



Bridging Occupational Gaps

with Refugees & Asylum Seekers

European
University Cyprus

Developing an occupational understanding of the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Minors (UAMs) living in shelters in Cyprus.

Dr. Pavlina Psychouli, Ms. Ioulia Louta, Ms. Marina Georgiadou
European University Cyprus – School of Sciences

Introduction

- A growing focus on the emerging area of Occupational Therapy (OT) with forcibly displaced populations
- Necessary to collect information from an occupational perspective to inform and define the role of OT in the field.
- The **Bridging Occupational Gaps with Refugees and Asylum Seekers** program:
- Clinical Practice Placement
 - For forcibly displaced persons
 - 2018 to date
 - OT Program, European University Cyprus
- Partnerships with third-sector partners:
 - UNHCR office in Cyprus
 - Nicosia Municipality
 - Local entities and NGOs
- OT interventions are provided at:
 - A refugee reception camp
 - Shelters for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (UAMs)
 - Community venues
- Main goal:
 - Help forcibly displaced persons integrate into the social, cultural and economic environment of Cyprus.

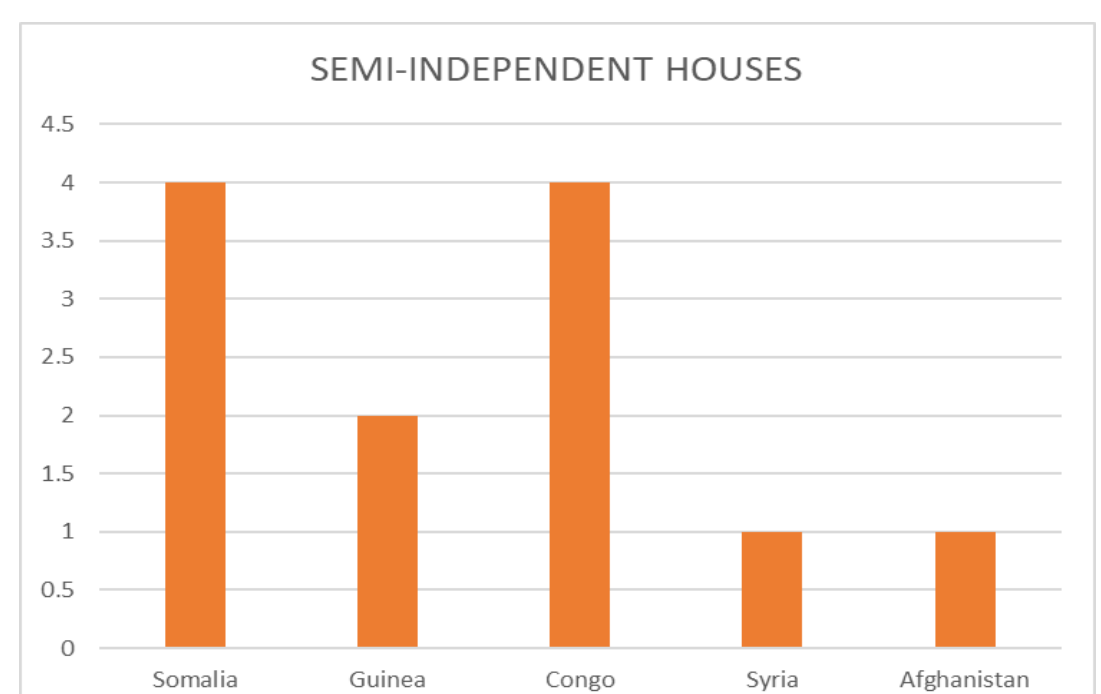
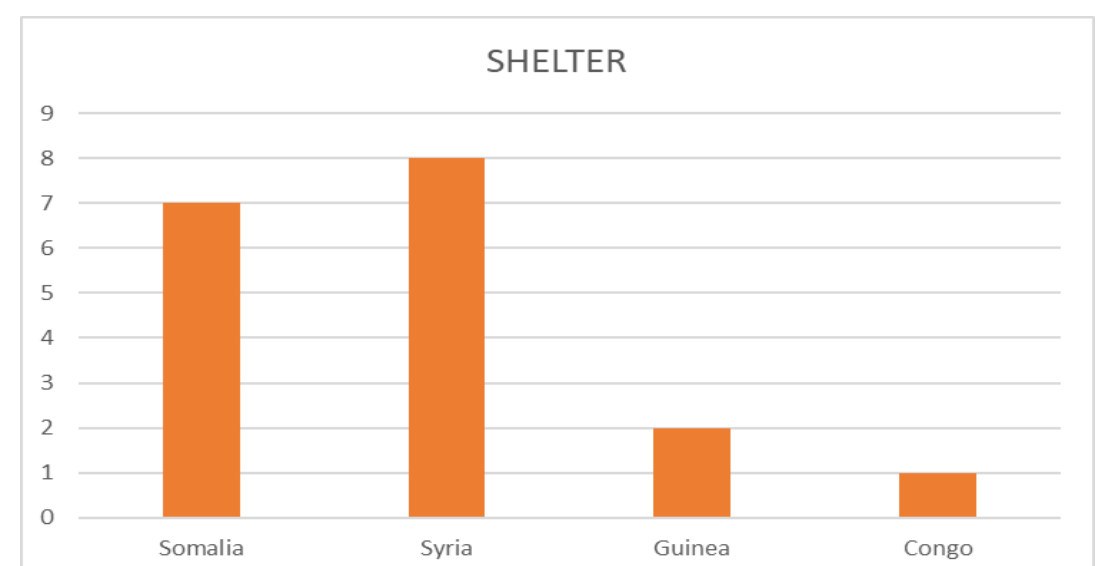
Working with UAMs:

- Part of students' fieldwork is taking place in shelters and in semi-independent houses for UAMs.
- Shelters are coordinated by:
 - Hope for Children CRC Policy Center
 - Social and Welfare Services of Cyprus
- They are based in Nicosia and in Larnaca.
- Main goal of OT program:
 - To support their transition into adulthood and enhance participation in occupations at home and in the community.
- Main objectives of OT program:
 - To establish a knowledge base on the occupational needs of this special population.
 - To assist in defining the role of OT in this field.
 - To train OT students on the assessment of UAMs.

Methods

Designing the assessment

- Informed practice:
 - Good practices, UNHCR guidelines, evidence-based practices.
- Occupation-centered outlook on assessment:
 - Not lose OT identity in a field where organizations have a long history of providing aid and protection services to populations in distress and in urgent need.
- Client-centered approach to assessment:
 - UAMs self-perception of occupational participation, performance, and satisfaction.
- Culturally aware & sensitive approach:
 - Be aware of own biases but also respect own cultural identities.
 - Use metacognitive strategies: e.g., plan, monitor & evaluate processes, reflect, self-question.
- Ethical reasoning process:
 - Guarantee consent, respect, privacy, confidentiality & practices that are meaningful, purposeful and beneficial for participants.



Methods

Key features of the assessment

- OT students are guided into designing and implementing detailed assessments of UAMs to define the most pressing occupational needs of:
 - The population group
 - The individuals
- The assessment plan includes:
 - Detailed interviews
 - Standardized assessments
 - COPM, MOHOST, RASOS*
 - Occupational profile & analysis
 - Clinical observations in UAMs natural environment
- Participants:
 - Unaccompanied minors: asylum-seekers & recognised refugees
- Settings:
 - Shelters
 - Semi-independent houses
- Duration:
 - 2018 to date

Challenges & solutions

- Lack of specialized assessment tools:
 - Created the RASOS* assessment tool.
- Insufficient scientific evidence:
 - Consulted expert OTs with experience in this field.
 - Put emphasis on data collection and analysis for future use.
- Lack of privacy during interviews due to insufficient accommodation conditions:
 - Ensured to find a safe space without interruptions.
- Language barrier:
 - Collaborated with translators for non-Greek or English speakers.
- UAMs reluctance to participate:
 - Explained our role and aim & provided information about the project.
 - Created authentic therapeutic relationships.
 - Respected cultural differences that discourage persons from sharing personal information.
 - Approached process with sensitivity and the guidance of the clinical supervisors to avoid trauma triggers.
- Students' lack of knowledge & inexperience in this field:
 - Held awareness and information sessions.
 - Invited guest experts for seminars.
 - Introduced information about OT with the displaced population in OT courses.

Results

Pressing needs of UAMs:

- Core occupations:
 - IADLs
 - Leisure
 - Education
 - Social participation
- At home:
 - Maintaining a balance of leisure activities with other occupations
 - Home management
 - Meal preparation
- In the community:
 - Mobility by public means of transport
 - Communication with public services
 - Participation in educational programs
 - Shopping at the market

Inhibitory factors that affect UAMs' occupational participation, performance and satisfaction:

- Personal factors:
 - Beliefs and values (e.g., cultural attitudes to self-care)
 - Mental dysfunction (e.g., PTSD)
 - Social skills (e.g., poor language skills)
 - Routines (e.g., daily routines due to religious commitments)
 - Personal background (e.g., low educational background)
- Environmental factors:
 - Physical environment (e.g., poor building conditions)
 - Social environment (e.g., social policies)

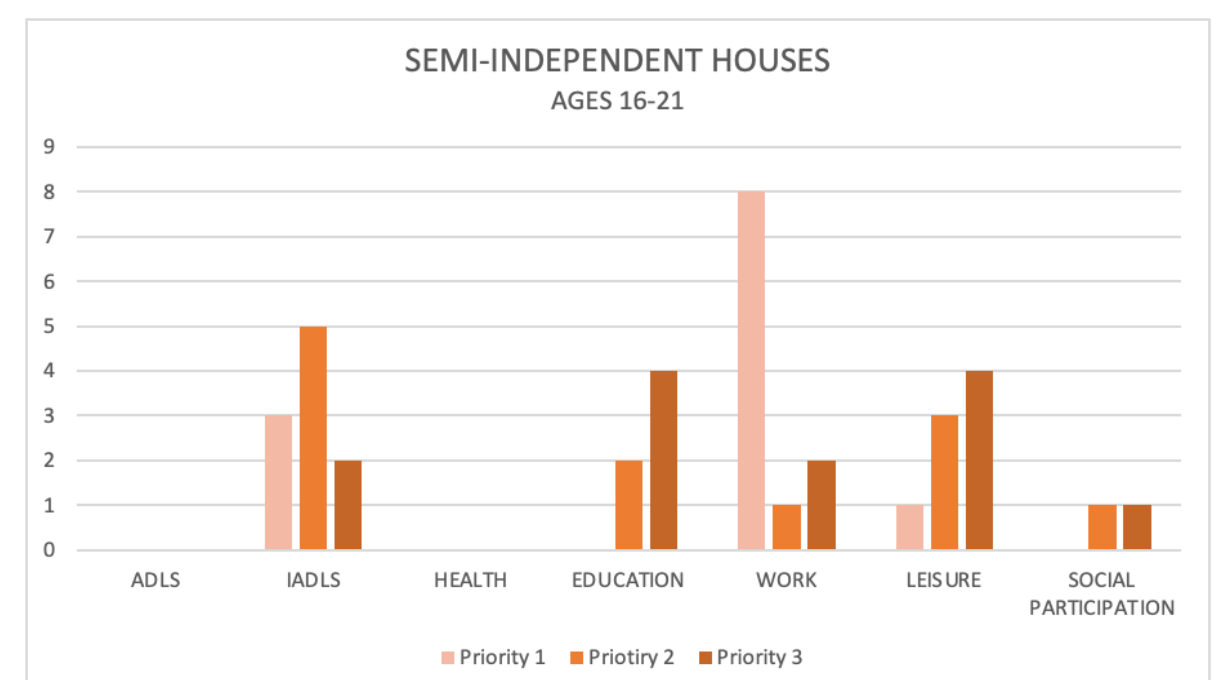
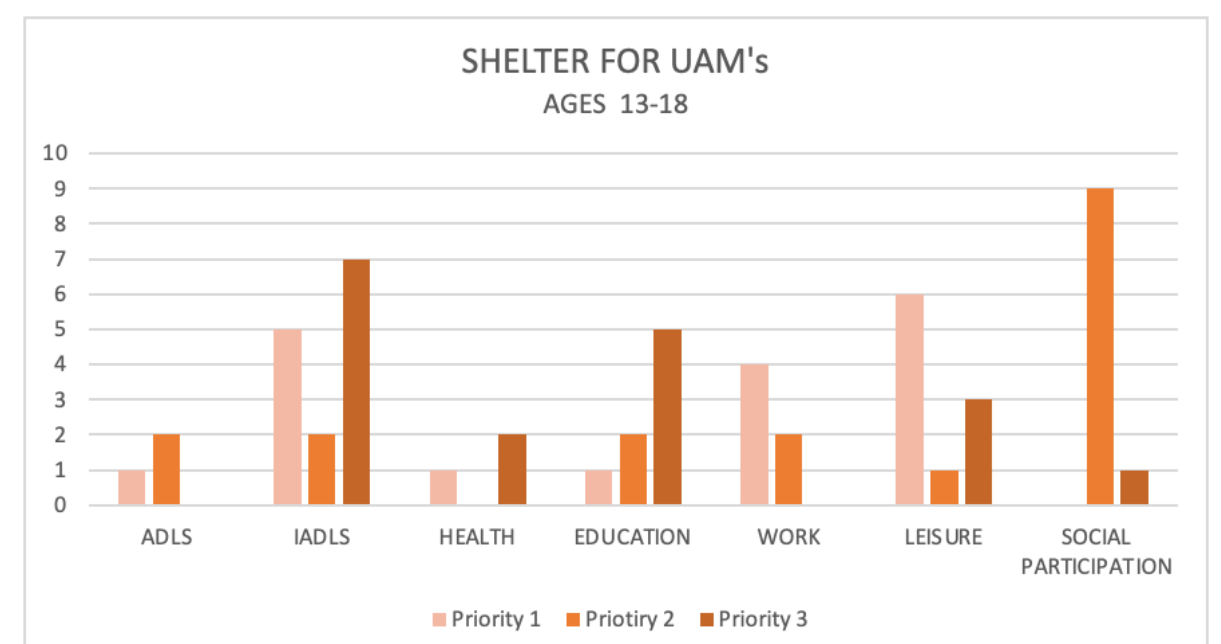


Table 3: UAMs occupational priorities

(The above information were gathered using the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) and the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Occupational Satisfaction (RASOS) Assessment Tool.)

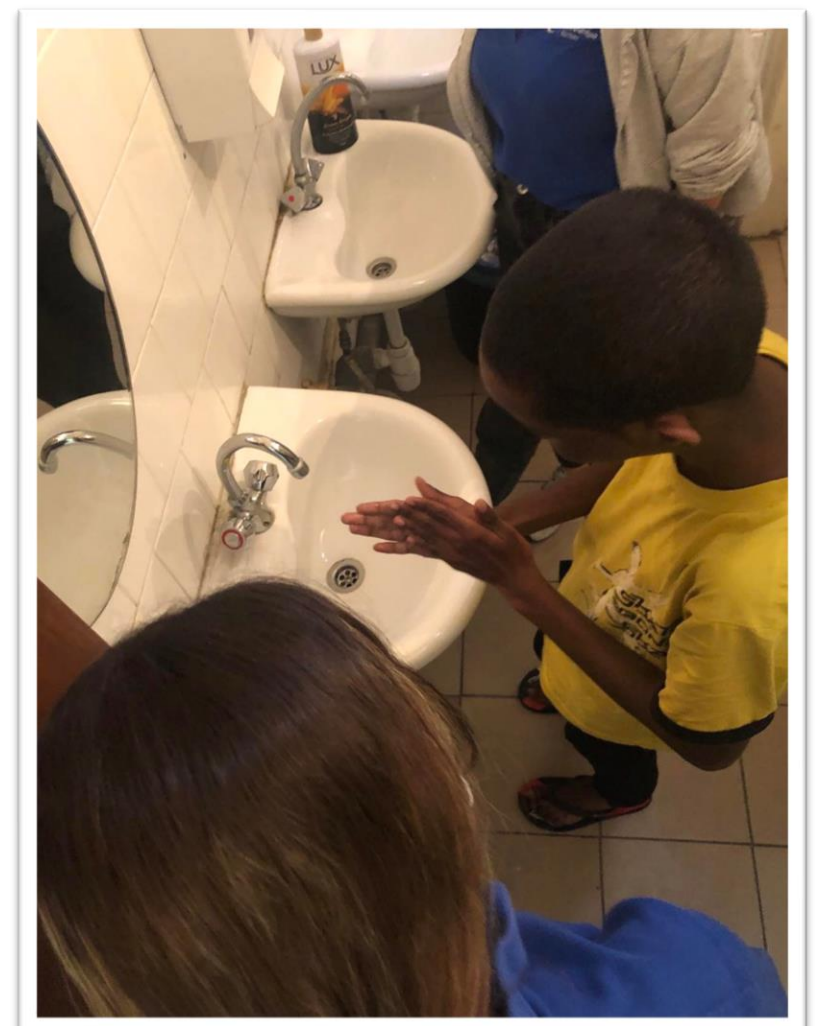
Results

Role of OT in this field:

- Identify specific and personalised occupational needs of UAMs.
- Identify current stakeholders and introduce interdisciplinary collaborations.
- Advocate for occupational justice.
- Provide scientific evidence to guide health and social policies.
- Expand understanding of OT profession.
- Promote culturally sensitive practices.

OT student training:

- Have a better understanding of UAMs needs and of this field.
- Identify and apply approaches of OT for social transformation.
- Expand their understanding of the professional identity of an OT.
- Critically reflect on future perspectives of emerging areas of OT.



References:

Christodoulou C., Psychouli P. (2022). 'Design of an occupation-based assessment tool for refugees and asylum seekers', WFOT 2022 Scientific Programme Committee, 18th WFOT Congress Occupational R-evolution, Paris, 28-31/ 08/ 2022.

Discussion & Conclusions

Key improvements – project expansion

- Develop culturally aware OT assessment tools:
 - the **RASOS** example.
- Explore pathways of information exchange and dissemination about UAMs' needs among professionals inside and outside the discipline.
- Apply interdisciplinary collaboration strategies on a larger scale to more efficiently assess and address UAMs needs and (re)define the role of each discipline in this field.
- Expand the boundaries of fieldwork practice.
- Create affiliations with key persons and representatives from the refugee community and involve displaced persons in the sense of a joint venture.