

# A Social Justice and Prevention Oriented Framework for Infusing Disaster Related Knowledge and Skills in Social Work Education

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# Salience.....

- ◆ **Historic role of social workers in responding to disasters and public hazards.**
- ◆ **Recent events highlight imperative of inclusion in social work education.**
- ◆ **Clear evidence of ways vulnerable populations experience inequities both in response & planning.**

# Intentions...

- ◆ **1. Highlight importance of social justice as framework for conceptualizing disasters.**
- ◆ **2. Demonstrate ways disaster-related content can powerfully enrich existing social work curriculum.**
- ◆ **3. Articulate requisite knowledges, values, and skills needed by social workers responding to disasters.**
- ◆ **4. Address a basic tension regarding building knowledge (so local & official knowledges mutually inform each other).**

# Conceptual Framework: Three Dimensions



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graph TD; A[Conceptual Framework: Three Dimensions] --- B[Social Justice (Praxis)]; A --- C[Expanded Definitions]; A --- D[Resiliency Promotion Risk Prevention];
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The diagram illustrates a conceptual framework with three dimensions. At the top is a green box containing the title 'Conceptual Framework: Three Dimensions' in yellow text. A vertical black line descends from the center of this box to a horizontal black line. From this horizontal line, three vertical black lines extend downwards to three separate green boxes. The leftmost box contains the text 'Social Justice (Praxis)', the middle box contains 'Expanded Definitions', and the rightmost box contains 'Resiliency Promotion Risk Prevention'. The background is a solid grey color with faint green geometric shapes scattered across it.

**Social Justice  
(Praxis)**

**Expanded  
Definitions**

**Resiliency Promotion  
Risk Prevention**

# First Dimension: Social Justice / Praxis working definitions

***“equitable distribution of benefits and burdens throughout a society...[particularly public institutions having to do with] protections of persons' rights through the legal system, income and wages, the allocation of housing, medicine, welfare benefits, etc.”***

(Miller, 1976, p. 222)

# Praxis...

- ◆ **Critical consciousness....the development of collective local knowledge regarding the forces that influence or shape the lives of group members.**
- ◆ **Involves learning to perceive and to question social, economic, and political contradictions and take collective action against social injustice.**

# PRAXIS: in disaster practice

- ◆ **Critical consciousness about the political, socio-economic, & ideological forces that have shaped the present condition.**
- ◆ **Awareness of how societal injustices have exacerbated the trauma experienced by vulnerable or marginalized groups.**
  - **(Post-disaster problems that result from injustice can be as intense as those caused by the disaster itself.)**

# Social Justice:

## Critical, Multicultural, Feminist, Postmodern Contributions

- ◆ **Challenges normative power structures & the oppression they produce.**
- ◆ **Compels recognition that “needs” & “help” are defined differently by different groups.**
- ◆ **Requires that disaster response services involve multiple forms of helping & multiple means of accessing services/benefits.**
- ◆ **Demands that services be responsive to people's actual appraisal of their needs and should include ways for them to claim collective responsibility.**



# Social Justice / Praxis

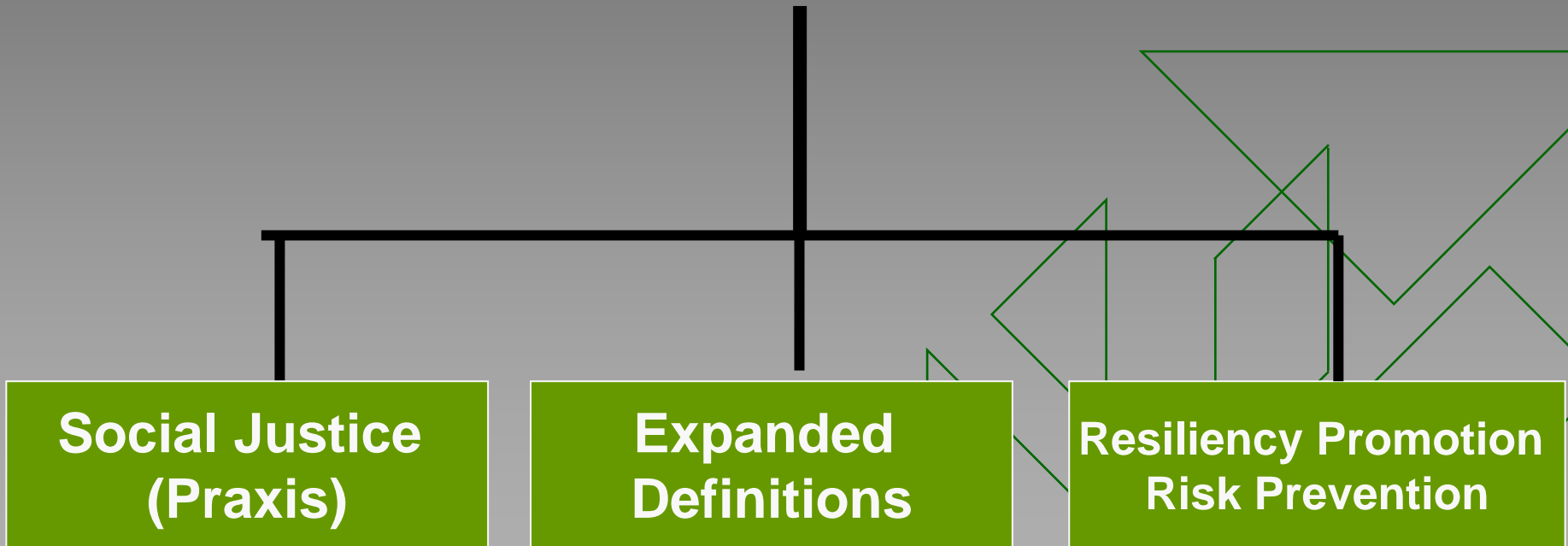
- ◆ **Vulnerable populations receive primary focus.**
- ◆ **Disaster response and recovery must build on inherent strengths of impacted groups, and not result in further victimization.**
- ◆ **Official responses should be organized around enhancing individual, family, community, and organizational resiliencies.**
- ◆ **Attention should be balanced between both individual trauma effects as well as community attributes.**
- ◆ **Moves from case to cause.**

# Social Justice: Re: Policies & Programs

Requires us to work to:

- ◆ **Eliminate policies that unnecessarily diminish people's sense of control over their lives.**
- ◆ **Expand programs (& policies) that enable people to exercise the greatest levels of personal freedom.**
- ◆ **Correct policies (programs) that drain finite resources from those addressing basic needs, exp. for those most vulnerable.**
- ◆ **Insure people feel they are integral and valued parts of society.**

# Conceptual Framework: Three Dimensions



# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters

- **Disasters occur when phenomena (natural or otherwise) are so destructive to an area's structural systems that it overwhelms local preparedness and the ability to restore essential structures without outside or external assistance. (DIFID, 2004)**
- **Collective stress situations, resulting from natural or technological sources, in which a significantly large number of individuals fail to have their needs met through societal processes.**

# Disasters Vary By...

- ◆ **Origin- natural, intentional, human caused**
- ◆ **Duration (including length of warning time)**
- ◆ **Intensity of event**
- ◆ **Potential for recurrence**
- ◆ **Extent of property damage**
- ◆ **Number of persons impacted**
- ◆ **Number of injuries and deaths**
- ◆ **Impact ratio (proportion of losses)**
- ◆ **Cultural and symbolic aspects**
- ◆ **Dynamic of recovery period**

# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters



- **Hazards**

- **Disaster Characteristics**

- Acute
- Collective
- Sudden Onset
- Not Political

- **Major Disasters**

- Natural
- Human-made
- Multi-Disasters
- Compound
- Migration

- **Second Disaster**

# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters

## Vulnerability.....

- ◆ In terms of both individual and community.
- ◆ Vulnerability not equivalent to “poverty.”
- ◆ Central is notion of distributive justice (generally...the lower SES, the greater vulnerability)

# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters

## Social vulnerability assessment involves:

- ◆ Initial well-being
- ◆ Livelihood resilience
- ◆ Self-protection
- ◆ Social protection
- ◆ Social & political networks and institutions



# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters

## ◆ Capacities....

- Generally, the ability to prevent or cope with threats.

## ◆ Assessment of capacities includes:

- 1. Physical and material
- 2. Social and organizational
- 3. Skills and attitudes

# Second Dimension: Expanded Understanding of Disasters

## Mitigation: The Cornerstone

**A collaborative planning process whereby hazards affecting the community are identified, specific vulnerability to the hazards is assessed, and agreement arrived at regarding how to minimize the effects of these hazards.**

# Conceptual Framework: Three Dimensions



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**Social Justice  
(Praxis)**

**Expanded  
Definitions**

**Resiliency Promotion  
Risk Prevention**

# Third Dimension: Risk Prevention and Resiliency Promotion Continuum

- ◆ Universal Knowledge and Skills address the entire population and move from cause to case
- ◆ Selective Knowledge and Skills target subsets of the population deemed at-risk and
- ◆ Indicated Knowledge and Skills target individuals who have been directly impacted by a disaster and move from case to cause

# Third Dimension: Risk Prevention and Resiliency Promotion Continuum

## Universal Knowledge & Skills

- ◆ **Identify present hazards, disaster risks, and risk features associated with them**
- ◆ **Fluency re: existing disaster policies and procedures**
- ◆ **Assess whether warnings are specific to culture and locality**
- ◆ **Assess vulnerable resources vs. emergent resources**

# Third Dimension: Risk Prevention and Resiliency Promotion Continuum

## Universal Knowledge & Skills

- ◆ **Assessment of Community / Organizational Preparedness (VCA)**
- ◆ **Locate and become familiar with disaster planning resources (e.g. mitigation and recovery policies)**
- ◆ **Assess coordination of National, State, Community, Neighborhood Emergency Disaster planning systems.**
- ◆ **Policy Analysis/Practice: Legislative Change and Advocacy Skills**

# Some Universal Knowledge & Skills:

- ◆ **Training and Education**
- ◆ **Administrative and Community Development/Planning**
- ◆ **Disaster Drills**
- ◆ **Organizational Assessment**

# Third Dimension: Selective Knowledge and Skills

- ◆ **Organizational and agency disaster plans for at-risk populations**
  - **SES, Socio-cultural, Geographic Factors, Differently-abled**
  - **Homeless**
  - **Elderly**
  - **Medically at risk**
  - **Out of Home Care settings**
- ◆ **Identify and be familiar with at risk communities AND at risk organizations (i.e., do they have a continuation of operation plan?).**



# Third Dimension: Selective Knowledge and Skills

## Assessing Community Resiliency

- ◆ **“Hopefulness” signs**
- ◆ **“Community identity” signs – heroes, native sons/daughters, legends.**
- ◆ **“Good neighbor” stories/narratives – (collectively shared survival stories)**
- ◆ **Intergenerational relationships and involvement**
- ◆ **Invisible, sociocultural resources**

# Third Dimension: Indicated Knowledge & Skills

- **Individuals and communities directly impacted by a disaster**
- **Stages of Recovery- including how individuals, families and communities might respond**
- **Common reactions and key concepts**
- **Disaster serving organizations**
- **Post Disaster Organizational Community Assessment**

# Third Dimension: Indicated Knowledge & Skills

## Key Concepts

- ◆ **Prepare first responders and volunteers**
- ◆ **Set aside reliance on standardized or routinized clinical methods.**
- ◆ **Avoid MH labels**
- ◆ **Tailor responses to communities and specific populations.**
- ◆ **Active outreach .... seek out and find those needing help, rather than expect them to find you.**

# Third Dimension: Indicated Knowledge and Skills:

## Common Reactions and Key Concepts

- ◆ **Individual AND Community trauma**
- ◆ **Problems in living NOT usually requiring mental health ... nor much need help “normalizing”.**
- ◆ **More practical than psychological... many reject assistance of any kind.**
- ◆ **Most pull together and function in the aftermath with some diminished effectiveness, but no need of intense response.**

# Third Dimension: Indicated Knowledge & Skills

## Key Concepts:

- ◆ **Match intervention to phase of recovery**
- ◆ **Identification and activation of support networks is critical**
- ◆ **Attend to worker self-care, especially the emotional toll that constant triage and ethical decision-making can have**

# Challenges for Social Work Education

- ◆ **Disaster Specialization or Integration within the Curriculum?**
- ◆ **Moving from individual trauma focus to community resilience & policy**
- ◆ **Case to Cause and Cause to Case (seamless practice..)**
- ◆ **Prepare students to work in community based agencies in planning, preparedness, and mitigation levels**

# Some Teaching Strategies & Learning Activities

- ◆ **Web Quest**
- ◆ **Ethical Dilemmas**
  - **Personal, professional, organizational obligations?**
- ◆ **Community Vulnerability / Capacity Assessments**
- ◆ **University Disaster Policy?**
- ◆ **Critique Disaster Plans:**
  - **State, Local, City**
- ◆ **NASW Code of Ethics, Social Work Speaks**
- ◆ **Follow the Money**
- ◆ **Research opportunities and constraints**
- ◆ **Success Stories in the News**
- ◆ **Self Care and Professional Development Plans**

# Summing up....

- ◆ **Situating disaster knowledge & skills within a Social Justice perspective**
- ◆ **New conceptualization / definitions of disasters**
- ◆ **Focus on risk prevention, capacities, and resiliency promotion**
- ◆ **Integrating disaster specific knowledges and skills in BSW / MSW Education**