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Abstract

Based on a rapid review of social work research literature on natural disasters, this article offers an original synthesis of lessons about the nature and organisation of social services in the context of natural disasters. Drawing on social practice theory, existing intervention models are problematised, offering a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between diverse types and levels of organisation, differing constituencies of disaster survivors, and differing environments in which they encounter. The paper also identifies elements of good organisational practice and sets an agenda for wider professional debate on the role of social work in international social development practice.

Keywords

Literature review, social work, natural disasters, social service organisation, social practice theory

Introduction

Across the world, we are experiencing an increasing number of extreme events such as natural disasters and political conflicts (Marc, 2016; UN, 2015). Each has an immediate and prolonged impact on the organisation, delivery and all other aspects of social work practice in the affected geographical area. The initial idea for this paper stems from my experience of social work and political conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Similarities and differences between the impact of political conflict and natural disasters were highlighted following the flooding across South East Europe in 2014. In parts of BiH, the flooding appeared to inflict similar destructive effects to the 1992-1995 war in this country.

While there is growing social work scholarship on both political conflicts and natural disasters, much of it has been produced in response to particular extreme events. There have been limited efforts to systematise what may be learned from existing professional and organisational practices across contexts. In parallel, the majority of knowledge and professional practices deployed in this field are not created and ‘owned’ by social workers, but practitioners and scholars in the field of development studies and practice. Healy’s (2017: 13) analysis of social work in the post-2015 Development Agenda¹ asserts that the profession needs to engage more robustly on the international level and in relation to global development issues – both because of our ethical obligation to engage in advocacy and because social workers are able to ‘bring their valuable practice knowledge into policy dialogues.’

Considering the relatively extensive body of research on social work in context of natural disasters and political conflict which has accrued over the past 30 years, it is important we aim to systematise and theorise our learning to date. Existing social work studies mainly focus on grassroots practice in extreme events and the impact of such events on a variety of community groups (e.g. Ramon and Zavirsek, 2012; Williams, 2008). At best, they focus on the analysis of the immediate ‘ceiling’ of local social service responses (van Haugten, 2014), without lifting their focus towards mezzo and macro social work – despite valuable lessons on social service organisation and social policy contained within such studies. This paper makes an original and distinctive contribution to knowledge by critically exploring and synthesising what may be learned from social work research on responses to natural disasters, particularly in relation to service organisation. This is done using the lens of social practice theory (Shove et al., 2012) which positions social practices in the realm where society and the individual are inextricably linked and organised.

Throughout this discussion, the term ‘social services’ is used as a shorthand for all organisations which provide a ‘home’ for social work practice, predominately employ social

workers and/or otherwise serve as a context for services which meet social needs. Whilst a recent literature review by Manning and Kushma (2016) offers insights for micro level learning in relation to case management in context of extreme events, the starting point for this review is that social work practice is anchored in organisational contexts and decisions are shaped by organisational factors (Hasenfeld, 1983, in Van den Haar, 2007). Hence, this analysis intends to provide insights and lay foundations for wider professional debate about what types of interventions and modes of service delivery are already effective, and which might yet be developed, in relation to social services in extreme events.

Methodology

This paper is informed by what is best described as a rapid review of the existing international literature on social work and natural disasters (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016). Whilst establishing and maintaining a degree of systematicity in the review process (outlined below), for reasons of practicability given the range and diversity of the literature involved, the methodology did not adhere to all requirements for a full systematic review.

In order to conduct as comprehensive a search as possible, the following databases were used: ASSIA (63 results), Google Scholar (113), IBSS (34), Social Care Online (214), Scopus (85) and Web of Science (181). The key word “social work” was combined with any of the following: “natural disaster”, “bushfire”, “flood”, “earthquake”, “tsunami” or “hurricane”. The search was restricted to social work research published after 1990, due to limited social work scholarship on this theme prior to that date. Only studies published in English were included in the review. Research on human-induced and technological disasters was also excluded for several reasons. Available definitions and typologies of disasters highlight them as distinct categories (Harding, 2007; Mohamed Shaluf, 2007) and there is sparse social work research on this topic alone – with exception of research on political conflict, which warrants a separate review. Papers which were concerned with

social work but mentioned natural disasters only briefly or as an example, as well as those without significant focus on social work in context of natural disasters, were also excluded.

Identified studies were scrutinised using Orme and Shemmings (2010) questions for critical appraisal of social work research. For example, all studies where authors did not provide sufficient overview of the study methodology were excluded from the analysis. This strategy generated a total of 100 social work research articles on natural disasters which complied with all inclusion and exclusion criteria (excluding duplicate results). Almost half are from the USA (48), followed by Asia (22 articles variously from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Taiwan). Further 10 included cross-country data.

Almost all the identified studies were small-scale and single disaster specific qualitative studies, and most focused at the micro level practice in particular settings. Data and findings from the studies were analysed using thematic analysis which allowed exploration of relationships between the themes emerging from the data, as well as to establish how these relationships are linked to the overall cultural context (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012, in Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016). Inductive coding was used to identify all available themes emerging from the synthesis of the selected studies. This article focuses solely on organisational and management issues, which were subsequently analysed in greater depth and detail.

Distinctively, thematic analysis of those studies was informed by social practice theory (Shove et al., 2012). This allowed interrogation of how organisational practices are produced both by the actors who utilise them and the social contexts in which they are situated. While all of the studies were context and disaster specific, social practice theory acknowledges that the dynamics of the grassroots, micro level, practice have consequences and can structure mezzo and macro level regimes and landscapes.

Findings and discussion

Review findings are presented in relation to three key themes – the broader context of social work interventions during and after natural disasters, elements of good organisational practice and the role of social work during and after natural disasters.

Broader context of social work interventions in disasters and its implications for practice.

Service organisation and practices, much like social welfare, differ significantly across the globe. However, reviewed studies also suggest a great deal of commonality. Four linked debates seem to be central; first one concerns flexibility and responsiveness of governmental and non-governmental services. Second concerns the tension between the ongoing need for ‘traditional’ social work services, as well as new services due to disaster-related needs. The related, third, debate concerns how to define social work service user groups during and after the disasters. Finally, experiences of oppression seem to shape the context of service delivery and how these are perceived by service users.

Flexibility, responsiveness and experiences of different types of organisations. Across the globe, social services before, during and after disasters, are likely to be provided by governmental or non-governmental organisations, with different roles, remits and types of provision (Cain and Barthelemy, 2008; Kulkarni et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2013). Social work research on disasters further differentiates between faith-based organisations and other non-governmental service providers (Cain and Barthelemy, 2008). All can operate across governance levels, from local to international (Lesning and Urek, 2010; Pawar, 2008).

A key concern highlighted throughout the literature is the degree of flexibility and responsiveness that services have at grassroots level when responding to a disaster. Several studies suggest that governmental services are too bureaucratised to allow the flexibility and

scope of delivery necessary to respond to a disaster (Cain and Barthelemy, 2008; Cherry and Cherry, 1997; Kulkarni et al., 2008; Manning and Kushma, 2016; Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997). They are not designed to ‘respond to sudden changes in their service population’ (Kulkarni et al., 2008: 419). If on offer, governmental social services usually provide targeted social services limited to specific community members (as opposed to universal provision); they are commonly delivered through cumbersome systems built to identify fraud prevention, rather than to ensure flexibility and wide-ranging delivery (Cherry and Cherry, 1997). Notwithstanding, as Smith (2012) highlights, people expect an immediate response from the government following a natural disaster, preferably from its highest level and implemented locally.

In contrast, non-governmental service providers are characterised in the literature as flexible and first responders to disaster in affected communities (Smith, 2012; Webber and Jones, 2013). In some countries, such as the USA, faith communities and organisations are suggested as the preferred providers of assistance, both at the site of a disaster and at the locations where people are evacuated (Cain and Barthelemy, 2008). However, a vibrant non-governmental sector may be lacking in many areas. Where they do exist prior to disasters, local non-governmental services may focus on specific needs and/or populations, and they may work in relative isolation from each other (Kulkarni et al., 2008). In a crisis induced by natural disaster, they are expected to extend their services to evacuees and to collaborate with each other, which may prove challenging. Some such organisations, particularly at the site of a disaster, may themselves temporarily or permanently disappear due to the disaster’s impact on their own membership and infrastructure; others may need to find new organisational strategies to provide services and meet both existing and new needs (Smith, 2012). Faith-based organisations may also struggle to recruit and train sufficient numbers of volunteers (Cain and Barthelemy, 2008).

Organisational role remit and specialism. In the aftermath of a disaster, people need both the existing pre-disaster social services and new ones, to meet the needs triggered by the disaster itself (Smith, 2014). The challenges outlined above raise several questions. Even if their resources remain intact following a disaster, should existing social services have the flexibility required to absorb and address new needs, as well as to meet existing ones? Alternatively, should this work be carried out mainly by specialist services and staff, on regional, national and/or international levels? If so, what would improve their effectiveness? Current practices vary, depending on the country and the level of experience of disaster management (Huang et al., 2014). In Barbados, for example, all social workers employed by the government have a remit to respond to the needs of people affected by disasters (Rock and Corbin, 2007). Existing research suggests social work in disaster-prone areas should aim to be equipped to address disaster-related needs (Ager et al., 2011; Manning and Kushma, 2016; Ng, 2012; Rock and Corbin, 2007; Smith, 2012).

Specialist disaster services are most commonly international or country-level ‘branches’ of international organisations, such as the Red Cross or UN agencies. Despite the recognition in social work literature of the important dynamics between ‘external’ and ‘local’ agencies in disasters (Dominelli, 2013), there is little social work research on the effectiveness of international organisations’ involvement, particularly by social workers from the countries affected by disasters who are themselves involved in the disaster interventions. Existing studies highlight that the international organisations tend not to understand local contexts (Pawar, 2008) or even aim to impose their own, external, values (Lesnik and Urek, 2010).

Who are the service users? The research literature pays considerable attention to the needs of service users, but leaves open the question of whether disaster social work should focus on responding to the needs of traditional social service users, or on the needs of all disaster survivors. For example, the literature suggests that the needs of traditional social work service users, and the services to meet them, tend to be disregarded or lost during and after a

disaster (Kulkarni et al., 2008; Smith, 2012; Zakour and Harrell, 2004). The needs of these service users become uncertain and fluid, both because the people themselves become highly mobile following a disaster and because of the loss of services (Huang et al., 2014). This is exacerbated as community cohesion and togetherness tends to discontinue during the disaster recovery phase (Moore et al., 2004); people may no longer live in the same communities as they did prior to a disaster.

In light of such findings, some researchers stress the need for more strategic disaster planning specifically for traditional service users, such as older people (Sanders et al., 2004), for whom procedures and provisions tend to diminish or disappear after a disaster (Cherry and Cherry, 1997). This becomes all the more significant since studies suggest that traditional service users (older people, children, disabled people, people living on low income, minorities and other marginalised groups) tend to be disproportionately affected by disasters when compared to the general population (Zakour, 1997). Furthermore, it is concerning to note that some studies in the USA suggest that disasters can also lead to increases in domestic violence (Reese, 2004; Smith, 2012), child sexual assault (Smith, 2012) and child abuse (Curtis et al., 2000) - adversities to which social work services are normally intended to respond.

In relation to the needs of the wider disaster-affected population, Bliss and Meehan (2008) suggest that core immediate needs such as housing, transport, medical and social support, have to be addressed as a priority. However, Ku and Ma (2015) argue that, from the outset, attention should be paid to survivors' long-term livelihoods, rather than focus solely on immediate needs in response to a crisis.

Creating and embedding meaning – experiences of oppression before, during and after a disaster. One of the key insights to emerge - in particular from the USA research literature - attests to the interplay between actors, organisational practices and wider social contexts

that Shove and colleagues' (2012) social practice theory encourages us to recognise. Specifically, oppression is exposed as an important lens which disaster survivors apply to their understanding of interactions with relevant agencies, including social services. Research highlights that while disasters impact all the lives in affected areas, their effects are 'disproportionately imposed upon ethnic minorities, low income families and other vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled' (Manning and Kushma, 2016: 249; also Kulkarni et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2004; Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997), particularly in the long term (Sundet and Mermelstein, 1997; Zakour, 1997).

Emergency services are also reported to arrive more quickly to affluent areas (Cherry and Cherry, 1997; Moore et al., 2004). Services offered are also likely to lack consideration for cultural differences and needs (Cherry and Cherry, 1997) or to acknowledge that black evacuees, for example, are likely to have distinctive cultural beliefs and experiences of oppression (Kulkarni et al., 2008). Researchers stress that support provision during and after a disaster needs to reflect the diversity of the population. Zakour (1996), for example, notes that, in the US, the more volunteers there are from minority communities who live in the disaster stricken area, the better the provision is.

These findings also have relevance for the involvement of international organisations in disaster-stricken communities outside the USA. Lesnik and Urek (2010), for example, report that racism and poverty played a significant role in the evacuation experience after the 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka. In other countries, gender inequality is also heightened during and after a disaster (Dominelli, 2015). Reporting on their action research with a rural-urban alliance for post-disaster intervention, following the 2008 Wenchuan county earthquake in Sichuan, China, Ku and Ma (2015) note that almost no women participated in the decision making at the disaster sites in the province.

Further exclusions from services during or after disasters attest to the operations of political interests and relationships of power. Pawar's (2008) case study on the experiences of flooding in the bank of Krishna river, India, for example, highlights that people can be excluded from services on the basis of whether or not they belong to a particular party. The same study also suggests that less than 50% of the aid was distributed to the flood-affected areas, attributing this to corruption in regional and national politics and its interplay with international aid efforts. Similar was reported in Yoon's (2009) case study on the role of community assets after the 1999 hurricane flooding in Princeville, USA. Furthermore, Lesnik and Urek (2010) report that aid distribution in Sri Lanka, following the 2004 tsunami, heavily privileged communities and their members who are perceived as more powerful and influential, as well as English speakers. The marginalised, poor, or living on the outskirts of affected communities were not informed of the aid distribution efforts.

The research literature leaves little doubt that oppression and corruption shape the interaction between various agencies and disaster survivors. Moreover, existing social work service users are particularly exposed to these inequalities, since they are among the most marginalised members of societies across the world.

Elements of good practice for disaster social service agencies

Despite their predominately disaster-specific and micro level focus, the reviewed studies suggest considerable agreement as to what constitutes good practice in the delivery of emergency and long-term disaster social services. They echo one of the conclusions of Vo's (2015) qualitative case study on the impact of Tropical Storm Nicole and Hurricane Thomas on a coffee-farming community in Southern Costa Rica - the process of service delivery is as important as its outcomes. Seen through the lens of social practice theory, certain competencies, meanings and 'materials'/practice models can be recognised as the elements of practice that inform and influence how practices 'endure and travel' and 'are sustained between moments and sites of enactment' (Shove et al., 2012: 15).

Box 1: Elements of good practice in the delivery of emergency and long-term disaster social services

1. Services need to be **responsive to the actual needs and assets** of people in a particular, disaster-stricken, locality.
2. Service providers across governance levels need to have **thorough and up-to-date knowledge of existing capacities and resources of local social service organisations** and other collaborators – **including information about sustainability of such support**.
3. Regardless of their ‘level’ or ‘type’, social service providers during and after disasters need to **invest time to co-ordinate and collaborate with each other to provide relevant and timely services**.
4. If available, **community oriented and strong local leadership in a disaster-stricken community** is an asset to provide locally relevant and co-ordinated disaster social services.
5. Crisis and long-term disaster social services need to be **flexible and creative in light of a changing service delivery environment**.
6. There is a need to ensure **access to and sharing of accurate and timely information and access to such communication from multiple channels**.
7. Disaster social services need to be **provided beyond the usual 1-2 year span and focus** not solely on immediate crisis responses, but **on long-term development and recovery**.

The first suggested element of good practice is that services need to be responsive to the actual needs of people in a disaster-stricken locality, rather than available donations and external priorities (Bliss and Meehan, 2008; Manning and Kushma, 2016; Pawar, 2000; Tang and Cheung, 2007; Webber and Jones, 2013). Most people are likely to need immediate access to temporary accommodation and support to meet their basic needs. However, the scale, type, cultural relevance and safety of provision for such needs is likely to vary from context to context. Time should be taken to identify what those needs are before distributing collected aid or intervening in a given locality.

While the concept of ‘needs’ permeates the social work vernacular across the globe, social workers in some countries are exploring alternative concepts, too. Ku and Ma (2015), examining interventions following the 2008 Wenchuan county earthquake in Sichuan, China, suggest it would be more relevant to place emphasis on survivors’ existing ‘assets’.

This would enable planning for long-term reconstruction and recovery to start from the point of immediate crisis onwards and to be led by local assets.

Secondly, whether they are local/national/international and/or governmental/non-governmental, service providers need to have thorough and up-to-date knowledge of existing capacities and resources of local social service organisations and other collaborators – including information about sustainability of such support (Bliss and Meehan, 2008; Christensen and Castaneda, 2014; Paulin and Soliman, 1999; Pawar, 2008; Wang et al., 2013). Sherrard Sherraden and Fox's (1997) study of five communities recovering from the 1993 Great Flood in the Midwest USA, suggests such knowledge is a crucial driver for long-term recovery, which must be considered even during immediate crisis responses.

Thirdly, regardless of their 'level' or 'type', social service providers in disaster situations need to invest time to co-ordinate and collaborate with each other to provide relevant and timely services (Ager et al., 2011; Kulkarni et al., 2008; Pawar, 2008; Smith, 2012; Sundet and Mermelstein, 1997; Webber and Jones, 2013; Zakour, 1996). This is particularly important to emphasise for international services intervening in a disaster context in any country (Huang et al., 2014; Tang and Cheung, 2007; Wang et al., 2013), but also for national services intervening in a disaster-stricken locality within their own country (Manning and Kushma, 2016; Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997; Webber and Jones, 2013). Hurricane Katrina evacuees interviewed by Kulkarni et al. (2008) in Texas suggested that services can best be provided all under one roof. Collaboration and co-ordination need to be promoted horizontally as well as vertically, across governance levels and sectors (Vo, 2015). Smith's (2012) qualitative study of the experiences of non-governmental service providers in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina suggests that such collaboration among local providers tends to be eroded during post-disaster recovery, once competition arises between them for limited funding.

The latter two elements of good practice may not be achievable without the fourth: in order to provide locally relevant and co-ordinated disaster social services, there needs to be community-oriented and strong local leadership in the disaster-stricken community (Pawar, 2008; Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997; Sundet and Mermelstein, 1997; Vo, 2015; Wang et al., 2013; Yoon, 2009). However, if such leadership is lacking, it is difficult to build in midst of a crisis.

Fifth, crisis and long-term disaster social services need to be flexible and creative in light of a changing service delivery environment (Bliss and Meehan, 2008; Dominelli, 2015; Huang et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2015; Pawar, 2008; Smith, 2012; Wang et al., 2013; Webber and Jones, 2013; Yoon, 2009). Sherrard Sherraden and Fox (1997) stress that each community is unique, making it difficult to predict what the issues for short- and long-term response and recovery will be; flexibility and creativity are key to addressing both. Findings from a case study of disaster response in a community in the Mano District, Japan, in the aftermath of the 1995 Great Hanshin Awaji earthquake suggest the need to reorganise 'the already existing patterns of resource management, organisation and norms' (Araki, 2013:44).

Sixth, there is a need to ensure access to, and sharing of, accurate and timely information and access to such communication from multiple channels (Bliss and Meehan, 2008; Cain and Barthelemy, 2008; Cherry and Cherry, 1997; Manning and Kushma, 2016; Pawar, 2008; Sundet and Mermelstein, 1997; Smith, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). This should include a variety of relevant information - from details about the disaster itself in order to counter disaster myths (Poulin and Soliman, 1999), to information about the rights and entitlements of disaster survivors and what is available to them locally. There are differing opinions as to whether or not such broad communication provision lies within the remit of social workers. For example, Ng's (2012) survey of Chinese social workers in Sichuan province shows that they questioned whether this should be their task or one for government officials.

Finally, disaster social services need to be provided beyond the usual one to two-year span and focus not solely on immediate crisis responses, but also on long-term development and recovery (Hawkins and Maurer, 2011; Kilmer and Gil-Rivas, 2010; Kulkarni et al., 2008; Larson et al., 2015; Pawar, 2008; Smith, 2012). Disasters tend to exacerbate existing community problems and create new ones (Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997). Manning and Kushma's (2016: 256-257) systematic review of international disaster case management research stresses that governments and national aid organisations 'seek to impose a rapid sense of normality through more rigid, top-down approaches' which 'downplays the complexities of human recovery.' In China, Ku and Ma (2015), conclude that the top-down focus on 'development' places too much emphasis on speed, efficiency and economic growth. Instead, they argue that the delivery of disaster social services should focus on ensuring on-going partnerships and support well beyond the immediate crisis and recovery periods.

The distinctive role of social work during and after disasters

The last of the key themes to emerge from this review concerns what may be learned about the distinctive role of social work in disasters. Researchers' conclusions are divided, and it becomes clear that social work needs a wider debate on this issue. In the context of Hurricane Katrina, Manning and Kushma (2016: 250) define disaster social work as practices that intervene at the point where 'due to erosion of natural support systems, such as family and existing social networks [...] survivors had to commonly rely on external assistance from community-based organisations to stabilise their conditions and facilitate their recovery.'

However, echoing a question raised earlier in this paper, some authors stress that the social work role should focus on support for traditional service users (Ng, 2012), or that social work disaster practice should be primarily concerned with mental health and social needs assessments, community outreach, referrals, and providing a range of psychosocial

interventions (Manning and Kushma, 2016). Zakour (1997), in contrast, advocates that social workers should act as overall co-ordinators for disaster intervention services.

Notwithstanding these differences, the literature offers a strong indication that community work should be one of the key activities for disaster social work across the world (van Heugten, 2004; Webber and Jones, 2013). Despite the fact that primary social work responses commonly involve crisis intervention and counselling, the research evidence is clear that key issues to be addressed in any disaster-stricken context are social, political and economic, as well as physical (Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997). As discussed, this is in context where the community cohesion and togetherness experienced immediately after a disaster discontinues during the recovery phase (Moore et al., 2004). The role of community social work is already recognised and embedded in practice within the Asia-Pacific region, where social work and social development are closely linked (Araki, 2013). If done well, it can facilitate creation of a community consensus about recovery goals, which encourages communities to work together (Sherrard Sherraden and Fox, 1997). This approach also creates forums for people to exchange their stories and support each other during the recovery, as well as to share their views on pressing community issues (Lesnik and Urek, 2010). Equally, disaster community work promotes social welfare in the community by sharing relevant information, co-ordinating services, funds and other resources (Araki, 2013).

Several studies highlight that such social work practices during and following a disaster are best underpinned by a range of theoretical understandings and practice approaches. Crisis theory emphasises that a hazardous event may be subjectively perceived as either a threat, a loss or a challenge; people's actions and responses will vary, depending on which perception they hold (Sundet and Mermelstein, 1997). Strength-based approaches (Araki, 2013; Zakour, 1997; Wang et al., 2013) or asset-based community management (Ku and Ma, 2015) focus on capturing and building upon the opportunities that a disaster may provide for

social change and development. The noted impact oppression may have on communities' ability to cope and recover during and after a disaster also suggest that principles of anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice should be prominent in disaster social work.

Implications of the findings for the disaster intervention models

While social work research in the context of natural disasters tends to focus on micro interventions, embedded within it is information from which we may draw insights about mezzo and macro level disaster social work practice. All of the elements of good practice identified in the research literature indicate a need for a more nuanced understanding of the organisations involved in providing emergency and long-term disaster social services. As social practice theory encourages, they also interplay and offer insights into features of the wider environment in which agencies and service users interact. To date, social work disaster intervention models, such as one offered by Dominelli (2013) solely identify core overall elements and stakeholders (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Disaster intervention chart, From: Social work education for disaster relief work. Dominelli/Gray et al., Copyright ©2013 and Routledge, reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.

Insert Figure 1 here

As presented in the findings, vertical and horizontal differentiation and analysis between governance structures and types of organisations is more complex than such model allows us to acknowledge. Furthermore, services and organisations need to be analysed in terms of their distinctive traditions and legacies, the nature of their collaboration, as well as politics embedded in the local context – particularly experiences of oppression or corruption. In light of the findings presented so far in the article, Figure 2 presents a revised version of Dominelli's disaster intervention chart, intended to capture this complexity.

Figure 2: Research informed social work disaster intervention chart

Insert Figure 2 here

Although this review has focused solely on social work in context of natural disasters, it is not inconceivable that similar analysis may inform our understanding of, and recommendations for, social work in other contexts of extremis. This, however, requires further scrutiny based on the available evidence. Furthermore, the analysis may be seen to offer important lessons on what type of service organisations and development we should advocate for, even at times of peace and in non-disaster affected communities. For example, while inter-organisational collaboration during disaster interventions is stressed as valuable, Smith (2012) highlights how such practices tend to disintegrate once daily life returns to a new equilibrium following a disaster. Communities starting a new, post-disaster life are likely to return to market-like, neo-liberal competitiveness – compromising the newly established mutual collaboration and partnership work (van Heugten, 2004).

Conclusion and onward reflections

The proposed new disaster intervention model offers insights into the relevance of social practice theory for reconceptualization of grassroots social work as well as organisational and inter-organisational practices. Good practice guidance also lends itself for production of tools that can help structure, monitor and evaluate organisation of disaster social services.

At a grassroots level, research literature points clearly to the key role of community social work and community mobilisation. Emphasis on community social work has been diminishing across the Western world for several decades (Zakour, 1997), but is crucial for disaster social work. Learning about such approaches should incorporate experiences and practices from the Asia-Pacific region where they are actively promoted (Araki, 2013).

However, community work will not only differ from country to country, but also from community to community (Webber and Jones, 2013). This is a lesson frequently forgotten during the export of social work approaches from Western to so-called developing countries. It is hoped that the renewed emphasis on co-production with service users, emphasised as a way to achieve sustainable development in the recent report on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (IFSW et al., 2016), may help promote the wider reinstatement of community work as a core method for social work. This also has implications for organisation of social services in disaster settings.

Several studies – and the proposed new disaster intervention model - emphasise the politicised dimensions of both crisis and long-term responses to disasters, and draw attention to the oppressive practices that afflict communities affected by disasters. They also suggest that social work may lack the skills to address these issues, or may not even see this as the social work role. Notably, Pawar (2008) asks why community partnerships do not challenge politicised decisions. In the USA, macro social work is recognised as a specialist form of practice. However, even recommendations from the US studies frequently expect other stakeholders to address the politicised nature of long-term recovery from disasters (see Kilmer and Gil-Rivas, 2010).

As Dominelli (2013) reminds us, other stakeholders are unlikely to advocate or lobby against politicised crisis responses, or support community members to do so - nor will they challenge oppressive practices and discrimination within aid distribution and support. She stresses that the remit for social work involvement in disaster interventions should include an emphasis on ‘equitable distribution of power and resources’ (ibid.: 281), but that the skills and practices for such a remit are yet to be developed. Review findings corroborate this call for further skill development.

Research literature also suggests the need for better linkages between international social work and emergency management communities (Manning and Kushma, 2016). Some international organisations, such as the Red Cross Society of Taiwan, recognise and have given social work a significant role in providing disaster relief, underpinned by emphasis on human rights (Wang et al., 2013). Nonetheless, considerable progress is yet to be made to ensure that social work knowledge and skills are fully integrated within international development organisations' responses to disasters. It is hoped that this review clearly highlights that social workers have a wealth of experiential and research knowledge to contribute on this topic, across micro, mezzo and macro levels of practice.

Within social work, the findings also highlight questions worthy of further study and debate. Should knowledge of disaster interventions be embedded into existing services or should disaster social work primarily become a specialist service? Should such work be led by grassroots, regional, national or international organisations? As noted, there is little social work research on the effectiveness of international organisations' involvement in disaster social service provision. Finally, should disaster social work focus solely on responding to the needs of traditional service users or the needs of all disaster survivors? It is hoped that this review can help inform a wider debate on these questions.

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Figures (also submitted as jpeg files)

Figure 1

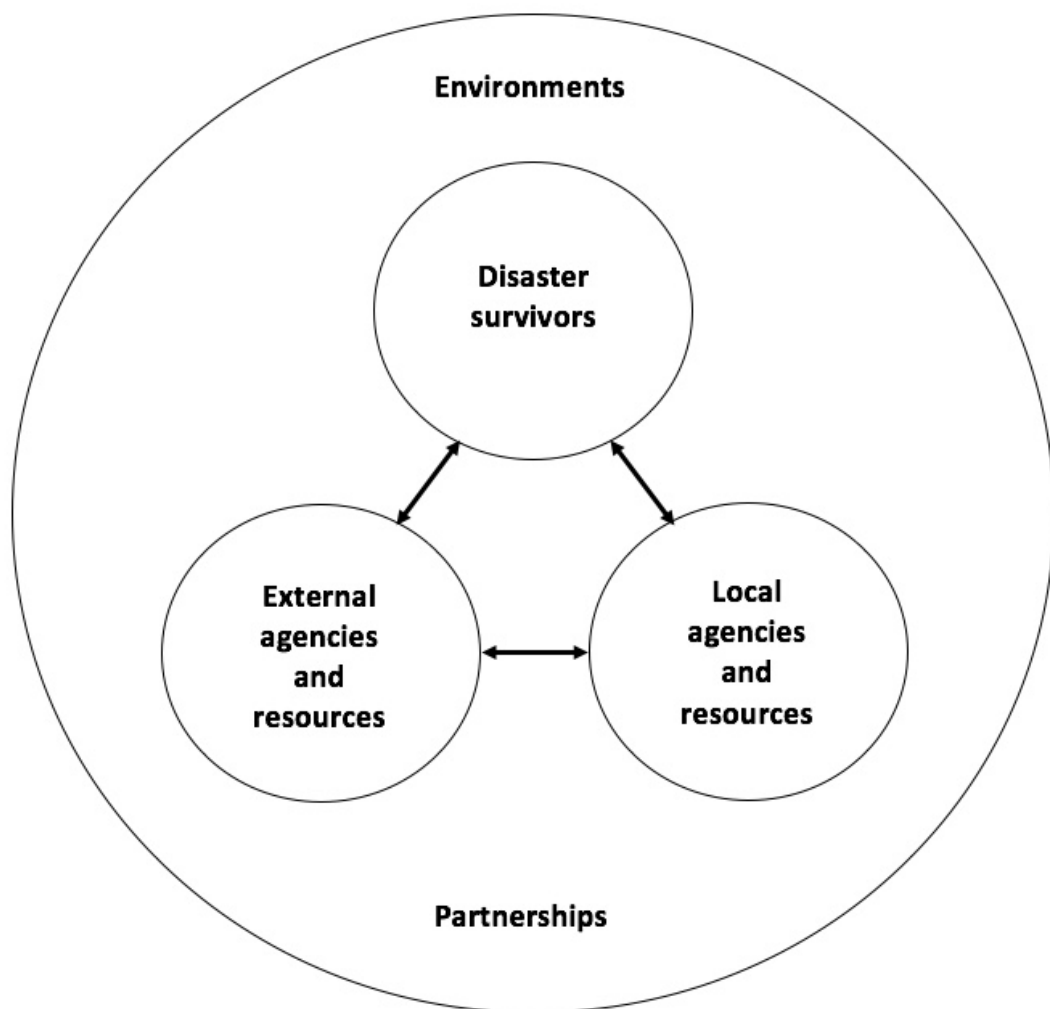
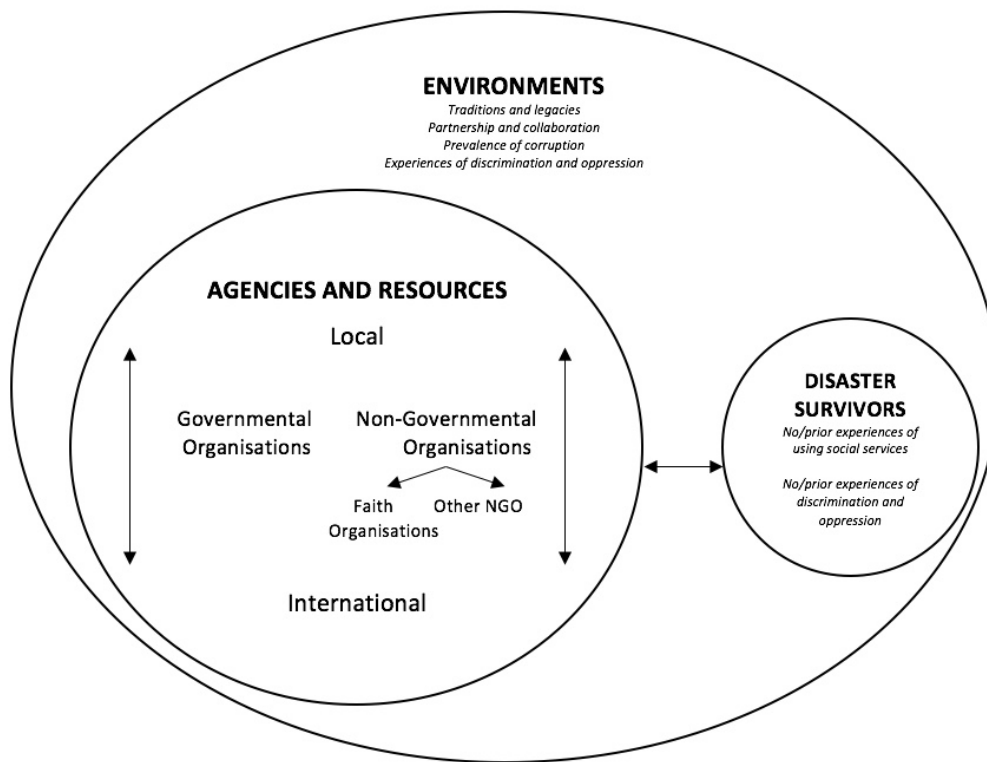


Figure 2



¹ <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml>