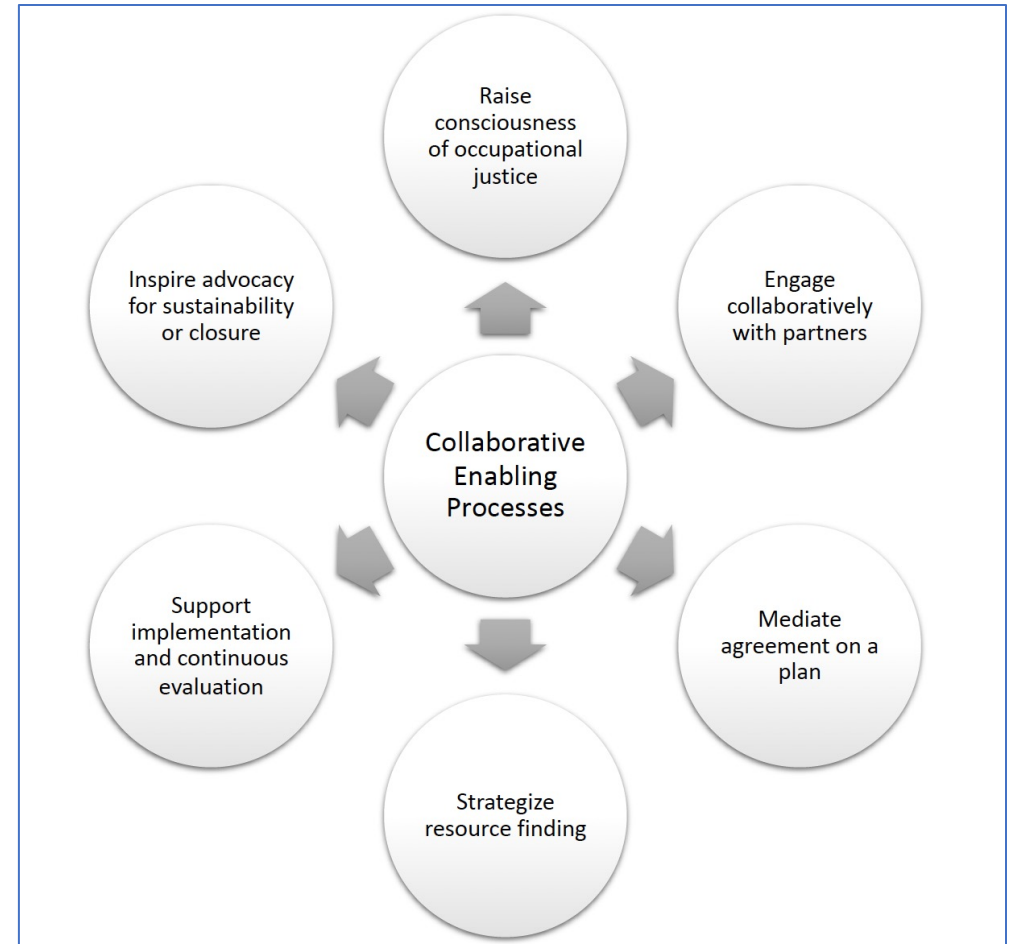


Figure 1. A Framework of Occupational Justice. Adapted from Stadnyk, R. L. (2007). A framework of occupational justice: Occupational determinants, instruments, contexts, and outcomes. In E. A. Townsend and H. J. Polatajko. (2013), *Enabling occupation II: Advancing an occupational therapy vision for health, well-being, and justice through occupation* (p. 81). CAOT Publications ACE. Adapted from Townsend, E. A. & Wilcock A. A. (2004). In C. H. Christiansen & E. A. Townsend. *Introduction to occupation: The art and science of living* (p. 251). Prentice Hall. Adapted with permission from the CAOT Publications ACE.

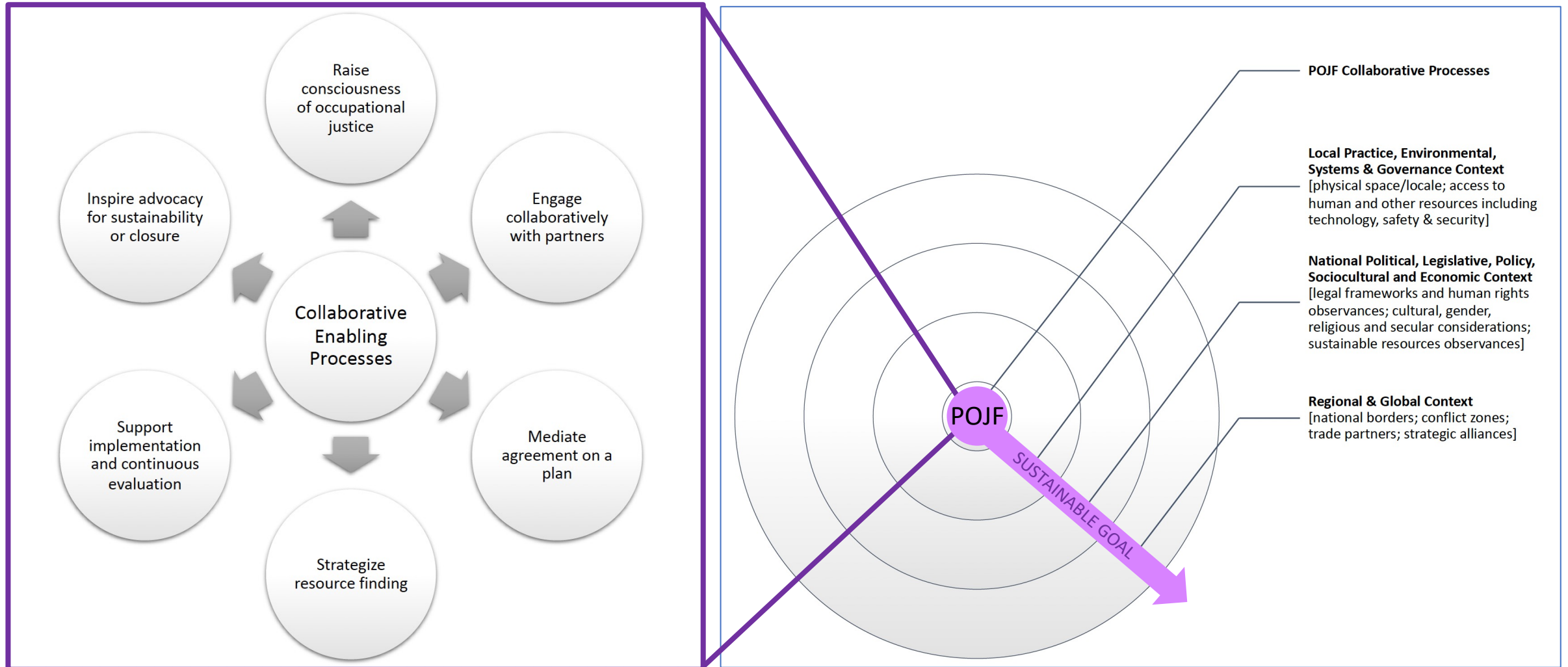
Participatory Occupational Justice Framework

(Whiteford & Townsend 2010)

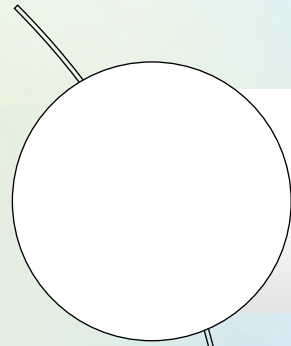
- Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (POJF 2010) aims to promote social inclusion and change by raising the awareness of and addressing occupational injustices.
- **It follows a non-linear flow with six key enablement skills that strengthen collaborative partnerships to achieve occupational justice.**
- The POJF has been used to frame some context-sensitive projects led by OTs especially in guiding assessment, intervention, and project sustainability (Sy et al 2019).



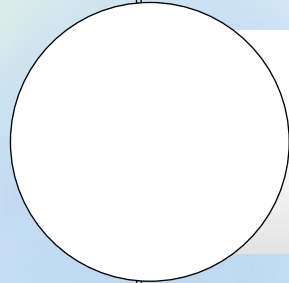
Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (Whiteford & Townsend 2010)



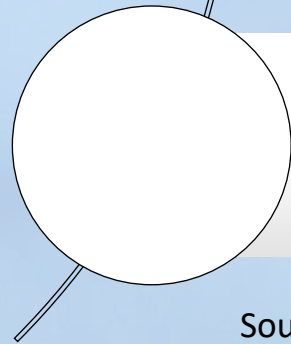
OJ Outcomes: *Occupational Rights*



1. Participate in a range of occupations that support survival, health and well-being



2. Choose occupations without pressure, force, coercion, or threats; free choice



3. Freely engage in necessary and chosen occupations without risk to safety, human dignity or equity.

Sources:

WFOT Position Statement on Occupational Therapy and Human Rights (2019);
Hocking, Townsend, & Mace (2021)



OJ Application in Populations

- Applying OJ concepts in occupational therapy can be challenging especially where OJ practices are largely relevant in non-traditional areas/populations (Hocking & Townsend, 2019).
- Remember that OJ is typically applied for populations (systems/structures) and not individuals (condition/disability).

Populations where occupational justice perspective has been utilized

(Townsend & Marval, 2013; Hocking & Townsend, 2019)

- People with disabilities who experience inadequate work accommodations
- People who are homeless
- People who are immigrants experiencing discrimination from the police, employers, and regulatory bodies
- Women who are barred from preferred occupations; sex violence against women
- Populations dealing with the following underlying structures: Ableism, Ageism, Colonialism, Heterosexism, Poverty, Racism, Sexism

(C) Michael P. Sy PhD | 2024 | Michael.Sy@zhaw.ch



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-ND](#)



OJ applied in Philippine studies

- Citizens recovering from drug addiction (Sy, et al. 2019; Sy & Ohshima, 2018)
- People with mobility concerns (spinal cord injuries) (Yao et al., 2020)
- Members of the LGBTQIA+ (Buenafe et al. 2022)
- University students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Delos Reyes, et al. 2021)
- Persons and groups engaged in non-sanctioned and “hidden” occupations (Sy, Martinez, & Twinley 2021; Sy, Carrasco, Peralta-Catipon, Yao, Dee, & Ching, forthcoming)
- Ableism and OT practice (Yao, Sy, Martinez, & Laboy 2022)

A Potential Tool for Practice: OJHQ

Occupational Justice Health Questionnaire: A potential tool that we can use in our practice in OT and justice work.

- What is it?
- How to use it?
- Where it has been used?

TABLE 45-1 Occupational Justice and Health Questionnaire

Instructions: Tick column 2 if client or community is able to meet the right listed in column 1. Tick one or more of columns 3-6 if client or community is unable according to the reason(s) stated.

Client: Individual, Community, or Population: _____ Date: _____

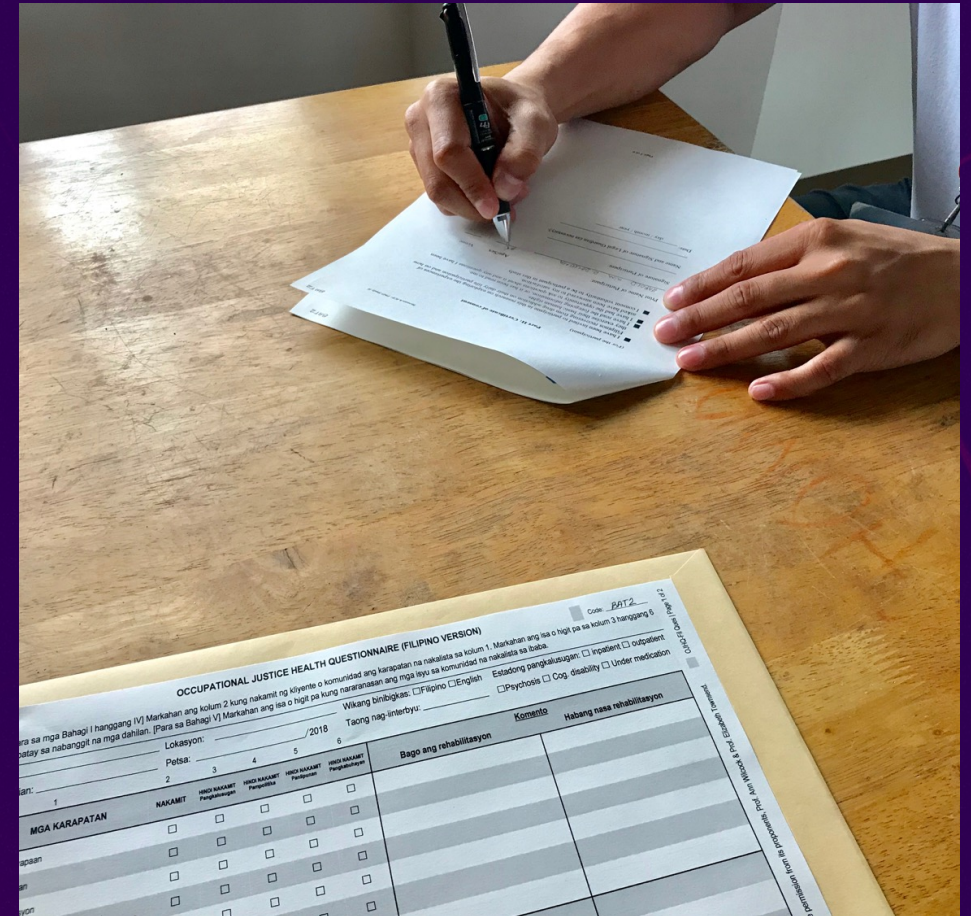
DETERMINANTS	ABLE	UNABLE Health	UNABLE Political	UNABLE Social	UNABLE Economic	COMMENT
Basic Needs World Health Organization (WHO)						
Peace						
Shelter						
Education						
Food						
Income						
Sustainable resources						
Social equity						
Social, Physical, and Mental Well-Being (WHO)						
Life pattern = well-being						
Work = well-being						
Leisure = well-being						
Can realize aspirations						
Can satisfy specific needs						
Has regular physical activity						
Change/cope with environment						
Validate personal uniqueness						
United Nations Rights—Living Standard Adequate for Health and Well-Being, Free Choice to:						
Employment						
Rest						
Leisure						
Holidays						
Community cultural life						
The arts						
Scientific advancement						
Participate in government						
Education toward full development of personality						
World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) Rights 5 As above plus free choice to participate in:						
Cultural beliefs and customs						
Local events						
SUMMARY: Instructions: Tick one or more if occupational injustice results from the community issues listed below.						
WHO and WFOT—The right to health and well-being through occupation is decreased because of:						
Poverty		Low incomes				
High unemployment		Stressful work conditions				
Gender discrimination		Social discrimination				
Limited education		Occupational discrimination				
Unhealthy lifestyles		Displacement				
Lack of health facilities		Political unrest				
Lack of recreational opportunities		Human rights violations				
Natural/man-made disasters		Armed conflict				
RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION						

OJHQ: What is it?

- Original purpose: to “prompt attention to occupational injustice in a busy practice day” and to “provide a starting point to document injustices and encourage action” (Wilcock & Townsend, 2014).
- Adapted and translated in the Filipino language (Sy, et al., 2019): OJHQ-Filipino Version
- 5-part questionnaire across 27 items:
 - Demographics
 - Part 1: Basic needs
 - Part 2: Overall well-being
 - Part 3 and 4: Living standards
 - Part 5: Specific injustices decreasing occupational participation
 - Recommendations/Action

OJHQ: How to use it?

- Each item is answered through binary options: Able and unable
 - Unable (health, political, social, and economic)
 - Place specific comments
- An interview guide has been devised to aid practitioners both in English and Filipino languages (this is one of the suggested ways of using the OJHQ).



OJHQ: Where has it been used?



So far, the OJHQ has been used in one country (Philippines) across different populations:

- substance addiction and rehabilitation setting (Sy & Ohshima, 2018; Sy, et al, 2019)
- college students (Delos Reyes, et al. 2021)
- LGBT community (Buenafe et al. 2022)

OJHQ

Demonstration

- Demographic
- Interviewing process
- Item completion
- Commenting process
- Considerations
- Action/Recommendations

Table 1. Occupational Justice Health Questionnaire (full copy)

Instructions. [For Parts I to IV] Tick column 2 if client or community is able to meet the right listed in column 1. Tick one or more of columns 3-6 if client or community is unable according to the reason(s) stated. [For Part V] Tick one or more if occupational injustice results from the community issues listed below.

Client: _____ **Age/Sex:** _____ **Recovery Status:** _____
Location: _____ **Date:** _____ **Interviewer:** _____

DETERMINANTS	ABLE	UNABLE Health	UNABLE Political	UNABLE Social	UNABLE Economic	COMMENT
--------------	------	------------------	---------------------	------------------	--------------------	---------

I. Basic Needs (WHO)						
Peace						
Shelter						
Education						
Food						
Income						
Sustainable resources						
Social equity						

II. Social, Physical, and Mental Well-being (WHO)						
Life pattern = well-being						
Work = well-being						
Leisure = well-being						
Can realize aspirations						
Can satisfy specific needs						
Has regular physical activity						
Change/cope with environment						
Validate personal uniqueness						

III. United Nations Rights—Living Standard Adequate for Health and Well-being. Free choice to:						
Employment						
Rest						
Leisure						
Holidays						
Community cultural life						
The arts						
Scientific advancement						

Participate in government						
Education toward full development of personality						

IV. World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) Rights 5 As above plus free choice to participate in:

Cultural beliefs and customs						
Local events						

V. WHO & WFOT—The right to health and well-being through occupation is decreased because of:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> Low incomes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High unemployment | <input type="checkbox"/> Stressful work conditions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> Social discrimination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited education | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupational discrimination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unhealthy lifestyles | <input type="checkbox"/> Displacement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of health facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Political unrest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of recreational opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Human rights violations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natural/Man-made disasters | <input type="checkbox"/> Armed conflict |

RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION

Source: Wilcock, A. A. & Townsend, E. A. (2014). Occupational Justice and Health Questionnaire (OJHQ). In B. A. Boyt Schell, G. Gillen, & M. E. Scaffa (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's Occupational Therapy* (12th ed., pp. 548-549). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

OJHQ: Development and Dissemination

URL: <https://tinyurl.com/ojhqsite>

(*To be updated very soon.)

Purpose of this Resource Site:

1. To disseminate OJHQ materials and resources easily and freely
2. To document inquiries from OTs and justice workers all over the work who would like to know more about OJ and the OJHQ

#ResourceSiteLaunched

<https://tinyurl.com/ojhqsite>



Our research team is happy to
launch the OJHQ resource site!

For health and social care professionals, educators and researchers

OJHQ: Our reflections?

(Sy, Roraldo, Delos Reyes, Yao, & Pineda, 2021)

- OJHQ can enhance practitioner's clinical and professional reasoning (especially narrative reasoning),
- Using OJHQ can facilitate justice-oriented practice across all levels of human functioning,
- Using OJHQ can activate reflective and critical OT practice,
- Recognition the interweaving and evolving nature of occupational injustices
- OJHQ can be used in interprofessional practice.



What could we have learned today?

- Occupational justice is part of our occupational therapy thinking in the 21st century; it is not an additive nor is it optional.
- Without an OJ perspective, we will continue to reinforce ableist, colonialist, and inequitable practices underpinned by the biomedical paradigm where we see our clients as ‘invalids that need fixing’.
- Injustices are everywhere. And while we cannot eradicate injustices in our society, we can make (small) ways to lessen and not reproduce them.



Open forum

Share, Ask, Critique, and Reflect

Email: Michael.Sy@zhaw.ch
Social media: [@drmikesyot](#)

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association – AOTA. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: domain and process. North Bethesda: AOTA.
- Bailliard, A. (2024). *Occupational justice*. In G. Gillen & C. Brown (Eds.), *Willard and Spackman's Occupational Therapy* (14th ed), pp. 139-160. Wolters Kluwer.
- Buenafe, J.P., Bejasa, N., Caseres, M., Arago, Q., Tuibeo, K.K., & Delos Reyes, R.C. (2022). Experiences of gay meen during the pandemic through the lens of occupational justice. <https://pjhrd.upm.edu.ph/index.php/main/article/view/618>
- Delos Reyes, R. D. R., Baes, D. M., Gualberto, S. M., & Pagcaliwagan, E. (2021) Experiences of University Students during Covid-19: A case-study using Occupational Justice Perspective. *Journal of Social Health*, 4(1), <http://socialhealthjournal.org/2021/02/23/experiences-of-university-students-during-covid-19-a-case-study-using-occupational-justice-perspective/>
- Gupta, J. (2016). Mapping the evolving ideas of occupational justice: a critical analysis. *OTJR*, 36(4), 179-194. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1539449216672171>.
- Hocking, C., & Townsend, E. (2015). Driving social change: Occupational therapists' contributions to occupational justice. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 71, 68 - 71. <https://doi.org/10.1179/2056607715Y.0000000002>
- Hocking, C., Townsend, E. & Mace, J. (2021). World Federation of Occupational Therapists position statement: Occupational Therapy and Human Rights (Revised 2019) – the backstory and future challenges. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, DOI: 10.1080/14473828.2021.1915608
- Hocking, C., & Whiteford, G. E. (2012). Introduction to Critical Perspectives in Occupational Science. In G. Whiteford, & C. Hocking (Eds.), *Occupational Science: Society, Inclusion, Participation* (pp. 1-7). Wiley Blackwell (Blackwell Publishing - Munksgaard). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118281581.ch1>
- Kronenberg, F., Algado, S. S., & Pollard, N. (2005). Occupational therapy without borders: learning through the spirit of survivors. Edinburgh: Elsevier/Churchill Livingstone.
- Lewis, E. & Lemieux, V. (2021). Social participation of seniors: Applying the Framework of Occupational Justice for healthy ageing and a new approach to policymaking, *Journal of Occupational Science*, 28:3, 332-348, DOI: [10.1080/14427591.2020.1843069](https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1843069)

References

- Patel, Amy, "Exploring Occupation as a Determinant of Health and its Contribution to Understanding Health Inequities" (2014). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 2131. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2131>
- Sy, M. P., Delos Reyes, R., Roraldo, M., & Ohshima, N. (2019). Uncovering the lived experiences of Filipino drug recoverees towards occupational participation and justice through an interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2019.1642380>.
- Sy, M. P., & Ohshima, N. (2019). Utilizing the Occupational Justice Health Questionnaire (OJHQ) with a Filipino drug surrenderee in occupational therapy practice: a case report. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 75(1), 59-62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14473828.2018.1505682>.
- Sy, M. P., Roraldo, M. P. N. R., Delos Reyes, R. C. R., Yao, D. P. G., & Pineda, R. C. S. (2021). Occupational justice health questionnaire: reflections on its application. *Brazilian Journal of Occupational Therapy/Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*, 29, e2961. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2526-8910.ctoAO2244>
- Townsend, E., & Marval, R. (2013). Can professionals actually enable occupational justice? *Cadernos De Terapia Ocupacional*, (2), 215. doi:10.4322/cto.2013.025
- Walley-Hammell, K. (2021). Social and structural determinants of health: exploring Occupational Therapy's structural (In)competence. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 88(4), 365-374. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/000841742111046797>
- Whiteford, G., & Townsend, E. (2011). Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (POJF 2010): Enabling occupational participation and inclusion. In F. Kronenberg, N. Pollard & D. Sakellariou (Eds.), *Occupational therapies without borders: Towards an ecology of occupation-based practices* (pp. 65-84). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Wilcock, A. A., & Townsend, E. A. (2014). Occupational Justice Health Questionnaire. In B. A. Boyt Schell, G. Gillen & M. E. Scaffa (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's occupational therapy* (pp. 548-549). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Yao, D. P. G., Sy, M. P., Martinez, P. G. V., & Laboy, E. C. (2022). Is occupational therapy an ableist health profession? A critical reflection on ableism and occupational therapy. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional*, 30, e3303. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2526-8910.ctoRE252733032>