



Article

Learning Green Social Work in Global Disaster Contexts: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract: Green social work (GSW) is a nascent framework within the social work field that provides insights regarding social workers' engagement in disaster settings. Although this framework has recently garnered more attention, it remains under-researched and underdeveloped within the context of social work research, education, and practice in Canada and internationally. To further develop GSW in social work education and professional training, we considered how social work students and practitioners can use a learning framework to understand the impact and build their capacities to serve vulnerable and marginalized populations in diverse disaster settings. To do this, we developed a four-step case study approach, as follows: (1) provide detailed background information on the cases, (2) describe how each case is relevant to social work, (3) discuss how each case informs social work practice from a GSW perspective, and (4) provide recommendations for social work practitioners and students using GSW in future disaster-specific efforts. This case study approach centers on natural, technological, and intentional/willful hazards that examine current GSW research–practice engagement in Canada and internationally. Applying this four-step case study approach to three extreme events in Canada and internationally (a natural hazard, a technological hazard, and an intentional/willful hazard) illustrates it as a potential method for social work students and professionals to build their GSW capacities. This will assist in building the resilience of Canadian and international communities—especially those who have been historically marginalized. This article sheds light on how current social work education and professional training should develop new approaches to incorporate the GSW framework into the social work curriculum at large in order to prepare for future extreme events while incorporating environmental and social justice into research and practice.

Keywords: green social work; four-step case study approach; extreme events; environmental justice and social justice; resilience



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1. Introduction

Extreme events, including natural hazards (e.g., wildfires and pandemics), technological hazards (e.g., explosions and pollution), and intentional/willful hazards (e.g., acts of terror and civil war), are being exacerbated by the global climate crisis (Peek et al. 2020). Social work researchers and practitioners have become more attentive to this fact as their position requires assessing and administering interventions for those who are impacted—especially the most vulnerable and marginalized (Wu et al. 2022a). Social work interventions concentrate on the interrelation of “environmental, social development, industrialization and urbanization” (Dominelli and Ku 2017, p. 7) and emphasize the relationships between the social, economic, and human experiences and environmental consequences of human behavior (Wu and Bryan 2021), contributing to environmental justice and social justice.

Green social work (GSW) (see Dominelli 2012, p. 25) is a growing framework that focuses on equipping social workers with the necessary tools to engage in these types of

hazards, curtailing research, practice, and policy to the unique needs of disaster survivors. GSW combines social justice and environmental justice theories to create an approach that social workers can adapt to their specific practices, regardless of scope. The key difference between GSW and social work practice at large is the integration of the natural and physical environment into practice to enhance the well-being of clients and the ecosystems they are a part of (Ramsay and Boddy 2017). GSW is a unique subgenre of the larger social work discipline that indicates the pressing need to highlight interactions “between equality, securing the wellbeing of people, animals, and plants, and protecting their physical . . . and natural environment” (Dominelli 2012, p. 6). Furthermore, GSW focuses on subject matter largely neglected in traditional practice, such as environmental issues. The discussion of these problems in a social work educational context is needed because of student interest (S. E. Miller and Hayward 2014) and to emphasize the importance of holistic social work practice where individuals are part of an integrated natural, physical, and social environment. Finally, GSW differs from other environmentally aligned social work frameworks because of its unique, holistic approach that incorporates social, political, economic, and cultural factors, and accounts for neoliberalist ideals of exploitation of the planet and resources for the privileged few (Dominelli 2018).

Contextualizing social work in disaster settings, building the resilience of marginalized populations to create a more just and equitable future for all is a major component of the GSW framework. Although GSW has been growing and receiving more attention recently (Wu and Greig 2022), recommendations for teaching and practice and its potential impacts on the resilience of vulnerable and marginalized populations are still under-researched and underdeveloped. This gap is apparent in the current education and professional training of Canadian social workers (Wu 2021).

This article uses the GSW framework to examine three case studies—one natural, one technological, and one intentional or willful hazard—from Canada and internationally. The international case studies offer valuable insight into how social workers engage GSW in practice through crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (a natural hazard) and the European refugee crisis of 2016–2018 (an intentional/willful hazard). Additionally, the Canadian-based case study examines GSW in a community-based setting, investigating disparities in clean drinking water in Indigenous communities (a technological hazard). We developed a four-step case study evaluation model to engage a GSW framework into these extreme events, as follows: (1) provide detailed background information on the cases, (2) describe how each case is relevant to social work, (3) discuss how each case informs social work practice from a GSW perspective, and (4) provide recommendations for social work practitioners and students using GSW in future disaster-specific efforts. The four-step case study approach stimulates the development of other GSW learning approaches, which enable social work practitioners to assist vulnerable and marginalized populations and communities in building resilience capacity in the global context of an ever-changing climate.

2. A Green Social Work Framework

GSW is a holistic and multifaceted framework to view social work practice that aims to restructure the status quo of social, political, and economic forces that negatively impact the planet and those on the social margins (Dominelli 2012). GSW builds on prior paradigms aimed at discussing environmental issues such as ecological social work (Ungar 2002) or environmental social work (Zapf 2010; Krings et al. 2020) (see also Ramsay and Boddy 2017 for a review of several paradigms). However, as Dominelli (2018) notes, there were several shortcomings of previous frameworks that did not adequately and holistically address the vast environmental, social, and structural concerns faced by the planet. GSW examines the interconnectedness between environmental injustices, social injustices, and neoliberalist thought and how they impact people’s well-being (Dominelli 2012, 2013). Since the initial development of GSW and its primary focus on environmental justice (Dominelli 2012, 2013; Krings and Thomas 2018; Philip and Reisch 2015), there have been crucial advances. GSW

has furthered its theoretical and practical contributions by advancing knowledge on disaster social work (Cuadra and Eydal 2018; Harms and Alston 2018; Pyles 2017), the climate and neoliberal impacts on food security (Gordon 2017; Muchacha and Mushunje 2019), and how GSW has started to be incorporated into the social work educational curriculum (Deepak and Mathbor 2022; Fronek et al. 2023; Jones 2018; Nipperess and Boddy 2018; Wu and Greig 2022).

This progress shows the importance of the framework for those who currently practice social work. It is also a critical paradigm to incorporate into the social work curriculum for students, regardless of the scope of their specific practice or subfield (Dominelli 2012). In the social work profession, there is an emphasis on social justice, which easily translates into environmental justice and sustainability when looking through a GSW lens (Wu et al. 2022b). This also includes disaster response, sustainability practice engagement, promotion of community collaboration, and advocacy for vulnerable and marginalized populations—who are disproportionately affected by various extreme events (Atter 2021; Drolet et al. 2015b, 2018a, 2018c; Wu 2022). The following literature review contains three distinct sections highlighting the theoretical and practical research that makes up the GSW framework. First, this section examines the theoretical foundations that support the framework. It then emphasizes the importance of social work in disaster response and building resilience. Finally, it details the need for further developed GSW research and interventions to support those practicing social work and students who will be the future of the profession. As a practice-based framework, GSW continues to grow in research, practice, and policymaking, thus making it a valuable concept for current practitioners and students of social work to learn and apply.

2.1. Theoretical Paradigms and Environmental Justice

A primary strength of the GSW framework in practice is the integration of significant critical theoretical paradigms that help guide anti-oppressive practice and learning. By definition, GSW aims to eradicate oppressive power structures that interact with hazards and environmental factors that create an imbalance of resources (Dominelli 2012). Due to this defining feature, critical theories that explore the nuances of power, dominance, and oppression are integrated into GSW. For example, queer theory (Butler 1999, 2004; Jagose 1997) and feminist theory (de Beauvoir 1949; Hooks 2000; Rhode 1990) challenge heteronormative and patriarchal power structures that can be used to advance social justice—a key aspect of GSW. Meanwhile, critical race theory (Bell 1976, 1980, 1992, 1995; Crenshaw 1988; Delgado 1984; Delgado and Stefancic 2023) opposes the notion that whiteness is a universal experience (Calmore 1995) and aims to dismantle white supremacist power structures that continuously oppress people of color who cannot opt into the benefits of whiteness.

An example of a theoretical perspective that is integrated into GSW that combines several intertwining power structures is intersectionality. Intersectionality examines how several power structures interact and influence social relationships, including race, gender, ability, sexuality, and class, among others (Collins 2019; Fox and Wu 2023; Wu et al. 2023). Intersectionality views these factors as interconnected, shaping each other, and forming the complex nature of how social relationships are understood (Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 2017). This ideology underlies the GSW framework, as oppression relates to the physical environment's interaction with individuals' everyday experiences, emphasizing power relations (Fraser et al. 2021). Social, economic, and environmental elements are examined as they interact, intersect, and influence one another under the GSW framework (Sim and He 2023). Environmental injustice and racism are two examples that can be further understood through these critical theoretical lenses (Wu et al. 2022c).

Social justice and environmental justice are paralleled in the social work profession (Nesmith and Smyth 2015) and there have been several calls to include critical theoretical perspectives when investigating environmental injustices in the social sciences (Breen 2021; Jacobs 2019; Ryder 2017). Bullard (1996) describes environmental justice as “the principle that all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and

public health laws and regulations” (p. 493). However, after decades of research, it is still common that all people and communities are not equally protected, as historically marginalized communities bear the brunt of environmental injustices (Bullard 1990, 2001; Bullard and Wright 2012; Fernández-Llamazares et al. 2019; Teixeira and Krings 2015). Social workers are entrenched in these communities given their marginalized status, and thus they are the most influential practitioners to respond effectively (Wu and Drolet 2015).

Environmental racism is a key concept within the larger environmental justice movement, defined as, “any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color” (Bullard 2001, p. 160). An example of environmental racism is the disproportionate number of minority groups located in close proximity to toxic waste sites (Beech 2020). Aamjiwnaang First Nation, in Ontario, Canada, is located in direct proximity to 40% of the chemical pollution in the entire country and has been exposed to adverse health reactions (MacDonald 2020). These groups “bear the brunt of the mental and physical health hazards resulting from environmental degradation, and experience distinctive vulnerabilities” (Teixeira and Krings 2015, p. 514). The communities with increased toxic waste and pollution are called “sacrifice zones” to acknowledge the mental and physical health damage the residents’ experience (Teixeira and Krings 2015). At the same time, “sacrifice zones” also refer to the inherent structural inequality, power dynamics, and oppression, as these are areas that those in power are willing to sacrifice due to who lives there. As such, through the aforementioned theoretical paradigms, environmental racism is something that GSW aims to address.

GSW framework combines several critical theoretical paradigms in order to focus on how extreme events must challenge structural inequalities (Dominelli 2012). This response covers various extreme events to which social workers have contributed, including the disasters related to climate change and tragedies associated with conflict over resources, systemic barriers to natural resources (Dominelli 2015), and immigration due to civil unrest (Drolet and Wu 2017). With the increase in extreme global events, social workers are called to consider the roots of social work to consider everyday environmental impacts, advocate for sustainability, and engage in disaster preparedness (Wu 2021). In response to this, practitioners have focused on multi-systemic resilience building. The next section describes previous research regarding GSW in practice during disasters and the relationship it has to resilience.

2.2. GSW Practice and Building Resilience in Disaster Settings

In the field of hazards and disaster research, generally, there are three types of hazards, namely natural, technological, and willful/intentional (CRED 2009). Natural hazards involve extreme weather events often influenced by climate change (e.g., tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes). Pandemics—such as COVID-19—and other public health emergencies may also fall within the purview of natural hazards due to the natural occurrences of viral infections and their exacerbation due to climate change (Carlson et al. 2022). Technological disasters involve technical malfunctions such as explosions, oil spills, and pollution, or poor infrastructure, which can lead to inadequate systems for human use such as a lack of access to clean drinking water and hygiene facilities in Indigenous communities (Stukes and Wu 2020). Willful, human-induced, or intentional hazards occur when damage or harm is caused by intent, such as terrorism or war. When these hazards trigger societal impacts, namely become disasters, social work involvement is initiated (Sim et al. 2021). Because GSW focuses on social justice and environmental inequalities, it can “seamlessly integrate disaster social work components” (Wu 2021, p. 1808).

Within disaster settings, social workers are a critical actor in each phase of the disaster and emergency management cycle. This cycle includes four phases: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (NGA 1979). Mitigation involves social workers planning to lessen the extent of the disaster. Preparedness includes ensuring communication is clear for agencies, governments, and people to prepare. The response phase involves triaging the

needs during and after the event. Recovery includes helping communities and survivors, improving living conditions, and helping with access to social services. Accordingly, resilience capacity refers to individual and collective capacities to prepare for, respond to, adapt to, and recover from extreme events (Cutter et al. 2008). Social workers provide health and social support, advocate for justice, mediate between levels of government and organizations, engage in community development, and ensure marginalized groups have access to information and resources through the entire disaster and emergency management cycle (Sim et al. 2021). All of these efforts affect individuals' and communities' coping capacities associated with the four components of building resilience.

As extreme events have widespread global, national, and local impacts, social work interventions continue at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Jackson 2017). Indeed, social work interventions at these levels can be leveraged to build the resilience of historically marginalized populations and communities. Social workers are relied on to use their micro-level work to focus on response and recovery disaster phases, ensuring vulnerable groups' immediate needs are met, involving shelter, food, and drinking water (Javadian 2007). Community-based mezzo-level social work is also a significant form of social work service delivery for disaster response (Master of Social Work 2019). Social workers working at this level can work in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery phases. They can encourage collaboration between NGOs and the government to prepare effectively for disasters and ensure communication to groups is clear, so the effects of the disaster are contained (Karabanow et al. 2023). Social work practitioners can ensure agencies meet immediate needs and support recovery work to restore communities' stability by engaging collaboratively (Leviton-Reid et al. 2022). Furthermore, social workers are called upon to build strength with individuals and their communities to recover after extreme events. As disasters are often catastrophic, social work practitioners need to be equipped to provide inclusive support for diverse people groups, especially marginalized groups. On the macro level, social workers could focus on improving or developing disaster mitigation strategies regarding community mobilization and advocating for sustainable policies to lessen the damage of adverse events (Noble 2018). This work requires a critical analysis of systemic and structural barriers that increase the level of impact. Embracing this lens and practicing critical analysis will empower a practitioner to enact policy change to significantly encourage ecological sustainability, community tenacity, and individual grit (Wu 2021).

Social work practitioners have an ethical responsibility to practice GSW and it is a disciplinary imperative to include GSW in the social work curriculum for students. Although the theory is still developing, social workers are often requested to support individual and community resilience post-disaster and should advocate against environmental injustice and racism. The final section of this literature review describes the development of GSW domestically in Canada and internationally.

2.3. GSW Still Developing Domestically and Internationally

In theory and practice, GSW is continuously developing as practitioners and scholars offer new insights and interventions to further implement the framework in today's rapidly changing climate and social environment. GSW is adaptable, with several iterations promoting environmental justice and social justice in disaster scenarios. This includes involvement in disaster relief (e.g., risk communication and emergency mental health support) (Wu 2018; Hansel n.d.), environmental preservation (e.g., community-based environmental education) (Rambaree 2020), and advocating for residents' environmental rights against ecological oppression (NASW n.d.; Teixeira and Krings 2015). GSW is also uniquely involved with global efforts to critically examine human involvement in the production and consumption of goods and services, energy transformation, and excess waste. This is done through a critique of neoliberal ideologies (Giroux 2005) that exploit natural resources and destroy the environment for increased profitability (Dominelli 2018; Dominelli and Bergougnan 2022; Dominelli et al. 2018; Noble 2016). Thus, GSW provides

an avenue to counteract these distinct environmental problems (see e.g., [Kennedy 2018](#); [Dominelli 2020](#)).

In Canada, the implementation of GSW has strengthened social work knowledge and interventions regarding disaster mitigation and post-disaster development, contributing to building resilient and sustainable communities across Canada. However, there is still work to be done as environmental injustices ([Cheung 2019](#)) and disparities remain in disaster impacts on historically marginalized groups ([Burton et al. 2016](#)) in Canada. The overwhelming need to continue developing a GSW agenda to support practitioners and social work students extends to an international context. Internationally, climate impacts environmental subjugation as resources and labor are exploited to maintain the dominance of developed countries' capitalist societies while disproportionately exposing developing countries to potential risks and hazards ([Adeola 2001](#)). As mentioned prior, GSW aims to dismantle these oppressive power structures rooted in structural inequalities ([Dominelli 2012](#)). Therefore, it is imperative that a GSW framework continues growing and developing at an international scale.

Social workers are engaged in responding to the full spectrum of extreme events, but further social work curricula and training in Canada and abroad are needed to strengthen social workers' capacity in disaster settings ([Drolet et al. 2015a](#); [Wu 2021](#)). Social work as a discipline and GSW as a framework is best suited to respond to environmental, disaster, and sustainability needs. Equity, justice, and human rights are the cornerstones of social work, which should be integrated multi-systematically to foster sustainability, social justice, and environmental justice ([Drolet et al. 2018a, 2018c](#)). However, the slow process of training affects the profession's credibility as disaster events and the need for equipped social workers in these contexts continue to increase ([Wu 2021](#)). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how GSW can be used in practice to train current practitioners and students to accelerate the training process and build resilience capacities for marginalized populations. To do this, this article examines three case studies to answer the following questions:

What is the significance of social work involvement in natural, intentional/willful, and technological disasters?

Based on case studies of social work in disasters, what recommendations can be made to incorporate GSW into training and practice?

How can GSW training and practice build disaster resilience capacities for historically marginalized populations?

As the profession grows in its understanding and incorporation of GSW and social work students are trained in GSW practice, it will increase its efficacy in the mitigation of disaster impacts.

3. Methods

Case studies provide foundational learning opportunities for social work practitioners and social work students to synthesize the GSW framework into a global and national context, demonstrating social work practitioners' critical role in disaster settings ([Daddow 2022](#)). Using case studies offers context for seeing social work in action, critiquing the effectiveness of interventions, and considering alternative responses ([Boxall et al. 2018](#)). Case studies have also been shown to be positive tools for student education as they relate to critical thinking, engagement, and practical application ([Yadav et al. 2007](#)). Indeed, case studies contextualize social work interventions for social work students into various disaster and emergency management stages.

We used several criteria to inform our case study selection for a deeper investigation and understanding. First, it was important to include cases that were widely covered by the media and well-known by the social work profession and social work students. By selecting familiar cases, social work practitioners and students can better contextualize the role of a social worker in a disaster scenario and how they might mitigate future extreme events to build the resilience of their communities. Another criterion that informed our selection was the relevance of each case. Therefore, we selected recent and geographically

informed cases—two international cases and one Canadian case. Finally, it was important to include each of the three major hazard types to gain a well-rounded understanding of GSW in disasters and the potential effects of GSW for resilience building. Thus, we selected a natural (COVID-19), intentional/willful (2016 European refugee crisis), and technological (Indigenous drinking water facility in Canada) hazard to outline these interventions.

The data collection for these case studies included reviewing academic and grey literature (e.g., news articles, as well as public, private, and non-profit sectors' reports) on disaster response by social work practitioners. Additionally, we used internet-based scope searching to identify examples that appropriately illustrate GSW-related social work involvement in disasters. However, as with every methodological approach, there were limitations that must be discussed. Disasters are best understood and conceptualized as social processes (Tierney 2019). Therefore, case studies may not fully capture the full, longitudinal developments of the events described due to the ongoing nature and long-term effects of these extreme events. There are also limitations associated with data available in the public domain. Specifically, a small amount of data detail Indigenous access to clean drinking water. This lack of publicly available data may be related to the ongoing effects of colonialism and the exclusion of Indigenous voices in Canadian news outlets. Furthermore, the lack of data may also be due to the omission of Indigenous perspectives and research in academic publications and journals.

4. Case Studies

In this section, we present three case studies that can be used to teach environmental-related issues and the implementation of GSW in practice: COVID-19 (a natural hazard), the 2016 Refugee Crisis (an intentional/willful hazard), and Indigenous access to drinking water in Canada (a technological hazard). For each case study, we developed a four-step approach (see Figure 1) to fully understand the case and to make proper recommendations for social work practice and education. The first step of each case study provides background information about the hazard. This serves as a brief literature review on the case allowing students and practitioners to get the basic information about the hazard. The second step explores why the case is relevant to social work practitioners and students. This step connects the hazard-related information to the discipline of social work. The third step dictates how the hazard case study can inform social work practice. When discussing social work *practice* in each of the case studies, we refer to how social work concepts, theories, principles, and techniques are put into action through direct intervention with clients, research, or policymaking. In other words, this step of the case study approach describes how knowledge can be operationalized for social work practitioners and students. The final step is providing recommendations. This step offers suggestions for effective interventions that further build GSW capacities for social work education, research, and practice.

4.1. Case Study 1: The COVID-19 Pandemic

4.1.1. Background Information

The COVID-19 pandemic was a global phenomenon (Lone and Ahmad 2020; Onyeaka et al. 2021; Yawney and Gadsden 2020)—the extensive challenges presented by the virus permeated all dimensions of life (Bashir et al. 2020; Brodeur et al. 2021; Poudel et al. 2020; Sarkodie and Owusu 2021), social work notwithstanding. Governments, organizations, and individuals were forced to adapt to an ever-changing and uncertain environment and collaboratively developed solutions addressing health, social, cultural, and other related losses. Indeed, globally, as of October 2022, there have been more than 6 million confirmed deaths of COVID-19 (World Health Organization n.d.). Mental health crises associated with public health mitigation strategies (e.g., social distancing, quarantine, and isolation) have been widely reported (Benke et al. 2020; Pfefferbaum and North 2020). Economic impacts on employment, labor force participation, and hours and wages reinforced these health consequences, jeopardizing the global citizens' overall well-being, especially for vulnerable

and marginalized populations (Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children n.d).



Figure 1. The four-step case study model.

The full spectrum of the influence of COVID-19 called for professionals from different fields to collaboratively respond to the changes, reduce the negative impacts, and support pandemic recovery (Fronek et al. 2023; Landi et al. 2020). For instance, essential workers, such as physicians, nurses, shelter workers, transportation operators, and firefighters, tirelessly worked on the frontline, maintaining the critical operations of our society (Adams and Walls 2020; Beames et al. 2021; Blau et al. 2021; Redondo-Sama et al. 2020). Health and social care professionals provided timely services to enhance the residents' health and well-being. Reopening societies required the related professionals to coordinate different resources to support pandemic recovery. As social work practice contributes to all these aspects, the COVID-19-driven multi-stakeholder engaged environment enables a platform to examine GSW interventions individually and collectively.

4.1.2. Relevance to Social Work

Social workers already familiar with the restraints of austerity were forced to navigate an increasingly challenging role in a global health context. Neoliberal ideology showcased the strain on healthcare and social service systems worldwide (Dominelli 2021). Practitioners were also faced with numerous ethical tensions relating to social injustice within geographically specific environmental contexts.

Social work students and practitioners are accustomed to reflecting on the impact of world events on social justice for marginalized or vulnerable groups. Internationally, countries in the Global South experienced COVID-19 outbreaks disproportionately. Within developed countries, people of color were more likely to contract the disease and die (J. Miller 2020). Social workers realized the narratives of "stay home, stay safe" and "wash your hands" carried privilege and the assumption that individuals had homes and access to clean water (Dominelli 2021).

COVID-19 highlighted environmental injustices worldwide. GSW provides practitioners with a framework to consider justice for the marginalized embedded in ecological contexts. Students and practitioners must consider climate change and the environmental impact on the virus developing and spreading (Dominelli 2021).

4.1.3. Informing Practice

The pandemic introduced new ethical dilemmas for social work practitioners. For example, in-person interactions were no longer possible and social workers were tasked with navigating confidential conversations inside their family homes (Banks et al. 2020a). International social workers adopted new roles (Banks et al. 2020b), such as in the Global South where many became involved with community health protocols, including hygiene and distributing personal protective equipment (Banks et al. 2020a, 2020b). In the Global North, practitioners maintained regular responsibilities adapting to mandates and work-from-home orders (Dominelli 2021). The pandemic exacerbated other challenges of the profession due to the restrictions and public health mandates. This included trouble building rapport because of mask policies and the need for technology-reliant interactions (Okafor 2021).

Social workers also faced ethical choices regarding personal risk and meeting the client's needs (Banks and Rutter 2021). Unable to ascertain each service user's level of adherence to COVID-19 protocols, every in-person interaction introduced a level of risk (UNICEF 2020). Many places worldwide did not prioritize social workers' access to personal protective equipment, thus increasing the risk of transmission for practitioners (Dominelli 2021).

Health disparities of service users also became more pronounced. Individuals living in poverty and densely populated locations were more susceptible to the virus. Worldwide, many found themselves unable to access clean water for consumption or hygiene (Wu and Karabanow 2020). Practitioners became further dependent on technology, but soon realized many clients did not have the same virtual access or capability (Banks et al. 2020a, 2020b).

4.1.4. Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for increased social work training in disaster mitigation and preparedness (Archer-Kuhn et al. 2020). Social workers worldwide acted to adapt and respond to the unprecedented global health crisis. However, there is evidence to suggest that if more energy was allotted to social workers in the mitigation phase, there would be less reactive maneuvering and more proactive planning (Nissen 2020).

Social workers have the responsibility to consider and advocate for human rights during disasters including pandemics such as COVID-19. As of March 2022, substantial proportions of citizens in developed countries have been vaccinated and resumed "normal" practices, whereas developing nations were still largely unvaccinated and experiencing preventable deaths due to the virus (Alakija 2022). Social workers living and working in developed countries should not lose sight of the global need for access to clean drinking water, health services, hygienic products, shelter, and vaccinations, among other health needs (Dominelli 2021). In many ways, globally, COVID-19 offered social workers a newfound sense of unity and identification with their international counterparts. This unity can continue as social workers have experience and understanding of the importance of their practice at a global level.

The pandemic demonstrated the immense value social workers hold in society, as practitioners supported individuals' mental and social well-being (Ashcroft et al. 2021). At the same time, the pandemic revealed an increased need for advocacy for the value and distinct contributions of the social work profession to individuals, communities, and worldwide (Banks et al. 2020a, 2020b). COVID-19 caused the entire social work profession to adapt and react. As a result, practitioners were able to question and evaluate processes and approaches to improve the practice from educational curricula to current practitioners. Social workers and students can benefit from continuing an innovative evaluative process to ensure that social work increases in effectiveness and efficiency. Social workers have an ethical mandate to ensure the profession has an ongoing and increased emphasis on preparedness and mitigation (Banks and Rutter 2021). Focusing on preventative measures instead of a reactive response to a worldwide crisis, such as COVID-19, will augment the profession, increasing the effectiveness of future disaster responses (Nissen 2020).

4.2. Case Study 2: The 2016 European Refugee Crisis

4.2.1. Background Information

Over the past decade, forced migration connected to regional conflicts, war, and poverty in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eastern Africa has caused millions of refugees to seek safety worldwide (Popescu and Libal 2018). Since 2011, Syria has been entrenched in a longstanding civil war that has contributed to the outmigration of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees (DeSilver 2022). Over 16 million people fled their homes due to conflict in Syria alone (Drolet et al. 2018b). In 2021, 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced because of violence, conflict, and rights violations, among other crises, including 27.1 million refugees and 4.6 million asylum seekers (UNHCR 2022). Finally, the most recent refugee crisis stems from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where after only one month, more than 3.8 million Ukrainians fled from their country (DeSilver 2022). With such a large number of people escaping the threat of persecution and violence, host countries have seen large-scale impacts to health (Almontaser and Baumann 2017; Daynes 2016) and economic (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2020; Damoc 2016; Richardson et al. 2020) systems. These crises are examples of intentional or willful disasters; forced migration results from human-induced actions, war over environmental resources, and the underlying colonial impact on these regions (Karlsson and Jönsson 2020).

Media outlets circulated the photograph of the deceased 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, resulting in many countries offering support for displaced persons (Walsh 2015) and managing public anxieties and concerns about migration (Papademetriou and Banulescu-Bogdan 2016). Although there were several factors influencing governments across the globe to welcome refugees from disaster-stricken areas, there was one constant throughout this process. Social workers took action and were responsive in settlement services for newcomers in their respective countries (Nobe-Ghelani and Ngo 2020).

4.2.2. Relevance to Social Work

Rights for refugees emerged as a focus after WWII (Boccagni and Righard 2020). It is still a necessity to pay close attention to displaced persons' needs for resettlement, connection to services, and advocacy of human rights. For these distinct needs, social workers' roles varied depending on geographic location (Ennis and West 2010). Some worked in refugee camps, ensuring basic needs such as food, water, and shelter were met (Hardy 2016). Other practitioners worked with disaster survivors of sexual harassment, overcrowded quarters, inadequate protection, and challenges accessing services (Teloni et al. 2020).

The emergence of the refugee crisis incited increased xenophobia and racism in many parts of the world (Popescu and Libal 2018). The term "refugee crisis" suggested that displaced persons were causing disruption and unrest in otherwise peaceful and settled societies (Teloni et al. 2020). In some areas of the world, anti-immigrant discourse became so rampant, countries such as Hungary closed their borders to asylum seekers and introduced laws to criminalize refugees (Popescu and Libal 2018). Furthermore, austerity measures in countries presented challenges in supporting refugees. These negative experiences extended beyond refugees to social workers committed to making a meaningful impact, even though they were already overworked and facing sparse resources (Teloni et al. 2020).

4.2.3. Informing Practice

The refugee crisis in Europe highlighted the enormous pressure social workers experience (Papouli 2017). This intentional/willful disaster revealed the need for more training in the early phases of disaster management, including mitigation and preparedness. Practitioners and students alike should continue to analyze prevailing narratives regarding refugees and how these narratives impact the daily lives of survivors (Boccagni and Righard 2020). The global refugee crisis sets the stage for the profession to become more equipped for social work with settlement services and refugees. Previously, practitioners underestimated the unique skillset of social workers to contribute to working with

refugees (Drolet et al. 2018b). Unfortunately, social workers have taken a “bystander role” in refugee response; considering the professions’ commitment to social justice and ethics, this approach is ineffective (Smajlovic and Murphy 2020).

The GSW model provides a distinct opportunity to consider the refugee crisis directly resulting from environmental injustices. War, conflict, and civil unrest in Eastern countries due to land disputes, previous colonial oppression, and resource monopolization have caused significant disruption in humans living within the nations at war and in countries around the world.

4.2.4. Recommendations

Social workers have a commitment to social justice and a specific methodology for working with and empowering individuals’ advocacy for rights (NASW 2017). Practitioners’ multisystemic approach to enacting change is their most significant contribution. The refugee crisis has shown how the profession can better respond to displaced persons and educate practitioners and students to respond to global events and disasters at macro, mezzo, and micro levels (Boccagni and Righard 2020).

At a macro level, social workers must critically analyze the regional and global social policy that impacts the rights of refugees and advocacy work (Drolet et al. 2018b). Practitioners’ commitment to justice is the foundational to advocating against xenophobia and anti-immigration narratives. In addition, there remains a governmental need to advocate for more agreement among nations about the collective response to refugee crises (Popescu and Libal 2018). Social workers could enact change by lobbying and advocating against policies that punish and subjugate displaced persons (Dombo and Ahearn 2013).

Social work agencies have a role in dismantling divisive narratives on a mezzo level with organizational mandates and policies (Hölscher and Bozalek 2012). Social work organizations can work with administrations to ensure adequate support for newcomers and connect formal structures of support with informal structures such as churches or community groups (Drolet et al. 2018b). Additionally, social workers should have sufficient supervisory support to ensure they are empowered and equipped, as burnout is a significant risk to the profession (Teloni et al. 2020).

On a micro level, social workers must navigate the complexities of working with refugees. This may mean accessing translation services and engaging in cross-cultural learning to increase understanding. Social workers in settlement services often assist refugees with housing, food, family reunification, and community (Drolet and Wu 2017). Focus on environmental justice involves practitioners’ commitment to supporting individuals affected by willful disasters such as the human-induced refugee crisis. Since 2011, conflict and residual effects of colonial involvement have highlighted the need for social policy, agencies, and practitioners to respond multi-systemically (Karlsson and Jönsson 2020). The global refugee crisis has underscored the need for coordinated social work education and integrated approaches, which can be facilitated by a GSW framework and approach.

4.3. Case Study 3: Indigenous Drinking Water Access in Canada

4.3.1. Background Information

The living conditions in many Indigenous communities across Canada do not meet the standards outlined by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Indigenous Corporate Training INC 2022). Canada has a resource disparity, including inadequate access to clean drinking water on Indigenous land. This disparity is an issue of environmental injustice, environmental racism, and social injustice. Canada is considered to be “water-rich”, yet Indigenous peoples in remote communities face challenges accessing safe and hygienic water (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Indigenous communities across Canada have battled with the government for access to clean drinking water for decades (Cheung 2019). As of May 2021, there were 53 long-term advisories recorded in 34 First Nation communities. This persistent problem represents the unfulfilled promises and performative electoral agendas of federal governments for over

40 years (Cheung 2019). In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vowed to eradicate boiled water advisories. Although he has successfully addressed over 50 communities' advisories, more remain. Other communities have and will develop new advisories over time due to inconsistent training of water technicians, among other barriers (Cheung 2019). The concern for clean water in Indigenous communities is multifaceted, involving individuals (micro), communities (mezzo), and federal governments (macro).

4.3.2. Relevance to Social Work

Access to clean water is an issue of basic and essential human rights (Stefanovich and Jones 2021). This infringement of rights is exemplified in the Neskantaga First Nation, where residents have to drive 10 min to a filtered water facility to collect clean water each week (Cheung 2019). In 2015, the community's water filtration system broke down and was not repaired for over a week. The Nation's most vulnerable people were evacuated for their health and safety (Cheung 2019). Neskantaga First Nation's chief, Eric Redhead, stated, "I don't believe anyone would say that this is in any way an acceptable situation in Canada in 2021" (Stefanovich and Jones 2021, para. 23). Social work practitioners and students must question why non-Indigenous communities across Canada do not experience the same obstacles to clean drinking water as their Indigenous neighbors. Such stark disparities in drinking water access between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities must serve as a call to action for both social work practitioners and students to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving to ensure justice.

4.3.3. Informing Practice

Access to clean drinking water represents the longstanding negative impacts of colonization (Goldfinger 2021). Social workers have a professional obligation to respect Indigenous practices regarding land and territory and must be aware of settler colonialism (Hiller and Carlson 2018). Social workers must dismantle structures of oppression and commit to advocating for ethical standards, including fundamental human rights.

Examining this issue provides an opportunity to understand the lived realities of Indigenous peoples. The priority of living on the land is an intention many Indigenous people have. This becomes complicated as Indigenous land and living arrangements are disproportionately affected by environmental racism, including pollution exposure, hygiene barriers, and contamination (MacDonald 2020). Using a GSW framework and approach, social work practitioners and students can begin to challenge environmental injustice and racism, thus informing social work practice and education.

4.3.4. Recommendations

Social workers are uniquely positioned to engage in multiple structures, systems, and levels of practice. Regardless of the micro, macro, or mezzo level or system, social workers must practice their profession mindfully, deconstruct personal bias, and increase awareness of privilege (Duthie 2019). Specifically, practitioners need to engage in culturally appropriate social work and understand that each Nation has regionally-specific methods (Baskin and Sinclair 2015). It is essential to acknowledge the history of the profession is rooted in colonial practices and the oppression of Indigenous groups. Practitioners and students should work with Indigenous elders to rebuild rapport, trust, and partnership (McCauley and Matheson 2018), while also determining the culturally specific needs of their communities.

Social workers practicing at a macro level can focus their attention on partnering with community members to protest injustice. Lobbying with groups, advocating, and liaising with the government can enact change (Stefanovich and Jones 2021). Social workers can focus their attention on disempowering structural systems, including questioning the management of funding affecting water systems and training for water technicians in Indigenous communities (Cheung 2019). Organizations have a role to play in informing Canadians about this issue and mobilizing support and action. Social workers can partner

with communities and empower organizations to strategize midterm solutions for residents on a mezzo level.

On a micro level, social workers can empower the client and consider the intersectionality of Indigenous culture, human rights violations, and connection to the land (Stavnhagen 2005). Using an Indigenous framework for recognizing the interconnectedness of all living things will help practitioners challenge the Western emphasis on individualism (Gray et al. 2013). Social workers can reframe the discourse of Indigenous peoples as victims and consider them as “leaders at the forefront of struggles to protect the land” (Hiller and Carlson 2018, p. 58). Clean drinking water is a fundamental human right included in the UN standards. It should be provided equally for all individuals in Canada, regardless of postal code, Nation, or cultural practice. Social workers have a professional and ethical mandate to advocate for the human rights of marginalized people groups.

Each of these three case studies has provided unique examples of three distinct hazard types and the role social work practitioners and students play regarding interventions for practice and education. The importance of examining these case studies and providing recommendations aligns with building resilience among historically marginalized communities and populations. The next section provides a discussion—using the case study examples—of how a GSW framework can build resilience for these populations.

5. Discussion: Resilience as a Pillar of GSW

Each of the prior case studies identified the need for the GSW framework to be implemented into social work practice and curriculum. The three case studies exemplify that a GSW framework should be utilized to supplement current social work practitioner knowledge and as an educational tool for social work students to (1) be able to incorporate GSW into their practice and (2) build the resilience of historically marginalized and vulnerable populations and communities. GSW framework is centered on bringing justice to the forefront—whether social or environmental—for historically marginalized communities. Disaster resilience is commonly identified as the ability of an individual, family, community, or population to sufficiently “bounce back,” (see Tierney 2019, p. 170, for more definitions), indicating the coping capacity to prepare for, respond to, adapt to, and recover from extreme events. GSW interventions play a critical role in building coping capacity, as described in the case studies.

Hence, we argue that resilience is thus a foundational pillar of GSW due to its interconnectedness with the other foundational components of the framework—social justice, anti-neoliberalism, and environmental justice. Social justice engages discussion and action surrounding the removal of oppressive, systemic, and structural barriers in society. GSW uses an environmental-focused, anti-neoliberal lens to do so, identifying inequalities and injustices in combination with vast industrialization and resource mismanagement and depletion, resulting in increased profit for the privileged few and decreased quality of life for the historically marginalized. This leads to environmental justice, which posits that as structural inequalities coalesce with environmental harms, those at the social margins bear the brunt of the impacts. These three components each play a critical role in building resilience capacities for historically marginalized populations, making resilience itself a fundamental piece of GSW theory and practice. To demonstrate this further, we provided three case studies that investigate three different hazard types. Each of the case studies details how GSW can benefit social work practitioners and students for resilience-building specifically and as a tool for practice in general.

The COVID-19 case study took an international perspective to examine social work practice and education through a GSW lens. A GSW perspective allows practitioners and students to question and disrupt the current status quo of social, political, and economic factors that have resulted in widespread and rampant inequality, marginalization, and oppression (Dominelli 2012). Neoliberal healthcare systems and social service ideologies (Dominelli 2021) have also exacerbated the pandemic for those at the social margins (J. Miller 2020; Wu and Karabanow 2020). However, building resilience for those populations is

necessary for a GSW perspective to function; thus, social work practitioners must view their practice through this lens and students must be taught using the same lens. Furthermore, the traditional community engagement approaches where the social work discipline is rooted provide social work practitioners with a deep understanding of the unique needs of individuals, families, and communities. The GSW perspective advances the current community engagement interventions to better fulfill these unique needs in disaster settings. Therefore, social work practitioners and students need to have the necessary curriculum and training framework available that allows for instruction and learning opportunities regarding environmental issues. Furthermore, social work students and practitioners can adopt a GSW framework to break down significant socially constructed barriers to provide vaccines, personal protective equipment, and clean water, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized population. This ultimately creates social safety nets, which is a critical factor in building resilience (Jenkins 2013). GSW also provides practitioners and students with pandemic-specific knowledge to enhance their awareness of the interconnectedness of the social, natural, and physical environments.

The second case study describing the European refugee crisis also noted the importance of social safety nets for disaster survivors. In this particular context, refugees fled their homes due to conflict, war, and poverty (Popescu and Libal 2018). As large numbers of refugees entered welcoming countries, the burden of support fell on social work practitioners and other related professionals to find them social support and settlement (Hardy 2016; Teloni et al. 2020). Again, resilience building is a necessary component to a functional GSW framework. As mentioned in the case study, social workers who operate using a GSW perspective are committed to social justice and empowering human rights (NASW 2017). Working in tandem with social justice practice (Gil-Rivas and Kilmer 2016), resilience is justifiably a major pillar of GSW to advocate for refugees' rights, educate the local community, support their settlement, and inform related social service policy. By centering the basic living needs of individuals—in this case, social services, healthcare, and housing—these social justice practices build the resilience capacities of marginalized refugees. Therefore, GSW is anchored by social justice and resilience building for marginalized individuals in disaster contexts.

The final case study examined Indigenous drinking water access in Canada. Indigenous communities in Canada face large-scale environmental injustice, social injustice, and environmental racism issues regarding clean water access and other basic living services (Cheung 2019; Human Rights Watch 2016; Indigenous Corporate Training INC 2022). A foundational tenet of GSW practice is ensuring environmental justice for all (Dominelli 2012). We argue that resilience-building works alongside environmental justice as a pillar of GSW because increasing the resilience capacities of historically marginalized populations requires social and environmental justice perspectives to function. Because several First Nations and Indigenous communities across Canada face disparities in water quality and access, social work practitioners must adopt a GSW perspective to assist these communities with securing justice and building longstanding resilience. Because of the position of Indigenous communities and federal governments, trust and rapport among social work institutions must be built as a first step in resilience building. When trust is built between communities and institutions, social ties are stronger when tested by future extreme events (Jenkins 2013).

A defining factor of GSW is protecting the flora and fauna that inhabit Earth while working toward the equal distribution of natural resources by challenging oppression by the privileged minority (Dominelli 2012). Resilience building is inherently connected to GSW because the purpose of increasing resilience capacities lies in the equitable and just distribution of resources and power to protect against future disasters. GSW practitioners and students must assist in advocacy efforts to challenge oppressive systems that continuously marginalize vulnerable communities. By challenging these structures while building advocacy capacities, resilience is built to advance (rather than solely bounce back) after a

disaster (Jenkins 2013; Tierney 2019). Thus, resilience-building capacities occupy a distinct place among the pillars of GSW.

Jenkins (2013) points out that marginalization from social processes such as racism, sexism, and xenophobia, among others, is a cause of disaster vulnerability. To adequately build resilience for marginalized populations, it is critical to address the root causes of vulnerability—inequalities in housing, employment, education, and healthcare; food insecurity; and poor water quality or access (Jenkins 2013). By identifying the root problems and challenging the oppressive systems that uphold them, a GSW framework can sufficiently build resilience for marginalized populations.

6. Conclusions

As extreme events continue to grow in frequency and intensity because of the effects of climate change, proper assistance for those who are most vulnerable is necessary. Social work practitioners and students are often in the best position to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to offer and assess interventions for these populations. To do this to the best of their abilities, a GSW-specific case study learning approach was conceptualized to equip practitioners and students with the tools to engage in dismantling systems of oppression that exacerbate the impact of disaster. These tools include critical theoretical paradigms and environmental and social justice frameworks.

Based on the Canadian social work education and practice context, this article examined three case studies focusing on the three major hazard types: natural, technological, and intentional/willful. Each case study provided insight into how GSW operates in practice and provides recommendations for practitioners and students for learning how to use the framework. Finally, we discussed the relationship between a GSW framework and building resilience for marginalized populations. The principles of GSW and resilience building offer a starting point and guidance for those in the social work profession to continue helping those who are differentially impacted by disaster. As the authors' social work education and professional training were completed in Canada, some recommendations are aligned with the Canadian context and might not be suitable for other countries. Hence, international readers are encouraged to adjust the case study approach to better fit their community-based backgrounds, advancing GSW interventions in specific, and contributing to the global climate change adaptation and a reduction of disaster risk.

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