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Role of Social Workers in Disaster Management with Special Reference to State of Jammu and Kashmir, India

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Abstract:

Disaster is commonly used to denote any odd event be natural or manmade, which brings about immense misery to a region. Despite being vulnerable to all types of disasters, the state is lacking a clear policy for managing disasters. There is need to shift from a reactive post-disaster relief-centric approach to a more proactive approach. Social workers can play a vital role in building a culture of managing disasters at community level.

Keywords: *Vulnerability, disaster policy, change in approach*

1. Introduction

The term's 'Disaster' owes its origin to the French word 'Desastre' which is the combination of the article - 'des' and 'astre' meaning 'star'. In earlier days a disaster was considered to be due to some unfavourable star. Today, the term Disaster signify any peculiar event be natural or manmade, which brings about enormous misery to a region. So that it becomes difficult to manage the situation through local resources. The Disaster Management Act 2005 defines disaster as "a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence affecting any area, arising from natural or manmade causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature magnitude as beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area".

Disaster Management Act 2005 define disaster management as a continuous and integrated process of planning, organizing, coordinating and implementing measures which are necessary or expedient for (1) prevention of danger or threat of any disaster (2) mitigation or reduction of risk of any disaster or its severity or consequences (3) capacity building (4) preparedness to deal with any disaster (5) prompt response to any threatening disaster situation or disaster (6) assessing severity or magnitude of effects of any disaster (7) evacuation rescue and relief and (8) rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In India, more than 68% of the land mass is vulnerable to drought. More than 58.6% of the land mass is at risk to earthquakes of various magnitudes. 12% of the land i.e. 40 million hectares is susceptible to floods and out of 7516 kilometre (km.) of coast line, around 5700 km. is prone to cyclones. The hilly regions are vulnerable to avalanches landslides, Hailstorms and cloudbursts. There are many Man induced disasters such as fire incidents, bomb blasts, terrorism, industrial accidents and other manmade disasters related to chemical, biological and radioactive materials.

India is vulnerable to multiple disasters and the changing demographics and socio-economic conditions, unplanned urbanization, development in high-risk zones, environmental degradation, climate change, geological hazards, epidemics and pandemics are further adding to its vulnerability. Clearly, all these contribute to a situation where disasters seriously threaten India's economy, its population and sustainable development.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is very diverse from the rest of the country with respect to topography, climate, economy, social setting and strategic location. Stretch over an area of 222236 square kilometres the state is divided into 3 regions namely Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh. The state is prone to various types of natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, landslides, avalanches, high velocity winds, snow storms, besides manmade disasters including road accidents and fires etc. occurring in various parts of the state. The Kashmir earthquake 2005 and the Sep. 2014 floods are still afresh in the memories which constrained state establishment as well as local authorities and civil society to think and form an effective Disaster Management Policy in the state of J&K.

1.1. Vulnerability Profile of the State

The State of Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed enormous natural disasters over the years but in the 19th and early 20th centuries the frequency of disasters has immensely increased. Due to its typical topography, rugged terrain, harsh weather conditions and poor economy, natural disasters has always caused huge loss to human lives and as well as to public and private property. The state is a multi hazard prone region with natural disasters like avalanches, snow storms, earthquakes, floods, high speed winds and landslides, besides manmade disasters including road accidents and fires etc. The ecological balance of the state has greatly influenced by human interferences and in most of the cases has directly resulted in disastrous event or exacerbates the natural disaster. Many researchers believe that construction of roads under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) schemes or railway track has altered stream course, discharge areas and sealed aquifers due to lack of geo-hydrological assessments while sanctioning or developing the projects. Moreover the illegal and disorganized construction on the river banks has disturbed the river ecosystem.

The hydro-meteorological hazard like floods, droughts and cloud-bursts are common in J&K and likely is the scenario of natural hazards such as earthquakes, landslides and snow avalanches. Large portion of Kashmir Valley (11% of the area of the state) include the Districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Budgam, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Pulwama, Doda, Ramban and Kishtwar are susceptible to earthquakes and fall under Seismic Zone V. These districts comprise 50% of the population of the State. Rest of the State including whole of Ladakh region and Jammu Division (90% of the total area of the state) are under the Seismic Zone IV. Low-lying areas of the Kashmir Valley, especially Sonawari, Awantipora along with parts of Jammu are prone to floods. Upper catchment area of Jhelum, Indus, Chenab and Tawi rivers are prone to flash floods. Higher reaches of Kashmir including Kulgam, Anantnag, Kargil, Leh, Gurez, Doda, Ramban, Kishtwar, Banihal, Kargil, Leh, etc. face avalanches and Snow Blizzards. Areas along major highways particularly Ramban, Panthial, Banihal, Doda, Rajouri Kishtwar, Gulmarg, Dawar, Gurez and Tangdhar, etc. are landslide prone. Most parts of Jammu division including Doda, Udhampur, Jammu and Kathua, etc. are drought prone. All District Headquarters/ densely populated towns and especially Gurez, Doda, Kishtwar and other inaccessible areas are vulnerable to fire incidents. However, incidents of fires are equally high in the plains as well as in Srinagar city. Hilly roads especially in Baramulla, Anantnag, Pulwama, Budgam, Doda, Ramban, Udhampur, Rajouri, Reasi, Poonch, Kishtwar, Ramban, Kathua, Jammu, Zojila, Kargil and Leh etc. are prone to road accidents.

Based on the above information it is evident that the state of Jammu and Kashmir is highly prone to disasters. Though the state is having an intuitional setup of disaster management but it is not working as it should work. The state has also developed a draft of disaster management policy, but that policy is yet to put in practice. Based on the field experiences the researcher feels that the social workers can a play great role in state disaster management.

2. Role of Social Worker in Disaster Management

This study is mainly focusing on the overall role of social worker in disasters in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. As the state of Jammu and Kashmir is highly vulnerable to disasters, so social workers can play a vital role in managing disasters. The role of social worker can be discussed in three phases: Pre disaster Phase, during Disaster and Post Disaster Phase. In the pre- disaster phase social workers have to identify, organise and make working of the different volunteer groups operational by assigning different tasks. Identifying the risky areas and taking up the safer routes during disaster is all that a social worker has to work upon. If the social worker has worked very well in the pre- disaster phase then it will be easy for him or her to manage the crises phase. If not then it will be too difficult to handle the situation. To rescue, to evacuate, to coordinate and to utilize the internal and external resources in a stipulated time will be a big challenge for social workers.

In the post disaster phase the social worker has to find and facilitate the different avenues in order to normalise the situation. This is very challenging. The social worker has to play multiple roles at a time. To Link individual needs with resources. To identify the places to be used as immediate shelter for the rescued people. Providing information and support to individuals and families who were homeless, reducing survivors lack of interest in life, and feelings of powerlessness and despair. Supporting individuals and families by providing emotional help/support, grief counselling and post-disaster support for vulnerable groups like people with disabilities, children and elderly people, motivating victims to restart their daily functioning. Facilitating contact between local government and voluntary groups, collecting donations, collecting, delivering and distributing food and materials and registering the needs of victims with the concerned authorities. Social workers can take a lead in preparing a draft of programmes and policies. The social worker can motivate the people to take-up earthquake designing in their construction and thereby decrease the future loses and apprehensions. Work for effective coordination between the government and non government agencies. To strengthen the early warning system by coordinating with concerned departments. Exploring and identifying the monetary benefits Compensation to disaster driven people. To increase public awareness about various types of disasters social workers can conduct different programmes, seminars and workshops in schools and community halls. To unearth the causes of poorly distributed aid resources from either side (government and non government organization side). To facilitate the disaster training for the existing volunteer groups and other interested persons in the community and lastly there is need to build a culture of managing disasters at the community level by empowering communities.

3. Conclusion

Social workers can have a great role in managing disasters at local level as social workers always work neck to neck with the community people. Most of the people in Jammu and Kashmir are unaware about social work services. There is a great onus on the social workers, as they have to sensitize the people about their diverse role in society. Social workers are important part of disaster aid and recovery plans at the micro, mezzo and macro levels they not only acted as representatives of the state, but they also endow

emotional support to families in shelters and the people who are in traumatic situation. As government representatives, social workers act on its behalf during emergency relief and thus enable it to carry out its responsibilities through their work, but at the same time social workers should be knowledgeable about the different tools and techniques of social work and should also know how to knob the situation at different phases of disaster. However, the teething troubles that social workers are encountering in following procedures and meeting the demands placed upon them are due to the lack of system integration, leadership vagueness, poor instructions and inflexible legislation. India has remained the home of calamities from times immemorial and every now and then the absence of professional hand is extremely felt. Complete avoidance of disasters is impossible but the losses caused by the disaster can be brought down to slight. It is the core responsibility of the social worker to integrate all the resources of a community and keep them at bay, by this way the social worker can bring the community at fore front and will develop their morale.

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