



Social Work and Disaster Practice

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Future of the Professions Research Group Conference

3 – 4pm Thursday 16 February 2023



Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Wiradyuri people who are the custodians of the unceded lands on which this project took place. We pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, and acknowledge the deep spiritual relationship of First Nations Australians with Country.

As members of the CSU community, we acknowledge the words of the Wiradyuri people, on whose land our university was founded, and share their aspiration of Yindyamarra Winhanganha, the aim for us all to learn the wisdom of respectfully living well, in a land worth living in.

ABSTRACT

At a global level, the United Nations promotes localised, multidimensional approaches to disaster practice to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of disasters on people and communities experiencing socio-cultural, political and economic disadvantage. Likewise, the International Federation of Social Workers encourages the profession to embed disaster practice as a core ethical concern within the professional domain. While there is a growing body of literature on post-disaster social work practice, models for pre-disaster practice are scarce.

In response to these global challenges and gaps in knowledge, our program of research into social work and disaster practice addresses the following research questions:

- How is contemporary social work practice conceptualised in the context of preparedness?**
- In what ways can community engagement and curriculum co-creation enhance education for the professions?**

Our presentation outlines the program of research, which involves a range of initiatives including action-based participatory research, decolonial practices, community engagement, international research partnerships, field education innovations, and co-creation activities. Implications for contemporary social work practice and professional identity in the context of disaster practice are also presented.



Overview

Social work and disaster practice

Existing models of professional practice

Conceptualising contemporary
social work and disaster practice

Our program of research

Community engagement and co-creation

International research partnerships

Education for the professions

Questions and discussion

Social Work and disaster practice

- Disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged people, etc.
- Social work as a multidimensional profession
- Our extensive record of work around disasters
- Raise visibility of social work profession to address social injustice
- United Nations frameworks + IPCC guidelines for disaster practice
- International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW) statement on environmental practice

(IFSW, 2014 & 2021; IPCC, 2022; Truell & Jones, 2020; UN, 2015).



Existing models for professional practice

- Existing models emphasise post-disaster practice
- Preparedness is a gap in the literature
 - Need to locate proactive disaster practice within the generic social work domain – not at the peripheries
 - Scope to extend conceptualisation of social work and disaster practice

(Boetto, Bell, & Ivory, 2021)

Conceptualising social work & disaster practice

Conventional social work

- Broadly framed through modernist lens, dominant discourses – neo-liberal, managerial, anthropocentric, humanist
- Construction of disaster/practice within the dominant discourse – individualist, fragmented, top-down practices

Contemporary social work – paradigmatic shift

- Increasingly characterised by decolonising, post-anthropocentric, critical post-humanist theories as foundations for the profession's turn to ecosocial approaches.
- Opportunities for transformative practice – focusing on disrupting intersecting systems of oppression and addressing systemic impacts.
- Working toward a fairer future for all through equity-centred practice - collectivist approaches, diversity, co-creation.

(Bell, 2012; Bell, 2023; Boetto, Bell & Ivory, 2021; Boetto & Bell, 2024).

SW and disaster practice program of research



PRACTICE RESEARCH

LOCAL COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

CO-CREATION

EDUCATION FOR THE
SW PROFESSION

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH
PARTNERSHIPS

Participatory action research

Strengthening disaster preparedness in human service organisations

Key findings:

- Awareness, knowledge and action
- Cross-sectorial and inter-professional relationships
- Direct practice interventions with service users/clients
- Diverse perspectives, experiences and needs of under-represented groups
- Organisational challenges and barriers
- Diverse and interactive approach

(Boetto & Bell, 2022; Boetto, Bell & Ivory, 2021)



Participatory action research

Research Outputs:

- Model of disaster preparedness
- Workshop program
- Online, free, self-paced, short course
- Organisational preparedness kits
- Service user/client preparedness kits
- Publications and report



Model of disaster preparedness

(Boetto & Bell, accepted, 2024)



ULTRIS model:

- Understanding your role
- Local community context
- Team preparedness
- Relationship building
- Implementing policies and procedures
- Service user preparedness

Community engagement and co-creation

- Emergency services advisory group
- Wiradyuri Elder & First Nations environmental scientist
- Cross-sectorial networking – community service providers, emergency response networks, local government, university
- Co-creation
 - Funded project – project support and design, workshop content and facilitation
 - Evaluation strategies
 - Open Learning course content (more on this later...)



International research partnerships



Partnership with Nihon Fukushi University (NFU), Japan

- Faculty of Social Welfare (NFU) & SSWA (CSU)
- 2018 – 2022: Staff exchange visits; student exchange; Social Work Identity Research Group (SWIRG)
- 2022 – present: Online symposium, Australia-Japan Foundation Grant (DFAT), Japan Study Tour (with DFAT NCP funding)
- Focus on exchange of knowledge and practice related to disaster practice and professional identity



International research partnerships



Partnership with University of Jyväskylä, Finland

- Current international comparative survey project
- Reciprocal relationship spanning nine years
 - Co-hosted three international visits in 2014a, 2014b and 2017
 - Cross-European ASTRA doctoral training 2022 and course contributions
 - Quality publications (Boetto & Bowles, 2017; Boetto et al., 2020; Boetto, et al. 2022)
 - Keynote speaker role (2022) and international symposium (2015), conference presentation (2020)



Education for the social work profession

Japan mobility program (2023) NCP funded

- Focus on disaster practice, professional identity and education for the profession
- An element of the NFU-CSU partnership
- *Potential primary data collection project/future publication*

China mobility program (2018) NCP funded

- Focus on ecosocial work and disaster practice
- Site visits – Wenchuan earthquake (2008), community services
- University visits – education for the profession, professional identity intrinsically linked to disaster practice
- HREC approved primary data collection/*future publication*



Field education

Disaster resilience

- Resilience NSW (now NSW Reconstruction Authority)
- Decolonising approaches to building disaster resilience
- Solidarity with First Nations aspirations and perspectives
- Conference presentation (Jeffries & Boetto, 2022)
- Industry partnership

Food security

- Uniting Care
- Publication (Boetto et al., 2015)



Suite of subjects – ecosocial & disaster practice

Development of Social Work and human service subjects:

- Transformative ecosocial change in human services (WEL427)
- Holistic ecosocial approach in disaster recovery (WEL426)
- Building sustainable communities (WEL428)
- Holistic ecosocial approaches in mental health (WEL231)
- Future directions in social work (SWK506)

International educator resources for International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

- Three chapters in edited series (Bell et al., 2019; Boetto et al., 2018; Kime et al., 2018)
- Available to 193 IFSW member countries across the world

Open Learning short course

Co-creation – emerged from funded research

Motivations:

- Co-create an enduring resource from the research project – value-add
- Contribute to SDG13 – multidimensional approach to disaster preparedness and community resilience
- Contribute to preparedness in community services sector
- Build a foundation for future educational and research initiatives
- E.g., evaluation project (commencing March 2023)



The screenshot shows a web page for an Open Learning course. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the 'Openlearning' logo, 'Charles Sturt University' logo, and links for 'About', 'Outcomes', 'Instructors', 'FAQ', and 'JOIN NOW'. The main heading of the course is 'Disaster Resilience in Community Service Organisations'. Below the heading is a photograph of a woman in a classroom setting pointing at a whiteboard with handwritten notes. To the right of the photo is a list of course details: 'Credential type: Certificate of completion', 'Start date: 01 Mar 2023', 'Duration: Flexible', and 'Cost: Free'. A red 'JOIN NOW' button is positioned below these details. At the bottom of the page, there is a short paragraph of text describing the course's focus on practical strategies for disaster preparedness in community service organizations.

Future projects and activities

Disaster preparedness Open Learning course – launch and promote March 2023

Survey research – evaluation of ULTRIS model of disaster practice (extension research emerged from original funded project) – 2023

Symposium 28 March 2023: NFU-CSU focusing on resilience & disaster practice in social work

Conferences: AWE Network

Publications

- Book chapters – e.g., Boetto & Bell (2024) – abstract accepted, full draft chapter ready for peer review
- Journal articles – e.g., scoping review on disaster practice in the profession; article from survey research (2024)

Podcasts – www.thesocialworkcafe.com – launches February 22



Questions ...



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Thank you

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