

Social Work Interventions in Disasters: Skills, Knowledge and Roles

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Effective Disaster Interventions are Becoming Increasingly Necessary

- Natural and human made disasters globally are increasing in frequency and impact.
- Most humanitarian aid workers are untrained in the disaster and relief fields.
- Social workers are second tier responders who need to support others and care for themselves (self-care and supervision).
- Social workers need training at qualifying, CPD and specialist (MA) levels.
- Ethical behaviour and doing no harm is a must.
- Critical, reflective practice, upholding respect, dignity and human rights, and good communication skills are essential.
- Disasters are complex situations that require holistic, transdisciplinary, interventions that sensitively involve and empower those affected.
- Disasters require a complex of understanding the interactions between social, political, economic and cultural systems (contexts), the physical environment and diverse professions and organisations.
- Understanding and meeting one's own professional development needs and having good ongoing supervision are also necessary.



Social Work: A Global Profession

- International contexts can impact on local practice, e.g., ‘forced migrants’.
- Joint Definition IASSW and IFSW (June 2001) is accepted globally.
- Social Work is universal, but needs to be adapted locally to cater for cultural traditions and contexts.
- BASW Code of Ethics (IASSW-IFSW Ethics Document) offers guidance, but is not a code.
- Human Rights, social justice (including environmental justice) and relationship based social work underpin social work in disasters.

International Definition of Social Work

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels”.

(IASSW, IFSW 2014)

Types of Disasters

Difference between a hazard and a disaster

- Risk assessment of hazard.
Hazards become disasters through human action.

Natural disasters

- Earthquakes, volcanic actions, storm surges, tsunami, hurricanes

(Hu)man-made disasters

- Poverty.
- Climate change and extreme weather events.
- Chemical spills.
- Armed conflicts.
- Terrorism.
- Health pandemics.
- Fires.

Differences are becoming blurred as human activities turn hazards into complicated disasters with much human suffering.



Training Needs: Your Views

- The 2004 Contingency Act says social workers are 2nd tier responders. What do you think of that statement?
- What topics/skills/knowledge would you want included in a curriculum for social work during disasters?
- What would you look for in a field-based learning opportunity?
- Do you think learning from overseas experiences is important? Why (not)?
- Would you like sessions to be face-to-face or online?
- What kind of training/education would meet your needs, e.g., Qualifying, MA, CDP?



Partnership with ADASS in Identifying Roles in England

- Paper 1 (5 mins to read Statement)
- The role of the ADASS and social workers in disaster recovery
- [..\..\recommendations-on-the-role-of-dass-and-social-workers-in-post-disaster-management-january-2019.pdf](#)

Continuous Professional Development: Training for Disaster Interventions

- Paper 2
- CPD Guidance on Social Work Roles Undertaken During Disasters
- Feedback on the guidance



Key Worker Role and Recommendations for Consideration Regarding Other Social Worker Roles

- Please discuss the statement (10 mins).
- Feedback/comments.
- What would you include in future?



International Contexts Interact with Local Ones

- Most international disasters are about natural disasters and (hu)man-made ones, e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes and ‘forced migration’.
- Social workers, academics and students are key helpers in these.
- The UK is not seen as a disaster-prone country.
Why do you think this is so?
- The UK has its share of disasters – terrorism including armed conflict like the Troubles in Northern Ireland, floods, droughts, heatwaves, coldsnaps, fires, fracking, shootings.
- What can the UK learn from other countries?
- How do social workers respond to issues of acceptance, belonging, and people’s claims to the right to live in the UK?

Self-Care

Self-care is important in disasters to:

- Address the emotionality in the work.
- To work effectively, and give and receive support.
- To avoid burn-out.

Self-care – Before departure:

- prepare yourself and family members/loved ones.
- If away for a while deal with milk, newspapers, health insurance, house insurance.
- Inform yourself about local customs and linguistic differences.

Self care on the spot :

- Ask about daily debriefing and peer support and supervision on the ground (be prepared to offer the same to others).
- Mutual care (self and others, reciprocity).
- Arrange for regular report-back to and supervision from your home base.

Self-care on return:

- Debriefing, support and supervision.
- Have a holiday if you can.
- Therapeutic care (including in long-term).



Thank You!

