DISASTER
CONCEPTS
and ISSUES

A Guide for Social Work Education and Practice

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Introduction to Major Themes of Disaster and Social Work

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The increasing occurrence of disasters around the world, with their unfortunate impact on vulnerable populations, property, and the environment, makes it imperative that social work educators, researchers, and practitioners become knowledgeable about disasters. Although social workers have been involved in disaster response and recovery activities for a long time, the study of disaster and social work's role in disaster has been largely absent in social work education. Only after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have disaster courses begun to show up in schools of social work. This is a welcome development, one that is essential for the profession of social work and good for the disaster field as well. Social workers play vital roles in disasters (Streeter & Murty, 1996; Zakour, 2000). It is therefore essential that social work educators provide guidance on the principles and techniques needed to maximize social work's impact.

Traditionally, social workers have been present at disaster sites to help in the response and recovery efforts, but this is often too little too late. There is an expanding body of literature that demonstrates how much can be done before disasters strike to reduce and even eliminate some of the negative impacts from disaster (Weichselgartner, 2001). However, of this available literature, even the multidisciplinary work has very limited involvement from social work researchers. This unfortunate bias is beginning to change, and this book contributes to social work's role in disaster by providing guidance specifically geared to social work.

In addition to the dearth of social work representation in the disaster literature, there is also no known social work literature that exclusively tackles the social justice aspects of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Given that every community in every country around the world is at risk for one type of

disaster or another, it is important for social workers to be informed about these risks and be able to contribute to making communities as safe as possible; this puts a special emphasis on reducing vulnerability. Social workers are particularly well positioned and trained to mitigate or even eliminate the negative impacts that disasters have on vulnerable populations. These topics are covered in this book.

This book is the outcome of an international seminar organized in January 2007 by the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education of the Council on Social Work Education in collaboration with the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the North American and the Caribbean Association of Schools of Social Work in Barbados. The seminar attracted social work educators, researchers, and practitioners from universities, government, and nonprofit organizations, as well as public agencies to explore disaster management theory, research, principles, skills, knowledge, and practices. The seminar was also attended by representatives from the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the International Committee for the Red Cross.

The goals of the book are as follows:

- To build on literature about mitigating, preparing, responding and recovering from disasters through a social work and social justice perspective.
- To give social work educators a central reference work to begin connecting with disaster literature and bringing into theory and practice key principles that will help educate and train the social workers of tomorrow to be discerning actors in reducing the levels of disaster vulnerability.
- To facilitate teaching and learning about disasters from a social work perspective by providing key concepts, revealing critical assumptions, and offering useful frameworks and a general bibliography for faculty and students.
- To promote the integration of disaster concepts and issues into social work curriculum and practice.

Overview and Flow of the Book

This book provides social work undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, and practitioners with an authoritative guide to concepts, emerging issues, and approaches relevant to serving vulnerable populations. Generally, the literature on disasters is organized across four stages of disaster planning: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Mitigation and preparedness take place before disasters

strike, whereas response and recovery happen after disasters. Mitigation means prevention or ways of stopping, neutralizing, or reducing the negative effects from disasters; passing a law that prevents people from having a residence in a floodplain zone is an example of mitigation. Preparedness involves the knowledge and skills to reduce negative disaster consequences; for example, teaching people to get under their desks or a table when an earthquake strikes. Response reflects behaviors during the short-term aftermath of disasters; delivering first aid to victims of disaster is an example of a response activity. Recovery represents the behaviors carried out after disasters over the long term; for example, renovating or replacing damaged buildings. The four stages of disaster planning are often referred to as the "disaster planning cycle" or simply the "disaster cycle" because over time the relationships between these stages form a cycle, as shown in Figure 1.
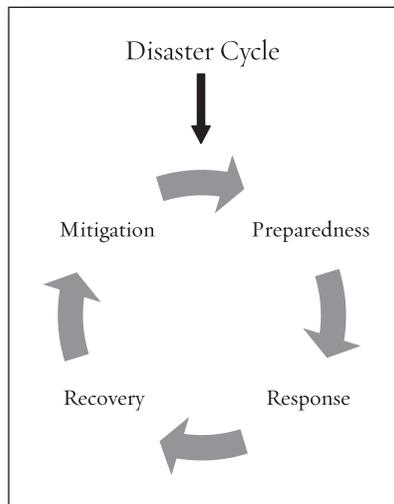
FIGURE 1: Disaster Cycle

The book is organized into three sections covering (1) concepts, perspectives, and methods; (2) practice procedures and examples; and (3) disaster curriculum and social work.

Section I includes five chapters that define and discuss the central concepts, perspectives, and methods guiding the emerging social work disaster research agenda, as well as social work services delivered before, during, and after disaster strikes a community or region. This section highlights the idea of vulnerability as the ratio of risk to susceptibility, resilience as the ability to bounce back, risk as the probability of damage or harm, social justice as principles of equity, and social development as

encompassing disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. These are each major concepts and ideas that relate to one another in various patterns forming a structure on which the knowledge and practice of social work can expand.

The first chapter, "Vulnerability: A Central Concept of the Disaster Curriculum" by David F. Gillespie, provides a historical sketch and overview of the disaster field and the vulnerability concept. This history provides a basis for recommending that the concept of vulnerability be moved from its current peripheral position to the center of social work disaster study. The traditional focus on hazards has limited our understanding of disasters and thus our ability to effectively manage disaster mitigation, preparedness, relief work during response, and long-term recovery. An emphasis on vulnerability brings social work into the heart of disaster work and research, because social work's knowledge of vulnerable populations and interdisciplinary orientation give it a natural place in disaster research, education, and practice. Although the idea of vulnerability seems on the surface to be relatively simple, it turns out to be a difficult idea to pin down. This is because it is not simply the sum of its causal factors; rather, it emerges in unique configurations from the interaction of those factors. Gillespie points out the importance of tracking changes that contribute to the level of vulnerability. Social workers are well positioned to be aware of neighborhoods or groups gaining or losing access to resources that can help to protect them or help them to recover from disaster. Vulnerability must be assessed at every phase of the disaster cycle. The distribution of vulnerable people must be mapped out and tracked over time. This is work that bridges the efforts of social work practitioners and researchers.

The second chapter, "Vulnerability and Risk Assessment: Building Community Resilience" by Michael J. Zakour, examines ways of reducing vulnerability both before and after disaster. Aspects of vulnerability theory are presented to reveal ways of increasing disaster resilience among vulnerable populations. Zakour emphasizes the populations historically served by the social work profession and points out that the social, political, and economic forces in a society often unfairly distribute risk and resilience among communities and populations. Two of the most important root causes of disaster are social marginality and lack of social development. The most vulnerable populations in disaster are low-income populations—the very young and very old, people of color, ethnic groups, minorities, and populations that experience low levels of social and economic development. Historically, these populations have been the clients of social work. The use of vulnerability theory and an improved understanding of risk and resilience promise a greater understanding of the societal and environmental forces that contribute to the occurrence of disasters. An improved understanding of the social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental causes of disasters can form the basis for new community interventions to build resilience in vulnerable populations and communities.

In the third chapter, "Recent Trends in Disaster Vulnerability and Resiliency Research: Theory, Design and Methodology," Michael J. Zakour and David F. Gillespie focus on the research for testing theories of community vulnerability and resiliency in disaster. Vulnerability and resiliency are conceptually and operationally defined. Cutting-edge research on disaster vulnerability and resilience is described, and the primary design, measurement, and analysis techniques are identified and discussed. These methods include both linear and nonlinear approaches. The linear methods discussed are correlation, regression, path analysis, and structural equation modeling. The nonlinear descriptive methods discussed are network analysis, geographic information systems, and systems dynamics. Each of these methods is part of larger perspectives that include their own set of assumptions, nominal and operational definitions, theoretical ideas, and models. But each of these methods has shown specific promise for disaster vulnerability research and disaster social work practice. Included in the examination of the vulnerability theory are the social and physical environment of populations and communities, with a focus on assessing for environmental liabilities and capabilities. Zakour and Gillespie argue that building vulnerability theory will help produce new social work interventions to reduce disaster vulnerability and to increase the long-term resilience and sustainability of communities.

In Chapter 4, "Teaching Disaster-Related Practice: Postmodern and Social Justice Perspectives," Mark Smith, Jolyn Mikow, and Mary Kay Houston-Vega elaborate on the knowledge and skills essential for social work disaster practice. They promote a three-dimensional approach using case examples and giving practice guidelines for preparing social work students to be effective across the various aspects of contemporary disaster practice. The first dimension emphasizes a critical understanding of disasters based on social justice and a strengths-based practice perspective. The second dimension elaborates on specific knowledge and skills of disaster response informed by postmodern and social justice perspectives. The third dimension promotes resilience and risk reduction at the community and organizational levels. Social justice has two domains: procedural (process) and distributive (outcomes). Procedural justice considers how the process occurred and the way decisions were made. The people affected by decisions should be represented and have voice during the planning process. The process should incorporate fair rules and opportunities for negotiation. It also typically includes legal guidelines to legitimize the decisions. The emphasis is on transparent processes. Distributive justice principles for allocating burdens, benefits, and resources are established. Perceptions of equitable distribution and need are central, with those involved feeling that the outcomes were fair, that everyone had equal access to resources and opportunities, and that those most in need were considered. It is important that diverse personal values,

viewpoints, and life situations are assumed to have validity and are deserving of respect. Smith, Mikow, and Houston-Vega emphasize the importance of attending to political and economic power differentials, the dynamics of differences between people and places, and the variety of perspectives that shape the professional helping context in disaster practice.

In Chapter 5, "A Social Development Model for Infusing Disaster Planning, Management, and Response in the Social Work Curriculum," Doreen Elliott discusses how disaster education can be a means to incorporate a global approach to practice in the social work curriculum. Elliott points out how disasters create complex psychosocial, economic, and service delivery issues that require an extended role for social work in disaster planning and management. The social development model helps clarify the role of social work in disaster and begins to lay out skills to be taught in the social work curriculum. This model extends the role of social work from the prevailing focus on relief work and crisis intervention into an expanded role that includes the phases of mitigation and preparedness and recovery in the disaster cycle. Elliott explains the context of social work and social development and discusses how social work, through social development, can promote disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Because the model incorporates social development, it emphasizes both individual and community strengths, capacity building, and the importance of human and social capital throughout the cycle of disasters. The social development model also offers a way of introducing a global approach to practice in the social work curriculum through the study of international comparative elements in social work practice approaches to disaster.

Section Two has six chapters that present a range of practice procedures and examples, including the practice of coordination as agreed-on relationships between independent organizations; "Community Impact Assessment" as a method of building disaster-resilient communities; social capital as a type of invisible assets in communities; the mental health model used by the American Red Cross in helping disaster survivors; the social, emotional, and cognitive issues involved in serving children and youth affected by disaster; and the nature of disaster response in China, with particular attention given to the roles of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the social work profession.

In Chapter 6, "Coordination: A Key Community Resource in Disasters," Kofi Danso and David F. Gillespie discuss interorganizational coordination of disaster resources for service delivery to support people, organizations, and communities affected by disaster. The concept of coordination is defined, and its utility to social workers is made clear through a discussion of trends that help social workers take advantage of opportunities to promote effective coordination. Several kinds of coordination are presented, ranging from relatively simple to more complex forms, and

a number of obstacles to coordination, as well as factors that facilitate coordination, are described. An understanding of these forms helps social workers promote coordination appropriate to the community's need. Developing effective coordination requires a thorough understanding of the factors that hinder and help the process of coordination. Danso and Gillespie define five types of community resources and illustrate each type at different stages of disaster. To guide the coordination process, social workers must know the nature of what is coordinated and how that nature changes at different stages of disaster. The major emergency service functions are discussed as critical community subsystems that require coordination to respond effectively when disaster strikes. An account of these systems comprising the social service sector is described, making clear the critical importance of coordination for safe communities. The authors suggest that every social worker regardless of position must strive to improve coordination because it saves lives and reduces losses from disaster. Recent experiences from the Katrina disaster demonstrate that the absence of an effectively coordinated system generates gaps in services. This chapter emphasizes the importance of social work professionals being equipped with the requisite training to coordinate needs and resources during disasters.

In Chapter 7, "Building Disaster-Resilient Communities: Advancing Social Work Knowledge and Skills," Robin L. Ersing focuses on teaching social work students the skills of the community impact assessment (CIA) as a method to build disaster-resilient neighborhoods. The CIA method fits well with social work principles. It requires involvement of the public in the assessment process, and the engagement of community members and stakeholders is integrated throughout each phase of the model. In addition, community values and goals are advocated and incorporated into the plans. The CIA method is also sensitive to revealing consequences that may threaten or disrupt the social stability and cohesion of a community. Five phases make up the CIA method: define the project and study area, develop a community profile, analyze impacts, identify solutions, and document findings. Ersing points out that the stages of the CIA method share common ground with the problem-solving model used to anchor generalist social work practice. Results from several successful community projects illustrate the application of CIA knowledge and skills within a social work context. Integrating the knowledge, skills, and values of CIA into social work courses holds promise and opportunity to achieve the provisions set forth in the profession's national policy statement on disasters.

In Chapter 8, "Surviving Disaster: The Role of Invisible Assets of Communities," Golam M. Mathbor examines the scope and prospect for effectively using the invisible assets of social capital, social networks, social cohesion, solidarity, and social interaction in disaster preparedness and also in mitigating the consequences

of natural disasters that hit coastal regions. The focus on invisible assets draws attention to psychosocial factors, such as fear of a disaster, and cultural factors, such as awareness of disaster types and the existence of evacuation plans and warning systems. Planning should take into account psychosocial supports and stigma in seeking services. Consideration needs to be given to the roles that families can play in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The role of schools, police, hospitals, fire departments, and the Red Cross are critical. In addition, ethnic communities and religious institutions have a place in disaster management too. Mathbor argues for persuasive work in formulating policy directives that emphasize community collaboration, solidarity, coordination, and utilization of social networks as a vehicle for effective service delivery before, during, and after a disaster. This chapter underscores the importance of social work education and practice in building invisible assets for sustainable disaster response and management and building resilient communities.

In Chapter 9, "Practice Perspectives of Disaster Work," Michael Cronin and Diane Ryan provide a description of the program that guides the daily provision of mental health services to persons affected by disaster. They describe how the program was developed in collaboration with the National Association of Social Workers, the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Psychological Association, and the American Counseling Association. They delineate the work that is done in the disaster mental health model used by the American Red Cross (ARC), indicating the emphasis given to individuals' strengths, resiliency, and coping styles. They also describe how the ARC program differs from traditional mental health services in their goals, objectives, methods, and settings. Cronin and Ryan depict and illustrate each of the micropractice interventions used in the program; these include psychological first aid, crisis intervention, assessment, casualty support, diffusing, advocacy, outreach, and staff support. They report on the psychological and emotional phases associated with disaster response and recovery, as effective intervention requires an awareness of these phases. The characteristics of mass causality work are identified, and the nature of work settings in disaster is provided, with descriptions of reception centers, respite centers, disaster shelters, family assistance centers, phone banks, points of dispensing centers, and staging areas. The authors emphasize the importance of flexibility in the role of mental health workers. Collaboration is highlighted in a discussion of macro- and organizational interventions. The chapter ends with cultural considerations and disaster mental health planning and cultural competence. This chapter clearly illustrates that effective disaster services require special skills, knowledge, perspective, and procedures.

In Chapter 10, "Vulnerability and Disaster: Risk and Resilience in the Context of Developmental Competencies in Children and Teens," So'Nia Gilkey explores

the impact of disaster on the vulnerability of children and youth. Vulnerability is recognized as a chronic condition, with vulnerable children and youth likely to suffer disproportionately more from the negative effects of disaster. Youth using alcohol or drugs or suffering from depression or an anxiety-related disorder are more likely to experience posttraumatic stress disorder, poor social adjustment, and poor academic achievement. Gilkey discusses how the impact of disaster on children and teens is affected by the child's age, developmental level, intellectual capacity, individual and family support, peer support, personality, media, and community response. Case examples from Hurricane Katrina are given for a family with young children and a family with a teen. Problematic behaviors are described, and appropriate interventions are discussed. Interventions on behalf of children include counseling and working with children on developmental skills such as problem solving, engaging in positive activities, and learning strategies that enhance the child's sense of control over what happens to them. Interventions on behalf of teens include identifying or developing positive personal attributes that promote social, cognitive, and emotional competence to nurture resilient qualities that can protect the teen from further distress. Gilkey puts forth a problem-solving strategy that involves identifying the problem, clarifying who is affected by the problem, brainstorming possible solutions to the problem, and developing a step-by-step plan to solve the problem. It is important to keep the plan simple, with reasonable goals, tasks clearly assigned, a way to monitor progress, and a way to evaluate success. This chapter makes it clear that through a better understanding of the impact disasters can have on the developmental competencies of children and youth, social work education has the capacity to lead other helping disciplines engaged in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

In Chapter 11, "The 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in China: Reflections on the Role of Social Workers in Disaster Intervention," Terry Lum, Xiying Wang, and Kofi Danso use a recent earthquake in China to illustrate the nature of disaster response by various stakeholders. This is an important contribution because Asia is one of the highest risk and most vulnerable regions for natural disasters in the world. This chapter gives an account of the Wenchuan earthquake, which affected over 500,000 square kilometers and killed more than 87,000 people. The Chinese government launched a swift response to the disaster; medical and emergency response teams were sent on the same day of the earthquake; and the military was called in for search and rescue operations. This top-down approach was efficient. In China, as elsewhere, the involvement of local citizens and the use of local resources are crucial in disaster response because locals know their community better than anyone else. But often local resources are insufficient to meet the needs, as in the case of the Wenchuan earthquake. The surge of volunteers overwhelmed the local governments

and the survivors and thus hindered the rescue efforts. The authors place a special focus on the roles of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the social work profession. Because, historically, disaster work has been a function of the government, there was no prescribed role for NGOs; this is changing as a result of the Wenchuan earthquake. A multitude of NGOs helped out in areas where the government was not working. The social work profession is in the beginning stages of establishment in mainland China. Social work educators from Taiwan who have had experience with earthquakes provided train-the-trainer workshops, after which the mainland China social work educators trained their students and the social workers in their cities. These social workers set up social service centers in temporary housing areas, taught concepts and skills needed to work effectively with disaster survivors, translated disaster documents and manuals from other countries into Chinese, and integrated concepts and skills developed outside China into Chinese social work practice. Lum, Xiying, and Danso conclude with lessons learned for stakeholders, including the government, NGOs, and volunteers. This chapter provides suggestions for coordination among stakeholders and community participation, which has implications for social work education and practice. There is much to be gained from knowing more about and working closer with China and other Asian countries.

Section Three builds on the foundation material covered in the preceding 11 chapters. This section is made up of three chapters with guidelines on integrating disaster content into the social work curriculum. The chapters discuss ethical considerations, multicultural education, and disaster content.

In Chapter 12, "Ethical Considerations in Disasters: A Social Work Framework," Hussein Soliman discusses how differences in the various kinds of organizations involved in disasters increase the chance for inconsistencies, conflict, and poor coordination in postdisaster services delivery. He presents an ethical framework and a model with specific guidelines that can be used by organizations to analyze the processes of disaster mitigation, preparedness planning, response, and recovery. This framework is organized around seven concepts: accountability, responsibility, equity, transparency, decision capacity, the risks/benefit ratio, and confidentiality. Principles of morality underlie these concepts. Soliman distinguishes different branches of morality, focusing primarily on normative ethics. Distinctions within normative ethics are drawn with the value of "distributive justice" or the comparative treatment of individuals being underscored. This involves treating people according to their merits, treating people equally, and treating people according to their needs or abilities. A central point of this chapter is that the moral, ethical, and legal rights of citizens of every country are to receive help and disaster support from their government. This is necessary because of the vulnerability of people who experience

problems caused by disasters. The author draws case material from Hurricane Katrina to illustrate the framework. The response to Katrina identifies the type of ethics applied and also reveals those not applied. Issues involving warnings, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery are pointed out and related to ethical principles. This chapter provides essential knowledge on the need to promote and establish ethical practice and intervention in the disaster field and, accordingly, identifies the various negative consequences that can happen if ethical principles in disaster are ignored or violated.

In Chapter 13, Martell Teasley and James A. Moore, "Disaster Recovery Case Management: Social Work and Multicultural Education," demonstrate how social work education programs can prepare students to become culturally sensitive practitioners for disaster recovery case management within multiethnic communities. The authors provide examples of how vulnerability places certain people at risk for problems following disaster. For example, discrimination of certain categories of people or communities often means there is a lack of information about the people or communities likely to be most strongly affected by a disaster. Useful literature regarding vulnerability arising from differences in perceptions, ageism, and disability bias is discussed. The chapter also demonstrates how universities can work with faith-based organizations and private nonprofit organizations to design meaningful disaster response education and training. The authors articulate a model for social work education and training that will prepare social work practitioners for practice with diverse and vulnerable populations during disaster mitigation, preparedness planning, response, and recovery.

In Chapter 14, "Be Prepared: Incorporating Disaster Content in an Era of Globalization and Climate Change," Rebecca L. Thomas and Lynne M. Healy address curriculum content on natural and manmade disasters for social work programs. Social workers are recognized as an important resource both before (mitigation/preparedness) and after (response/recovery) disaster. Social workers in international social work will inevitably be involved in disaster work and often provide assistance in disaster response, assessment, recovery, restoration, and policy development, especially for those who are the most vulnerable. Interestingly, the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 1996) indicates that "social workers should provide appropriate professional services in public emergencies to the greatest extent possible," yet social work education has just begun to incorporate disaster content into the curriculum. Even more interesting is the fact that this neglect occurred even in places where government mandated roles for social workers in disaster management. Thomas and Healy argue that disasters provide an avenue for infusing, extending, and enhancing international content into social work curriculum. The chapter discusses the principles for developing disaster content based on protracted efforts to internationalize social work curricula.

Finally, we provide an annotated bibliography to augment the work of social work faculty in teaching, researching, practicing, and developing curriculum. It contains relevant information on disaster management, such as a bibliography, journals, and a list of disaster-related organizations worldwide. There is also a compilation of valuable resources and materials on disaster management and planning. This section provides information on organizations and stakeholders, both domestic and international that work on disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. This section also facilitates information retrieval and serves as a quick reference guide for identifying general and specific information related to disaster management.

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