Role of Professional Social Workers in Biological Hazards

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Abstract

Biological hazards pose more threat than any other hazards as more number of people in these types of hazards are vulnerable and risk is comparatively more. The impact of a biological disaster is biological, psychological, social, and economical. Biological disaster if not attended with proper preparedness can be an epidemic in countries like India with a huge population endangering the life of the many and putting extra pressure on the resources, finance, and governance. Professional social worker intervention can involve grass-root contribution, collaboration, and resource mobilisation from within the community to promote prompt response and resilience. So a deductive model has been employed to discuss the role of professional social workers in biohazards. The same has been put forth by a non-empirical article to contemplate on the proposed changes to bring a prompt and quick response. The article asserts that professional social workers through their intervention can play a crucial role in all the stages of disaster management.

Keywords: Professional Social Workers; Biological Hazards; Disaster; Preparedness; Mitigation; Restore.

Introduction

Biological hazards also called a biohazard to include viruses, parasites, bacteria, food, fungi, and foreign toxins that pose a threat to the health of living organisms, the security of property, or the health of the environment. It also includes include medical waste or samples of a microorganism, virus, or toxin (from a biological source) that can affect health. The Discovery of new microorganisms and the development of new genetically modified (GM) organisms are the new biological hazards. If the hazard becomes a disaster it is an epidemic having the potential to be pandemic. Biological disasters like

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all other disasters not only impact human and development but put the very existence of human beings under threat.

The impact of the biological disaster is not limited to physical but extends to the psychological, economic, and social aspects of the individuals making them and society more vulnerable. Biohazards further hamper the nation's growth and development. So it's vital to recognise it when it's a hazard and implement a holistic approach to tackle involving each and every member of the society.

When many individuals are involved collectively in an approach proper management of the same becomes essential to avoid herd or mob mentality. As herb mentality would eventually lead to aggressive, escapist, acquisitive, or expressive behaviour. Few vested interest people can utilise it to promote their personal goals.

A professional social worker's role is vital in not only managing and ceasing mob psychology but in ensuring that individuals actively participate and contribute in the approach to achieve the chalked out goals i.e., to either prevent the hazard or minimise the impact through timely intervention. Social Workers are being recommended as the profession is based on six core values which are:

- Service
- Social justice
- Dignity and worth of the individual
- Importance and centrality of human relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

Social work is a profession that had heavily borrowed from other sciences like anthropology, sociology, psychology, criminology, health, economics, philosophy, law, counselling, psychotherapy, etc. With cumulative knowledge from so many fields Professional, Social Worker intervenes in problem-afflicted areas or with problem-afflicted people and tries to resolve the problem by helping an individual to help themselves, treat, cure, or prevent psycho-social and adjustment problems. It not only limits individual challenges but deals with families, groups, and community problems effectively.

Social Workers can play an effective role not only in disaster but also in prediction, early warnings, and in the prevention of a hazard and simultaneously preparing individuals, groups, and community for facing it with minimum loss.

Their contribution can also be crucial in response, rescue, and in relief measures. Involvement in restoration and rehabilitation can also prove beneficial. Apart from

these, they can also prove beneficial in assessing and understanding the impact after the disaster and rehabilitation to deal efficiently with further such threats.

So widely speaking a professional social worker can play an active role in all the stages thus,

- assessing the problem and creating awareness among groups and communities of the risk
- implementing unified preventive measures
- preparing the individuals to deal with the disaster
- mitigating impact by motivating individual full participation and contribution
- undertaking rescue and relief measures effectively by ensuring all strata of the society are covered
- promoting restoration and rehabilitation according to the grass-root requirement
- conducting scientific study and research to understand the impact and identify the drawbacks, if any from individuals opinion
- build theories for further dealing with the situation more efficiently

So a professional social worker involvement at all stages, i.e., commencement, middle, and end-stage is very essential and helpful to not only provide human touch but to mitigate the impact largely.

Methodology

A deductive model has been employed by review of 23 articles to discuss through a non-empirical article a proposal to bring a few changes in the existing disaster management program. The aim of the article is to assist the disaster managers and other think tanks to contemplate the proposed changes to bring a prompt and quick response from the grass-root level involving community members especially the women, youth, and children.

Analysis

Early identification of biological hazards is more vital for a country like India where the population of India is vast and spread across all strata's with more population confided to the base of the pyramid, i.e., the aggregated population of poor, the middle class is more compared to upper-middle and upper class, increasing the ratio of the vulnerable population. A more vulnerable population means the highest impact and downfall on economic growth and development. The biological disaster may push the people on the lower strata further downwards and make recovery, restoration, and rehabilitation a long duration task. Similarly, India has a more young population than the older; proper

use of them and deploying work on a voluntary basis among biological hazards would make them more responsible and accountable. The involvement of young people will also contribute towards more innovative ideas and vast usage of technology to speed up the work. Survey of all the areas in detail would be helpful in not only assessing the risk involved but identifying the resources, and in preparedness planning. A survey needs extensive planning, time and effort, and designing, implementing, and analysing requires a professional as they are crucial aspects. The survey helps to understand the problem from the grass-root level providing more effectiveness in measures taken post-disaster. Professional involvement in the survey would also result in the analysis and interpretation of the data rather than a mere collection of facts and figures.

Community centres under professional social workers should be made mandatory at ward level all over India with running a pilot project. This community centre should be held responsible for dealing with their community challenges, mobilising their resources, and implementation of programs essential or required based on their survey for their community. These centres can play a vital role in not only creating awareness, preparing but also can prove effective in mitigating and restoration. The state can assist in case their resources are falling short, thus making the state government responsible for managing and the ward and centre accountable for execution and implementation allowing the centre governance to focus on more key and burning issues. Along with this decentralisation of power from the state to particular wards would make them accountable, responsible, and prompt while working on their specific area. As discussed earlier would provide more time to state and central governance to focus and address key issues.

Community centres can start preparing once the hazard is identified by training all while keeping women and youth at the forefront. Professionals through involvement in the community, and social action break through the stereotype role of the women and empower them to participate in not only preparedness but also in post-disaster activities. Simultaneously children the further of any nation should be prepared by conducting fake disaster drills and involving in projects that promote thinking and contribution to innovating ideas. Professionals can also contribute actively in other stages of disaster to only promote the active participation of the community but also cater to the special needs of the vulnerable population at times of disaster and take various other measures to mitigate the impact of the disaster.

Results

A study conducted by Yamin, reveals that disaster hinders the process of poverty eradication and sustainable development with poor and developing countries bearing

the most severe impact (Yamin, 2014). A report prepared by SAMHSA discusses that people on low socio-economic status engaged in jobs involving more risk with fewer resources are more likely to be less cognizant of the risks associated with their work and further asserted that they have no clue or plan of preparedness ready. Report highlights that poor sections of the society are unable to respond to official warnings about disasters. Due to which they suffer more serious consequences during impact, from property damage to homelessness to physical and financial impacts contributing to more adversity (SAMHSA, 2017). Young people involved in disaster management can be made at all levels i.e., identifying risks; designing community emergency plans as well as their own; exercising a plan; setting up early warning systems, and implementing response; mitigation; and risk reduction plans (Akeyo, 2010). Researcher Khorram-Manesh highlights that "Youth Are Our Future Assets in Emergency and Disaster Management" (Khorram-Manesh, 2017). Survey assists in disaster management activities: risk assessment, planning of mitigation measures, implementation, drawing lessons, and accommodating them to further mitigation measures, sensitisation, and so on (YE, 2015). Ponto states that survey research is a useful and legitimate approach as several strategies exist to reduce the potential for error. Survey research has clear benefits in helping to describe and explore variables and constructs of interest (Ponto, 2015). An illustration can be given on how the survey can be useful by referring to International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies survey which was conducted to draw a report to shed light on potential areas of priority for countries strengthening their rules and procedures for managing disaster relief (IFRC, 2015).

East Asia Summit discussed that as a community play the role of the first responder its crucial to invest in strengthening community (EAS, 2014). UNOCHA, states that community engagement promotes access, avoids conflicts, makes aid more efficient while ensuring recovery and resilience (UNOCHA, 2017). According to Pollitt, decentralisation reduces information overload, which speeds up decision making and makes the public sector more efficient. Another argument is that decisions made closer to the citizens are more responsive to citizens' specific needs. Similarly, administrative decentralisation can reduce political tension since it reduces central governments' political intervention in local matters. It can also promote innovation as new ideas do not have to travel all the way up through the hierarchy to get approved (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Parthasarathy has further asserted the point of decentralisation but it's limited to state governance. Taking into consideration the key pointers one can conclude that decentralisation promotes a quick and prompt response which is the most essential requirement especially in disaster response (Parthasarthy, 2020).

A researcher suggests strategies to train and educate women in not only performing their expected duties in such an event but in defining their responsibility and input which they can offer for the inculcation of disaster safety culture amongst the society (Gokhale, 2008). Gautam and Mishra reminds us how women's involvement in Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra and in Latur and Bhuj earthquakes not only reduced women's vulnerabilities in emergency situations and the post-disaster but contributed significantly in repairing and rebuilding infrastructure. They further bring it to notice the cultural difference in India and the rest of the subcontinent, i.e., in India, certain women are apprehensive about confiding in or being touched by a male relief worker even in times of crisis (Gautam & Mishra, 2015). Giving the example of a coastal disaster, Nambiar explains how the role of women in disaster risk management is growing (Nambiar, 2019). Researchers asserted that the role of children and youth as potential informants within informal and formal risk communication networks have been significantly underestimated (Mitchell, Haynes, Hall, and Choong, 2008). Another researcher through their article asserted that children are resources that have to be cultivated and mobilised for disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience (Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum and Van Horn, 2018). UNISDR in its report recognises Children, as "tomorrow's leaders" and key "agents for change", and identified them as the primary target in education and knowledge for disaster risk reduction (UNISDR, 2011).

The research paper highlights that there is scope to social workers to play an effective role in the preparedness phase, impact phase, disillusionment phase, and redevelopment phase. It also reveals that contributions of social workers in the recovery processes are getting recognition though active participation in redevelopment and social planning is the need of the hour (Wong, 2014). A study conducted in Finland concludes that enhancing social capital in client work, social work's own organisation, and in multiorganisational networking, should be central in disaster social work as many positive impacts have been observed (Rapeli, 2017). Exploring the role of social work in post-disaster researchers had highlighted that workers can solidify, best practices and evidence-based responses at the micro to macro levels to provide greater conceptual clarity for the experiences of disaster survivors among the many others (Bauwens & Naturale, 2017). A paper shows that professional social worker can play the role of the catalyst which includes evacuation, search and rescue, advocating support group, facilitator for fundraising, outreach for social service provider and community health worker, supervisor, volunteer, and coordinator (Kamrujjaman, Rusyidi, Abdoellah and Nurwati, 2018).

Discussions

Based on the above analysis and results following steps for dealing with biological hazard has been drawn which is subjected to the review and contribution of experts.

- Social Worker collaborating with bodies that identify the biological hazard at its early stage providing time to officials and policymakers to build a strong action plan. International Society for Infectious Diseases (ISID) ProMED, Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases, first reported on what has now been identified as COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) out of Wuhan, China on December 30, 2019, when it was still undiagnosed pneumonia: (ISID, 2019). India National Disaster Management team for biological disaster should build liaison with bodies that provide first-hand information about the onset of the disaster like ProMED.

- Professional social workers should work with low socioeconomic groups to create awareness, plan, and prepare for a disaster as a community to mitigate the impact on their psycho-social and economic life. Professional social workers motivating, counselling, and training young people at an early age to involve in risk assessment and preparedness plan to pool innovate ideas and exploit technological usage to the fullest extent. Workers through youth can also assist in keeping a tap on rumours and misleading information that promote disrespect for governance and noncorporation leading to mass agitation and voluntary disobedience putting their lives in danger increasing the ratio of impact.

- Surveys conducted by professionals would not only enhance the quality but also promote human touch and escalate the views, ideas, and requirements of the people to the top planners. National Census around the corner each city, village to be divided based onwards and further divided into areas under each police station. Detailed surveys concentrating on hazards, risk, and vulnerability of masses would prove advantageous in not preparing and mitigating the risk. Simultaneously a survey post-disaster would assist in collecting people's views, ideas, and feedback which would not only provide a clear picture of the impact, but would identify corruption, loopholes, and drawbacks if any in the executed plan. Thus, a survey by a Social worker would not only be professional and cost-effective but assist in improvising and enhancing the existing plan and mitigating the impact further. Simultaneously it would also assist the system while planning out policies for the overall development of the nation and in tracking its implementation.

- Community Centers for each ward under professionals can create awareness, identify risk and vulnerability, prepare, mobilise its resources, raise funds, and implement restoration programs catering to the need of the local people. While simultaneously addressing psycho-social or relational or maladjustment challenges.

- Along with this decentralisation of the power to local authorities i.e., to each ward would make the ward leader and its member more accountable and responsible, who together with professionals can plan, and prepare according to their people requirements and mitigate the impact of a disaster and restore more efficiently by addressing their individualised challenges and ultimately make themselves self-sufficient and resilient to further disaster reducing the burden on central governance.

- Through community centres, professionals can motivate, train, and promote women in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and post-disaster efforts along with youth and other members of the community. This step would help Indian women involvement and reduce their vulnerability ratio while collecting their inputs which might assist in lowering the impact.

- Along with women the professional social worker by visiting schools can conduct fake disaster drills and motivate and train them to contribute their innovative ideas. These would not only ensure the inflow of ideas from young minds but would promote a more responsible and accountable citizen who is ready to face adversities. Children's disaster drill response can be reported by professionals to respective authorities to bring about a change in curriculum to ensure young minds understanding and contribution in preparedness from the early age of their life. Through the drill, the worker can also assess the qualities of feeling, response, responsibilities and accountability towards one's community and promote the same among children through proper activities at regular intervals.

- The professional social workers in disaster response can focus on senior citizens, physically and mentally challenged, less privileged, physically sick, pregnant women, and other vulnerable population of the society by categorising them to different groups. To ensure that their existing challenges do not aggravate, simultaneously provide therapies to the vulnerable group to deal with their psychosocial problems that spring due to disaster. To also ensure that the vulnerable group rights and dignity are not compromised amidst the disaster. The intervention of professional social workers can place an orderly planned preparedness program in place with humanitarian touch catering to the needs of different groups of the society which would ensure an effective response by community members in disaster mitigating the impact. Simultaneously their presence can make the short-term and long-term post-disaster recovery measures a smooth transaction. And with efficient follows-ups and interaction, the psychological post-disaster impact can be minimised to a great extent.

- Among the other vital roles, the workers can also in collaboration with media create awareness, and assist in efficient preparedness and planning follow up. It can also collect inputs of media negative influence on the community and submit to policy-makers to amend laws and regulations to overcome it.
- Professionals can also provide an in-depth report of the entire process to policy-makers to know which efforts are to be strengthened and which to be substituted.
- Professional workers can also be part of the medical team and promote psychological support to the patient and their family members. It would not only save the time of medical staff which can be used to attend more cases but also provide the psycho-social aspect of the patient, history, and little additional information which might prove beneficial in the execution of treatment and gaining quick recovery.

Conclusion

Efforts of Professional social workers can be divided into hazard identification; preparedness, disaster response; and post-disaster measures. In each of these, the workers can play a crucial role and assist the community with its own involvement and resource to identify, prepare, face, and restore with minimum losses. Thus, ensuring that the efforts in put by governance in meeting sustainable development are not futile and the nation's economic development is not pushed downward to a few centuries back hampering the growth of the country and its citizens.

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