

Abstract Title: The cards you are dealt:
Stories of labelled men

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Introduction

Returning to the community post-incarceration is a complex transition. Current policies, research, position stands, and programs target decreasing recidivism as the main outcome without considering the processes that lead to desistance from crime or the perspectives from people making this transition (JHS, 2016). Occupational therapists are allied healthcare professionals that believe that access to opportunities to engage in meaningful activities is a human right and something that people with a record are often denied (Kronenberg, 2005).

Objectives

The objective is to consider how men with a criminal record define and conceptualize community integration. Understanding how aspects of social location, embodiments of masculinity and other determinants of health impact the day-to-day lives of the men in this study will be explored.

Methods

A participatory action research (PAR) project was completed as an Occupational Therapy (OT) group with men with a criminal record currently living in an Ontario community. The group was informed by PAR positions the men as co-researchers, allowing politically disenfranchised people to have a voice (Wang & Burris, 1997). Following a three-phase process guided by anti-oppressive theory, the group worked towards developing a shared critical consciousness and a plan for enacting social change (Friere, 1996).

Results

A visual display was created to represent the shared narrative of the co-researchers. The men completed a community grant to fund the publication of a softcover book for distribution to other organizations, public libraries and individual stakeholders (McKittrick et al., 2017). Numerous community presentations have taken place in an attempt to educate the wider public about the oppressive realities of the criminal justice system and reduce stigma associated with having a criminal record.

Conclusion

PAR can promote understandings of the meaning and value of everyday life for marginalized populations and self-growth for participants in emerging practice settings. Rethinking the way that Occupational Therapists facilitate groups in the community can pave new directions for OT practice and advocate for occupational and social justice for men with criminal records.

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