

Social work practice during times of disaster: A transformative green social work model for theory, education and practice in disaster interventions

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The necessity for social workers in disaster settings is becoming more likely in the context of the climate emergency. Disasters are predicted to continue and intensify, and Aotearoa has seen its fair share of disasters over the past few years. With Cyclone Gabrielle, Covid-19 and the White Island disasters fresh in our minds, this text showcases some of the roles social workers can take in supporting community at times of disaster.

Social work practice during times of disaster is a contemporary text from a seminal writer in social work literature. The founder of Green Social work, Professor Lena Dominelli, has written a go-to guide on how to use social work practice in the disaster context. I read this book in an eBook format.

The book has a two-part structure: Part 1 is entitled "Disaster interventions in local and national context in the UK"; Part 2 takes a more international perspective with "Learning lessons from disasters occurring in other countries".

Part 1 examines case studies of disasters from the United Kingdom in recent years. Covering the Covid-19 pandemic (chapter 3), the failure of social work to respond to climate change (chapter 4), extreme weather events (chapter 5), the Grenfell fire disaster

(chapter 6) and terrorist attacks (chapter 7). In these chapters, Dominelli looks at each type of disaster and discusses the impacts of them on the social world looking at how a physical disaster can quickly become a social disaster when it impacts people's lives. Here she endorses "human rights-based service delivery" (p. 110) as an approach to working in disaster response, with examples from UK flooding events highlighting the social work interventions that happened at the time.

She also looks at wildfires, giving examples from Scotland England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Canada and linking these to climate change. There is an exercise useful for teachers on wildfires as well as guidelines on how to respond.

As disaster response is heavily reliant on the local policy and resources available in the region, readers outside of the UK may find the first section helpful as an example of how these were managed. The remaining chapters, 8-12 (Part 2), cover international natural disasters, storm surges, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions (chapters 8 & 9), which cover a range of disasters from a typhoon in the Philippines to a superstorm in Cuba, flooding in New York and in Pakistan. Each comes with helpful exercises to help the reader digest the information and reflect on an aspect of disaster recovery,

policy, or practice. Guidelines for social work interventions are also available.

Later in Part 2, Dominelli looks at human-made financial disasters (chapter 11) which is an interesting and not commonly thought of type of disaster alongside natural disasters. She describes the history of financial disasters such as the Wall Street crash and its social implications and the financial crisis of 2007 to 2009 with the resulting exacerbation of structural inequities, globalised economics and neoliberalism creating negative impacts on climate policy.

In this chapter, she puts context to the connections between the global financial systems, climate and disasters around the globe, impacting communities and social systems where those with fewer resources are being forced from their homes and livelihoods. She advocates that “local communities can engage in acts of local solidarity concerned with managing and re distributing resources and protecting individual rights to mitigate hardship and affect social policies” (p. 230).

Professor Lena Dominelli’s intention in writing this book was to “provide crucial material to support the development of social work practice during disasters and curriculum that equips social workers to assume disaster intervention roles with integrity and effectiveness” (p. 1) using the lens of Green Social work to contextualise disaster practice (chapter 1). Overall, I will say she has achieved this goal. Disasters are very much here to stay and will become more prevalent in the uncertain climate time to come.

I would definitely recommend this as a foundational text for anyone who is unfamiliar with the social work role in disaster work or is interested in learning more about the urgent need in this very relevant emerging area of social work practice.

As our profession prepares to support humanity facing an uncertain future, we, as the social work community, need to upskill and work together across borders to build resilience. This text is yet another great resource from one of our key writers in the field.

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