

Welcome to The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal

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Article citation:

Chichaya T.F. (2025).
Welcome to The Human
Occupation and Wellbeing
Journal. *The Human
Occupation & Wellbeing
Journal* 1(1)
[https://howj.org/index.php/
howj/article/view/34](https://howj.org/index.php/howj/article/view/34)

Conflict of interest: The
author declares no conflict
of interest



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INTRODUCTION

I am deeply delighted and honoured to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of Human Occupation and Wellbeing, and even more so to write this introductory note for our inaugural issue. We are launching this journal at a pivotal time when the imperative to design and occupy meaningful spaces for scholarship and practice has never been more pressing. The generous support from both long-standing collaborators and new colleagues has been both humbling and inspiring. Together, we have created a platform shaped by a shared vision: to enable nuanced exploration of the reciprocal relationship between human occupation and wellbeing, with the goal of advancing the betterment of humanity. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the Associate Editors, the richly diverse editorial team, and the esteemed Ubuntu Advisory members for their inspiration and encouragement; their names are listed on our website's editorial team page.

As this scholarly journey unfolds in forthcoming issues, I look forward to sharing deeper insights and discoveries. In this inaugural issue, I begin by contextualising the key terms that define our journal's name and guiding ethos; wellbeing, human occupation, uncolonised perspective, and the foundational principles of Ubuntu. I will then reflect on the critical importance of occupying relevant spaces in our fields, before concluding with an overview of the contributions featured in this issue.

Wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing frequently accompanies the notion of health. In 1948, the World Health Organization defined health as *"a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"* (WHO, 2005). Although wellbeing was embedded within this definition, it remained undefined on its own until 2021. World Health Organization defined wellbeing as *"a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions"* (WHO, 2025).

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In its current form, the WHO's definition of wellbeing is well-intentioned but remains impressively under-theorised, lacking the specificity needed to be translated into consistent research frameworks or policy instruments. By stating "similar to health," WHO aligns wellbeing closely with health constructs. Yet this positions wellbeing as a derivative, implying that it is something to be managed through health systems rather than something to be understood on its own socio-cultural footing. What does this mean for people who carry a medical diagnosis or people with disabilities? Without operational specifics, this definition remains aspirational rhetoric rather than a tool for meaningful intervention or evaluation. Lastly, there is no explicit recognition of cultural, spiritual, and relational dimensions all which are central especially to Indigenous populations and the majority Global South ways of being.

This framing perpetuates epistemic erasure and sustains a one-sided Western materialist interpretation of wellbeing. For disciplines like occupational therapy and occupational science, fields that claim commitment to lived experience, person-centredness, justice orientation, the power of human occupation and embodied practice, this definition requires significant expansion and interrogation to serve as a genuinely inclusive and actionable concept.

This year, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) updated its definition of occupational therapy to state: *"Occupational therapy promotes health and wellbeing by supporting participation in meaningful occupations that people want, need, or are expected to do"* (WFOT, 2025). In this paper, I intentionally refrain from engaging in debates over the definition of occupational therapy itself and instead

maintain a focused exploration of the term wellbeing. Although the WFOT definition includes wellbeing, the term has not been clearly articulated and not inconsistently defined within occupational therapy and occupational science literature (Aldrich, 2011). This journal provides a critical platform for exploring what wellbeing entails and investigating the processes through which it is lost, restored, and maintained across diverse contexts.

Within positive psychology, wellbeing has been most prominently defined by Seligman (2011), following a shift of focus from the pursuit of "happiness" through life satisfaction to the promotion of flourishing via his Well-Being Theory (PERMA), a structured framework comprising the five core elements of Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Despite its popularity PERMA has been criticised and considered as a list of factors related to wellbeing and not a theory that provides a conceptual definition of wellbeing and the underlying mechanisms of flourishing (Wong & Roy, 2017; Joseph, 2021). Moreover, there are content validity gaps when used with different population groups as wellbeing is context-based (Carlton & Wong, 2023). Meaning this is more likely in many non-Western contexts, particularly where spirituality, communal cohesion, and existential balance are foundational to wellbeing. Furthermore, PERMA neglects the complexity of human suffering, existential anxiety, and moral obligation, dimensions that are key to authentic flourishing. This illustrates the vastness, complexity, and multidimensionality of well-being, underscoring the need for a more balanced and sophisticated inquiry into the concept. Wellbeing is inherently multifaceted and if

health and social care professions truly commit themselves to helping individuals flourish, they must first understand what wellbeing genuinely entails.

Human occupation

Occupation is a term whose meaning is heavily influenced by context, it is a site of semantic and ideological contestation. Its interpretation depends on who is speaking, who is listening, and the situation in which it is used. In linguistics, homonymy refers to words with the same spelling and pronunciation but unrelated meanings, such as the bark of a dog versus the bark of a tree, while polysemy describes a single word with multiple related senses, such as the mouth of a person versus the mouth of a river (Valera, 2020). The word occupation straddles both concepts, as it encompasses several definitions and meanings, some closely related and others entirely distinct, depending on context. Dictionary definitions of occupation commonly include profession, control of a territory by a foreign military force, or the act of using up space or time. In contrast, the conceptualisation of human occupation as encompassing all activities that people engage in throughout daily life is largely unique to the disciplines of occupational therapy and occupational science (Wilcock & Townsend, 2009; D'Souza, Galvaan, & Ramugondo, 2017; Pierce, 2024).

This broader and more nuanced understanding is seldom reflected in mainstream English dictionaries, where the term is often limited to references to hobbies or what people do with their free time. This journal adopts a more expansive understanding of human occupation as the dynamic and multidimensional doings of individuals and communities in both every

day and unexpected activities that structure time, confer meaning, and express values. It is through human occupation (human doings) that people enact purpose, negotiate identity, and sustain wellbeing. The reverse is also true, occupations can also lead to alienation, identity loss, and diminished wellbeing. This happens particularly when they are misaligned with personal, communal, or sociocultural values, lack meaning, or, in the most extreme cases, when they are harmful or destructive. Such occupations (human doings) that are harmful to individual and community wellbeing have been explained under the conceptual lens of the dark side of occupation (Twiney, 2020).

Some of the worst scenarios of human doings include large-scale acts of violence and killing. In the United States, gun violence has become a leading cause of death among young people under the age of 19, with over 48,000 firearm-related fatalities recorded in 2022 (Bassett, 2024). Furthermore, protracted conflicts that have persisted for decades in countries such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan, often underreported in mainstream media, as well as in more recent and escalating wars in Gaza, Palestine and Ukraine are examples (Mlambo & Dlamini, 2019; Hryhorczuk et al., 2024; Hamamra et al., 2025). Although this phrase is often invoked in the context of suicide prevention messaging, “just one life lost is one too many” is equally relevant in this context (Conwell, & Farley-Toombs, 2012). The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal is a platform where the different types of human doings can be critically discussed, with the aim to find collective ways of making human occupation to meaningfully contribute to the wellbeing of humanity.

It is important to recognise that although English has become the dominant global language, largely through the historical and ongoing legacies of colonialism, it is also limited in how it captures the concept of occupation and associated constructs. The semantic complexity that surrounds the term 'occupation' in English does not always exist in other languages. In other languages there is no single equivalent word for occupation, but rather phrases that more fluidly convey its meaning (Malfitano et al., 2022; Akrofi, 2025). Some of the articles in this issue illustrate the limitations of the English language while illustrating the richness of other languages when articulating some concepts relating to our doing, being, becoming and belonging (Kronenberg, 2025; Takaendesa, 2025). It is part of our long-term vision to have this publication offered in multiple languages.

Uncolonised perspective

Decolonisation has become a widely invoked term, often reduced to a rhetorical gesture that sanitises educational curricula, institutional policies, and professional practices while maintaining colonial values without much structural change (Shah, 2024; Toure, 2024). A critical dissonance emerges at the heart of decolonization: how can it be meaningfully pursued without a coherent understanding of what the "uncolonised" entails? Therefore, our ethos arises from an uncolonised perspective: one that foregrounds ways of knowing and doing that have survived and continue to survive colonial systems and values, and that continue to sustain many communities today.

To take this standpoint is to recognise survivance, resilience, and epistemic continuity as foundations for genuine transformation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

From this standpoint, decolonisation can progress beyond a mere buzzword towards meaningful and substantive change. Welcome to the Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal.

Ubuntu from the basics

On 18 August 2025, Gurpreet Singh went viral on social media and news outlets after a video captured him kindly removing laundry from a washing line while delivering a parcel, as rain began to fall and the homeowner, Verrity Wandel, was away (Whiteman, 2025; Mezha.net., 2025). At its most fundamental level, Gurpreet Singh's action embodies the core tenet of Ubuntu philosophy often translated as "I am because we are" or "a person is a person through other persons." This worldview posits that our humanity is inextricably tied to our reciprocal relationships with others. Singh's momentary decision to act was not merely a helpful gesture; it was a practical enactment of communal interdependence, a recognition that the wellbeing of a stranger is connected to his own. The fulfilment he reported and the profound gratitude felt by Wandel are direct validations of this philosophy, demonstrating how individual wellbeing is boosted through acts of kindness and communal care.

The viral celebration of Gurpreet Singh's kindness is a symptom of a society yearning for Ubuntu. His simple act became newsworthy precisely because it disrupted a low expectation of collective obligation, revealing a yearning for a more connected and compassionate way of being. In hyper-individualistic societies, where communal bonds and mutual responsibility have been weakened, such acts of everyday kindness have become so scarce that their appearance is considered remarkable,

revealing a longing for a more connected and Ubuntu-informed way of being.

The most revealing dimension of this episode, however, lies in the subsequent mediation of Gurpreet Singh's identity. The headlines that circulated across most platforms were not neutral descriptors but laden with racial, ethnic, and religious signification: *'Indian-Origin postman'*, *'Sikh postman'*, *'Punjabi delivery boy in Australia'*, *'Australian Sikh postman'*, *'Laundry hero'*. This instinct to classify and label his identity cannot be divorced from the act itself. It raises critical questions about the unconscious frameworks through which goodness is perceived and authenticated. This creates a subtle but pernicious dynamic where virtue is ascribed to, and expected from, particular groups, while being considered optional or exceptional for the dominant culture. Such framing exempts the broader society from the same standard of expectation and perpetuates a model minority trope, which is itself a tool of coloniality that pits racialised groups against one another.

The statement that Singh "took a minute to decide whether to do it or not" (Whiteman, 2025) is also loaded. It speaks to the complex social hesitations that we internalise, concerns about boundaries, misunderstanding, or even suspicion. That he overcame this hesitation is to his credit. Yet, a society informed by Ubuntu would strive to make such a decision not a moment of conflict, but an instinctual expression of shared humanity. This example is deliberately chosen to demonstrate that the principles of Ubuntu, while born of specific African intellectual traditions, are not confined by geography; they articulate a universal human potential for

interdependence that is relatable across continents, languages, and ethnicities.

Occupying spaces

Occupying academic and professional spaces, particularly in peer-reviewed publication is a powerful act of resistance and reclamation for authors from historically marginalised groups, especially minoritised ethnicities and those situated in the Global South. A recent study by Gatwiri et al. (2025) starkly reveals how marginalised scholars are subjected to a peer review system designed to uphold Eurocentric norms, where harsh and unprofessional critiques are disguised as "blind" reviews. Intellectualised racism weaponises academic rigor to erase and silence knowledge outside dominant Western frameworks, while a lack of diverse reviewers ensures this injustice continues unchecked (Gatwiri et al., 2025) this links directly to fields like occupational therapy and occupational science where representation of marginalised voices is strikingly low. This is not just bias; it is systemic academic violence.

In occupational science and occupational therapy, dominant Euro-Western epistemologies have long dictated what is recognised as legitimate knowledge, systematically silencing other ways of knowing, doing, and being (Ahmed-Landeryou, 2023). This exclusion results not only in narrow, decontextualised understandings of occupation and wellbeing but also in professional models and interventions that frequently fail to align with the cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of occupations for people from diverse backgrounds and their lived experiences (Simaan, 2020). The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal seeks to address this imbalance by providing a platform where

antihegemonic scholarship is encouraged, where silenced epistemologies are centred, and where pluralistic, justice-oriented, and culturally grounded perspectives are shared and discussed.

The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal emerges at a time when an important outlet for occupational therapy and occupational science scholarship, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) Bulletin, has ceased publication (Sinclair, 2023). Notably, the Bulletin occupied a somewhat neutral position, in the sense of being unconstrained by national or regional boundaries, and welcomed contributions from authors across the globe. I can personally attest to the supportive experience we received from the editors when we co-published a paper with colleagues from Namibia and Zimbabwe in 2022.

While WFOT preserves an archive and mentions exploring new communication forms (WFOT, n.d), the closure of the Bulletin is precisely opposite of what the field needs. We need more spaces, not fewer, particularly those that amplify emerging, historically marginalised, and nonconformist voices, where antihegemonic practices often emerge (Gerlach, 1025; Eseonu, 2021; Corsini, et al., 2022). Dropping a citable publication in favour of news feeds, social media posts and a newsletter may be strategically atypical. The cited reasons for cessation, namely fewer submissions and low usage, are a predictable artifact of limited accessibility rather than evidence of irrelevance, since the WFOT Bulletin was not fully open access and many articles remained behind a paywall. In light of the recent release of WFOT's updated definition of occupational therapy (WFOT, 2025), it

would be a welcome and progressive step for WFOT to consider launching a new peer-reviewed, citable publication, that is fully open access. This would potentially enhance global accessibility and knowledge dissemination and address the limitations of the previous project.

The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal encourages boldness to question entrenched assumptions, to frame wellbeing in richer, more inclusive terms, to surface what has been silent/silenced and to bring transformative innovations. This is an interdisciplinary space for debate, for contested ideas, and for forging new solidarities on topics relating to promoting wellbeing through human occupation. We welcome submissions across a variety of categories, including personal narratives, original research articles, evidence synthesis reviews, book reviews, perspectives, and original research articles encompassing diverse research designs and methodologies. In response to preliminary anecdotal feedback, we will be introducing essays and letters as standalone sections of the journal beginning with the next issue.

This issue

Following the release of our call for papers in April 2025, we initially intended to publish five papers in this inaugural issue. However, the enthusiastic response from authors exceeded our expectations. In the spirit of fostering inclusive and generative scholarly spaces, we are delighted to present ten contributions, an expansion that shifted our publication timeline from July to August. This first issue includes an editorial, two personal narratives, two perspectives, four original research articles, and a review. Each offering a unique lens on the complexity and richness of human occupation and wellbeing.

Our contributors represent a rich diversity of voices, including first-time authors, early career researchers, and established academics. Other authors also write from lived experiences, bringing depth and authenticity to their work. This reflects the diversity and depth we aim to nurture in this journal. The collaboration during the peer review process has been truly inspiring. Reviewers showed generosity, and authors were open to feedback and together they created a space for critical dialogue behind the final versions of the manuscripts. This exchange of ideas, invisible to most readers, is itself a vital form of scholarly contribution. Two of the published articles were co-authored by members of the editorial team. To uphold the highest standards of integrity, those team members were fully recused from all editorial and review decisions regarding their submissions. A double-blind peer review process was maintained.

As we move forward, we continue to encourage a culture of cultural humility, compassion, and relational accountability in all aspects of the journal. The review process, as demonstrated in this issue, can be both rigorous and but still collegial and humane. A small gesture such as a reviewer beginning their feedback with a word of thanks to the author can reflect the spirit of Ubuntu and affirm the humanity and dignity of the authors. We invite you to read, reflect, share, and respond to what is offered here. Most of all, we invite you to join us in building a journal community grounded in Ubuntu and a shared commitment to advancing the pluralistic understandings of what truly captures the full spectrum of human occupation and wellbeing. This effort is for the betterment of all humanity.

Welcome to The Human Occupation and Wellbeing Journal!

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