# Intersectional Perspectives on 'Productivity' from Female Refugees with Disabilities Suzanne Huot<sup>1</sup>, Leanne Fells<sup>1</sup>, Perdita Elliott<sup>1</sup>, Anne-Cécile Delaisse<sup>1</sup>, Mary Kam<sup>2</sup>, Sandra Almeida<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of British Columbia, Canada <sup>2</sup>S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Canada

# Background

- Neoliberalism influences health & social services delivery<sup>1</sup>
- Individuals increasingly made responsible for their own unemployment & are framed as 'at risk' of dependency<sup>2</sup>
- Systemic focus on individualism has a homogenizing effect that obscures the social conditions differentially shaping people's labour market opportunities<sup>3</sup>
- Female refugees with physical disabilities face intersecting systems of oppression (Figure 1) in employment preparation & participation



Figure 1: Intersecting systems of oppression

# **Research purpose**

• To determine barriers to labour market participation for female refugees with physical disabilities

#### **Objective** 1

## Objective 2

### Objective 3

How does the intersection of identities shape experiences of preparing for, seeking, & gaining employment?

What alternative productive occupations are meaningful to this population?

What are the barriers & facilitators to participation in productive occupations?

# Methodology

- Exploratory qualitative pilot study conducted in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
- Semi-structured interviews with 9 participants
  - 5 female refugees with physical disabilities
  - 4 primary caregivers (3 female, 1 male)
- Facilitated by interpreters to conduct interviews in participants' primary language

# Findings

The first important [barrier] is money [...] because for [this entrepreneurial work] I need to hire people and I need money to hire people. If the companies they don't hire me, I myself, I need to hire people but I don't have money to hire people.

We all want equal access and [...] people are saying, "oh you're [disabled]." I'm a permanent resident, I'm a citizen, I have a BA. I'm educated and I moved to *Canada.* The system unfortunately didn't recognize everything.

It is good to have it as a family doctor [who speaks the same language]. But then other appointments, specialists, they don't give me any interpreter, so it is hard for us to communicate. Sometimes we bring my husband's friend. [...] They don't know about the medical terminology, they are not certified interpreter [...] they told us "if you want an interpreter you have to hire one" and it cost at least 50 dollars an hour.



We ask about that, but we don't get any information from anywhere [...] there is a person that works with the new people here, but when we ask him "oh, sorry, I don't have information." And right now there is no one work for us because we are here for two years and few months and we are permanent resident. Yeah, so I don't find anyway to find information.

[The settlement worker] tell me "there is a house like that, if you want to be in this house it's ok, if no, do you want to sleep in the street?" I hear these words, it hurts me.

#### Recommendations

### Discussion

- Need to dismantle intersecting barriers
- From an occupational justice perspective, systems create barriers, such as providing services in silos without coordination to accommodate complex needs
- Providers lack knowledge of appropriate services & how to access them, & there are inadequate resources for newcomers with disabilities
- Enhance coordination of services
- Increase supports to reduce language barriers
- Provide individualized employment support
  - Provide options for employment outside of the traditional labour market
- Educate to reduce stigma & discrimination
  - Policy makers, service providers, employers





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