



*“This is not the future; I don’t have any future.”*

How do Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruption from an intersectional perspective; a Short-term Ethnography study

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In particular, have transparently indicated where and how I have used Generative Artificial Intelligence tools, including the way I have interpreted and integrated the outcomes into my own analysis and discussion.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

OT: Occupational Therapy/ Occupational Therapist

OS: Occupational science

RWD: Refugees with disabilities

UNHCR: United High Commission of Refugees

WHO: World Health Organization

WFP: World Food Program

## **Abstract**

Refugees with disabilities experience challenges transitioning to life in the refugee camp affected by their intersecting identities of having refugee status, living with disabilities and often their gender. The experiences of six refugees with disabilities were gathered mainly through interviews and participant observation for five weeks in the Dadaab refugee camp, to understand their participation in meaningful activities. This study uses an intersectional lens to highlight how multiple identities of refugees living with disabilities intersect with each other to create a compounded nature of occupational disruptions created by the conditions of a refugee camp and migration trajectories experienced. By developing a nuanced understanding of occupational disruptions experienced by refugees with disabilities, occupational therapists and occupational scientists can enable meaningful participation, and improve the quality of the lives of refugees with disabilities.

## **Keywords**

Occupational disruption, intersectionality, refugee status, disability status

## Introduction

Global disability estimates that out of 21.3 million reported cases of refugees (UNHCR, 2021) about 12 million persons with disabilities are experiencing forced displacement and this population is often under-identified (WHO, 2023) in the countries of asylum. In this study, refugees are described as people fleeing from their country of origin due to fears of persecution and generalized wars, availing themselves of the protection of a given country (UNHCR, 2021). A refugee camp here is defined as spatially and temporally as always having boundaries and being temporary in nature, while in practice this may be met with permanence (Turner, 2016).

Transitioning to becoming a refugee disrupts already established occupations of the refugees and alters the ways in which these occupations are performed (Blair, 2000), for instance, separation from one's family disrupts previously established family roles. Refugees experience disrupted sense of identity and belonging when they have to adapt to different cultural and social norms (Gupta, 2012). Refugees with disabilities are at an increased vulnerability for risk of these disruptions (Suleman & Whiteford, 2013). This is because the intersecting identities of living with disability and having a refugee status expose them to physical, social, and political contextual elements which disrupt their participation in meaningful occupations in the refugee camp. For example, the sandy environment of refugee camps restricts independent mobility.

Therefore, when occupational disruption is experienced by refugees with disabilities, it is most likely to be influenced by their intersected identities (Song & Freedman, 2019). Even with the growing number of studies done on refugees, refugees with disabilities remain to be invisible in the eyes of service providers.

To meet our responsibility as a profession in the enactment of occupational justice, this study uses an occupational and intersectional perspective to enhance the understanding of the concept of occupational disruption by individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities in a context presenting multiple barriers to participation.

### **Transitions in occupation**

Over life, individuals experience occupational changes where they shift from one occupation to another (Townsend, 2002). Becoming a refugee is one of the life circumstances that force individuals to change their established occupations and being displaced forcibly removes the choice of refugees taking up new occupations (WFOT, 2014). This limits their opportunities in accessing and participating in meaningful activities (Blair, 2000). Meaningful engagement in occupation indicates an individual's choice and access to those occupations and sheds light on structures that enable or hinder their ability to participate in them (Blair, 2000). Participating in meaningful occupations helps refugees deal with the experienced trauma of fleeing their country of origin (Whiteford, 2005) supporting their transition and meaning making of these life changes (Blair, 2000; Huot et al., 2013).

### **Effects of Occupational disruption**

The sudden need to flee or move and the precarity which individuals find themselves in, results in a disruption of multiple areas of daily life and roles. Occupational disruption, the engagement in occupations is one of these areas (Morville & Erlandsson, 2013). Occupational disruption occurs when individuals experiencing displacement suddenly lose the opportunity to



maintain and participate in their daily roles (Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000). Occupational disruption is a temporary state characterized by a significant interruption of identity associated with changes in the quantity and quality and nature of one's occupations following a significant life event, or transition affecting multiple areas of functioning, including social and emotional functioning (Nizzero et al., 2017; Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000).

The geographical displacement of RWDs into camps significantly disrupts the continuity of their social support systems such as, friends and families, their previous works, previous family roles (Gupta, 2012) and previous cultural and religious customs (Gupta, 2012; Mccarthy et al., 2020; Morville & Erlandsson, 2013; K. Roberts, 2002; Song & Freedman, 2019).

Disruption in meaningful occupations limits the abilities of the refugees within the new setting (Fisher & Hotchkiss, 2008) making them struggle to maintain an occupational life in the country of asylum (Davis & Souza, 2009). Prolonged limited capabilities, and unresolved occupational disruptions can lead to occupational dysfunction, impacting RWDs' ability to engage and perform in roles and routines (Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000) they were previously familiar with. However, given supportive conditions and just contexts, disrupted occupations can be regained, developed, or adapted to new ones (Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000).

### **Life in the Refugee camps**

Refugee camps, though intended to be temporary, in practice are experienced and met with permanence (Turner, 2016) and are characterized by various limitations depending on the length of stay of the refugees there (Steindl et al., 2008). Participants from a study by (Burchett & Matheson, 2010) describe their lives in the refugee camp as interrupted and in a state of limbo with the uncertainty of the future; whether they will be resettled, repatriated, or

integrated into the country of asylum (Bond et al., 2007). Refugee camps leave refugees somewhere between the life they left behind and the new unpredictable future (Schiltz et al., 2019). This uncertainty is linked to negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety with limited social support (Bailey Jr et al., 2009). The anxiety, stress and uncertainty refugees experience living in refugee camps present a safety risk of the future, profoundly affecting their occupational well-being and severely restricting their occupational participation (Campbell & Steel, 2015). The uncertainty of the future influences the refugees' volition in engaging in occupations that have long-term meaning such as marriage. The daily occupations of refugees are intrinsically intertwined with the law, social expectations, the physical and cultural environment, and the social isolation faced through discrimination in the camps (Connor Schisler & Polatajko, 2002; Martins & Reid, 2007; Simich et al., 2005; Steindl et al., 2008; Whiteford, 2005). RWDs are particularly vulnerable, and experiences limited access to available services in the camp. (Mccarthy et al., 2020) notes that participating in meaningful occupations helps to promote continuity, to enhance a smoother transition in new roles in a new country, and to create a sense of community after experiencing these disruptions.

The environmental factors in refugee camps deprive RWDs opportunities to participate in meaningful occupations which impacts their ability to fulfill their roles and disrupts their occupational routines (Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000; Wicks, 2001). For instance, mobility restrictions expose RWD to social exclusion, and disrupted access to services (Reilly, 2010a). Environments like refugee camps that do not support participation and create disruptions in opportunity to engage in satisfying and meaningful occupations are regarded as contributing to occupational injustice (Whiteford, 2005).

## **Intersecting vulnerabilities**

People with disabilities, both refugees and native-born, experience restrictions from participating in meaningful occupations due to barriers that reinforce occupational disruption (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004; G. Whiteford, 2004).

RWDs (Crock & Ernst, 2017) suffer layered disadvantages. Their refugee status is associated with political and social barriers that cut them off from the rest of the world (Steindl et al., 2008). After displacement, RWDs face social, environmental and political difficulties as they are stripped of the protection from their state of citizenship with their disabilities challenging their participation in society (Crock & Ernst, 2017). (Morville & Erlandsson, 2013) states that the intersectionality of being a RWD subjects them to environments that do not support their participation in meaningful occupation and to politically oppressive systems.

## **Intersectional and Occupational perspective**

Employing intersectional lens on refugees with disabilities, assists in understanding the constraints and challenges this population faces at diverse levels and intensities (Gupta, 2012).

Occupational engagement is a fundamental human need, (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999) and we need to consider what happens when individuals do not participate in occupations, even temporarily (Nizzero et al., 2017). With the assumption that humans are occupational beings (Yerxa, 1990) employing an occupational perspective when addressing disruptions experienced by individuals with intersected identities like disability and refugee status provides insights on how occupation can be used to regain or adapt altered roles and identities (Gupta, 2012). This shifts the focus from viewing their impairments as the problem, to acknowledging that societal,

and political structures isolate and exclude refugees with disabilities from full participation in occupations and in the community (Townsend, 1999; Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000). Using an intersectional and occupational perspective can determine what occupational opportunities exist in various places and for whom they exist, in addition to the way in which they are expected to be performed (Rudman, 2012).

Even though disrupted occupations can be regained or adapted (Whiteford & Wilcock, 2000), there is little knowledge of how refugees with disabilities experience this in the context of refugee camps. To address this, the following research question was applied in this study; how do Somali refugees with disabilities living in Dadaab refugee camp experience disruption from an occupational and intersectional perspective?

The researcher followed an interpretivism acknowledging the perceptions and experiences of the participants, while using these perceptions and experiences as a starting point for deeper inquiry through observation, use of theory, and evidence (Ryan, 2017).

### **Rationale of the study**

This study challenges both theoretical and practical aspects of OS and OT, by examining circumstances in which the growing concept of occupational injustices, such as occupational disruptions, encompassed with intersecting vulnerabilities such as disability and refugee status (Whiteford, 2000).

It was vital to examine issues such as the nature of the environment one is situated in, influencing RWD's occupational participation such as the refugee camps (Reilly, 2010a). To address occupational disruptions experienced by RWDs living in refugee camps, OT and OS need to view them beyond their biomedical limitations and look at their intersecting attributes from

an occupational perspective. This study bridges the knowledge gap on intersectional and occupational approaches from which to address the occupational disruption experienced by refugees with disabilities.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The study aimed gain knowledge about how Somali refugees with disabilities living in Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruptions from an occupational and intersectional perspective, with the following objectives.

1. To explore how occupational disruptions are experienced by Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp
2. To describe underpinning factors that influence occupational disruptions experienced by Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp

### **Reflexivity**

It is important I reflect on my personal background and interest in forced migration which influenced the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this study. The occupational injustices I was exposed to while working with refugees influenced the use of occupational justice framework as the theoretical framework. Ethnography was considered to delve into the intricate experiences of refugeeism by capturing the nuanced details of the interaction between their experiences and their multiple identities (Tickle, 2017).

To reduce personal biasness on the interpretation of the data and findings, I strived to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019) and

treating the participants as experts of their experiences. I reflexively thought about my religious background in relation to the cultural immersion in different religious context from mine. I remained aware of any negative influence of these differences and strived to treat the participants with respect, empathy and dignity, independent of my belief stance. I collected my data during Ramadhan season, a religious Islamic event, where I chose to put on religiously accepted attires and covered my head whenever I was in the community. This helped reduce the reactivity of my presence to my participants and displayed respect for their culture and religion. Recognizing the power imbalance between myself and my participants, I constantly reminded them of their rights and autonomy to participate in the research. This created an environment for them to share their experiences free from the fear of reprisal.

When entering the camp, I needed to adopt strategies like using a gatekeeper to negotiate my access and movement in the community. Ethical principles while using the gatekeeper were considered by explaining the importance of participants' anonymity, confidentiality and autonomy.

I kept a reflective journal to document my thought processes, feelings and observations and held discussion meetings with my supervisor who helped identify blind spots on any personal biases.

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a constructivist ontology positing that reality is co-constructed by individuals within a social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and applied an interpretivist epistemological stance that focused to uncover the meaning-making of the participants attached to their experiences.

### **Study Design and Methodology**

A qualitative design was used as the methodological underpinnings for this research, employing a short-term ethnography approach (Smith & Atkinson, 2017) to explore how six (5 Males, 1 Female) refugees with disabilities experienced occupational disruption. By sharing in-depth information about their experience (Zina, 2005), short-term ethnography tries to meet their socio-cultural needs (Larkey et al., 2001) of this population. It uses cultural immersion to help the researcher build rapport, gain trust, and engage with the participants (Tileagă et al., 2022) in their natural state. A five-week intense data collection process led to deeper understanding of their experiences in the refugee camp (Brett et al., 2022).

### **Data collection**

Data was collected from three sources, the intrinsic lives of the participants, the design and location of the refugee setting and significant objects to the participants, using various methods for data collection and analysis. Firstly, I conducted participant observation to observe the activities the participants invited me to (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019). During the observation, the researcher took field notes to record what was observed as well to document the participants' unspoken communication like their outward expressive emotions and the

researcher's own reflection about potential biases (Eriksson et al., 2012). The established direct relationships with the participants, helped the researcher learn their codes to understand the meaning of their actions and behaviors (Gobo, 2008). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to discuss in detail the occupations previously observed (Roberts, 2009) to gain deeper understanding of their meaning-making and experiences while participating in these occupations. The free-flowing semi-structured method (Adams, 2015), allowed the possibility of potential topics to come up where the researcher did not establish a fixed sequence through which the relevant topics were covered (Boyle, 1994). The interview sessions helped the researcher relay the interpretations back to the participants, who confirmed what information was used in the study (Boyle, 1994). The interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Visual data were collected in the form of photos, as well as artefacts which helped the researcher explore issues of identities, and experiences (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013), providing more information about the participants and their surroundings. Using these different data collection tools acted to triangulate information between the reported behavior of interviewees and the observation of their acts (Denzin, 2012).

### **Sampling and Study Population**

The sample group was selected through purposive sampling strategy (Khan, 2014) based on the conditions, purpose and availability of the participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

The participants were invited to participate through posters, word of mouth and a gatekeeper acted to mobilize the participants. The study was conducted during Ramadhan time and the participants that were selected initially withdrew from the study due to their



availability. With the help of a gatekeeper new participants were selected (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019) with emphasis on the ethical principle of the study.

To protect the anonymity of the participants, some details were omitted, and pseudonyms were used. This is discussed in detail in the ethics section.

### **Data Analysis and Reporting**

This study used a narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) to interpret data gathered with a back and forth between sampling, data collection and analysis of the data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). With the ethnographic approach, I analyzed the data while simultaneously presenting my interpretations of the participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). A narrative analysis allowed for in-depth attention to paid to the individuality and nuances of each participant (McCormack, 2004), where the fieldwork was analyzed and emergent plots (Mattingly, 1998) organized using intersectional and occupational lens (McCance et al., 2001) ordered into patterns for interpretation and significance. Being cognizant of the social norms of the setting under study, I described its social and cultural context. I employed a realist stance to describe how social, political and cultural norms shaped the participants' behavior (Atkinson, 2016), and used a first-person perspective to establish my position in my study setting, present the findings from my point of view (Gullion, 2016).

### **Ethical Consideration**

Several ethical issues were considered throughout this study and approval was granted by Ethical Committee for Student Research (ECSO-FG) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA) before collecting the data. I felt obligated to be ethical both professionally and

morally, because refugees with disabilities being vulnerable populations, ethical concerns such as power, and consent, confidentiality, and trust, risk to the researchers and potential harm to participants may arise (UNHCR, 2007) or manifest later (Jacobson et al., 2007).

Consent forms were given to the participants prior to data collection, and ensured they fully understood the study and voluntarily and knowingly signed the consent forms to ensure integrity in the research (De Wet, 2010) and were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Both verbal and written consent was used for consenting. Pseudonyms were used instead of their real names to protect their anonymity. Because of the sensitivity of this study and to minimize potential harm, the researcher identified mental health and psychosocial professionals for the participants. A gatekeeper was used to recruit new participants, with emphasis on ethical practices of ensuring participants' autonomy, confidentiality and anonymity.

## Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study, which aimed to explore the occupational disruptions faced by refugees with disabilities within refugee camps. The findings are outlined in three main narratives that stemmed from pairing the narratives of the participants and are organized by the plots. Firstly, the study delves into the uncertainty and agency throughout the migration trajectories. Followed by attempts to create stability in uncertain and fragmented context. Lastly the findings explore the participants' feelings of being stuck in the refugee camp.

### 1. Uncertainty and agency throughout the migration trajectory

#### *Raha – advocacy catalysts*

As she navigated unfamiliar borders on her journey of fleeing persecution to seeking asylum, Raha was involved in a road traffic accident, that caused her paraplegia. Despite the various occupational disruptions she faces, Raha is narrative flourishes with the need to negotiate for agency.

*“My leg, it’s not a birth disability, but when I came here [refugee camp] I got into a road accident until now I am using a wheelchair”*

Raha, a divorced mother of 2, has stayed in the refugee camp for the past 21 years, and has been running her own boutique shop for the past 5 years in Iftin camp, located 15 kilometers from Dadaab’s humanitarian base. To understand how she experiences accessing the camp, Raha invited me to her boutique stall. When I arrived, Raha together with her paid assistance were setting up the shop (see picture 1). Raha hired this lady who is a new arrival, to help her meet the financial needs she and her family have, as new arrivals in the camp. We see

that Raha not only meets her functional needs when it comes to running her shop, but she also advocates solidarity with other refugees.



*Figure 1 Shows the setting of Raha's boutique shop in Iftin market*

Being a divorced refugee woman with disability Raha is exposed to psychological gender-based violence. From an intersectional standpoint we see how this violence is associated with her gender, disability and refugee status. She experiences derogatory comments about her

disability and get harassed by male members of the community for her gender and entrepreneurial roles. Continuous exposure to this violence led Raha to suffer depression, impacting her productivity to perform daily chores.

*“The men say, ‘a disabled woman? how can she do business?’ ‘You cannot stand and make your shop, who can help you, you have no one’ At night I think about these, I cannot sleep I only cry and ask why this is happening?”*

Raha experiences challenges performing normative gender roles like meal preparation, home care and supporting her elderly mother because of the limitations of her disabilities which entrenches her dependence on others heightening her marginalization in society.

*“Preparing meals for the night is challenging, washing is not hard, but someone needs to hang them. It is very difficult”*

With the floods in the camp, it was hard to imagine how Raha navigated the environment coming to work (see figure 2).



*Figure 2 shows photo of a vehicle stuck in the flood (right) and a mobility device used in the camp (left)*

*“Disabled people face many problems because of the flood; they can’t go to the market, nobody to push them. The WFP even stopped food distribution because of the floods. some agencies are inaccessible, you won’t see those with disabilities. One day me and a lady [humanitarian worker] fought because she was giving money for flood support but there were no disabled people. Afterwards she told me to sign up 17 disabled people for the money”*

Here we see the conditions of the refugee camp reinforcing experiences of oppression such as systemic inequalities amongst disabled refugees. Also, we see that despite her own hardship and challenges, Raha uses her intersected vulnerabilities as an advocacy catalyst and voice to help those further marginalized in the community

***Faruk – levels uncertainty***

Faruk came to the camp past 33 years ago and shortly after, acquired an infection. Faruk was left undiagnosed and without proper treatment for 6 months before being referred to Nairobi for medical attention. He was diagnosed with meningitis and at the time of diagnosis, the symptoms had severely impacted his motor coordination and speech leaving him with ataxic cerebral palsy.

*“When I came here, this disability happened to me. After 6 months no medicine [and] no change the doctor said ‘we can’t help you, we don’t have the medicine, we must send you [to] Nairobi’*

We see the conditions of the camp expose Faruk to infectious diseases, and delay in access to proper medical services lead to acquisition of preventable disabilities.

Faruk arrived in the camp only with his father, who was his sole provider after becoming disabled. Shortly after, his father passed away, stripping Faruk of his social support, exacerbating his mental health condition, making it difficult for him to perform his daily tasks.

*“When my father died, I’m became very sick and started having stresses. I didn’t have anyone to take me in. This neighbor helped, with water, food, but when they were fasting, I won’t have food to eat. What can I do? It’s a very difficult life. No wife, no job, nobody to help me, what can I live in this world for, and I don’t want to continue stressing? I think maybe to [commit] suicide”*

We see how becoming an orphan, Faruk occupied another marginalized position making him more vulnerable in society. We see Faruk experiencing disrupted social support making him dependent on basic needs like food, which further perpetuates his marginalization.

I accompanied Faruk to the main hospital, where I saw how he experiences access to such essential services. The hospital's environment restricted Faruk mobility using his mobility device (see figure 3), forcing him to use the hospital self-propelling wheelchair. Faruk's disability limits him from self-propelling a wheelchair, further complicating his access to medical care. These barriers make Faruk depend on busy nurses or familiar people to get him to the clinic, limit his independence to participate in such a crucial occupation.



*Figure 3 shows a motorized vehicle that Faruk uses as his mobility device*

We see the mobility device acting as a barrier restricting his access to social settings such as the mosque, an important play for him, where he will crawl on the hot ground to get in. The instable sandy grounds of the camp caused Faruk to fall off his device.



*“I use my hands. Because I can’t walk first, I can’t drive the motor vehicle to enter the mosque. But the sun is very hot and the land is very hot...I can’t go to the now.”*

In his employment history, Faruk was discriminated because of his disability where in instances of budget cuts he will be the first one to be laid off. Loss of occupational identity severely disrupted Faruk’s sense of purpose and his role within the community, making him feel uncertain about his future in the camp, his future job opportunities, and financial resources, forcing him to focus on short-term survival that disrupted his engagement in social activities.

*“I like going to the market and talking with people. It helps me with my stresses. But I cannot go every day, I don’t have job, no money to buy petrol for my bike. I fear I’ll finish the petrol and I’ll be stuck.”*

## **2. Creating stability in an uncertain and fragmented context**

### ***Wale- stitching or repairing fragmented trajectories through occupations***

Wale, who became a refugee 13 years ago, has an amputated leg and uses prosthesis to move around. Upon his arrival, Wale was relocated multiple times within the camp.

*“After my arrival in the camp I was hosted by a refugee in Ololo for 3 months. UNHCR then took me to Iftin and then I was taken to a new camp, Stadi. In 2017 UNHCR said we must relocate to other camps Stadi was being closed, I relocated again to Okongo. Moving here and there was too much. I ran away from the camp and went back to Somalia... but I came back to the camp”*

Here we see the disrupted paths he took after his arrival in the camp, due to institutional factors, like closure of some parts of the camp. The frequent relocations (see red lines in figure 4) disrupted consistent engagement in his established routines. Even though the constant

relocation may have influenced Wale's decision of running away from the camp, we can also interpret it as a drastic attempt of him escaping the vast hardships associated with being a refugee.

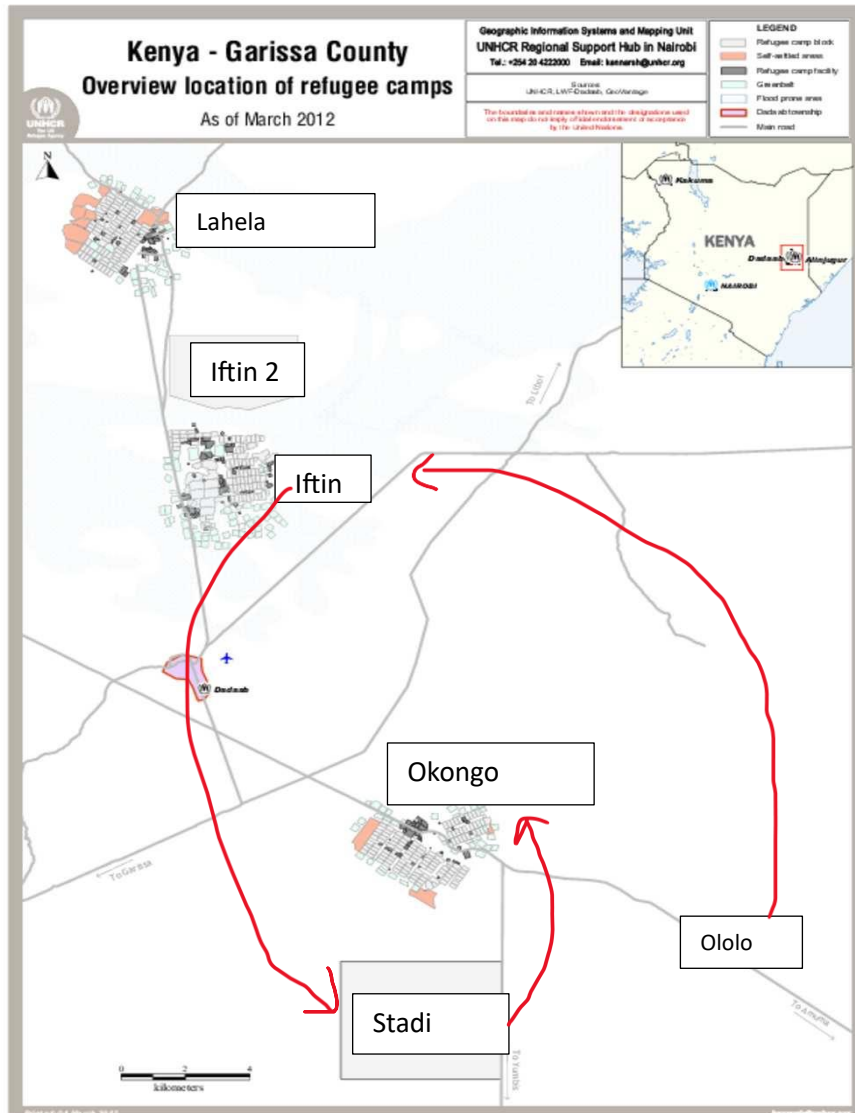


Figure 4 shows the map of Dadaab refugee camp using pseudonyms in place of the real names

Wale, an avid footballer, invited me to his 7s aside tournament. As an attempt to reduce reactivity from the surrounding and the risk of being attacked by terrorist groups, I wore a Dera, and covered my head for this visit.

During the match, I observed the camaraderie between Wale and the other players. They would tackle him and pass him the ball suggestive of value for one another. Wale plays a leadership role for the team. He would coach his teammates on their break, and he scored a point for their team granting them victory.

*“I want to be a professional player. Somalia gives opportunity for amputee players to play in Mogadishu. The amputees play only against other amputees, but since I play with those without disability, I can be a professional. If I get an opportunity outside the camp, I can represent a national team”*

We see playing football, a meaningful activity for Wale, serves as a sense of hope outside the refugee camp. However, Wale’s experiences stab-like pain caused by the outgrown prosthesis, which was last fitted in 2019, when he compensates for the leg length discrepancy. Wale has followed up on the prosthesis with relevant NGOs, and each time he’s informed there is no funding for prosthesis fitting. This lack of appropriate assistive devices disrupts Wale from independently participating in meaningful activities.

*“Working is not a shame, what’s a shame is begging. Sometimes I learn how to cut hair from my barber friend. There are no jobs, I become a barber and shave people from home. I try my best to stay busy”*

Wale is seen to have a flourishing sense of agency despite the challenges he faces as a disabled refugee man.

***Modi- striving for stability in an unstable context***

Modi an old-age man with hemiplegia has lived in the camp for the past 32 years and is a special education teacher. Modi experienced challenges integrating into the new environment due to disrupted family support and cultural practices, limiting his coping mechanism during the transition. This resulted in his attempt to escape the camp.

*“I suffered a lot coming here. In Somalia, we played traditional dance to make us happy. But when I arrived in the refugee camp, there was no cultural dances. After one year it became intolerant staying here, I hated staying here, we don’t have our dance to help us! I tried going back to Somalia, but our country still had problems. Instead of dying, I stayed here by force, no choice”*

Culture is closely linked to one’s sense of identity and belonging, and disrupted cultural practices affected Modi’s participation in the community as a new refugee. We see how lack of autonomy of one’s life disrupts their occupational lives where Modi feels forced to be a refugee. The conditions of the camp restricted Modi from engaging in pastime activities like farming, led to permanence in its disruption.

*“In Somalia, my family were farmers. I helped them on the farm. These activities we are not doing them here because the sun is hot and no water”*

Modi invited me to see him teaching, an important occupation to him. Despite the physical limitations of his disability, Modi teaches deaf learners. Modi noticed a lack of sign language teachers for these learners and got an opportunity to pursue a diploma in special education outside the camp; he focused on sign language.

*“Our deaf learners had no teacher; their future was dark. In 1996, I went to learn sign language in Kenya Institute of Special Education for 2 years and Garissa college for 2 years again then I came back and got this job. I have been teaching for 15 years sign language.”*

Even though Modi experienced a brief disruption from his previous job; advancing his education, the enhanced skills and knowledge empowered him to pursue meaningful occupation teaching hearing-impaired learners contributing to his economic empowerment that enhanced his power and influence within society.

While walking, Modi, who is a divorcee, revealed that he is in a romantic relationship, and about to marry.

*“I have a girlfriend from the host community, I will marry her. I hope the wedding will come next year. My friends who left here and went abroad will support me with the money to build a good house to bring my wife!”*

In the context of a refugee camp, refugees engage in permanent events while living disrupted lives because the transient and unstable nature of refugee camps challenges the permanence and stability associated with major life event such as marriage.

### **3. Being ‘stuck’ in the refugee camp**

***Issa- existing in dual identities at all time***

Issa is currently pursuing computer packages and invited me to join him in a lecture to observe his experience navigating social and structural settings. Issa was the only disabled student in this class and the teacher shadowed him after instructing the whole class. His hemiplegia restricted him from effectively operating the computer. His functional limitations challenged his speed, and ability to complete assignments within the lesson's duration. The need to simultaneously use the keyboard and the mouse makes him easily fatigued, limiting time spent engaging in this occupation.

After his class, Issa returns home to push his disabled brother to school. With his own limitation, this causes added fatigue limiting his productivity in other activities.

*"I must push my brother to school from home, and it's very far. But he's my brother I'll be there for him"*

During this trip, Issa faced stigmatization and discrimination from an interaction he had with his former students.

*"When I was coming from the computer class, I met my former classmates. I told them I'm studying computer to work for UNHCHR. I was shocked when they said 'You aren't going to get employed, look you are disabled. Even when you learn who'll give you the work? But I have the certificates, I must use of them.'"*

Using intersectionality lens, we see how discrimination and inequality reinforces oppression amongst those with intersected vulnerabilities like disabled refugees. The interaction above highlights the use of power to discriminate against those with intersected vulnerability, limiting them to wholly root themselves in the community.

Every month, refugees will receive food rations from the World Food Program (WFP). Issa invited me to join him at the food distribution point, to collect his family’s ration. At the distribution point there was no separate shed dedicated to disabled refugees, exposing them to harsh climatic conditions, inequality of service provision and injuries in case of a stampede. These hardships forces Issa to have someone collect their ration on their behalf, disrupting participation in this occupation. Issa gave me his token (see figure 5 below) that he said serves as a physical reminder of the feelings of being stuck in an uncertain life.

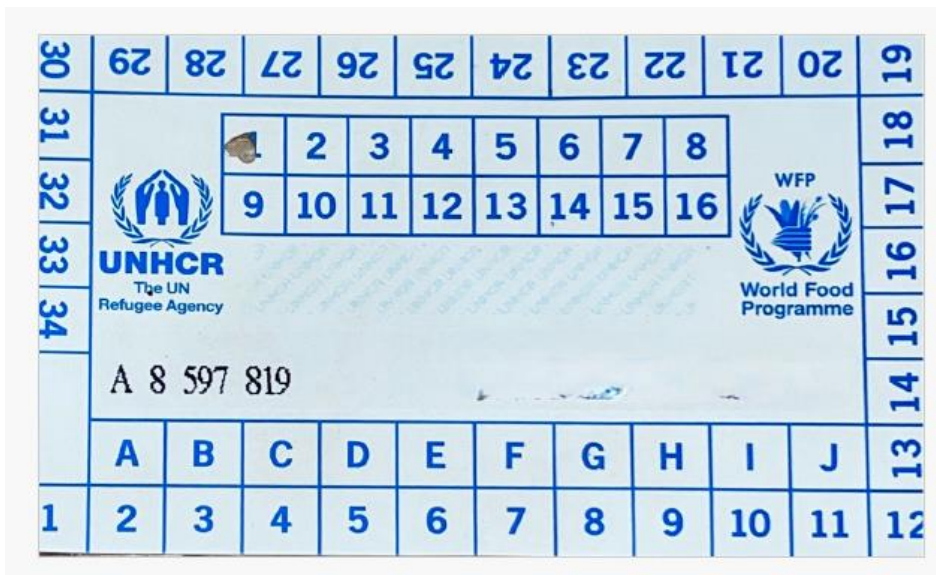


Figure 5 shows photo of a Food Token used by refugees to identify them at food distribution points

*“This is not the future; I don’t have any future. I don’t want to marry here; how can I take care of my family like this?”*

We see Issa faces psychological frustrations that are related to his discrimination against his disability and refugee status which he dually exists at all times.

***Aziz- ‘call me my name’***

Aziz who lives with monoplegia, arrived in the camp 16 years ago. In the camp, refugees are allowed to conduct livelihood activities such as tailoring, selling food and non-food items and, in Aziz's case, running a taxi business within the camp's section, (see map above). Aziz invited me to join him during his trips.

I noticed his vehicle was not adapted to fit his disability needs, exposing him to risks such as road accident if he needed to simultaneously use both legs urgently. After 30 minutes of looking for customers, Aziz got one who had luggage needed to be loaded in the car. Aziz asked me to help him, later explaining that the community with his disability he is unable to load customers' luggage. This causes them to hesitate using Aziz's taxi, which negatively affects Aziz's business.

During this trip, I noticed people passed Aziz's car, and call out 'jeri' or 'j', a term Aziz explained to mean 'disabled'. In the few minutes I was with him, he was referred to as disabled by countless people. Some, he would acknowledge by nodding while others he would ignore and drive by. This discrimination as well as inaccessible school environment led Aziz to drop out of school.

*"I dropped out in high school because the wheelchair cannot pass in the soil somebody must push me and, on the way, they will call me 'j' throwing stones at me. It was a lot. I have told them to call me by my name but still. I feel so much pain in my heart, I cry sometimes."*

We see different limitations reinforcing each other creating a cycle of marginalization that is difficult to break and get a hold in Aziz's identity. An inaccessible school setting led him to



drop out of school which limited job opportunities for Aziz, perpetuating poverty and social exclusion.

The lack of position of power in the community due to his intersected attributes exposes him to helplessness when self-advocating for people to call him his name. This lack of hope impacts his productivity and consequently disrupts his engagement in daily routines. This influenced him to apply for resettlement in a third country.

*“I’m waiting for resettlement, but nothing, I’m waiting till now. Because of these challenges I need to get out of Kenya and Africa”*

Aziz is uncertain about his application status making him feel stuck in limbo, uncertain of his future, and lacking control over the situation. Aziz being stuck could be interpreted as how disability and refugee status has affected roles and even his identity.

## Discussions

In this section, I will reflect on the narratives with literature stemming from the occupational and intersectional perspective which I adopted in this study.

The narratives reveal that migration trajectories create states of disruption brought about by the lack of political intentions, from the refugees' country of origin, to address the humanitarian crisis experienced by refugees. The lack of autonomy associated with being forcibly displaced disrupts one's already established routines (Hart, 2023).

The narratives show that refugees with disabilities experience significant disruptions in their ability to participate in daily life and roles (Whiteford, 2004) due to various intersectional barriers that are not because of individual factors but are deeply rooted within structural and systemic inequalities present in the setting of a refugee camp (Humanity& Inclusion, 2023). Through an intersectional lens we see the interaction of the intersected identities such as gender, disability, and refugee status emerged as a crucial factor with female refugees with disabilities facing heightened risks of gender-based violence (Pisani & Grech, 2015). This compounded discrimination associated with their gender, and disability, challenges their opportunities to participate in community activities therefore, leading to their social exclusion (G. Whiteford, 2004). We also see the interaction between living with disabilities and caring for loved ones that expose refugees with disabilities to experience occupational disruption (Mirza, 2011). This burden exacerbates the physical limitations of refugees with disabilities that can lead to loss of energy to sustain engagement in other meaningful occupations, potentially leading to their disruption. These intersectional aspects are seen to reinforce each other in all the narratives, causing a vicious cycle of disadvantages that are hard to break.

The salient conditions of refugee camps profoundly restrict mobility and independence of refugees with disabilities (Steindl et al., 2008), which reinforces their marginalization within society. This aligns with previous study done by (Turner, 2016) which emphasizes that the setting of a camp challenges meaningful participation for refugees with disabilities to take up roles in the community.

Refugees with disabilities face economic constraints that disrupt them from occupational engagement. Refugees with disabilities are excluded from the few available economic activities (Werker, 2007) due to discrimination, inequality and inaccessible work environments. This economic exclusion results in financial dependence on the community and humanitarian support, which isn't always sufficient to meet their needs. Additionally, this economic marginalization limits the abilities of refugees with disabilities to engage in community activities or pursue personal goals, reinforcing a cycle of poverty. The disrupted participation in income-generating activities affect their financial stability (Mungania, 2014) and challenges their sense of agency and autonomy.

The narratives highlight the inadequacy of existing humanitarian response frameworks in addressing the specific needs of refugees with disabilities from an intersectional perspective, leading to gaps in service provision. For instance, the lack of appropriate rehabilitation services tailored to meet the unique and specific needs of refugees with disabilities limits their functional limitations to participate in daily activities (UNHCR, 2021). Additionally, the structural procedures involved in provision of services such as assistive devices, are often not mindful of the context in which the refugees are situated, making the assistive devices cause barriers in their occupational engagement. For instance, the camp's environmental characteristics of flood

and sandy instable grounds poses mobility restrictions to those using wheelchairs. Other challenges faced in accessing assistive devices and other rehabilitation services are the delays and disruptions (Whittaker et al., 2021) to receiving the appropriate service in a timely manner. These inadequacies emphasize the need for policy reforms that are accessible and cater to the diverse disability needs of refugees with disabilities.

Using intersectionality lens, this study acknowledges the complex relationship between vulnerable identities and systems of power and oppression (Reilly, 2010b). Understanding this will help better address the occupational disruptions experienced by refugees with disabilities, who occupy different intersections of the multiple marginalized identities. It is important to note, as seen in the narratives, that there is diversity in experiences faced by refugees with disabilities which have different levels of intensities.

### **Implications for occupational science and occupational therapy**

The findings of this study underscore the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective in OT and OS practice as well as in humanitarian policy making practice. Recognizing these multiple-layered barriers faced by the intersected identities of refugees with disabilities, stakeholders will be able to design inclusive interventions to address the specific occupational needs RWDs experience. The practical implications of this study call for enhanced training for OTs working in refugee contexts to help them better understand and address the complex needs of this vulnerable population. With these, the study will contribute to the advancement of both practical and theoretical understanding of the concepts of intersectionality and occupational disruptions that will inform best practices.

## **Limitations of study and future recommendations**

While this research provides valuable insights, it also has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and not gender-balanced which may limit the generalization of the findings. Future studies should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to validate and build on these findings.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study highlights the occupational disruptions faced by refugees with disabilities, underscoring the need for an intersectional approach in practice. By developing a nuanced understanding of the compounded barriers refugees with disabilities experience, it is possible to improve their quality of life by enabling their full engagement in society.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Formal ethical application

# Application Format

## Ethical Committee for Student Research (ECSO-FG) Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA)

The ECSO-FG requires a brief **summary** of the research project.

Particularly information about **ethical aspects, potential risks and measures to reduces those risks, must be addressed.**

If you work with participants, you must also include a **Participant Information Letter**, which you will send to potential participants of your research project. This should have information about their role or task, the risks, etc.

You must also include an **Informed Consent form**, that will be provided to and signed by the participants.

You also need to complete a **Data Management Plan (DMP)** and demonstrate that your project complies with **General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**.

### Checklist to be filled in by the researcher:

- Before you start:

Have you checked whether your project is subject to the Dutch Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) or equivalent in your country?

Check here: [Your research: Is it subject to the WMO or not? | Investigators | The Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects \(ccmo.nl\)](#). If it is not, you can proceed:

- Personal details of the student researcher applying for ethical approval:

First name and surname: **Elizabeth Andare**

Master Programme: **European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy**

Phone number: **+254706407744**

E-mail: **lizzie.andare@hva.nl**

Personal details of the research / project supervisor (if applicable)

First name and surname: **Margarita Mondaca**

Department / lectoraat / researchgroup / role: **Senior Lecturer at the division of Occupational therapy. Department of neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society. Karolinska Institutet Sweden**

Phone number: +46762464334

E-mail: **margarita.mondaca@ki.se**

- Research project

Title of the study

**How do Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruption from an occupational and intersectional perspective; a Short-term Ethnography study**

Attach a brief summary or maximum 2 pages (*this can be taken from your research proposal and should include the background, purpose, research question and/or aims and timeline*).

*Attach a Data Management Plan (see attachment for guidance)*

- Research methods

Describe the type of research (*for example observational research, quantitative survey research, qualitative research with interviews, randomized controlled trial, etc.*)

**A qualitative research design is proposed for this present study employing a short-term ethnography approach as the theoretical perspective. Data will be collected through traditional ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, walk-along interviews, and mapping.**

*Attach your Interview Guide or other data collection tools.*

- Participants / respondents: if applicable

Description of participants

*(age, gender, other demographic characteristics)*

How, from where and by whom will the participants be invited / recruited?

What are the inclusion and exclusion criteria?

**A purposive sampling strategy will be used to select the participants from the Dadaab refugee camp based on the researcher's judgment about which participants will be informative and fit the inclusion criteria. The researcher will invite participants by posting the information on the shared community notice board, and word of mouth to ensure those who cannot access the notice board get the information. The potential participants**

**will then be contacted via a telephone call. The information at the notice board will be posted in the following languages: English and Somali**

**For this, the study's inclusion criteria are:**

- **Participants from the Somali community**
- **Participants who have refugee status**
- **Participants with self-reported disabilities**
- **Participants living at the Dadaab refugee camp for at least 3 months**

**The study will exclude:**

- **Participants whose disabilities limits any form of verbal communication**

*Attach your Participant Information Letter and Consent Form.*

- Ethical aspects:

Describe how you will ensure the confidentiality and safety of participants.

Discuss any risks and how you will minimise these.

During the research process, there may be a possibility of participants being or getting in distress. The researcher will look out for the signs of distress and meet these emotions with empathy. Pauses or interruption of the interview or observation will be suggested if necessary researcher will remind the participants that they are free to stop at any time they wish. If the distress is overwhelming for the participant, the researcher will inform about possible channels and instances to seek for health care if necessary. Mapping of places and photographs will be gathered as part of the ethnographic data. The researcher will make sure that both pictures, maps and pictures of artifacts do not expose the participants or other persons identity. This will be done by taking pictures where the face or other recognisable features are not exposed. In regard to mapping of places, recognisable places that might create risks for the participants by revealing them will be changed, modified or removed. This will be discussed in advance with the participants to avoid any challenges. The same negotiation and ethical procedure will be conducted in relation to potential recognisable artifacts captured in pictures.

The signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and their names will be replaced with codes. The researcher will maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms instead of their real names during analysis and reporting, keeping their records in password-protected files, and encrypting files and data stored in the computer. They will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any further consequences.

- Any further comments by the applicant

List of appendices

- Short summary of the study
- Data Collection instruments, e.g. Interview Guide or Questionnaire
- Data Management Plan
- Participant Information Letter (if applicable)
- Informed Consent form (if applicable)

Student's Signature

Date:

Supervisor's Signature

Date:

## **Appendix 1: Brief summary of study proposal**

The number of people with and without disabilities being forcibly displaced worldwide as refugees are continuing to grow. The displacement forces these individuals to experience occupational disruptions when they lose the opportunity to maintain and participate in already-established occupations that are important to them. However, limited research has examined these occupational disruptions from refugees with disabilities. Occupational disruption has physical, psychological, and emotional effects on an individual such as limiting one's skill set, and lack of support system due to separation from family, and friends. However, given supportive conditions, these disruptions can be resolved. It is, therefore, crucial to understand how people with intersecting vulnerabilities living in a refugee camp experience occupational disruption from an occupational and intersectional perspective. For this purpose, a short-term ethnographic approach will be employed to interview, and observe six participants (3 male, and 3 female) and mapping of activities and places important to them over a period of 4-6 weeks. The following research questions will be asked;

- How do Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruptions?
- What factors influence occupational disruptions experienced by Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp?

## **Appendix 2: Data Management Plan**



- What type of data will you be collecting?

*e.g. audio recording, video recording, interview transcripts, online survey data, standardised outcome measure data. Also mention the software used.*

**The researcher anticipates collecting data from interviews and participant observations of Somali refugees with disabilities. Data such as photos, field notes, audio recordings, interview transcripts, and pictures of artifacts will be gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal and walk-along interviews, and mapping of places of relevance. The researcher will use MAXQDA, a software program that will help in transcription analysis, coding, and text interpretation of the data.**

- Where will the data be stored and who will have access to it?

**The signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet, and the names of the participants will be replaced with codes. The audio records and the transcripts of the participants will be pseudonymized and their records kept in password-protected and encrypted files stored on my computer in my HvA onedrive account.**

- What are the main risks to data security and what measures will you take to prevent these?

*e.g. breach of privacy, loss of data, unauthorised access*

**The main risks to data security could include a colleague or friend using my computer and unintentionally reading files of the participants without having the proper authorization permissions. This will be prevented and avoided where the researcher will store data and records of participants in a separate laptop dedicated to the research process, and locked in a cabinet.**

**The other risk will be collecting more data than is needed and the researcher will prevent this by avoiding to collect unnecessary and excessive data.**

**As is possible that during data collection at the camp there will be no internet services, data such as pictures and recorded files of interviews will be momentarily stored at the researcher's computer and the files will have encrypted password. This data will be stored at the HvA onedrive account as soon as internet is available.**

- How long will the data be retained?

**All the field notes, the audio records, and photos will be stored for 6 months at the HVA onedrive account to be destroyed once the researcher has received a pass for the module. The transcribed data will be destroyed once the researcher has satisfied the module's requirement. The researcher anticipates on sharing and publishing the results to academic peer reviewed journals and therefore, the data will be retained with respect to the journals' guidelines in my computer cloud storage which is equally safe.**

- **Data Protection Check:**

- What personal data will you collect from the participants?

*Keep personal data, from which a participant could be identified, to a minimum and justify why it is needed.*

**The researcher will collect the names of the participants, pseudonyms will used to replace their real names. The researcher will collect the age, marital status, place of origin and gender of the participants will be replaced with codes. These personal data are necessary to understand the intersecting factors of the study participants. The key for this personal information and pseudonyms will only be known by the researcher and will be kept at the HVA onedrive account.**

- Are any of your participants vulnerable through age, being a patient or other factors?

*Justify why these participants need to be involved.*

**The study will involve vulnerable individuals due to disabilities, political factors and having a refugee status. The study aims at understanding the experience of occupational disruptions from their point of view, making it necessary to involve them in this study. Limited information is known about this group, and the study results will contribute to better understand the participants needs and living conditions and to creating better strategies to meet these needs.**

- Are you working together with any external parties, who will have access to personal data?

*Provide contact details and justify why they need access.*

*NB: consider obtaining ethical approval through the organisation with whom you are collaborating.*

**No external parties will have access to the participants' personal data**

## Appendix 2: Positive Feedback for approval

Ethical Committee



**Student Research**  
**Faculty of Health (ECSO-FG)**

Tafelbergweg 51  
1105BD AMSTERDAM  
[ecso-fg@hva.nl](mailto:ecso-fg@hva.nl)

To: Lizzie Andare,  
Student of the European MSc in Occupational Therapy  
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Health

Subject: Request for ethical advice on research **“How do Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruption from an occupational and intersectional perspective; a Short-term Ethnography study”**.

Ref: \*OCC2302

Date: 17.05.2023

Dear Lizzie,

The Ethical Committee for Student Research of the Faculty of Health (ECSO-FG) discussed your application relating to the research project “How do Somali refugees with disabilities living in the Dadaab refugee camp experience occupational disruption from an occupational and intersectional perspective; a Short-term Ethnography study”.

Because the committee did not identify any risks in the design and execution of the research, as presented in the (final) proposal, it hereby issues positive advice on the research proposal.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) ECSO-FG.

Kind regards,



AUAS Ethical Committee for Student Research, Faculty of Health (ECSO-FG)

Dr. Debbie Kramer-Roy, Chair

*\*please note that this is an internal reference number, which aims to help us locate your positive advice letter in case of queries. It is not formally registered in the Dutch CCMO system.*

### Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Question	Probing Questions
<b>Participant Background Information</b>	
Could you tell me what circumstances led you to flee from your home country?	Why did you flee your home country? How has this experience been like for you?
What is your marital status?	
What is the highest level of education you have attained?	
What is your employment status?	
What is your nationality/ethnic group?	
What social position do you hold in the community?	Are you the head of your household, a community leader?
<b>Grand Tour Question</b>	
Could you describe a typical day for you? In any places of relevance in or outside the camp	
Could you describe a typical day at work/school/market/mosque?	
Could you describe a typical day in the refugee camp?	
Could you describe a typical day with the host community?	How do you engage/relate with the host community?
Could you draw me a map of your section in the refugee camp and describe places of interest? In the camp or other places of relevance	Why are these places of interest to you? What do these places mean to you?
Could you explain the easiness or difficulty of accessing the camp/section in the camp?	Why do you find it easy/difficult to access these areas?

<b>Details through questions</b>		
What daily activities are difficult/rewarding/enjoyable for you?	Could you invite me to join you to one of these activities? activities/work/leisure	(Data collection through informal small talks, mapping, participation observation, walk along interviews)
What are some of the activities that you did back in your home country that were important to you?	How did you use to perform these activities? Why were these activities important to you?	
What activities do you miss/long to do here that you used to do back in your home country?	Why do you long to do these activities? What do these activities mean to you?	
What are some of the ways that you are able/not able to do activities you used to do back in your home country?	Why are you able/not able to perform these activities?	
<b>Questions about their experience</b>		
Could you describe your experience moving into the refugee camp?	How was your journey from your home country to the refugee camp? How long was the journey? Who hosted you in the camp?	
Could you please share some of your experience of being a refugee with disability living in a refugee camp? Positive and negative		
Could you tell me how you made friends/social contact with people in the camp/at school/at work?	What is it like making new contact relationships in the camp?	
Could you describe some of the challenging experiences you have encountered in the camp?	Why did you find this challenging?	

#### Appendix 4:

Participant name	Location	Date	Start- End time
Area of Observation	Field Notes		Artifacts
People	Who is part of the participants community? Who they are with? What is their role?		Take a picture people being observed ( only with consent and without being able to be identified (for example

		pictures only shows hands, of feet or backside of the persons)
<b>Place</b>	What is the location, setting, environment, and the context of the camp? What is the total population of the camp?	Take a picture of the general setting in which the observation is taking place (people is not possible to be identified, see note above)
<b>Activity</b>	What are the people being observed doing? How are they doing what they engaging in?	Take pictures of what people are doing during the observation( only with consent and without being able to be identified, see note above)
<b>Atmosphere</b>	What is the tone used during the observation? What is the emotion of those being observed? What are the feelings?	Field notes
<b>Words</b>	What is being said? How is it being said? What vocabulary is being used?	Audio or video record the observation (see note above)
<b>Things</b>	What are the physical things and objects that are in the environment? What does it mean to the participants?	Take photos of things and objects that they use, show or display ( if objects are easy to link to persons, these will not be showcasted and alternative objects holding similar meanings will be taken. This will be discussed and negotiated with each participant)
<b>Other areas of observation emerging while doing field work</b>		
<b>Reflexive comments:</b>		

## Critical Reflection

In this section I will take you through the development of this thesis through my critical reflections. During my work tenure in one of the world's largest refugee camps, I was exposed to the political, social, cultural and environmental issues faced by refugees living in refugee camps (Bala, 2005). My journey to becoming an OT has been driven with the passion to serve and help people with disabilities live a dignified life. It's with these reasons that my interest in understanding the occupational injustices faced by refugees with disabilities was piqued. My research supervisor, knowing my interests and that time, my space of influence working in a refugee setting, suggested I focus on a specific type of occupational injustices faced by this population. Through an in-depth literature search I realized there is a huge knowledge gap on occupational disruption faced by refugees with disabilities and the available literatures are not up to date. I therefore chose to study the experiences of occupational disruption faced by refugees with disabilities, from an intersectional and occupational perspective. For the purpose of being transparent, it is important to note that this chosen topic was considered also because I am interested in exploring it further through a doctorate degree.

Since I was interested in the meaning-making of refugees with disabilities, this study took a short-term ethnography as its methodological underpinnings. The chosen methodology requires a continuous and simultaneous process of analyzing, interpreting and learning from the data collected (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) throughout the study. This is a very demanding activity and is also time-consuming (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019), that can be considered a disadvantage of using this approach. But given the short timelines for this degree and the emergency context of this study (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004), a short-term ethnographic

approach made it feasible for me to complete the fieldwork in five weeks. Analysis and interpretation of the data were tightly connected (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) where I analyzed the data while simultaneously presenting my interpretations for the readers.

It's important that I take you through my critical reflections on my entry and exit of the fieldwork to understand how my presence and departure impacted the study group and influenced the data collection process. My work history in this study setting gave me the opportunity to use my former employer as a gatekeeper. Their support during this period provided the resources to access the field and my participants, as you will see later in this section. I strived to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019) because I didn't want my history in the camp to influence my judgement and interpretation of the setting and the study group. I travelled to Dadaab refugee camp where I immersed myself for five weeks in the culture and the environment of my study population. As I entered the camp, I was made aware of its temporariness, marked by makeshift shelters made of branches, tarpaulins, iron sheets and thatched grass which rain and cold easily penetrate. The shelters were overcrowded and very close to each other, exacerbating the already poor living conditions in the camp, making it prevalent to outbreak of diseases, and high mortality levels (Polonsky et al., 2013). One of my recruited participants had passed away a few days before my arrival due to a cholera outbreak. This had several ramifications on the study design and its integrity. Firstly, this death reduced the sample size of the study and would have made it harder to draw reliable conclusions. This death impacted me both psychologically and emotionally as we were already acquainted through the rapport built.



During my arrival in the camp, the refugees, majority being Muslims, had entered Ramadhan. This is an Islamic holy month marked by abstinence from food and drinks from morning to evening. Collecting data during Ramadhan required me to be respectful of the participants' religious practices and considerate of their autonomy. Due to family obligations such as increased responsibilities at home during Ramadhan, three female participants had to withdraw from the study since the added responsibilities limited their availability for the research. Their withdrawal further reduced the study sample size and impacted its integrity where there would have been a lack of representation of the refugee experience. This population was assumed to have unique experiences and challenges due to their intersected identities such as gender, disability and refugee status and their absence would mean a loss of crucial information highlight gender-specific issues.

To address the issue of sample size of this study due to the loss of participants, I used the gatekeeper to help recruit new participants, emphasizing to them the ethical principles of participants' autonomy, anonymity and confidentiality. Building trust and rapport with these new participants, especially on this sensitive topic, was crucial to obtaining rich and authentic data. I fostered this by respecting their culture and being transparent about the aim and objective of the research.

The principle of ethnography is to study participant's actions and accounts in their everyday context, in as natural a state as possible, instead of creating environments to study them (Hammersley & Atkinson 1947-, 2019). This proved hard to follow in the setting under study as it posed a life-threatening risk to me, for instance if I had to observe the participants in their homes. This is because Dadaab is classified at substantial threat levels of security

(Rudolph, 2013) with the presence of armed bandits, terrorist gangs such as the Al-Shabaab that presents a threat of violence against the humanitarian workers. To respond to these risks, humanitarian workers are prohibited from freely moving in the camp without at least armed guards, and must observe curfew time, meaning all workers in the field must return to their quarters by 2pm. These limited my ability and flexibility to reach and engage with the participants in important spaces such as their houses, and mosques. Omitting these experiences meant loss in important experience for this population. In terms of personal security and safety during this period, I collaborated with an NGO that I worked with previously. They acted as my gatekeeper and provided me with security resources such as armed vehicles and guarded accommodation to access the community and my participants.

The timing of the exit was unprecedented. On my 5<sup>th</sup> week in the camp, our residential compound was under attack by a terrorist gang. This was my first time experiencing a shoot-out battlefield. And it happened in the wee hours of the night. It was only in the break of dawn that the shoot-out subsided when the terrorists were overpowered, and we got security intel of the situation. As a group, me and the other staff had to undergo a debriefing and counselling session for mental support. I was negatively impacted psychologically and emotionally where I was constantly in a fight and flight, fearful of leaving our compound and didn't trust going in the community anymore. This consequently affected the data collection process as I abruptly had to leave the camp, after informing my supervisor, cutting short the data collection process. My abrupt and unforeseen exit affected my participants emotionally, but we resolved to continue with the interviews virtually. Personally, I had a mix of emotions as I exited the camp. I was filled with gratitude by the support I received with the NGO that collaborated with me and equally

grateful to the participants whose stories I got to hear. I felt guilty leaving the participants behind in such an environment. My heart broke and continues to break as I remember what I survived, and my participants don't get to. The terror of that night is indeed the life story of refugees globally from the time they were persecuted to living in 'safe' spaces. How are they still resilient? I left the field with so many questions that I hope to explore further when I pursue a doctorate degree. The attack challenged my analysis process, where I got emotionally triggered going through the experiences of the participants from the data gathered. Keeping a journal helped reduce potential personal bias and using my supervisor as an external perspective helped to highlight any biases.

During the initial stages of analysis, I used CHATGPT an Artificial Intelligence tool to brainstorm the issues that were arising from my study. However, no idea was borrowed from the AI tool. All findings and results are my original work.

As I come to the end of this academic road I am filled with gratitude for the impact the Euro-Master program has had on me and in my space of influence. Through this program, I gained new insights and knowledge to promote occupational justice in my home country with each module challenging me to develop both critical thinking and research skills through an evidence-based practice approach. These invaluable skills have helped me in my working experience where I perform operational research for the organizations I work with.

### **Description of research presentation to lay audience**

Now I will give you a description of how I will present this research to a layman. My target audience is the policy makers and community members in the refugee camp, and I will present my findings in person through community and interagency meetings. I will use simple

everyday English and Swahili, if needed, to present my topic, its findings and conclusion. Since both the members of the community and policy makers are in the refugee context, I will explain the outcome of my study using real-life examples of current and ongoing interruptions in meaningful activities of the refugees. I will use the narratives from my participants to highlight key issues they have experience when interrupted from doing important things to them, while ensuring to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. I will explain how these interruptions affect the refugees and the broader community and offer action plans to help address the issues identified. Before ending, I will allow time for questions, answers and discussions to address common concerns.

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