

Original Research

Exploring Occupational Therapy in the Punk Community: A Qualitative-Ethnographic Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: The punk community is a subculture that is often viewed as contrary to the dominant culture. Society often misunderstands this community, constructing it as a negative and marginalized group. Occupational therapy strives to be more diverse, fair, and inclusive in order to strengthen practitioners' contributions to healthy and engaged communities. This study aims to explore the forms and meanings of occupation in the punk community through an occupational perspective.

Methods: This study uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis used ethnographic thematic methods, while data validity was tested through source triangulation.

Results: Thematic ethnographic analysis produced two main themes related to the exploration of occupation in the punk community. The first theme concerns the forms of occupation in the punk community, which include anti-mainstream, egalitarian, and DIY (Do-It-Yourself) aspects. The second theme discusses the meaning of occupation in the punk community, which includes working as a means of survival, occupation as self-expression, occupation as a form of contribution and concern for others, and participation in occupation to improve welfare and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion: The forms and meanings of occupation in the punk community are very different from those in society at large. The beliefs and environment of the punk community shape unique occupational choices compared to the wider community. The results of this study emphasize the importance of expanding the scope of occupational therapy practices to be more inclusive.

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INTRODUCTION

Every individual has activities that shape their identity, function, and well-being in life. Occupational science defines these activities as occupations, which cover various

aspects such as self-care, work, education, leisure, and social participation. The activities carried out by individuals not only serve as routines, but also have a profound meaning for the life of the group. Social, economic, and cultural conditions often influence individuals in carrying out these activities (Ihsan et al., 2024).

Occupational science examines the relationship between individuals' activities and their well-being. Researchers state that occupation involves not only actions (doing), but also reflects self-identity (being), social belonging (belonging), and individual development (becoming). Individuals who experience barriers in carrying out their activities are at risk of occupational injustice, which can have an impact on their well-being (Lindström et al., 2023).

Marginalized groups often experience occupational injustice. The punk community is included in this group because it is often stigmatized by the general public (Stewart & Way, 2023). Members of the punk community adopt the principles of Do-It-Yourself (DIY), freedom of expression, and economic independence. Stereotypes attached to the punk community cause them to experience discrimination in access to employment, education, and social services (Fajri, 2020).

History records that the punk movement developed in England in 1970 as a form of resistance against social and economic injustice. Punk communities began to emerge in Indonesia in the 1980s in several major cities, such as Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Bali. Punk communities in various regions have different characteristics, depending on their social environment. The city of Salatiga began to show the development of a punk community in the early 2000s (Fajri, 2020).

The punk community has various activities that reflect the group's identity and values. Members of this community often play music, write songs with socially critical lyrics, get tattoos as a form of self-expression, and carry out community-based activities to support fellow members. Each individual in the punk community has different activities depending on their job, social relationships, and economic conditions (Mustakim, 2025).

Members of the punk community often experience limitations in carrying out their daily activities. Social and economic inequality indicates occupational marginalization, a condition in which individuals or groups lose control over their activities due to structural pressures. Occupational therapists need to understand how this community carries out its activities in order to create a more inclusive approach (Vass & Heffernan, 2023).

Research on punk communities in Indonesia is still limited. Existing studies focus more on social, legal, and health aspects, while exploration of the forms and meanings of occupation in these communities is still rare. This study is necessary to understand how members of punk communities shape and interpret occupation in their lives. This study aims to explore the form and meaning of occupation in the punk community using an occupational science perspective. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of occupational science and provide insights for occupational therapy practitioners in treating marginalized groups in a more inclusive and equitable manner.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. This approach aims to understand the life experiences of the punk community in depth in their social and cultural context. Ethnographic research allows researchers to directly observe the activities of the punk community and explore the meaning given to the occupations they carry out (Zapata-Berrero & Yalaz, 2020).

This study used purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to determine participants. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals who met the research criteria, while snowball sampling was used to obtain additional participants through the punk community's social network. The inclusion criteria in this study included individuals who were active in the punk community, resided in Salatiga, had been members of the community for at least three years, and were willing to provide informed consent (LaMarre & Chamberlain, 2022).

This study involved ten participants selected based on the inclusion criteria. This number was considered sufficient to achieve data depth and allow for in-depth exploration of the punk community's occupation. Participants who met the criteria were invited to participate in interviews and observations.

This research was conducted in the city of Salatiga as the main location, focusing on places where the punk community gathers. The choice of location was based on the existence of an active punk community and accessibility in collecting data. This research lasted for six months, from May to November 2023.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. The interviews aimed to explore the experiences and meanings of the occupation carried out by the punk community, while non-participatory observation was used to understand their activity patterns directly. Documentation in the form of audio recordings, photos, and field notes was used to supplement the data obtained during the research (Hays & McKibben, 2021).

Data reliability was tested using a source triangulation strategy to enhance the credibility of the research results. This triangulation involved comparing data from various sources, such as interviews with several participants, direct observation, and analysis of relevant documents (Abfalter et al., 2021). In addition, the transferability aspect was maintained by providing a detailed description of the research context, while the dependability and confirmability aspects were ensured through an audit trail that transparently recorded all stages of the research.

Data analysis was conducted using an ethnographic thematic analysis approach. The analysis process included data organization, interview transcription, coding, identification of main themes, and data interpretation based on occupational perspectives. This analysis aims to find patterns of punk community occupations and the meanings they give to their activities (Zapata-Berrero & Yalaz, 2020).

This study has met research ethics standards by applying the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality. Each participant was provided with information about the purpose of the study and their right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time without consequences. Participant identities were protected by using initials or codes, and all data collected was stored securely to prevent access by unauthorized parties. This study has passed the ethical feasibility of Dr. Moewardi General Hospital Number: 1.641/VIII/HREC/2023 dated August 30, 2023.

RESULTS

This study explores the forms and meanings of occupation within the punk community in Salatiga. Based on thematic ethnographic analysis, two main themes were found, namely the form of occupation of the punk community and the meaning of occupation of the punk community. These themes were obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation carried out during the research. The following table shows the identities of the participants involved in the study,

including their age, gender, occupation, and length of time they have been involved in the punk community.

Table 1. Participant Identities

No	Participant Code	Age (Years)	Gender	Occupation	Length of Membership (Years)
1	R1	27	Female	Street performer, sells punk accessories	10
2	R2	36	Male	Street musician, T-shirt printing business	21
3	R3	21	Male	Street musician	5
4	R4	27	Male	Street musician	9
5	R5	20	Male	Street musician	3
6	R6	33	Male	Street musician	17
7	R7	24	Male	Street musician	5
8	R8	33	Male	Street musician	19
9	R9	36	Male	Fried Onion and T-Shirt Printing Business	24
10	R10	23	Male	T-shirt Printing Business	7

The thematic analysis found two main themes related to the occupation of the punk community, namely the form of occupation and the meaning of occupation. These themes were then categorized into several sub-themes as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Research Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Forms of Punk Community Occupation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anti-Mainstream 2. Egalitarian 3. DIY (<i>Do-It-Yourself</i>)
The Meaning of Punk Community Occupation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working as a Means of Survival 2. Occupation as Self-Expression 3. Occupation as a Form of Contribution and Caring for Others 4. Participating in Occupation to Improve Personal Well-Being and Sense of Belonging

Theme 1: Forms of Occupation in the Punk Community **Anti-Mainstream**

The punk community engages in occupations that differ from those of the general public, whether in terms of dress, behavior, or lifestyle choices. Members of this community wear punk-style clothing such as boots, leather jackets, and mohawks, and have tattoos and piercings as a form of self-expression. Some members of the punk

community also consciously choose not to participate in elections and reject vaccination programs as a form of distrust of the government system.

"I wear these boots as a symbol of resistance; we don't like war, but we're ready to fight!" (R8)

"I don't vote and I don't get vaccinated, I'm still alive. Why should I trust the government?" (R9)

Egalitarian

The punk community has a strong sense of togetherness. Daily activities are often carried out collectively, such as sharing food, traveling together, participating in social activities such as mutual assistance, and fundraising for community members in need. This attitude reflects the principle of equality that is fundamental to punk community life.

"Here, we are all equal. If there is food, we share it. If a friend is sick, we help them." (R10)

"We are family; if there's an event outside the city, we support it, we go together." (R1)

DIY (Do-It-Yourself)

The punk community applies the DIY principle in various aspects of their lives. Most of them work independently, such as busking, selling punk accessories, or opening small businesses such as T-shirt printing and fried onion production. Punk groups also create their own music and songs as a form of expression and social criticism of the conditions they face.

"I prefer to work independently; I don't want to be told what to do. Punk is about being independent!" (R9)

"We make our own music, record it ourselves, because we don't want to be controlled by the industry." (R6)

Theme 2: The Meaning of Occupation in the Punk Community

Working as a Means of Survival

Most individuals in the punk community engage in occupations as a form of survival or a means of making a living. Jobs such as busking and independent businesses are done to meet basic daily needs, including food and shelter. Some community members also set aside their income to help families who are still in their hometowns.

"Busking isn't our first choice, but it's what allows us to eat every day." (R7)

"I still have to send money to my children at home, so I work as hard as I can." (R9)

Occupation as Self-Expression

The occupations carried out by the punk community are a means of expressing group identity. The way they dress, the music they create, and various social actions are forms of self-expression and criticism of the social system that they consider unfair. Punk groups choose not to follow existing social standards and present themselves in an authentic and different way.

"I wear this jacket and have this hair not for style, but as a way to reject their rules!" (R10)

"Through songs, I can say everything I can't say directly." (R3)

Occupation as a Form of Social Contribution

The punk community does not only focus on their individual lives, but also cares about others. The group is active in various social activities, such as free markets, food distribution for the community, and solidarity actions for friends in the community who are experiencing difficulties. These activities are carried out as a form of caring for fellow human beings and to show that they also have positive social values.

"We organize free markets so that people know that the world is not just about money." (R8)

"If a friend is in trouble, we raise funds, because we know how hard it is." (R2)

Participation in Occupation to Improve Self-Well-Being and Sense of Belonging

The punk community provides a sense of belonging and pride for its members. Participation in various community activities helps the group feel accepted, both within the community and in the wider society. In Salatiga, the punk community is fairly well accepted by the community, so the group feels more comfortable participating in various social activities with local residents.

"In punk, I'm not alone, I feel like I have a family that understands me." (R5)

"The community here is kind; we are invited to participate in community service, we are accepted, and that makes us happy." (R4)

DISCUSSION

This study shows that the punk group has a unique occupation that differs from the general public. The form of occupation carried out by punk groups is based on the principles of anti-mainstream, egalitarianism, and DIY (Do-It-Yourself); while the meaning of occupation is related to survival, self-expression, social contribution, and a sense of belonging (Fife, 2024). The form of occupation in punk groups reflects resistance to dominant social norms.

Their lifestyle rejects conformity, whether in dress, work, or socializing. The concept of anti-mainstream is reflected in their choice of clothing, accessories, and attitudes toward institutions such as the government and political systems (Heffernan & Thomson, 2023). Previous studies show that punk groups globally share similar characteristics in rejecting systems that are considered oppressive to individuals (Ihsan et al., 2024; Stewart & Way, 2023).

Egalitarian values in punk groups are reflected in the habit of sharing resources, supporting one another, and avoiding hierarchy within the group. Activities such as sharing food and shelter are evidence of strong social solidarity. Studies show that marginalized groups often develop collective support systems as a form of adaptation to social pressure. Punk groups also apply the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) principle in various aspects of life. 's fieldwork shows that jobs are created from independent ventures, such as screen printing and accessory businesses, as well as music production as a means of expression and social protest. The DIY principle in punk groups has long been associated with resistance to capitalism and efforts to create economic autonomy (Mustakim, 2025; Novanda et al., 2024; Stewart & Way, 2023).

The meaning of occupation in punk groups is closely related to the aspect of sustainability. Working as a means of survival is a reality that must be faced, relying on informal jobs such as busking or small businesses to meet basic needs (Fife, 2024). Research highlights that marginalized groups tend to rely on informal skills as a strategy

for survival in an economy that does not offer many opportunities (Heffernan & Thomson, 2023).

Occupation also serves as a form of self-expression. Clothing style, music, and social action become a form of communication to the outside world about identity and values (Symons & McGowan, 2025). Studies show that subcultures such as punk often use art and visual symbols as a means of expression and social protest against systems that are considered oppressive (Fajri, 2020; Laili Desitasari et al., 2023).

Punk groups also interpret occupation as a social contribution to others. Activities such as free markets, food distribution, and solidarity campaigns for community members experiencing difficulties demonstrate a high level of concern for collective welfare. Research indicates that marginalized groups facing the injustices of occupation often build forms of social solidarity to overcome the limitations they experience (Schwartz, 2024).

Participation in occupation also increases well-being and a sense of belonging within punk groups. Interaction with the wider community, especially in the city of Salatiga, which is quite accepting of punk groups, gives community members a sense of appreciation. Studies explain that meaningful involvement in occupation has a positive impact on a person's mental and social well-being, especially for groups that often experience social stigma (Ihsan et al., 2024; Laili Desitasari et al., 2023; Lindström et al., 2023).

This study has several strengths. First, it provides new insights into how punk groups form and interpret occupations, especially in the context of occupational injustice. Second, it broadens our understanding of how individuals in marginalized groups create social systems that function to support their well-being.

This study has several limitations. The limited number of participants and the use of snowball sampling may have caused bias in the results. The social structure within punk groups is unstable, making it difficult to determine a definite time for interviews. This study only explores the form and meaning of occupation, so it does not provide practical information about occupational therapy interventions that can be applied in this group.

Further research is recommended to explore the obstacles experienced by punk groups in carrying out occupations and how occupational therapy approaches can be applied to improve well-being. A broader study with a larger sample size is also needed to understand the dynamics of punk groups in various regions in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that punk groups have different forms of occupation compared to the general public. The occupations carried out refer to the principles of anti-mainstream, egalitarianism, and DIY, and have meanings such as survival, self-expression, social contribution, and a sense of belonging. The results of this study also highlight the occupational injustice experienced due to social stigma and structural barriers that limit access to more stable and sustainable occupations. This study emphasizes the importance of expanding occupational therapy practices to be more inclusive of marginalized groups such as punk groups. Occupational therapy practitioners can collaborate with social services and communities to provide education, skills training, and access to more accessible health services.

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