Occupational therapy and culture: a literature review

Abstract

Background: Occupational therapy has culture as a relevant phenomenon of interest. Culture appears increasingly often in occupational therapy research, from diverse approaches and foci. As culture is difficult to define, and has political and ethical implications, an investigation into its usage is warranted. Aim: To identify and describe how culture as a broad phenomenon is expressed in OT research published between 2006 and 2011, regarding knowledge development in the discipline and its impact on practice. Methods: A qualitative study was carried out, using an integrative literature review. Thirty-nine studies in English were included. Results: From the analysis, two dimensions concerning expressions of culture emerged: “culture is alive” and “occupational therapy as a culture”. Aside from these dimensions, a group of forces that have an impact on these dimensions is described. Conclusions: In its understanding of expressions of culture, occupational therapy stands at a crossroads between traditional and critical approaches. A lack of critical insight into professional knowledge increases the risk that occupational therapy will remain satisfied with the current understanding of culture, based on the dominant knowledge. The discipline could fail to address the political, ethical, and theoretical issues required to reach the targeted diversity in its practice.

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