

# Social Work Education for Disaster Recovery and Community Building

by

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# The Importance of Social Work Education for Disaster Management

- Need for well educated professionals to address human caused and natural disasters
  - Terrorist attacks to Tsunamis
  - Conflicts between and within countries
  - Earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions
- Need to apply social work knowledge and skills to tasks ranging from
  - Reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons
  - Rebuilding of communities and societies

# The Field of Disaster Management

- Social workers long involved with disaster management
  - Many employed by Red Cross, Red Crescent, and other non-governmental agencies
  - Others work for governmental and intergovernmental agencies, such as the United Nations' High Commission on Refugees
- Often they are not identified as social workers
  - Need for more interaction and organizational linkages between emergency management and the social work profession

# The Field of Disaster Management

- Emergency management in multi-disciplinary work
  - Social work is one of many disciplines in the field
  - Currently there is limited content in social work education with specific focus on disaster management
  - Most specific training is on the job or through special courses offered by the International Association of Emergency Managers
  - Some universities offer degrees in Emergency Management Administration

# Social Work Roles in Disaster Work

- Disaster relief and recovery requires a range of roles familiar to social workers
  - These include roles ranging from counseling to case management to community development
  - Social workers have foundation training in micro and macro roles applicable to emergency management
  - Some generalist knowledge and skills provided by social work education can be applied to the field of disaster management

# Social Work Roles in Disaster Work

- However, some studies of social workers involved in disaster work conclude that they are not adequately prepared to handle many of the special demands of this field
  - The crisis nature of the work, the emotional stress, and the problems of interacting with multiple organizations created special demands for which they were not prepared
  - On the job training was not sufficient to prepare them for the multiple demands that were different from their previous social work experience

# Framework for Disaster Management Education\*

- Education for professional roles in disaster management should provide curriculum content and experiential learning in the following phases of the disaster event:
  - Assessment for:
    - probability of occurrence
    - vulnerability to risk
    - community capability to manage disaster
  - Mitigation by:
    - minimizing potential of destruction and disruption by building social and physical infrastructure and organizing the community for potential emergencies

\* Adapted from Gillespie, Rogge, and Robards (1996)

# Framework for Disaster Management Education\*

- Preparedness by:
  - planning for services to vulnerable groups
  - training volunteers for disaster event
  - developing community support groups
- Response by:
  - mobilizing resources for vulnerable populations
  - providing food, shelter, and other survival resources
  - targeting health and social services
- Recovery by:
  - rebuilding social and physical infrastructure
  - empowering citizens and communities through social development
  - reintegrating vulnerable groups into the community



# Macro Social Work Roles in Disaster Recovery

- Pre-Disaster
  - Organize and participate in community pre-disaster planning and management committees
  - Plan and develop interventions focused on the groups most vulnerable to the impact of the imminent disaster
- Post-Disaster
  - Focus on team-building and community coordination during immediate aftermath of disaster
  - Manage reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees
  - Engage in grassroots social development in rebuilding communities and social networks

# Macro Social Work Roles in Disaster Recovery

- Managing reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees
  - Examples: Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Development of human services for vulnerable populations
  - Example: Social service centers in Bosnia and Kosovo
- Grassroots social development
  - Example: Peru and Philippines

# Incorporation of Disaster Management Knowledge and Skills Into Social Work Education

- **Curriculum Options:**

- Infusion of disaster management content and cases into existing courses
  - Positive outcome: Exposure to large number of students
  - Negative outcome: Limited depth and breadth of learning
  - Obstacle: Finding room in courses already filled with content
- One course and field placement:
  - Positive outcome: Overview of field plus some skill development
  - Negative outcome: Much content left for post-degree in-service training
  - Obstacle: Limited number of elective options for most social work students

# Incorporation of Disaster Management Knowledge and Skills Into Social Work Education

- **Curriculum Options (continued):**

- Concentration (specialization) in disaster (emergency) management
  - Positive outcome: Exposure to service network and specialized knowledge and skills
  - Negative outcome: Available to a limited number of social work students
  - Obstacle: Difficulty of adding more specializations to the curriculum
- Dual degree in social work and disaster management
  - Positive outcome: Learning to work within a multi-disciplinary field of practice
  - Negative outcome: Increased amount of time in educational program
  - Obstacle: Working out curriculum compatible with curriculum requirements in two or more disciplines

# Important Components of Disaster Management Education for Social Workers

- **Field Education**

- Expansion of field practicum placements beyond traditional agencies, e.g., Red Cross

Examples:

- United Nations programs
  - National voluntary organizations active in disaster (NVOAD)
  - Local emergency management offices
  - Public health agencies
- Field experiences covering both micro and macro levels of intervention
  - Multi-disciplinary field experiences

# Important Components of Disaster Management Education for Social Workers

- **Classroom**

- Provision of generalist practice knowledge and skills within field of emergency management
- Content on service networks as well as specific policies and services
- Specialists in counseling or community development should have sub-specialties in other levels of practice

- **Laboratory**

- Experiential learning should include simulated experiences covering different phases of a disaster event
- Simulations in disaster management should help develop skills for different levels of intervention, e.g., micro, meso, and macro