

# Contributions and Challenges of Aging Exiles to The Domain of Occupational Therapy

Jutta Brettschneider, MS OTR/L (Germany/Israel/USA)

## Introduction

How does a human being handle the trauma of wars, emigration, integration and then all the personal challenges over the course of a long life? How can therapists prepare themselves to become able to build respectful relationship with their clients? What can therapists do to act professionally when clients with unresolved experiences from the past exhibit uncooperative behavior during training sessions?

Since the development of Occupational Therapy around World War I, millions of people have migrated from their home countries to one or more foreign countries. People moves voluntarily to seek a better life or were persecuted, threatened to leave or expelled.

Migrating means leaving the familiar environment and having to integrate into new contexts.

Our mission as occupational therapists is to support clients in gaining and regaining participation in life and health.

**Occupational Therapy Domain:** The table below presents all the aspects that influence a person's engagement in occupations, her/his participation in life and society and her/his health. In occupational therapy, we call it the "Aspects of the Occupational Therapy Domain".

Areas of Occupation*	Client Factors	Performance Skills	Performance Patterns	Context and Environment	Activity Demands
Activities of Daily Living (ADL)*	Values, Beliefs and Spirituality	Sensory Perceptual Skills	Habits	Cultural	Objects Used and Their Properties
Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)	Body Functions	Motor and Praxis Skills	Routines	Personal	Space Demands
Rest and Sleep	Body Structures	Emotional Regulation Skills	Roles	Physical	Social Demands
Education		Cognitive Skills	Rituals	Social	Sequencing and Timing
Work		Communication and Social Skills		Temporal	Required Actions
Play				Virtual	Required Body Functions
Leisure					Required Body Structures
Social Participation					

\* Also referred to as basic activities of daily living (BADL) or personal Activities of daily living (PADL).

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2008). Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (2nd ed.) American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62, 628

## Case Study: Contributions and Challenges of The Yekkes to the Domains of Occupational Therapy

**Yekkes:** German speaking Jewish Israeli residents who entered the county 1933-1945, fleeing the Holocaust.

### Purpose of the Study:

1. To understand the daily coping strategies of this population in order to provide better services for them
2. To develop guidelines for clinicians in geriatric settings with clients with comparable experiences

**Method:** Semi structured interviews with an adapted version of the Occupational Performance History Interview (OPHI II, Kielhofner et al 2004) with three residents of a Parents Home in Israel as well as extensive observation. The data were analyzed using narrative analysis adapted from the sociologist Riessman (1993).

**Results:** the participants demonstrated special abilities and skills such as:

- Taking responsibility for their life and their actions
- Performing a high level of engagement in occupations despite severe physical impairment
- Maintaining their cultural values in room design, literature, meals, lectures, clothes, music etc.

They also experienced and exhibited specific challenges:

- The need to keep control and their distinguished order
- The reluctance to resistance in accepting physical assistance
- The danger of increased isolation

These findings lead to the following guidelines for working with the Yekkes in a client-centered and culturally competent clinical practice:

1. Build collaborative relationships, emphasize transparency in goal planning and plan of care and translate the concept of participation to the specific needs and abilities of this population.
2. Perform bracketing of own biases, background and interests (e.g. emotions and attitudes as a German

non-Jewish therapist with German Jewish Holocaust survivors).

3. Achieve an understanding for the historical, cultural and political background of the client (e.g. study about German Jews in the 20th century). This will enable the therapist to embed "disconnected" (to current context) comments or behavior to a meaningful historical context.
4. Validate and integrate client's patterns, habits and performance (e.g. the German "Schlafstunde" = Naptime with strict order for quiet between 1-3pm) into therapy planning.
5. Use narration and narratives as much as possible to enable the client to keep control of the situation

**Conclusions:** The Yekkes were a specifically resourceful example in teaching their therapists about survival in exile, about resilience, integration and maintaining their own culture. Being not always outspoken about their special life challenges and needs, narrative analysis made it possible to detect their contributions and needs, so that this population can accept and benefit from services as occupational therapy.

The above listed guidelines are expected to be adapted to other contexts and cultural groups with persecution and exile experiences, for example: aging exiles from countries like Chile, Russia, Vietnam, China, East Germany, and Iran; aging war veterans who fought in wars and were traumatized.

### Reference List:

- 1) American Occupational Therapy Association. (2008). Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (2nd ed.) American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 62, 625-683.
- 2) G., Mallinson, Y., Crawford C., Nowak, M. Rigby, M., Henry, A. & Walens, D. (2004). The Occupational Performance History Interview (Version 2.1) OPHI II. Chicago: Model of Human Occupation Clearinghouse, University of Illinois.
- 3) Riessman, C.K. (1993). Narrative Analysis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.



**Information About the Author:**  
Jutta Brettschneider, a German trained OT, lives currently near Washington DC in the USA. From 1999 until 2006, Jutta lived in Jerusalem and participated in projects in Jerusalem, Israel and Bethlehem, Palestine. She worked in a "Parents Home" with old-old Jewish German Immigrants, the "Yekkes" where she conducted this study.

I am looking forward to encounters with colleagues from many different countries.

Contact: yuttab@verizon.net

### Questions to My Colleagues:

- ❖ How would these results work for your work and life context?
- ❖ What stories would you tell from your experience as a clinician and from your country?

You are welcome to share a few sentences on the attached cards. Please leave your contact information or business card. I will get in contact with you.