

The occupation of self-employment in South African informal microenterprises

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Abstract

Introduction Self-employment in informal microenterprises has been encouraged to facilitate employment opportunities in South Africa. However, participation in self-employment within the community served by professionals such as occupational therapists is limited by many factors such as a lack of implementation of government initiatives. To enable individual and community participation in this type of work for those who have occupational dysfunction, particularly persons with disabilities, professionals such as occupational therapists need to understand the structural, contextual and occupational outcomes related to self-employment. Based on the Framework for Occupational Justice this study explored the occupation of self-employment in microenterprises in the low-resourced urban community of Alexandra Township.

Method A quantitative descriptive non-experimental design study was used to identify informal microenterprises in the community using a transect walk and community mapping. Structured interviews were conducted with key informants (service providers and business owners) who provided perceptions on factors which impacted the occupational outcomes of microenterprises.

Results Structural and contextual factors from the perspective of the participants resulted in unjust occupational outcomes concerning occupational rights, particularly participation, choice and balance were impinged on by the lack of job opportunities. Occupational marginalization and imbalance were reported since many businesses lacked adequate and appropriate space from which to e.g., trade. Some business owners, however, reported just occupational outcomes related to the occupational right for meaningful occupation in providing a service to the community and financial income to support themselves and their families.

Conclusion Occupational therapists need to play various active roles in raising the consciousness of unjust occupational outcomes and support for just occupational outcomes that are achieved in engagement in self-employment in informal microenterprises.

Keywords: Informal sector, structural factors, contextual factors, occupational outcomes, Alexandra Township.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of professional practice, occupational therapists should be aware of and be involved in collaborative processes which enable individual and community participation in typical occupations¹. Occupations, such as work is defined as “labour or exertion related to the development, production, delivery, or management of objects or services; benefits may be financial or nonfinancial (e.g., social connectedness, contributions to society, adding structure and routine to daily life”². However, ever paid work or “the socioeconomic relationship between a worker and an employer in which the worker sells their labour power under a formal or informal employment contract”^{3:267}. is unavailable to many. Unemployment was a known challenge facing low-middle income countries such as South Africa even before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic with the unemployment rate being 34,5% in quarter 1 of 2022⁴. In South Africa, unemployment has been exacerbated since many citizens were denied equal access to formal employment, building the economy, and receiving education and training during and after apartheid.

To improve employment rates, stimulate the economy, and counteract poverty, the National Integrated Small Enterprise Development (NISED) Masterplan proposed by the South African government encourages citizens to explore entrepreneurship in small self-owned microenterprises or small businesses⁵ where they can be considered as self-employed and “earning their living from the independent pursuit of economic activity, as opposed to earning a living working for a company or another individual (an employer)”^{6:1}.

These small businesses contribute positively to an economy of a country⁷ but there seems to be limited coordination with less and inadequate assistance provided to those embarking on this form of self-employment⁸ since the National Development Plan (NDP) focuses on registered small and medium enterprises (SMMEs) only. For most considering self-employment, involvement in an informal, unregistered microenterprise is the only option available. Valodia et al.⁹ indicate these informal microenterprises are typical of a developing economy with high unemployment, where individuals' choice for employment is limited¹⁰. These microenterprises are created by survivalists from the poorest in the population, who are unable to become part of the mainstream economy and for whom self-employment may be an imposition rather than a choice¹¹.

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Informal microenterprises include service and skills, retail (buying and selling of products) and manufacturing/production of products on a small scale¹² which include vendors, small shops and household industries which employ no more than five people¹³. These businesses lack formality in terms of registration and do not have access to the conventional commercial banking sector. Thus, in South Africa, the owners of these small businesses operate on the margins of the economy¹³ even though government initiatives such as the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) and Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) have been put in place since 2004 to assist them. The lack of concerted effort from the government could be contributing to the high failure rate for these microenterprises within the first three years of operation¹⁴.

To understand the just and unjust occupational outcomes of self-employment in informal microenterprises, structural and contextual factors related to self-employment in the informal labour sector need to be researched and documented from the occupational therapist's perspective. Locally, and internationally, however, there also seem to be limited to no evidence-based frameworks for self-employment for persons with occupational dysfunction including those with disabilities. To respond to the South African government's call on entrepreneurship occupational therapists need to have a better understanding and awareness of the why, when and how of self-employment in the informal labour sector. This would enable occupational therapists to actively facilitate the occupational outcomes possible for those who have the potential for and are involved in self-employment in microenterprises.

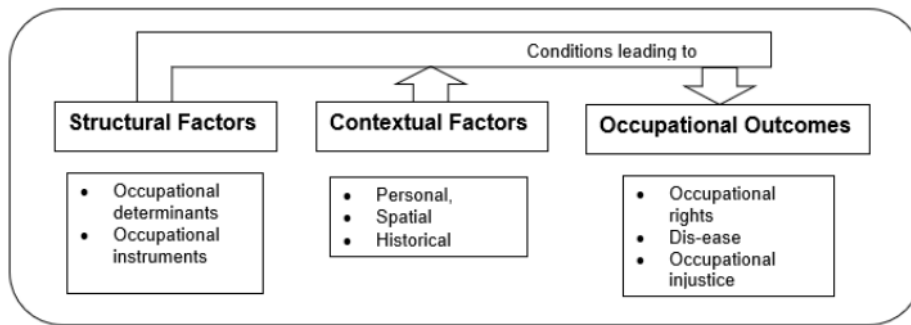
This study aimed to explore occupation outcomes¹⁵ for self-employment in microenterprises in the low-resourced urban community of Alexandra Township, based on the Framework of Occupational Justice from the perspective of key informants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Framework of Occupational Justice presents a perspective of occupational outcomes concerning occupational rights (meaning, participation, choice, and balance) as well as dis-ease or social disruption and occupational justice or injustice (occupational alienation, occupational deprivation, occupational imbalance or occupational marginalization)¹⁵

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Figure 1 The Framework of Occupational Justice

The framework highlights participation in an occupationally just way based on structural factors and contextual factors which support or restrict occupational outcomes. Structural factors include occupational determinants such as local and national policies and occupational instruments which include occupations affected by policies including education and employment. These interact with personal, spatial and historical contextual factors, all of which contribute to occupational outcomes¹⁵. Like many other nations across the globe, South Africa was and is still not immune from negative structural and contextual factors due to man-made negative effects resulting from acts such as imperialism and colonialism which date from centuries ago¹⁶. Unjust occupational outcomes for employment in South Africa are impacted by social issues including injustice of exclusion from everyday occupations including employment. Even though Apartheid officially ended in 1994, its legacy continues to hurt the majority of the population in the form of social ills, poverty, corruption, crime, and violence, promoting inequality in South Africa¹⁶. The country is nearly three decades into democracy, but the majority of ordinary blacks, are yet to benefit socially and economically.

Although occupational determinants in the form of legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and also Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has been put in place¹⁷, the lack of occupational instruments, such as adequate education and opportunities for skills development amongst previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa has manifested in even higher unemployment. Malefane¹⁸ observed that those in microenterprises are disconnected from the mainstream economy as they are marginalised by local and national policies related to structural factors that

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affect growth potential. These may suggest that there is limited support received by business owners of many informal microenterprises. Occupational instruments instituted in SEDA programmes to support self-employment in small businesses which include 2.3 million business owners operating in the informal sector and providing 23% of total self-employment in the country¹⁹. The DSBD programme failed to achieve support goals and inclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities in informal small businesses in 2021¹⁹ to promote economic development and alleviate poverty in local municipalities¹⁸.

Even specific policies developed to support microenterprises, such as the Township and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme (TREP) and the local economic development (LED) strategy²⁰ are focused on integrating business ventures into regulatory environments before they can access funding. The services for business skills training and product development support, all require online access and application, which for many is not available. Thus, Hadebe²¹ indicated that informal businesses in low-resourced areas in townships in South Africa, rarely try to access financial assistance from the government since none were successful. Support from non-governmental organisations and corporate initiatives (as part of their social responsibility) in the form of opportunity centres^{22, 23}, industry hives, microenterprises directories, and the provision of training programmes^{21, 24} do not appear to adequately reach those in informal microenterprises. Baumann²⁵ reported that those providing this assistance do not appreciate or understand the challenges on the ground faced by owners of informal businesses. Other than a lack of access to financial assistance, a lack of job permanency and no paid leave or other benefits are mandated since the businesses are not part of the regulatory framework that governs employment.

Other structural factors under occupational instruments, such as lack of access to education as well as personal and historical contextual factors which do not allow for the development of skills impact the occupational outcomes amongst previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa, excluding them from the formal employment market. These individuals embark on or are *pushed* into participation in self-employment in informal microenterprises out of necessity in a context which is resource-constrained and where no other work is available²⁴. This is supported by the push and pull theory of entrepreneurial motivation where push indicates no choice to start a business based on opportunities in the market but due to circumstances forcing the individual to become a self-employed business owner²⁶ irrespective of unjust occupational outcomes.

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Concerning the study context, Mpofu-Walsh²⁷ in 2021 highlighted the inequality in South Africa in terms of the spatial context with the majority of those in urban settings residing in impoverished communities such as Alexandra Township. This residential area is one of the most densely populated and poorest townships in the Gauteng province, and it presents issues of overcrowding, lack of resources in terms of municipal services and very limited work opportunities²⁸. According to Charman et al.,²⁹ self-employment in urban townships in South Africa exists mainly in the form of shops within someone's house (spaza shop), street trade, taverns (shebeens), grocery retail and hair care services. Spaza shops, where individuals sell airtime, snacks, fruits and vegetables, cigarettes and groceries from a window or door in their own home, cigarettes and groceries make up 17% to 25% of self-owned informal businesses. Self-employment in service and skill-based businesses include hair care, repair, mechanical, religious, educational, and transport services operated from the business owners' homes and on the street. The sale of food, liquor and takeaways equates to over 50% of all business activities. Only 5% of businesses are involved in micro-manufacturing which relates to the production on site by the business owner of items such as furniture, clothes and metal gates^{12, 29}. The occupational outcomes for these business owners are negatively impacted by limited suitable locations as well as access to suppliers and advertising³⁰.

Although the occupation of self-employment is not new to the occupational therapy profession¹² there is limited literature supporting engagement in self-employment, especially in informal businesses. Thus, by understanding the structural and contextual factors affecting the occupational outcomes for business owners of microenterprises an occupational therapist should be able to apply the fundamental to the philosophy of the profession that "people have the right to participate in a range of occupations that enable them to flourish, fulfil their potential and experience satisfaction"^{31:1} This may assist occupational therapists in mitigating unjust occupational outcomes and facilitating engagement in self-employment in these microenterprises for persons who are occupational dysfunctional or have disabilities².

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative descriptive non-experimental cross-sectional design study was used where data was collected during a once-off visit. More insight was gained on activities and factors related to

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running microenterprises that already exist, i.e., no manipulation of variables³² in the community of Alexandra Township, a low-resourced urban community.

Research site

This study took place in the low-resourced urban community of Alexandra Township. This township was established in 1912 as freehold plots for Black citizens²⁸ in the North-Eastern suburbs of Johannesburg in the province of Gauteng in South Africa. Under Apartheid, all rights were removed and the people living in Alexandra Township were restricted in terms of mobility, land ownership, education and the right to vote amongst others. Post 1994, when South African citizens could move freely within the country, physical space became more limited due to an influx of people moving to the cities, such as in Alexandra Township, to find work. Housing in Alexandra Township consists of old formal dwellings and shacks with the overall infrastructure around this area being poor²⁸.

Population and sampling

The perspectives of a limited number of key informants were elicited since detailed information using structured interviews to obtain quantitative descriptive data were used. These key informants were snowball, conveniently and purposively sampled business owners of profitable microenterprises and those who are gatekeepers who provide services to the community in Alexandra Township.

The service providers who met these criteria a) were those who occupied a position of authority, b) interacted with the community in Alexandra Township and worked in Alexandra Township. These were i) a staff member from the ward counsellor's office with knowledge of policies related to informal business operation, ii) an occupational therapy technician (OTT), working at a primary health care clinic, and iii) a private business owner promoting self-employment in this community. The service providers assisted with three different transect walks with the researcher and the identification of informal microenterprises in the community. Based on the community mapping one main street in Alexandra Township was selected as representing a typical street e.g., there were shack houses, infrastructure was neglected and many microenterprises were operating. Forty-six businesses on the street were mapped in a one kilometre area on the street.

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Business owners were selected from the 46 microenterprises to participate ²⁷ in the study if they met the following criteria i) had run a profitable microenterprise for at least three years, ⁴ ii) lived in Alexandra Township or/and had a business ⁵ located in Alexandra Township, iii) were ¹ of working ages of between 18 to 65 years⁴ and iv) generated an income greater than that of the monthly South African disability grant amount of R 2 080 for the year 2023³³. A sample size of 40% of the owners of the microenterprises (n=16) met these criteria.

Research Instruments

A questionnaire was used to guide structured interviews with service providers. The service providers' questionnaire was piloted for content validity by experts in the field of vocational rehabilitation in occupational therapy and received a Content Validity Index (CVI) score for this questionnaire was 3,3/4 overall³⁴. The service providers and the researcher conducted a transect walk and community mapping, to establish the physical location of the different microenterprises, their spatial context and their categories in Alexandra Township³⁵.

Data from microenterprise owners were collected using a separate questionnaire in the form of guided structured individual interviews with a combination of open and closed ended questions. The business owners' questionnaire was piloted for face validity with subject matter experts and microenterprise owners in Diepsloot (another low-resourced urban Township) which is geographically located north of Johannesburg.

Data Collection

Interviews with the service providers and business owners were initiated after ethical clearance (ethics certificate number M170820) was obtained ²³ for this research from XXX (see title page). Each service provider and business owner was ²³ informed of the aim of the study and signed informed consent to participate.

The service providers assisted with three different transect walks with the researcher and the identification of informal microenterprises in the community. Once all businesses on the street had been mapped, owners of the microenterprises ¹⁹ who met the inclusion criteria were informed about the study and approached to participate in the study. A total of 17 business owners were recruited and appointments were made with each to complete the interview at a time that suited

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them. One business owner could not continue with the interview due to the presence of illogical thoughts on the day of the interview.

Data analysis

Frequencies of the types and the location of each microenterprise were determined and presented descriptively. The questions on the questionnaires were analysed using summative content analysis according to the Framework for Occupational Justice¹⁵ and considered the structural, contextual factors and occupational outcomes related to the operation of microenterprises in the community from the perspective of the service providers and the business owners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The perspectives of the key informants based on the Framework of Occupational Justice are presented in terms of structural factors and contextual factors related to occupational outcomes of self-employment in microenterprises. Refer to Table I.

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2 Table 1: Analysis of perspectives of key informants based on the Framework of Occupational Justice

Structural factors	Underlying occupational determinants	Type of economy -Informal, businesses were not registered	Regional/ national/ local policies -Laws (e.g., adhere to By-laws to avoid police harassment/confiscation of goods) -Lack of formal funding policies. Difficult access as it requires businesses to be registered and/or mostly online-based applications.	Values -Income greater than R2500 - higher than social grants -Service to the community -Contribution to the economy	Cultural/community values -Donations to worthy causes -Cost-effectiveness products/services -Services on credit
	Occupational instruments	Education and training Government, Private or Non-Government Organisation (NGO): -Education (level) ranges from none to tertiary. Median <Grade 12 -Business training -In-service training:61% -Formal vocational rehabilitation for self-employment -Skills development	Employment Need structured support/programmes: -Legal-1 -Financial-0 -Municipal hubs-2	Technology -Availability of technology and connectivity to e.g., enhance business systems (financial management)	Communications and media -Communication with e.g., suppliers -Advertising
Contextual factors	Personal contexts	Age 20-60 years (working age)-median 35 years	Gender -Male-82% -Female-19%	National origin -South African-56% -Foreign national-44%	Family -Involvement in the business-100% -Number of dependants-mean 7.5
	Historical contexts	Financial source -Family or friend -Self-based	Area -Low resourced -Customers availability	Transport methods used when replacing the stock -Walking for less than 5km (6%) -Usage of own transport (13%) -Use of public transport (50%) -Getting stock delivered to them (19%) -Using a friend's car (6%).	
Occupational outcomes	Spatial/ environmental contexts	Urban/rural location -Urban -Overcrowded	Universal design and accessibility -Accessibility of business location is poor -Poor infrastructure, road and pavement maintenance	Business location -Surrounded by similar businesses -Pavement under the shelter of an umbrella or awning (Permanent or temporary) (63%) or -Yard of a house or tented room (31%)	Security and storage -Burglar bars and security doors - Sleeping at the business site -Dogs -Lack of space Participation -Doing in this occupation difficult
	Occupational rights	Meaning (why self-employment)-56% -Flexibility, freedom and working for self -Provide a service -Income generation -Sense of belonging and Self-identity -Xenophobic attacks -Discrimination	Balance -Operating hours-8 to 16 hrs/day. Average (10 hrs) -Operating days-mainly over Easter and Christmas holidays. Some businesses (31%) had no official closure day/s.	Choice -Rather have paid employment -Pushed into self-employment	
Occupational outcomes	Dis-ease	Occupational marginalization Lack of access to finance, training and formal employment		Occupational imbalance -Long working hours affect a balanced lifestyle	
	Occupational injustice				

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Structural factors

The structural factors impacting self-employment in informal microenterprises in Alexandra Township were mostly described by the key informants. The three service providers who were purposively sampled were firstly a staff member from the office of the ward councillor who oversees services related to the township and is responsible for the implementation of the LED strategy. The occupational therapy technician was the second service provider and she lived in Alexandra Township and was based at a local primary health care clinic. She rendered home visit services to this community including facilitation of occupations amongst the disabled community members. The third stakeholder was part of a private organisation that has a division that entails self-employment and entrepreneurship training (at a fee) in Alexandra Township for individuals aged between 7 and 18 years. Refer to Table II.

Table II: Demographics of Service Providers

Service Providers (n=3)	Age	Gender	Race	Office location	Institution or organisation	Work area and residential area
Alexandra ward councillor's office	Mid 30s	Female	Black	South of Alexandra Township	Government	Works and lives in Alexandra Township
Occupational Therapy Technician(OTT)	Late 40s	Female	Black	South of Alexandra Township	Government	Works and lives in Alexandra Township
Young Minds Group (YMG)	Early 20s	Male	Black	East of Alexandra Township	Private	Works in Alexandra Township

Occupational determinants

The service providers reported a lack of clarity about the roles of governance and the value of informal microenterprises to the community. However, they reported a positive occupational determinant as the mutual relationship, between the business owners and customers who reside in the same community bringing about convenience to the community of Alexandra.

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According to the business owners, they at times operate on a credit basis (known to locals as “*nkoloteng*”, a Setswana/Sesotho word) and they provide services at cost-effective prices. Some business owners were reported to give back to the community of Alexandra in the form of donations, for instance, a donation will go towards community campaigns or events at old age homes in the community of Alexandra.

Another positive determinant as reported by the business owners was a monthly income which ranged from ZAR2 500 and ZAR5 000 per month. Even if this income was lower during bad months, over holidays and when the weather was bad, the monthly earnings generated were more than the income provided by the South African government in the form of grants available such as social relief of distress (SRD) grant and for persons with disabilities³³.

The key informants reported the negative occupational determinants to include the lack of formal financial support and access to funding (capital) to assist microenterprise owners. Additionally, the processes required to apply for any funding are complicated and time-consuming¹⁸. The staff member from the office of the ward councillor indicated, since 2013, by-laws in the Joburg Metro also require informal traders to apply to the Council for a formal lease or allocation of a stand on a public road or any other property under the control of the Council. Informal traders in Alexandra Township are managed by the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) in charge of municipal assets (land, property and in this case markets) thus, informal businesses are not officially recognised by the city³⁶. Since most of these business owners do not have a certificate to trade, they are exposed to ongoing harassment from the Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD). Police officers charge owners of informal microenterprises for trading infringements such as not observing health regulations and obstructing public thoroughfares and confiscating their stock. The attitude of the municipality to informal small businesses seems to be punitive rather than supportive. This is supported by Igwe and Icha-Ituma³⁷ who indicated governments in developing countries have a culture of trying to formalise and regulate business with restrictive policies creating barriers to informal microenterprises.

Occupational Instruments

The service providers were aware of political and legal organisations that provide assistance programmes to small businesses, and those organisations included public and private initiatives, which entail amongst others pro-bono services from reputable law firms such as Edward Nathan Sonnenberg (ENS) Africa. Services provided to the microenterprise owners as reported by service providers and supported by literature include but are not limited to, business legal advice and workshops and venture capital funds³⁸. Local government initiatives

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include the community centres, opportunity centres^{22, 23}, and an Automotive Hub³⁸ in the community of Alexandra and a small and medium enterprise database at City of Johannesburg Region E offices. These initiatives are provided to afford micro-enterprise business owners a platform to bid for sub-contracts or tenders intended for Region E and support emerging microenterprises with assistance and advice on self-employment and business support which includes training²². However, it seems many business owners are unaware of or cannot access these services since some of these services require the use of technology and online platforms which are not available to everyone. This may suggest that this service is geared more towards formally registered small businesses.

Concerning communication and media, most business owners reported they rely on advertising based on word of mouth in this sector³⁹, although 10% reported they did have finance for formal advertising.

Being exposed to persons with disabilities, the OTT service provider felt it was more challenging for persons with disabilities to become self-employed. There are no formal vocational rehabilitation services, particularly supporting self-employment available in Alexandra Township and issues such as using an assistive device (e.g., a wheelchair) were reported to affect efficiency in operating a microenterprise. This is supported by Maziriri and Madinga⁴⁰ in their study in Sebokeng Township in Gauteng, where persons with disabilities reported a lack of support and discrimination from the community in which they lived, which affected their ability to be self-employed.

For the occupational therapist to promote engagement in self-employment in microenterprises, collaboration with local service providers. Prospective collaborators could include but are not limited to, government departments, non-government organizations (NGOs), private organisations and organisations for persons with disabilities. This is necessary to facilitate the client's awareness of possible positive and negative determinants of occupation which may impact the operation of their microenterprise as well as facilitating access to occupational instruments or programmes which can support a successful engagement in self-employment and achieve a more positive occupational outcome.

Contextual factors

Personal context

Most business owners in this study were over the age of 35 years¹⁹ which is supported by research indicating that older individuals preferred being self-employed if they cannot easily get paid employment⁴¹ (Table III). Most of the business owners were in their early thirties when

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starting their own businesses since it took time to save enough money and gain experience and confidence to start a business on their own.

Most of the business owners were males and this is in line with research that indicates females are less likely to be involved in self-employment due to being more family-orientated and more involved in piece work. Most business owners were married, had not completed high school and had been doing business for a period ranging from 3 to 28 years with a mean of 17 years⁴². In terms of nationality and dependents, 56% (n= 9) of the business owners were South Africans and 44% (n= 7) were foreign nationals.

Table III Demographics of business owners (n=16)

		n	%
Gender	Male	13	81.25
	Female	3	18.75
Age	25 – 35 years	5	31.25
	36 – 45 years	8	50.00
	46 – 50 years	3	18.75
Marital status	Married	8	50
	Single	6	37.5
	Cohabiting	2	12.5
Education	None	1	6.25
	Primary School	3	18.75
	< Grade 12	6	37.5
	Grade 12	3	18.75
	Tertiary	3	18.75

The number of dependants cared for by the business owners ranged from 2 to 30 dependants, with an average of 7.5 dependants. The high number of dependants could have been the *pushing* factor for these business owners to resort to self-employment so that they can support their families. All business owners indicated that family support was essential for the success of their business as confirmed by Petersen and Charman⁴³ that many employ family members. Informal microenterprises therefore not only provide for families but offer employment and work experience.

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The business owners indicated their ability and skills influenced the type of business they engaged in but all reported needing commitment and resilience. Business owners' success was perceived by the business owners to be the quality of the service or product they provided and their attributes or work ethic, such as dedication, and patience “*ku tiyimisela*” (in xiTsonga, meaning determination). It was observed that less complex business logistics were required to run a retail business. Buying and selling sweets and snacks entails sourcing the products and selling, whereas the service category business such as a hair salon requires having a skill set.

Three business owners reported disabilities due to i) stroke, ii) shoulder and back injuries from a motorbike accident, and iii) a gunshot. For these participants, pain and relying on others to obtain stock for them (stock was sometimes stolen) affected the hours they could work and the profitability of their businesses. Disability and discomfort did not deter these participants from engaging in self-employment, which may suggest that successful small business opportunities may be considered as a placement option for persons with disability. A client profile (e.g., their priorities and the reason they intend to explore or why they would be suitable for self-employment)⁴⁴ should be developed when assisting those with disabilities to consider self-employment. Their education and training needs (occupational instruments under structural factors) are to be considered as well as family support and how any occupational dysfunction can be accommodated⁴⁵.

Historical context

Their lack of access to formal training or education allowing access to the formal employment market, impacted on outcomes of self-employment in microenterprises in South Africa. There has been little improvement in education since democracy for 75% of South Africans with public schools in low-resourced areas having a high dropout rate and little access to technology. These schools lack accountability, management, a culture of learning and teacher competence resulting in poor coverage of the curriculum, monitoring of homework and performance on national tests⁴⁶. Less than a third of the business owner participants had an opportunity to finish school or attend business training. This applies particularly to persons who became disabled when young and have limited access to basic education⁴⁷. The majority of business owners (61%; n=11) received in-service training on-site while working or volunteering at a business owned by a neighbour, friend, or acquaintance since they were excluded by costs from formal business training. According to Mahadea and Khumalo⁴⁸, it is these historical constraints which affect competence and capabilities and knowledge which have a major impact on the growth and success of microenterprises.

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Another contextual factor that historically restricts access to finance for business owners is a lack of generational wealth and fixed assets in accessing financing available from any institutions that normally provide loans for businesses¹⁸. In South Africa, these are a result of the unjust previous ruling systems. To start their businesses, various business owners reported that they used amounts ranging from ZAR450 to ZAR30,000 with the capital raised from family and friends. Most business owners indicated that they saved up money and bought necessary tools, and materials for their business and then started their business on a small scale.

Business owners were further impacted by the historical restrictions on formal economic activity and limitations defining the population in townships before democracy¹⁶. The stock, therefore, had to be sourced at sites outside of Alexandra Township. Transportation methods used when replacing stock by the business owners were walking for less than 5km (6%), usage of own transport (13%), use of public transport (50%), getting stock delivered to them (19%) or using a friend's car (6%). This activity was time-consuming and took hours out of their working day and high transport costs were reported by 53%-60% of business owners in similar studies regarding accessing stock from locations far from where the business owners operate⁴⁸.

While the location of the business in the township close to customers increased the probability of building a clientele base within their area⁴⁹, customer-orientated practices were needed to keep existing customers since this is essential for the business to succeed. Due to the limited finances available to customers in the township context, strategies used to keep customers included providing appropriately priced low-cost items and maintaining hygiene in the business, although this was difficult when selling e.g., food on hot days. As highlighted earlier, another strategy used to keep customers was business owners operating on a credit basis. However late payment from debtors was reported by over 80% in another study as impacting the sustainability of these businesses that have little in terms of cashflow reserves⁴⁸. One business owner highlighted that he only added a 20% markup which his customers preferred. In line with the above, Ngubeni et al.⁵⁰ indicated that it is very difficult for small informal businesses in Alexandra Township to access customer bases and markets in more lucrative nearby areas such as Sandton.

Occupational therapists can play an advocacy role in assisting those engaging in self-employment by contributing to organisations campaigning for the rights of these business owners to trade in e.g., Johannesburg and assisting with extending access to other customer bases and markets. Referrals for formal or informal training in business skills, as well as development or consolidation skills needed to operate service microenterprises, should be

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made according to the client's capacity as assessed by the occupational therapist. This is in line with education and training needs (occupational instruments under structural factors) ⁴⁴.

Spatial (environmental) context

The number and type of microenterprises were identified in a small one kilometre area in Alexandra Township through mapping and the transect walk. Refer to Figure II.

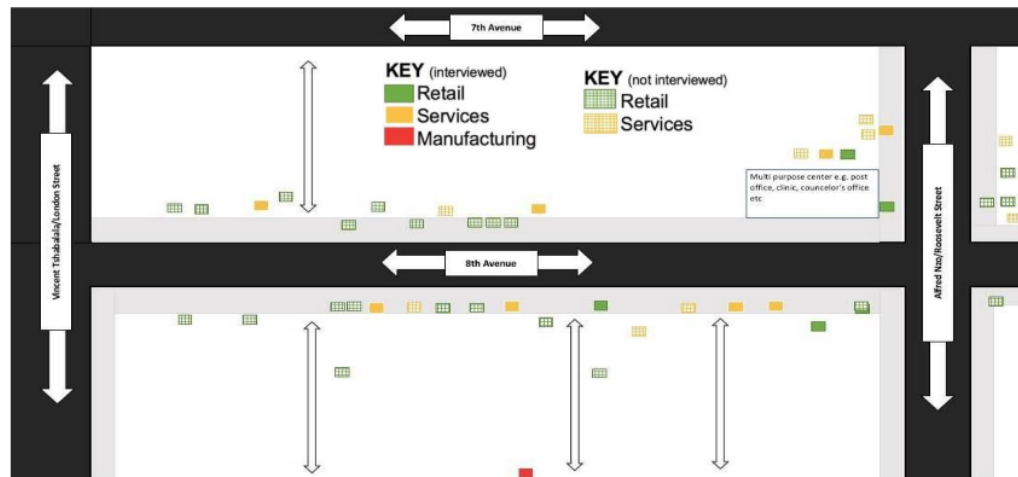


Figure II. Alexandra Township community map (8th Avenue)

There was an abundance of similar microenterprises on the road chosen in this small area where 46 businesses were located. Businesses in the categories of i) retail (61%), ii) services & skills (37%) and iii) manufacturing or production (2%) were identified. ⁶ The findings in this study are similar to those of other studies in urban Townships in South Africa i.e., Ivory Park, Tembisa and Diepsloot²⁹. The clustering of many businesses in one area impacted the diversity of businesses and created competition amongst similar businesses affecting their sustainability³⁹. Mahadea and Khumalo⁴⁸ report that 94% of owners of microenterprises agree that excessive competition restrained the growth of their business. The close proximity of other businesses negatively affected the ability to attract new customers⁵¹.

Other spatial contextual factors facing and impacting negatively on the businesses in this study included a lack of space⁵¹ and high rates of rental on space that was available. It is documented that a lack of space to legally operate businesses is an ongoing issue³⁹ with no indication of

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any solution in terms of allocated market space in low-resourced urban communities⁵². Businesses are forced to operate on pavements and in temporary structures. Approximately two-thirds of the businesses were located on the pavement sometimes under the shelter of an umbrella or awning (63%) or in the yard of a house or rented room (31%). Refer to Figure III.



Figure III: Location of businesses

Natural factors, such as rain, were reported to affect the running of a business as many of their business structures could not cater for this type of weather. Business owners' exposure to weather and toxic environments such as car fumes when working on the side of a busy road were realities affecting their health adding to their vulnerability⁵³. This vulnerability is further extended to those with an impairment and disability according to the Department of Health⁵⁴ and the World Health Organization⁵⁵.

For those with pavement-based businesses, all equipment, tools and material were packed away and taken home when the business closed for the day⁴⁸. This was compounded by limited storage space affecting the profitability of the businesses due to goods spoilage for instance. Local crime levels also impacted stock management as security was a major concern. Solutions that they used included e.g., burglar bars and security doors to secure their stock, sleeping at the business site and having dogs on standby to safeguard their businesses. However, Grabrucker and Grimm⁵⁶ report that no substantial negative effects of actual crime rates on informal businesses in South Africa were found in comparison to the perceptions of the business owners and other external factors.

A full understanding of the client's home and everyday environment is required by occupational therapists before encouraging clients to explore self-employment. This is essential in planning the steps that can be taken to engage in this form of employment successfully within the

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constraints related to spatial contexts. When facilitating or encouraging self-employment with clients with the potential and showing interest in being self-employed these should be made overt. The need for clients to prioritise and place customers' needs at the centre of their businesses should also be emphasised with occupational therapists playing a role in terms of environmental adaptations to facilitate engagement in self-employment.

Occupational Outcomes

Those business owners who are self-employed in informal microenterprises were facing many unjust occupational outcomes within the confines of the structural and contextual factors mentioned above¹⁵. However, due to their ability to adapt to adverse factors and their emphasis on customer service and provision of good service, they have stayed in business supporting findings made by Chatterjee and Das⁵⁷ on successful microenterprises in their study in India.

Occupational rights

The right to choice was limited, half of the business owners indicated that they were only involved in self-employment as this was their only option for employment due to the lack of jobs in the formal sector. The right to participation was also limited which made "doing" in this occupation difficult since these business owners had limited finances as to what business they could afford to start, and what locations were available in which to operate the business. They were unable to develop their business potential and capabilities⁵⁸ as none of the business owners were planning to try and grow their businesses. However, the business owners interviewed have consolidated the right to participate using planning to set up businesses that had a chance of succeeding and had used their previous exposure to business and skills training.

Just occupational outcomes were reported by over half (56%) of the business owners since self-employment did meet their right to be involved in a meaningful occupation. This was achieved by contributing to the economy and leading fulfilling lives as they did not wish to be employed by another person. For them being self-employed came with freedom such as being their own boss, flexibility in working hours and the opportunity for self-driven personal growth without limitations. These microenterprises offered business owners the ability to financially provide for themselves and their families which can contribute to alleviating the effects of poverty in low-resourced contexts. Furthermore, services and products were made available to the community at affordable prices, often within walking distance from their homes adding convenience and savings on aspects such as travel costs⁵⁹. These informal commercial activities are also embedded in the social context allowing for relationships and support which

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do reinforce the business owners' place in the community, sense of belonging, and self-identity⁶⁰.

Right to a balanced lifestyle was impacted by lengthy trading hours which ranged from 8 to 16 hours per day with an average of 10 hours. Closure of the businesses in a year was reported on days over Easter and Christmas holidays, although 31% of the businesses operated every day of the year with no official closure time. For business owners, work occupied most of their waking hours limiting participation in other activities. The impact of these working hours on wellbeing of the participants requires further research and the stress related to self-employment in these businesses to understand the real effect on them⁶¹.

Dis-ease

Social disruptions affected the foreign nationals in that their businesses had experienced or were at risk of looting and damage due to xenophobia⁶² resulting in unjust occupational outcomes. Clients seen by occupational therapists may experience dis-ease, especially in the formal sector in a form of discrimination.

Occupational injustice

Occupational marginalisation was experienced by business owners in terms of access to education, training, formal employment and finance. Further occupational marginalisation and imbalance were evident due to the legalisation of informal trading in Johannesburg, access to customer bases, a lack of job permanency, no paid leave and other benefits since their businesses are not part of the regulatory framework that governs employment in South Africa³⁹. Sixty-nine percent of the participants reported that they do not have sick pay and that if they became ill not being able to work could result in the failure of the business.

CONCLUSION

The small sample size affects generalisation, consequently, the conclusion is limited to the findings of this research. The unjust occupational outcomes of self-employment in Alexandra Township are impacted by structural and contextual factors and resources. Findings indicate that business owners of microenterprises in Alexandra Township have limited rights in terms of choice and suffer occupational marginalisation and imbalance. Rights associated with meaning in occupation associated with self-employment are being fulfilled. Occupational right to choice, a balanced lifestyle and participation were compromised due to their involvement in self-employment in microenterprises. Other challenging factors for the microenterprise owners were a lack of access to finance, education and training and suppliers as well as limited

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business locations and customers while working long hours for a small profit. However, the participants in this study had achieved success in self-employment and reported just occupational outcomes for meaning in occupation in terms of freedom and flexibility at work, providing a service and being part of the community while financially supporting themselves and their families

The findings on profitable self-employment occupations in Alexandra Township seem to suggest that occupational therapists should get involved and play an active role in understanding and addressing occupational injustices when facilitating self-employment for those with occupational dysfunction and clients with disabilities. Occupational therapists should raise awareness within the profession and form partnerships to advocate for change within this employment sector if they are to support self-employment in microenterprises.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice

Amongst the many roles that occupational therapists have, in self-employment, they could play these roles:

- i) The collaborative role, such as referring and working with various sectors in the interest of the end users. This will assist with sourcing and providing opportunities for skills development. This may include working with the government (e.g., Department of Labour and Small Enterprise Development Agency), private sector (e.g., yes4youth), other professions (social workers and industrial psychologists) and organisations for persons with disabilities (e.g., Disabled People South Africa). If there are resources for referring clients, equal opportunities can be provided for all those entering self-employment, particularly in the aspect of entrepreneurial training.
- ii) The researcher role by conducting further research in this field e.g., the development of an evidence-based framework on self-employment for occupational therapists. More research is still needed on e.g., domains such as performance patterns, performance skills and client factors related to self-employment for persons with disabilities;
- iii) Once enough contextually relevant research or data is gathered, the educator's role could be played by incorporating and teaching content on self-employment as an occupation in their curriculum.
- iv) In a consultation or clinical role they may assist with adaptations to the skills, tasks or environment. Important aspects to consider by the occupational therapist together with

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their clients during the collaborative occupational therapy process include, but are not limited to,

- a. The client's motivation, dedication and the main reason for getting into self-employment;
- b. Potential to be self-employment; and
- c. Steps to be followed, how to start and stay self-employed (level of resilience).

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