Social Work Practice During Times of Disaster

A Transformative Green Social Work Model for Theory, Education and Practice in Disaster Interventions

LENA DOMINELLI

ROUTLEDGE

Social Work Practice During Times of Disaster

Disasters affect people individually and collectively in their communities, national societies, and the international sphere and in any setting from the home to the planetary level. Furthermore, these disasters can be complex, multi-layered and what happens in one location can affect sentient beings elsewhere directly and/or indirectly. These create interdependencies between people, the flora, fauna, and physical environment that require the holistic, transdisciplinary approaches to disasters that are advocated by green social work perspectives.

Using case studies drawn from practice and research to explore the skills and knowledge needed by social workers to practice within disaster situations, this book illustrates what good social work practice during times of disaster looks like. It highlights the theories, skills and expertise needed to intervene effectively in specific disaster situations and provides case studies as a major vehicle for considering ethical dilemmas and skills sets that facilitate interventions in specific disasters. Part I focuses on disasters that afflict the UK, where social workers may be part of the emergency response including floods, droughts, cold-snaps, windstorms, storm surges, fires, chemical discharges, terrorism and COVID-19. Given the interdependent nature of disasters, this section also draws upon knowledge from the international sphere to show how the local and global are interlinked. Part II considers disasters that dominate in other parts of the world, but which have impacts upon the UK, either because its personnel go overseas to provide humanitarian aid, or because the victim-survivors of such disasters seek sanctuary in/migrate to the UK. These disasters include refugees from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, armed conflict and climate change. The ethical dilemmas that social workers face during all disasters are particularly poignant in the case of asylum seekers and refugees.

This book will be of interest to all social work professionals, practitioners in emergency and health settings working with social workers, academics and students both in the UK and around the world.

Lena Dominelli (Professor) is Chair of Social Work and Director of the MSc in Disaster Interventions and Humanitarian Aid at the University of Stirling. She has undertaken research in projects including climate change and extreme weather events, health pandemics such as COVID-19; earthquakes; volcanic eruptions; disaster interventions; vulnerability and resilience; community engagement; coproduction and participatory action research; and climate risk for young people. Lena has published widely in social work, social policy and sociology, including several ground-breaking classics, the latest on *Green Social Work* which provides a theory and practice of disasters from a social justice perspective that includes environmental justice and sustainability. A key message of her research is using a holistic approach that includes the duty of people to take care of Planet Earth by seeking alternatives to fossil fuel-based patterns of production and consumption to ensure sustainable approaches to meeting human needs and ending wars through the peaceful resolution of conflicts. She founded Social Work for Peace to this end. She currently chairs the IASSW Committee on Disaster Interventions, Climate Change and Sustainability and attended United Nations discussions on climate change (UNFCCC COP), since Cancun, Mexico in 2010. She also chairs the Special Interest Group on Disasters, SPEDI, for the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and is a founder member of the England Round Table on Disasters and Social Work. She has received various honours and prizes for her work.

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This book is dedicated to Mother Earth, the planet that nurtures us all and provides us with all we need. It is also a 'thank you' note to all those wonderful, courageous environmentalists whose voices will never be silenced regardless of dictators, murderers and predators waiting to pounce on every ounce of generosity bequeathed to us by Mother Earth. The Earth has its own song of strength and solidarity to sing. We can but join the choir.

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Acknowledgments

A book is rarely the work of one person sitting in a garret in front of a dimly lit computer screen for days on end. Rather, it typically involves many people, engaged in dialogue and conversations that end up sharing experiences of the profundities and nonsenses of life, which leave profound insights in one's brain and heart. This book is no different. Countless conversations, some deliberately sought out, others occurring through happenstance, have left their marks on my mind. They have made me rethink the question of how I express the gratitude and thanks that I want to give to those whose words have pushed the 'pause' button and required me to think through my views more clearly, although I did not realise this until much later. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for enabling me to think more deeply to understand the greater complexities of living in a world full of vested, competing and controversial interests.

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Finally, I must thank the many members of my family who were always there for me, cheering me on, even during dark moments when I would realise I could no longer pick up the phone to talk things through

with Mom and Dad. Nonetheless, their spirit lives on in all of us and I feel their voices on the whispers of wind that breeze through my communion with nature.

Thank you all!

Preface

Disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity across the globe as human activities keep shifting the balance of harmony between nature and humanity, and as people seek to exploit nature's bounty whether it is animal, plant, other living beings, land, waters, air, minerals or other resources created through millennia of ceaseless action and laid at our feet. It is a tragedy that humanity, with notable exceptions such as indigenous populations who continue to respect nature and its generosity in providing resources that sustain life, has repaid its generosity with greed, indifference and a ruthlessness that has brought the planet, the biosphere and all things within it to the brink of a mass extinction and to the detriment of humanity as a whole.

The bell is sounding its knell of warning. It is still not too late to pull back from the abyss and work with nature to care for our daily needs and the planet that nurtures us in a sustainable relationship whereby people care for this beautiful planet and all it contains to infinity. This means rethinking our lives, especially how we produce and consume the goods and services necessary for living a fulfilled life at peace with the elements and with each other. This vision of moving forward in humanity's attempts to live differently and in harmony with our surroundings is also an important part of social work. However, many practitioners argue that disasters, including climate change and poverty, the symptoms of which they encounter every day, have little to do with social work. They maintain that while practitioners may assist in responding to the needs of victim-survivors of a disaster, once they have done that rebuilding communities, their infrastructures and the wider society within which they are located is the prerogative of some other profession, not theirs. This book takes issue with such pronouncements to argue that social workers are at the heart of every disaster response throughout the disaster cycle – prevention, preparation, relief, recovery and reconstruction. Moreover, it draws upon the green social work model to develop a theory, practice and a curriculum for the brave new social work portfolio

of disaster interventions and humanitarian aid. This material is core social work, building on its values, concern for social justice which now includes environmental justice (Dominelli, 2012a), commitment to empowering individuals, groups and communities, lobbying politicians and policymakers to ensure that as the United Nations (UN) put it in its Agenda 2030, 'no one is left behind', and mobilising people for transformative social change. A social change built on peace, reciprocity, solidarity, sharing resources equitably and sustainably, and valuing diversity and inclusivity.

A journey into the unknown by working through what is known is what this book lays out before you. And it asks you to respond to its clarion call with energy, enthusiasm and a willingness to give and keep on giving as we all commit to building this transformative future together.

Lena Dominelli
26 November 2022

1 Introduction

Introduction

Disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity at local and global levels and pose new challenges for social work practitioners, academics and students to consider. Given the absence of coverage of disaster interventions in qualifying social work programmes in the UK and elsewhere except for the TATA Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India, which has trained practitioners in this area since 1947, this unacceptable state of affairs must be corrected quickly. This book will provide crucial material to support the development of social work practice during disasters and a curriculum that equips social workers to assume disaster intervention roles with integrity and effectiveness. It progresses this task by exploring green social work (GSW) theory and practice as a transformative paradigm that redefines social work interventions during disasters within holistic, transdisciplinary, socially constructed directions embedded in social and environmental justice and human rights-based directions. This introductory chapter contextualises green social work, a newly emerging paradigm for practice that goes beyond the theory and practice of the 'deep ecology' approach described by Besthorn (2012). Consequently, GSW is a socially constructed integrative, transdisciplinary model that explicitly critiques neoliberal models of production and consumption and argues for the replacement of fossil fuel usage with renewable energy sources and implementing the duty to care for and protect planet Earth in perpetuity. GSW is rarely covered by other social work books considering ecological or environmental approaches. Until very recently, the absence of this paradigm in pockets of the discipline discussing environmental issues was ironically demonstrated by the lack of the inclusion of Dominelli (2012a) as a chapter author in various edited collections except for Gray et al. (2013). However, Dominelli's contribution to that text focused on the general curriculum rather than green social work theory and practice.

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Chapter 1 defines green social work, its contributions to the profession, and key institutions and concepts integral to disaster interventions. It will also introduce the rest of the book, explaining its rationale, and distinctiveness from other environmental publications. It argues that green social work interventions during disasters provide an excellent opportunity for widening the practice portfolio for practitioners and students and equip them to provide better services for victim-survivors of disasters and 21st century challenges. Acknowledging social work's contributions to disasters will enable the profession to move out of its comfort zone to meet the challenges posed by contemporary realities.

Disasters: Twenty-first century challenges to social workers

Hazards of varying types have led to disasters when human behaviour impinges on their presence in often unplanned ways. This is instanced by building housing on a flood plain without thinking about taking precautions to deal with potential floods. Flood plains have been nature's way of dealing with a flood hazard, providing space for a river to expand into the surrounding area without causing irrevocable damage, until developers utilised this land to build high density housing. Giving little thought to the risks posed to people living in these properties meant that householders were poorly prepared when disaster struck, as indicated in Chapter 5 on floods.

A health pandemic is another kind of disaster. COVID-19, a respiratory disease which burst on the world scene in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and later became a world pandemic which has impacted everyone globally in a differentiated manner. COVID-19 has had two important effects that have altered the landscape for social workers and governments. One is the horrendous experience of being a victim-survivor in an illness for which humanity has no natural immunity. Another effect was the alterations in daily practice routines. These factors exposed existing structural inequalities in accessing health care and other services. They also altered professional practice responses to needs during this catastrophe and pulled everyone into the remit of the digital technologies to work from home.

Problematic challenges included home visits being disallowed in a relationship-based profession; inadequate personal safety equipment, and fear of spreading COVID-19 among service users and professionals' own families. These significant changes in everyday routines shifted public attention onto the imperative of preparing for the next disaster. Providing professional support for those suffering adversity in disasters indicated key roles for social workers to perform in responding appropriately and adequately to needs during calamities. Professionals,

including social workers need appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) and to be well-trained in disaster preparedness, mitigation, adaptation, and prevention. However, despite the opportunity to embed social work during disaster responses brought about by COVID-19, the public in the UK rarely thinks about its contributions in such tragic situations. Thus, the inputs of social workers and social care workers including loss of life in various disasters, including COVID-19 remain invisible. Social work's invisibility during disasters remains an issue to be challenged (Dominelli, 2014).

Disasters are increasing in intensity and frequency locally and across the globe. Among these are climate change with its associated extreme weather events covering droughts, floods, cyclones, storm surges and wildfires; earthquakes; volcanic eruptions; and more recently, health pandemics and cataclysmic wars. These precipitate environmental and social disasters that challenge people's capacities to live in the world and thrive in it. The lack of capacity in coping with unexpected events is becoming particularly evident and requires political leaders to promote solidarity to enhance resilience and response capacities globally. The current health pandemic, COVID-19, has exposed the general failure of health and social care systems to react to shocks with resilience that encompasses everyone, especially those without state support globally. Disasters have compounded existing social inequalities within and between societies. They have also highlighted the failure of politicians' fine rhetoric to meet basic human needs and welfare rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that all member states of the United Nations (UN) have signed.

Moreover, the destruction of the biosphere, especially that involving tropical and temperate forests wreaks substantial calamities when people disrespect the people-environmental hazard interface. COVID-19 emanated from people transgressing into the animal kingdom. Others include SARS, MERS, swine flu, H1N1, Ebola and Zika. However, unlike nationally driven responses to COVID-19, global cooperation at governmental levels in these other specific instances of viral spread, prevented their becoming pandemics despite their inherent potential to do so. Such governmental cooperation and solidarity were missing in the COVID-19 pandemic because nation-states have prioritised solving the problems it generated within their own borders. This reaction also ignored interdependencies among nation-states, peoples, flora, fauna, and physical environments, and exacerbated the fears created by environmental degradation and exploitation, particularly among indigenous and disadvantaged populations.

The World Disaster Report (IFRC, 2018: 16) revealed that 84 per cent of natural hazards affecting 2 billion people are weather-related. Many people displaced by weather-induced disasters, might migrate to more clement

surroundings, challenging the notion of state boundaries. Moreover, the poorest people in the Global South bear the brunt of the damage disasters cause. One of the drivers behind such destruction is the neoliberal system of industrial production and consumption. It exploits human labour, particularly that of women and children living in the Global South and uses the environment as a sink to extract profits for shareholders in global multinational companies which increasingly include billionaires from China, India and Russia, not just the West. *Forbes Magazine* claims Moscow was the city with the most billionaire's per capita in 2016. However, this position is being challenged by billionaires inhabiting other megacities. Rich people contribute more to global warming than do poor people.

Social workers are involved in all these disasters in the immediate relief and recovery stages, usually in evacuation centres where they provide practical assistance such as water, food, clothing, medicines and shelter, coordinate resources, emotional support, reunify 'missing' individuals with family members, reunite people with pets and/or livestock, and arrange psychosocial support. Social workers acting as community development workers, remain after the cameras have gone, and engage in the reconstruction stage to rebuild societies and communities following a disaster. The social work voice is muted, and the media are full of accounts from other professionals, including health professionals who are prioritised above social workers and social care workers.

Disasters are experienced differentially, and social workers are attuned to this through their micro-level work and commitment to social justice and human rights. Green social work conceptualises environmental rights as an integral part of social justice (Dominelli, 2012a). Practitioners can advocate for marginalised groups whose voices are ignored, mobilise communities and lobby for policy changes and resource re-distributions that cater for their specific needs. The United Nations and its various agencies are charged with delivering humanitarian aid during disasters. Social workers are involved in these structures delivering aid and attempting to influence strategy through their international organisations, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Known as 'sister organisations', they were formed in 1928, and have worked together on various initiatives since. The most recent of these is the Global Agenda, running from 2010 to 2030. I consider these institutions below.

International institutions

International institutions form the bedrock of humanitarian aid throughout the disaster cycle including reconstruction. The institutions

associated with the United Nations system symbolise the international world order. The United Nations Security Council, General Assembly, and associated agencies are key to delivering humanitarian aid. Crucial among these for social workers are:

- UNHCR (refugees; now UN Refugee Agency)
- OCHA (humanitarian aid)
- OHCHR (human rights)
- UNICEF (children)
- UNWomen
- WHO (health)
- UNCHR (refugees)
- ILO (workers' rights)
- FAO (food programme)
- International Court of Justice (the Hague)
- WTO (trade)
- UNDP (social development)
- Social Work Day at the UN (March)
- Global Social Work Day (March) (initiated by IFSW and now includes IASSW).

Deliberations in the United Nations, especially the Security Council, are governed by two key principles: national sovereignty (sovereignty); and the duty of care (protection). These principles contradict each other. Article 2(1) of the UN Charter restricts international action in the internal affairs of member states. Overcoming this limitation requires unanimous Security Council approval. The Security Council consists of five permanent members: China, Russia (initially Formosa/Taiwan and Soviet Union respectively), France, United Kingdom, and United States of America. A veto exercised by one of them can stymie any action. This occurred recently regarding Putin's War in Ukraine when Russia resisted any attempts to hold it accountable. Among its aggressive actions, it did not declare a conflict of interests and stay away from the proceedings. Article 2(1), initially based on the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, was agreed by the League of Nations in 1933. The 'sovereignty' principle can be used by rulers to disallow delivery of international aid as did Myanmar/Burma when Cyclone Nargis devastated the country in 2008. The UN Security Council eventually approved aid delivery for Nargis victim-survivors when the duty of care trumped national sovereignty. The 'Responsibility to Protect' was agreed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2000.

Various UN conventions are relevant for social/humanitarian workers. These include the:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially Articles 22–27, which address rights to food, clothing, shelter, health, and education can be very useful in providing individuals and groups with these resources (George, 2003).
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Beijing Platform for Action, 1995.
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention.
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

These agencies deliver aid through the cluster system which is discussed in Chapter 2.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), considered in Chapter 4, is not an agency, but a treaty which UN member states have endorsed to combat climate change. It meets yearly in the Conference of the Parities (COP) meetings. The COP has delegates (government representatives) and observers consisting of various stakeholders including NGOs such as Oxfam, IASSW, the Sierra Club, universities with expertise on climate change and businesses that are accredited to attend COP meetings. Twenty-seven COP meetings had taken place by 2022. COVID-19 led to the postponement of COP26 in 2020.

Climate change is a key disaster that requires social workers to take more active roles in such eventualities than they have hitherto. Despite decades of messages from politicians and activists in the Global South for the international community to act quickly, fund adaptations, and uphold the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, little has changed. COP25 in 2019 which relocated to Madrid, Spain from Santiago, Chile due to social unrest was hugely disappointing. COP26, which took place in Glasgow after being postponed from 2020 to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic following restrictions imposed on social distancing, and travel, was another disappointment. And so was COP27 which took place in 2022 in Sharm-el-Sheik, Egypt. No global action to mitigate climate change and keep global warming to a rise of 1.5°C has been implemented. National self-interest and geopolitical dynamics help

perpetuate the deadlock that has hindered international activities on climate change since Copenhagen in 2009.

Boris Johnson sacked Claire Perry O'Neill, the then President of COP26 in January 2020 and replaced her with Alok Sharma who presided over its activities in Glasgow, Scotland during November 2021. The extended wait for COP26 could have been used to secure such agreements in readiness for November 2021, but this time was lost as the work done by O'Neill was ignored. Yet, engaging in pre-meeting deliberations is essential to convincing the many countries involved to put aside national self-interest and reach a global agreement about moving forward well before they reach the convention locale. The limited outcomes of COP26, and absence of the leaders of the key greenhouse gas emitting nations China and Russia, the first and fourth largest emitters respectively from COP26 were other disappointments. Thus, expectations for COP27 in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt were subdued. And when that ended in November 2022, little progress had been made in getting firm agreements with deadlines on implementation globally.

Social workers can engage in such arenas. Although, a few do on behalf of the profession, many more should do so. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) has engaged in COP deliberations since 2010. Here, it aims to make visible the invisibility of existing social work activities in the climate crisis and ask questions to highlight the dangers of neoliberal forms of production and consumption for the poorest members of the global community and those living in small island developing states (SIDS) that are sinking under the sea, despite having contributed least to the climate crisis (Thomas et al., 2020).

Climate change is a key socially or human-induced hazard, not a natural one, and affects all the Earth's inhabitants. Climate change produces extreme weather events such as wildfires, cyclones, droughts, and floods that lead to both social and environmental disasters, often with catastrophic results. Climate change features in this book as a key disaster which is relevant to social work practice. Another one is the COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 3). This disease has taken hold because a coronavirus crossed the animal-human barrier and spread through human-to-human transmission. These interactions have been attributed primarily to industrialisation systems that have exploited the Earth's resources while destroying many vegetative and animal habitats, thereby placing humans and animals in closer proximity and danger. There is considerable debate about how far any disaster, including earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, are 'natural' rather than being socially constructed, even if the hazard begins as a natural one (Alexander, 1993; Pelling, 2003). Some researchers consider all disasters as human induced. Consequently, this book explores the controversies around 'natural' and (hu)man-made

disasters to see what insights come out of such disagreements for current and future social work practice and its ability to engage with other professionals and researchers to protect human and planetary wellbeing. Social workers are responsible for engaging in such topics alongside other disciplines and professions Matlakala et al., 2022). Social workers have to claim their place at the decision-making table, engage in transdisciplinary teams, and ask awkward questions about power relations, structural inequalities and inequitable resource allocations that hinder the development of innovations that will unite people in coproducing a more inclusive, equitable and solidaristic world that is better able to stave off disasters.

Structure of the book

The book is structured to explore how disasters affect people individually, collectively in their communities, national societies, and internationally, and in any setting ranging from the home to the planetary level. Disasters can be multi-layered, interdependent, and complex because events in one location can affect sentient beings elsewhere directly and/or indirectly (Van Eck et al., 2021). These interactions can deepen interdependencies among people, the flora, fauna, and physical environment and require holistic, transdisciplinary approaches to disasters as advocated by the green social work model. This model integrates theory and practice devised through coproduction processes in which scientific experts, residents from local affected communities, policymakers, businesses and other stakeholders work together to solve common problems, build resilient, sustainable communities, societies and physical environments by pooling and valuing their separate knowledges. Moreover, those engaged in community engagement and coproduction processes are more likely to uphold proposed solutions because these are embedded in reciprocated caring relationships that bind people, plants, animals, and the physical environment (air, soil, water) in meeting the needs of all those living in a specific biosphere.

To cater for this global diversity and scale, the book contains two, interlinked parts. Part One, focuses on disasters that afflict the UK (as one country composed of four distinct nations – England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), while simultaneously making links between it and the global arena, through the interdependencies among people and socio-economic and biospheric systems that interact with each other. The chapters in Part I focus primarily on disasters encountered within the UK: fires, floods, droughts, cold-snaps, windstorms, storm surges, chemical discharges, terrorism, and COVID-19. These calamities befall other places, so the articulation between the local and the global is also examined. The chapters in Part II, consider disasters that dominate other

places in the world, but which also impact the UK, either because its personnel go overseas to provide humanitarian aid, or because the victim-survivors of such disasters seek sanctuary in or migrate to the UK. These disasters include those migrating away from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, armed conflict, and climate change. If global warming is not kept within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the numbers of those seeking refuge from climate induced disasters will increase dramatically.

Case studies drawn from practice and research will explore the skill sets, understandings and knowledges needed by social workers to practice within disaster situations. These explore what good social work practice during times of disaster looks like. These disaster case studies will highlight the theories, skills and expertise needed to intervene effectively in specific situations. Through disaster discourses I consider how action research projects can coproduce resilient solutions to disaster vulnerabilities. I conclude by retheorising social work to expand paradigms that link caring for the Earth with meeting people's needs. Thus, I argue that the 'social' should not be trumped by 'economic' exigencies. Other crucial issues include the deconstruction of existing practices through transdisciplinary work, rethinking risk assessment, mitigation, adaptation, and preventative measures alongside a reconsideration of concepts like resilience, sustainability, and producing goods and services that do not cost the Earth. Case studies and exercises will be utilised to consider ethical dilemmas and skills sets that facilitate interventions in specific disasters. This book highlights alternative paradigms for practice rooted in environmental justice and transformative economic approaches to meeting human needs. GSW is key to reconceptualising social work interventions in disasters. Below, I describe the book's contents.

Part I – Disaster interventions in local and national contexts in the UK

Chapter 2 – Contextualising social work interventions in disaster situations in the UK: a multi-nation approach

This chapter sets the scene in the UK, covering UK-wide legislation, that of its constituent nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) and socio-political economic contexts that have shaped social work roles and responsibilities in disasters, highlighting similarities and differences between them. Devolution will drive further differentiation between each nation-state. The Aberfan disaster in Wales lacked social work intervention except for those volunteering or working with the Red Cross, but the trauma arising from it persists and requires attention. The chapter also examines the roles of international organisations on social work during disasters.

Chapter 3 – COVID-19: a health pandemic that challenges the social work profession

COVID-19's arrival in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and its global spread to reach the UK is covered in chapter three. It considers the poor preparation for this pandemic among practitioners, the networks of support they devised to adapt to their changing roles within this new situation, including delivering services through digital technologies and various practice transformations. It also covers transferable knowledge and practice skills, lessons from other countries, and making practice culturally relevant and locality specific.

Chapter 4 – Climate change: social work responds to political failures nationally and internationally

Government tardiness in responding to the dangers of human-induced climate change, globally is examined in chapter four. The British National Action Plan (NAP) formulated following the Paris Agreement of 2015, covers geopolitics and power relations underpinning national responses. It examines social work's contributions to discussions within UNFCCC COP (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of the Parties) through representation and organised side-events, e.g. COP 26 in 2021. Climate change interventions, critical to twenty-first-century practice, range from adaptation to reconstruction.

Chapter 5 – Extreme weather events: flooding and wildfires, disasters frequently calling upon social workers' contributions

Floods, a major disaster intervention for UK social workers, are becoming more frequent and more intense, making previous flood plans and preparations inadequate. This chapter uses case studies to highlight the extensive range of activities that social workers perform in flooding disasters to mitigate impact on victim-survivors in the different UK nations.

Chapter 6 – The Grenfell fire disaster

The Grenfell fire disaster of 2016 was a wake-up call for the failure of successive governments sufficiently to address fire protection in high rise buildings, and indifference to adequately training social workers to intervene in such calamities. This chapter focuses on the experiences of social workers who volunteered to support residents. They uncovered the lack of human rights and social justice in the treatment of residents who were largely from black and minority ethnic groups, receiving low

pay and facing structural inequalities. It will draw on the findings of the public inquiry into Grenfell, and fears of slow action on fire-proofing similar buildings.

Chapter 7 – Terrorist attacks: immediate and long-term consequences for social work interventions

Chapter seven considers terrorist attacks occurring within the nations of the UK. These include 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, Lockerbie and Dunblane in Scotland, the 7/7 tube attacks in London and the Manchester Arena attack of 2017. Lessons learnt from the 9/11 World Trade Center attack in the USA filtered into emergency planning forums in the UK. The chapter demands appropriate training at qualifying level, in-service top-up training, continuing professional development (CDP) and specialist (Masters) levels for social workers to cover the ongoing needs for training, debriefing, self-care, supervision, and support for practitioners.

Part II: Learning lessons from disasters occurring in other countries

Chapter 8 – Storm surges and hurricanes

Storm surges and hurricanes feature regularly in industrialised countries like the USA, and industrialising ones like the Philippines. Social workers working with local populations to survive disasters and rebuild their communities provide lessons accessible to others doing this difficult and complex work. These situations require social work support for extremely disadvantaged communities within a context of differentiated experiences of disasters to provide greater inclusivity in emergency responses and policies.

Chapter 9 – Earthquakes: socio-economic and political structures turn a natural hazard into a social disaster

Earthquakes are a major 'natural' disaster. However, those occurring in the UK go unnoticed due to their insignificant magnitude. Others, like those in Sichuan, China; Concepción, Chile; Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand; and Haiti have presented substantial, serious, and complex catastrophes. These and others like that in Fukushima, Japan and 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami become case studies covering humanitarian aid, the invisibility of social work interventions in disasters, lack of capacity in social work education and training, and creation of the

Rebuilding People's Lives Post-Disasters Network (RIPL) by IASSW in 2005. This chapter also examines the importance of working with seismologists, other physical scientists, and engaging other stakeholders, especially residents.

Chapter 10 – Volcanic eruptions: a local natural hazard with sometimes unanticipated global impact

Volcanic eruptions were rarely considered in UK-wide social work circles until the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in Iceland in 2010 when flights were grounded for a week and highlighted the need for additional research by NERC (Natural Environment Research Council) and the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). This chapter considers the lessons to be learnt from social workers researching this area, including the wearing of masks for protection from ashfall. This became relevant for COVID-19 as preparations include stockpiling masks and distributing them, tasks undertaken by social workers, community development workers, and NGOs in the Global South. This chapter also explores ethical dilemmas and concerns arising from a world order that places greater priority on safeguarding economic interests than people's health or children's education.

Chapter 11 – Financial disasters

The 2008 global financial disaster triggered by the fall of Lehman Brothers – the American bank deemed too big to fail, highlighted the fragility of a neoliberal economic system based on wealth accumulation and insufficient liquidity and assets. This tragedy caused enormous hardship to low-income people in countries across the world and subjected them to years of austerity to revive the financial institutions that drove the economy. This chapter studies the impact of reduced public expenditures on service users who become dependent on state welfare and/or charitable support while case managers developed packages of care that proved inadequate, e.g. philanthropy-driven responses like food banks over rights-based entitlements then and in the 2022 cost-of-living crisis. This chapter argues for rights-based entitlements, and the valuing of public service and civic ethics.

Chapter 12 – Conclusions

Disasters of diverse kinds have challenged social workers to think about structural issues and their impact on human rights, social justice and environmental rights in a way that has not occurred before. This chapter

concludes by considering what social workers can and cannot do, depending on specific socio-economic, cultural, political and geographic contexts and differentiated disaster outcomes, dependent upon gender, age, ethnicity, disability, mental ill health, and income. It argues that social workers can play crucial roles in advocating for rights-based approaches to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and adaptive interventions to widen the practice portfolio, become trained to respond to the new challenges disasters create, and acquire the new skills sets necessary for participation in disaster interventions and humanitarian aid. It calls for a rethink of social work curricula to include training for disasters at all educational levels and advocates for changes in policy and practice to endorse support, solidarity and reciprocity locally, nationally and internationally. This envisages a new world order that social workers can promote.

Green social work: A model for disasters and humanitarian interventions

Green social work (GSW) affirms environmental justice within social justice as it promotes social development and sustainability. GSW is a transdisciplinary model for practice. It 'focuses on how the social organisation of relationships between peoples and their interactions with the flora and fauna in their physical habitats create the socio-economic and physical environmental crises that undermine the wellbeing of human beings and planet earth' (Dominelli, 2012a: 25).

Green social workers assess the risks posed by environmental and human-induced hazards and argue for:

- Recognition of interdependence among all living things and planet Earth.
- Profound holistic conceptual and social transformations.
- Sustainable relationships among peoples, other living things, the inanimate world, and planet Earth in a reciprocated duty to care for and about everyone and everything.
- Transdisciplinarity involving all sciences and professions to engage local communities/residents to share expert, local, and indigenous knowledges and co-plan and implement action throughout the disaster cycle.

A transdisciplinary framework enables GSW practitioners to address risk by:

- Working in empowering community-based partnerships to resolve environmental issues through coproduced solutions owned, controlled, and managed by local residents.

- Understanding disasters, their nature, causes and associated secondary hazards. This knowledge, especially the physical science behind disasters, must become easily accessible to non-specialists.
- Knowing the spatial contours or geographic particularities of each disaster because communities are situated in specific physical settings.
- Understanding communities' specific vulnerabilities and strengths to care for the physical environment and not increasing environmental stress with inappropriate demands (e.g. building housing on floodplains).
- Understanding the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts of the locality in which a disaster occurs as central to individuals' sense of identity and belonging.
- Respecting people's attachment to space and place, an under-rated feature of traditional models of community-based disaster risk reduction strategies, to facilitate community engagement.
- Understanding that attachment issues are deep, profound, and critical in explaining people's sense of security and safety in a specific place and space.
- Appreciating the physical environment as an end-in-itself, and not only as the context in which people live and acquire resources they need to survive and thrive.
- Mainstreaming the green social work curriculum for all social work students and practitioners.

There is no agreed definition of the terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary; some authors use the terms interchangeably (Dominelli, 2016). Dominelli (2016), Bracken (2017), Sim et al. (n.d.) and Sammonds (2018) have attempted to unravel their definition and usage. These authors argue that transdisciplinarity differs from multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, through its key focus on multistakeholder engagement and emphasis on the processes of coproduction. Dominelli (2012a) proposed:

- Multidisciplinarity: separate disciplines working together on a common problem without developing a common approach, but each contributing from a specific disciplinary perspective.
- Interdisciplinarity: separate disciplines working together on agreed common objectives without sharing an agreed theoretical or common framework.
- Transdisciplinarity: various disciplines working together on a common problem with agreed objectives and sharing a common framework or theoretical approach that brings together diverse stakeholders having an interest in coproducing solutions to a particular problem and valuing diverse forms of knowledge, e.g. expert, indigenous or local.

Transdisciplinarity lays the groundwork for 'doing science differently' (Lane et al., 2011) by working across disciplinary and professional boundaries to solve problems by utilising connectivities in scientific, lay and indigenous or local knowledges. Hirsch Hadorn et al. (2008) claim that transdisciplinarity has four characteristics:

- A focus on real world problems.
- Transcending and integrating different disciplinary paradigms.
- Participatory research (coproduction).
- Seeking unity among knowledges to transcend disciplinarity.

Social work can contribute substantially to and learn from this approach, including valuing locality-specific, culturally relevant, participatory anti-oppressive practice, research, and grassroots-based professional paradigms.

Lane et al. (2011) argue that 'doing science differently' involves transdisciplinarity whereby each group learns from the others to innovate and solve agreed problems for effective disaster management. Doing science differently means that expert and lay knowledges are both valued and used to coproduce solutions. This insight arose from the 26 June 2007 flood in Pickering, North Yorkshire which had flooded in 1999, 2000 and 2002. Working together effectively requires trust and good communication to enable the contributions of different voices to be heard and valued. Stakeholder engagement traditionally focuses on consultation and information-sharing that treat people as passive recipients of scientific expertise rather than promoting and valuing co-participatory stakeholder engagement.

Transdisciplinarity in research and practice is increasing in relevance to disaster interventions (Dominelli, 2018b; Post, 2019). This is because it is expected to: provide time for reflexivity; share materials with others; develop common objectives and goals; undertake joint training; work through problems together (team building); seek innovative solutions to social problems (for disasters it includes saving lives); collaborate with diverse stakeholders, experts, and community residents; and build capacity within scientific and lay communities.

Tensions exist within transdisciplinary approaches. These need to be acknowledged and addressed. They include:

- Professional rivalries.
- Gender disparities.
- Ethnic insensitivities.
- Individualised versus collaborative working.
- Inadequate resourcing and funding.
- Privileging expert knowledge over indigenous and local knowledges.

- Scepticism about the values of equality and coproduction.
- Fear that coproduction shifts power away from experts.
- Other people's assumptions and reactions.

Key concepts for understanding disasters

Disasters are contextualised in the interstices between a hazard which may have a physical component and the social structures within which they occur, especially socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious ones. Moreover, there are key concepts which are critical to understanding what is happening to the people, animals, plants, and physical environments within specific situations. Considered below, these concepts encompass power relations, hazards, risk, exposure, vulnerability, mitigation strategies, capacity building and resilience:

Power relations

Power is conceptualised as the control that people can exercise in social relationships with others. Some adhere to a fixed view of power which is considered a zero-sum game as depicted initially by Parsons (1957). This means that power is a fixed entity that occurs within a binary of one party to a relationship holding power, and the other having none. Thus, a person, community or state either has or does not have it. Those that do not have power are subordinated to the more powerful party and considered inferior and weak. In disasters, those who consider power as fixed and pre-determined, expect people to respond according to pre-planned top-down directions. If this does not happen, they are surprised, perceive people as 'ungrateful' for the help proffered, and blame victim-survivors rather than their top-down approach. Anderson and Brion (2014: 69) utilise this conceptualisation when describing power as a social relationship that assumes 'asymmetric control over valued resources'.

Power can also be considered as a dynamic multi-layered relationship which is continually negotiated and recreated to reflect changing expectations and interactions between people, communities, or states (Foucault, 1980; French, 1985; Dominelli, 2009; Pyles, 2016). This conceptualisation of power means that people are engaged in responses that are not pre-determined. In the context of a disaster, this usually means that people engage in what is happening, although the extent of their involvement may vary according to the stage in the disaster cycle occupying their energies. This extends to the possibility that they may refuse to engage with those offering help. This is accepted as their choice, based on their specific understandings of what is occurring, and what they

need. Thus, finding out the basis of their responses, not prejudging them, and anticipating that they may change their minds at another point is important.

Hazard

A hazard is a potential source of danger or risk that can impair (physical and/or mental) health. Hazards are categorised as geophysical, meteorological, hydrological or climatological. They may inadequately portray (hu)man-caused disasters, e.g. technological failures in nuclear plants, chemical spills as befell Bhopal, India, terrorist attacks, and wars. Chartes et al. (2019: 232) define a hazard as 'any natural or man-made substance, chemical, physical or biological agent, that is capable of causing an adverse health outcome'. They argue that such dangers are assessed through a multi-step risk assessment process consisting of hazard identification to determine the circumstances than can produce adverse health outcomes; hazard characterisation which establishes the exposure levels that produce ill-health; and exposure assessment regarding a population's exposure to particular hazards. This assessment helps determine the level of risk posed to susceptible people. Mitigating these risks assists in developing resilience.

Risk

Mitchell and Harris (2012) define risk as the likelihood of 'suffering harm or loss'. In a disaster, judging whether a risk will materialise or the extent of damage a hazard may cause is uncertain. Risk is mitigated by adaptation measures that develop resilience (Lubell et al., 2021).

Risk assessment

A risk assessment, defined as *a function of the likelihood and impact to assess and mitigate risk* in the event of a disaster, aims to reduce the negative impact of vulnerability on an individual's or community's well-being. Ultimately, a risk assessment aims to reduce risk and uncertainty, enhance resilience, or achieve sustainability by encouraging individuals to prepare themselves to cope with unexpected hazards and/or risks (Jongman, 2017).

A disaster occurs when hazards, risks, exposure, and vulnerabilities combine to produce human suffering beyond the victim-survivors' capacity to cope individually and collectively (Cutter, 1996). The formula utilised in planning responses is: *risk* = *hazard* × *exposure* × *vulnerability*. Disaster planning groups examine risk, identify, and prioritise

individual and group vulnerabilities to articulate actions that will reduce their vulnerability (Cannon, 1994). As resource availability drives planning processes there can be a gap between the resources needed and those delivered (Alexander, 2002).

Mitigation strategy

Mitigation refers to attempts to reduce potential harm that may be engendered by a specific hazard. A mitigation strategy is a strategic approach to eliminating hazard risk and preventing a disaster or reducing the harm caused upon impact with individuals and society. Effective mitigation and adaptation often involve a holistic approach that acknowledges interdependencies (Dominelli, 2012a; Narayanan et al., 2020).

Exposure

Exposure is defined as the extent to which a hazard encounters people, plants, animals, built infrastructures and physical environments in its proximity in specific locations over a period. It is a key element in the equation, Risk (R) equals Exposure (E) × Vulnerability (V), usually shortened to R = H × E × V. This formula is used regularly when considering the impact of natural hazards on vulnerable social groups.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a contested concept referring primarily to the lack of capacity to resist damage or harm when exposed to the danger(s) a hazard poses (Ten Have, 2018). The damage may be physical and/or emotional, and not necessarily functional. Responses vary. Individuals may accept the prevailing social order, roles, and prescriptions to 'fit in', accommodate, or resist being labelled as 'vulnerable', e.g. women (Hollender, 2002). They are deemed vulnerable by 'emphasizing the maintenance and reproduction of normative conceptions … neglecting countervailing processes of resistance, challenge, conflict, and change' (Collins et al., 1995: 498). This highlights the passive conceptualisation of women's agency. Controlling or reducing vulnerability depends on maintaining functionality, structure and control; having the capacity to organise one's life, socio-economic and physical environments; and strengthening the capacity to learn from past experiences to adapt better to future risks. Füssel (2007: 159) offers a definition of vulnerability that covers 6