

Rising to the occasion: Disaster social work in China

First author and corresponding author:

Timothy SIM, Associate Professor

Email: sstim@polyu.edu.hk

Mailing address: Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Telephone numbers: Office - [852] 2766-5015; Mobile - [852] 6600 0854

Three other authors [in the following order]:

- Professor Angelina YUEN-TSANG Woon Ki, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- Chen Hui Quen, Lecturer, Chengdu University of Information and Technology
- QI Hua Dong, Lecturer, Sichuan Agricultural University

DRAFT

Rising to the occasion: Disaster social work in China

Abstract

The fifth year of the deadly Wenchuan earthquake that killed more than 87,000 people will be commemorated in 2013. This article critically reviews the development and charts the direction of disaster social work in China, since the fateful 2008 Wenchuan earthquake jump-started it dramatically. While disaster social work publications, social work projects and organisations surged, young Chinese social workers felt challenged by poor professional recognition, harsh working conditions, and limited prospects and support. However, they have been spurred onwards by the resilience and growth of their clients and professional fulfillment in the daunting process of recovery and reconstruction.

[97 words]

Number of words:

Abstract: 97

Main text: 4,643

Table: 293

References: 1,289

Total 6,332

Introduction

There is little doubt that disaster management is an integral part of social work (Gillespie, 2008; Ku et al, 2009; Tumelty, 1990). Social workers are known to play an important role in all phases of disaster management (Banerjee & Gillespie, 1994; Dodds & Nuehring, 1996; Padgett, 2002; Sim, 2010; Yanay and Benjamin, 2005) via micro-, meso- and macro- level interventions (Javadian, 2007; Zakour, 2007). These have helped to address the special needs of vulnerable groups affected by disasters during the response phase (Dominelli, 2009; Javadian, 2007; Sim, 2010; Webster, 1995; Zakour, 1996); and build social capital in disaster risk reduction (Mathbor, 2007; Gillespie & Murty, 1994; Mileti, 1999). Unfortunately, the profession has yet to successfully create a specialism on disaster management (Javadian, 2007), and social workers' voice has rarely been heard in the media and rarely been engaged in discussing issues of practice and policy (Dominelli, 2012). But in China where social work is a budding profession since its reinstatement in the late 1970s, the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake (Sichuan da di zhen) has expedited the development of disaster social work in the region. This article aims critically to review the development of disaster social work in China through a survey of 45 social workers currently involved in disaster social work in Sichuan, China, with a focus on the profile of the social workers, the challenges they encounter, their professional reflections, and the direction ahead for the development of disaster social work in China.

Challenges in disaster social work

Dominelli (2012) set an ambitious but urgent call for “green” social work by advocating for the rights of peoples and developing new concepts and models for practice that would engage with a range of stakeholders to develop locality-specific and culturally relevant responses to the major environmental and social related problems. To respond to this worthy call, social workers may need to examine at least three pertinent challenges: inadequate disaster social work training, unclear roles and mandates in disaster management, and understanding and optimizing local cultures and resilience after a disaster. We address these below:

Inadequate training. Many authors have expressed concern about inadequate evaluation and consolidation in practice despite social workers’ continued involvement in disaster management (Drumm et al., 2003; Javadian, 2007; Rogge, 2003; Zakour, 1996). This is not unconnected to the lack of systematic training and education in disaster social work. Systematic curriculum development in disaster social work is too far and few in between internationally (Rock & Corbin, 2007; Mathbor, 2007). What is most worrying is the ‘quick and dirty’ short-term training in disaster social work in the face of recurring disasters. For instance, Becker (2007a) observed that some social workers received last-minute three-day training during the 2004 Indian ocean earthquake and tsunami, since few had received proper equipping. During the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, about 60% of social workers sprang into action, with few who had systematic training (Chou, 2003; Iravani & Ghojavand, 2005). To tackle this longstanding deficit in disaster social work, there has not been a lack of plausible solutions and suggestions. Ang (2007) suggested that disaster social work should

incorporate training related to human rights, public education and social rehabilitation targeted at the marginal groups in addition to traditional social work modules in casework, group work and community work. With more frequent disasters occurring, the need for cross-disciplinary training in disaster social work has been highlighted (Becker, 2007b; Newhill & Sites, 2000; Mathbor, 2007). Where an entire course or module is not feasible due to the lack of resources and expertise, suggestions are made to include at least be one to two sessions into general social work didactic to discuss issues related to working with disaster survivors and communities, basic practices such as providing salient information, dealing with victim family members sensitively (Iravani & Ghosvandi, 2005). Several social work educators and researchers have suggested comprehensive disaster social work curricula and training formats (Chou, 2003; Dominelli, 2012; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2007; Jordan, 2006; Padgett, 2002; Rock & Corbin, 2007). Little can be found, unsurprisingly, in the Chinese mainland on disaster social work education.

Unclear role and mandate. Social workers need to contend with the issue of mandates and roles in disaster situations. Social workers are known for their expert knowledge and skills in mobilizing, linking and coordinating resources, services, and people, particularly in disaster situations where chaos and confusion are often the order of the day when basic infrastructures are no longer working efficiently (MacCormack, 2007; Mathbor, 2007). This may be made worse by the arrival of international relief teams after a major disaster, which often leads to the creation of ad hoc parallel structures that confuse the situation even further, overwhelming local agencies and their systems

(Twigg, 2004). Bormann and colleagues (2007) observed huge wastage often arise in the process of assessment in disaster situations due to the lack of coordination and communication between government and non-governmental organizations. But without a mandate given by the stakeholders, social workers may not be able to play a role in disaster management effectively, however skillful or creative they might be. Drumm and colleagues (2003) were cognizant of the political restrictions that could hinder the attempts of social workers in mobilizing and coordinating resources in disaster situations. During the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, social workers felt most torn between heeding the needs of the disaster survivors and meeting targets and priorities of the government in resource allocation and service provision (Chou, 2003). In China where the government has across-the-board say in disaster management, the dilemmas and issues related to mandate and role may be heightened.

Dynamic local cultures. Social workers need to contend with the challenges of understanding and utilizing the local capacities and cultures adequately in post-disaster situations, though this challenge is not limited to social workers. Cahill (2007) has observed that foreign donors and aid agencies may develop rescue plans and response strategies that are not relevant to the local culture and contexts, and end up creating problems for the local recipients. Bormann and colleagues (2007) urged social workers to be observant about specific social, cultural and historical factors when carrying out assessment in disaster situations, and look out for economic, social and political injustices that may complicate rescue and responses in post-disaster situations. Furthermore, the onus is upon social workers to understand and identify the cultural

nuances and expressions of disaster survivors. For example, grief, pain, sorrows, anxiety, and the list goes on, are expressed and dealt with variously in different cultures.

However daunting it may be in a short frame of time, social workers need to , be aware these diverse cultural beliefs and expressed emotions may be further compounded by gender, age, and socio-economic positions. Chinese culture is not monolithic.

Furthermore, China currently prides itself in officially recognizing 55 ethnic minority groups that comprise about 8.5% of her 1.3 billion people. As China braces itself against the perpetual threats of floods, droughts, seismic activities and extreme climate hazards that have killed millions (EM-DAT, n.d) in the past and of those to come in the years ahead, Chinese social workers need vigilantly to prepare and equip themselves to contribute meaningfully in adverse situations.

Fledgling Chinese disaster social work

The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake on 12th May 2008 is one of the worst in China and the world's history. This deadly earthquake of 8.0 Richter scale killed more than 69,000 people, with another 18,222 people missing. As the world and China mourned the heavy casualties, foreign and domestic aid poured in. As a fledgling profession, Chinese social workers did what they could in contributing to post-disaster management and rescue unreservedly. This incidentally marked the beginning of disaster social work in China (Peng, 2009). More than 1,000 social workers were estimated to have participated in immediate rescue, reconstruction of damaged communities, counselling of affected

individuals and their families in the aftermath of this earthquake (Liu, 2009; 2010; Liu & Zheng, 2010). Other than government led and local NGOs and projects, social work educators in China and Hong Kong seized the opportunities presented to contribute creatively and actively. One of the uniqueness is the collaboration of several higher education institutes, especially between mainland and Hong Kong universities (Liu, 2010). One outstanding example is the “Sichuan University (SCU) and Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) Sichuan Post-Disaster Reconstruction Support and Research Centre” that provided, among a host of medical, rehabilitation, engineering projects, a range of social work services in the most severely hit regions such as an “Expanded School Mental Health Network” in Wenchuan and Mianzhu counties that focused on providing mental health and psychosocial support to students, their families and teachers since 2009 (Sim, 2009; Sim, 2011). Grounded on the solid partnership of the two universities with sizable support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club, this has now developed into a SCU-PolyU Institute for Disaster Management and Reconstruction (IDMR) located on the Sichuan University Jiangan campus, covering a total floorage of 20,000 square metres and encompasses 6 disaster disciplinary laboratories, and one disaster database and resource centre.

Bian and colleagues (2009) identified a range of difficulties social workers encountered less than one year after the Wenchuan earthquake, with “lack of agencies to which clients can be referred” (75.9%), “lack of financial support” (67.9%) and “lack of integration among social workers” (50%) as the three top problems encountered. The Deputy Chief of the Social Work Department at the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, Mr.

Liu Zheng reported that there were three main problems as social workers made their debut entry into disaster management in China (Liu, 2009). First, many social work projects and services were not sustainable. Most of them were not duly recognized by the government and were not part of the overall rescue and recovery plan. Many lacked funds and were staffed by social workers from other provinces who could not commit on a long-term basis. The second problem was related to the limited capability in disaster management of social work as a new profession. Given the massive scale of destruction of the Wenchuan earthquake, social workers were able to set up services in only a few regions, leaving many other seriously disaster-hit areas unattended, particularly rural and far-off locations. Moreover, most social workers did not receive relevant training and were inexperienced in carrying out needs assessment, service planning and delivery adequately in dire and dynamic post-disaster situations. The third problem was the narrow focus of social work interventions. Social workers concentrated mainly on serving children, young people, older people, disabled people and those in grief after the earthquake. Social workers had difficulty in providing specialized services for those severely affected and special groups such as ex-offenders and overly stressed rescue workers. Moreover, while social workers were visible in providing direct services, they were hardly involved in macro interventions to do with reconstruction planning and recovery policy making.

Five years on after the Wenchuan earthquake, what has become of disaster social workers? What have they learned? What lessons does China social work have to offer in disaster management internationally?

Methods

A 10-item survey questionnaire was developed to capture a clearer picture on the demographics and experience of disaster social work in China. The questionnaire focused on four key questions:

1. What was the profile the Chinese disaster social workers in relation to their personal background (e.g., gender, ethnicity, place and year of birth), education background (e.g., graduation year, institute) and professional background (e.g., work status, experience, clientele, theoretical framework)?
2. What were their motivations for participating in disaster social work?
3. What challenges did they encounter in doing disaster social work?
4. What were their professional reflections in doing disaster social work?

Since there is no government or professional coordinating body such as social workers' association in Sichuan which keeps a register of social workers, there is no reliable data on the total number of social workers in Sichuan. Through the joint PolyU-Peking University Master of Social Work programme, a Sichuan social work NGO that has been providing training and networking for local social workers, and our extensive professional networks established over the five past years, we listed a total of 19 legally registered social service agencies and projects in Sichuan that are involved in disaster social work. These disaster social work agencies and projects employed a total of 85 social workers. The list was further reviewed and corroborated by an experienced local

social worker who has been involved in disaster social work since the Wenchuan earthquake. We managed to send out 60 invitation letters and questionnaires in mid November to early December 2012 to social workers from 17 of the 19 agencies and projects. Forty-five social workers completed the questionnaires themselves and emailed them back to us personally, giving us a response rate of 75 per cent. Content analysis was conducted by the first and third authors to generate salient themes and categories based on the responses of the participants. As some of the respondents were known to the investigators, their identities were not verified upon receiving their responses via email, and, to protect anonymity, the data bear no identity of the respondents. A reference number is assigned, which is used in this paper to present the quotes.

Findings

Most of the respondents were young and inexperienced individuals, who have devoted themselves to serving a wide range of clients in the most seriously disaster-affected areas. These young social workers have taken up a career in Sichuan because they were motivated by the passionate in social work and the need to respond to the dire reconstruction needs after the Wenchuan earthquake. Most were challenged by the lack of professional competence, poor professional recognition, harsh working conditions, and low remuneration as they attempted to perform as disaster social workers. In their professional reflections, most find it important to integrate theory,

values and practice for disaster social work to continue to develop in China. Others emphasized the need to respect local cultures and complexities especially in post-disaster situations, as well as to appreciate the strengths and resilience of clients. This calls for social workers to be humble and willing to learn from clients, without being too concerned with promoting professional theories, values and practices that may not work.

The findings of this qualitative study cannot be generalized and must be considered with caution. But we are hopeful that our findings and discussion can help to document the newly emerging disaster social work field in China and provide insights for future social work development in China and the region.

Introducing Disaster Social Workers in China

Who are the Chinese disaster social workers? Table 1 shows that there was a balance in gender among those interviewed. Slightly more than half were born in Sichuan and the majority are Han Chinese, though it should be noted that Sichuan has a high Qiang and Zang minority population. The majority of these social workers were young and inexperienced; more than 84 per cent were born after 1980 and graduated after Wenchuan earthquake. Though they were employed as social workers, only two-thirds had formal social work training at baccalaureate level; some had training in psychology, sociology and even other disciplines. About half had four years of disaster social work experience, and the majority having had only one employer in the past few years. A high

proportion worked full time and had experience working in range of settings, especially in rural areas. They had served a range of client groups, particularly working with young people, children and the community, using a genre of interventions, particularly group work, resource linking and management, community work, individual case work, and financial assistance, using systems theory as their major theoretical framework.

[Table 1 about here]

DRAFT

Table 1 Demographics and profile of disaster social workers in Sichuan

| Personal background | | N | % | | | N | % |
|--|--|----|-------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|----|-------|
| Gender | Male | 23 | 51.1% | Place of birth | Sichuan | 24 | 53.3% |
| | Female | 22 | 48.9% | | Other Chinese provinces | 21 | 46.7% |
| Ethnicity | Han Chinese | 37 | 82.2% | Year of birth | 1960 – 1969 (43 to 52 years old) | 5 | 11.1% |
| | Qiang (A major minority groups in Sichuan) | 4 | 8.9% | | 1970 – 1979 (33 to 42 years old) | 2 | 4.4% |
| | Zang (A major minority groups in Sichuan) | 0 | 0 | | 1980 – 1989 (23 to 32 years old) | 35 | 77.7% |
| | Other minority groups | 4 | 8.9% | | 1990 – 1994 (18 to 22 years old) | 3 | 6.7% |
| Educational/professional background | | | | | | | |
| Graduation year | Before 2008 Wenchuan earthquake | 12 | 26.7% | Work status | Full-time | 40 | 89.9% |
| | After 2008 Wenchuan earthquake | 33 | 73.3% | | Part-time | 5 | 11.1% |
| Discipline | Social work | 30 | 66.7% | Disaster social work experience | 4 years | 22 | 48.9 |
| | Psychology | 2 | 4.4% | | 3 years | 5 | 11.1 |
| | Sociology | 2 | 4.4% | | 2 years | 12 | 26.7 |
| | Others | 11 | 24.4% | | 1 year | 6 | 13.3 |
| Number of employers past four years | One only | 31 | 68.9 | Service location* | Rural | 42 | 93.3 |
| | Two | 9 | 20 | | Suburban/ County | 26 | 57.8 |
| | Three | 3 | 6.7 | | Urban | 21 | 46.7 |
| | Four and above | 2 | 4.4 | | Others | 4 | 8.9 |
| Service clientele* | Young people | 34 | 75.6 | Service focus* | Group work | 42 | 93.3 |
| | Community | 33 | 73.3 | | Resource linking & management | 40 | 88.9 |
| | Children | 32 | 71.1 | | Community work | 38 | 84.4 |
| | Disabled | 27 | 60 | | Individual case work | 37 | 82.2 |
| | Parents/ family | 22 | 48.9 | | Financial assistance | 27 | 60 |
| | Volunteers | 21 | 46.7 | | Family work | 17 | 37.8 |
| | Older people | 20 | 44.4 | | Psychosocial support & counselling | 16 | 35.6 |
| | Minority groups | 17 | 37.8 | | Policy advocacy | 10 | 22.2 |
| | Others | 1 | 2.2 | | Others | 2 | 4.4 |
| Theoretical orientation* | Systems theory | 39 | 86.7 | | | | |
| | Cognitive-behavioural therapy theories | 20 | 44.4 | | | | |
| | Post-modern theories | 16 | 35.6 | | | | |

*Participants could choose more than one response.

Doing Disaster Social Work in China

Motivation. When asked about the reasons for choosing to work in a post-disaster context, three-quarters of the disaster social workers expressed their commitment or passion to develop a social work career:

As a new graduate, Sichuan is where I think I can accumulate social work practice experience (Participant 4)

Because I have chosen social work as my profession (Participant 13)

This corresponds with the findings of Liu and colleagues (2012) that many newly graduated social workers in China were enthusiastic in developing an identity with the social work profession.

About half wanted to respond to the needs of earthquake survivors and participate in the reconstruction after the earthquake. As Participant 15 said: "Having experienced the earthquake personally, I feel called to serve those in need". There were also those who felt the sense of responsibility as a Sichuan local resident and the opportunities available to do social work after the earthquake.

Challenges. When asked about the challenges of working in post-disaster situations, about half of the participants attributed the greatest challenge working in a post-disaster context to their low professional competency:

In the face of a demanding job in post-disaster Sichuan, our lack of experience

and young age definitely did not help (Participant 2)

I found it almost impossible to resolve the livelihood problems that the residents encountered (Participant 20)

This is not unconnected to the current situation where a high percentage of social work teachers have not gone through professional social work education themselves, or are young PhD graduates freshly returned from overseas with little practice experience, with the tendency to “transport” directly from Western social work theories to their classroom teaching (Yuen-Tsang & Wang, in press). The situation is further compounded by little focus on disaster management in the current Chinese social work education curriculum (Bian, et al, 2009), as well as the inadequate supervision on the job.

Other challenges were connected to poor professional recognition given by the residents and government, especially in rural settings, as many had little idea about what social work was. The difficulties Chinese disaster social workers encountered were exacerbated by limited financial and manpower resources, harsh working environment, particularly in remote areas and feelings of isolation and lack of support:

We are located in remote areas where there are limited resources, clients are scattered far away from one another, and it is difficult to develop services (Participant 12)

Professional reflections. What were the social workers professional reflections having worked in the disaster social work field in the past years? Many of the social workers became cognizant of the need to integrate theories, values and practices that were relevant to the local contexts. As Participant 42 poignantly said: “We must carefully strike a balance between professional ideology and actual practice”. This is in tandem with early social work leaders’ struggles to find a balance between importing social work knowledge and methods, and the need to develop indigenous conceptual frameworks and structures for organizing social work principles and practices (Tsang & Yan, 2001; Yuen-Tsang & Wang, in press). While international standards on social work should be recognized, they should be integrated with the practical reality of the local context in China’s journey to search for its own model of social work education and practice (Yuen & Wang, 2002). This is even more urgent for disaster social work in China given its recent emergence in the face of the expectation of more disasters occurring.

A group of young social workers emphasized the need for social workers to respect local culture and respond to local needs sensitively in post-disaster contexts so as to be effective:

We need to consider carefully the cultural differences, life experiences of our clients and what is acceptable and not acceptable to them especially in a post-disaster situation (Participant 22)

We need to consider the complex contexts that our clients live in when interacting with them and providing service. We also need to be aware of the

unique factors affecting a post-disaster situation (Participant 30)

The above sensitivity is particularly important since the social workers are member of the dominant group (Han Chinese) working in the multi-ethnic and multi-culturally diverse setting of Sichuan (Ng, 2008). Without cultural sensitivity, it may affect their ability to empathize with the minority groups, especially in a post-disaster situation in relation to the expression of intense emotions and complex thoughts. Another important but related theme the research highlighted is the appreciation of clients' strengths and resilience:

Our clients have their own strengths and solutions when they encounter problems. We need to appreciate their way of living and coping methods in dealing with their own future, they are not as weak as we think they are
(Participant 6)

As more practitioners are wary and suspicious about the use of pathological approaches in disaster situation, such as the misuse and overuse of post-traumatic disorder (PTSD) (Sim, 2009, 2011), Chinese social workers were in fact more balanced in understanding the vulnerabilities, as well as the strengths of individuals and communities in post-disaster situations, as highlighted in current literature (Bourassa, 2009; Gillespie, 2008; Padgett, 2002). Ng and Sim (2012) confirmed that Sichuan students seemed to have adjusted better than expected despite disruptive effects of the earthquake. Apart from the countless resilient testimonies we have heard from children, their families and communities, even though they suffered tremendous loss including disability, grief, and

loss of properties. The Chinese are indeed exemplary in rising to the occasion rebuilding their lives and homes, which Chinese social workers need to learn and appreciate more as they forge their identity by taking up a new mission (Ku et al, 2009). As Participant 16 so astutely put:

We need to ask whose needs are we meeting: the clients or the workers? We need to continually understand and find out what our clients need respectfully, despite our good intentions. They are after our clients whom we are supposed to serve (Participant 16)

Discussion

Social workers' roles in disaster situations are many and diverse, and social work interventions in disaster situations are complex as they often involve working with different stakeholders and covering a myriad of dimensions of those seeking to rebuild their lives at varying stages of disasters relief (Dominelli, 2009). The Wenchuan earthquake has incidentally and dramatically facilitated the growth of disaster social work and social work NGOs in China. But, as with their counterparts overseas, Chinese social workers were ill-prepared and untrained when the earthquake jolted Sichuan. However, there has yet to be any systematic disaster social work education in Sichuan (Bian et al, 2009) and other Chinese provinces as far as we are aware. This was seriously compounded by misgivings about social workers' roles and mandates as the government and local people did not know what the profession could offer due to general ignorance about social work (Ku et al, 2009; Liu, 2009). Despite many structural, financial and professional constraints and challenges and obstacles, social workers, especially those who were young and inexperienced, have risen to the occasion and accomplished considerably in the few short years after the earthquake by working with a diverse population in highly demanding conditions which were adversely affected by the earthquake.

While they struggled to provide what they thought useful and relevant, these Chinese social workers discovered the importance of respecting the local culture and responding the local needs sensitively in a post-disaster situation, as well as the need to appreciate

the strengths and resilience of clients who have experienced a horrific disaster, so aptly expressed by one of the young social workers: "Our clients have their own strengths and solutions when they encounter problems... .. they are not as weak as we think they are". This is especially salient in Sichuan where there is a rich minority ethnic heritage, particularly that of the Qiang and Zang minority groups. Many had been severely affected by the earthquake and have since started to recover and reconstruct their lives. They have epitomized the resilience and resources evident among many disaster survivors (IASC, 2007; Padgett, 2002), and have tenaciously rebuilt their lives after the fateful earthquake. On other hand, Chinese social workers would also need to be careful not to be culture-bound while being culturally responsive, as there are aspects of culture that could be oppressive and dehumanizing (Ng, 2008).

The needs and profile of the residents have been evolving as time moves on since the Wenchuan earthquake. Social work practitioners and academics need to continue to adapt to changing demands in the post-disaster situations, and decide the directions ahead over time. But more importantly, the need to consolidate lessons learned in disaster social work cannot be overemphasized (Liu, 2009; Sim, 2010; Streeter & Murty, 1996). This is especially so as China, alongside many other nations, will be encountering more disasters as climate changes continue to affect the world. For example, recent estimates that an earthquake with a million fatalities could occur in the Himalayan belt of South Asia, places China in line as a potential theatre of such a mega disaster (Shaw et al., 2009). Chinese social workers will be confronted with increasingly difficult challenges as they attempt to respond to a plethora of issues at different stages of

disaster rescue and recovery. The support for social workers to document and reflect on what were the good practices and what were the pitfalls could be created through symposiums, local social work exchange networks, higher learning programmes, and national social work professional bodies. One strategic way forward is to generate evidence-based practices and/or practice-based evidences by promoting collaboration between academics, practitioners and clients (Sim & Ng, 2008). Many pertinent issues await exploration, including but not limited to, comparing western models and frameworks in Chinese disaster social work, examining if social work values and principles can be universally applied particularly in China disaster contexts, and developing indigenous disaster social work in China in view of the rich cultural, social, economic and political characteristics. Ng (2011) is of the persuasion that there is indeed “social work with Chinese characteristics”, which we could add to the world’s literature on disaster management. The main Chinese characteristics include the professionalization of social work being led by the government, the adaptation of social work values in rural and minority settings, and the unique coping strategies Chinese people have used in this horrific disaster, which social worker practitioners and academics have learned and appreciated. Consolidating the lessons learned in working with the government and the Chinese rural and minority communities would surely be a unique addition to the social work disaster literature internationally. But the challenge is creating a platform where Chinese social workers could communicate with their counterparts locally and overseas. We await their responses to this article eagerly.

Conclusions

Five years after the Wenchuan earthquake, the Chinese government and Chinese community are now much more aware of what social work can do in disaster situations and even applaud their efforts (Liu, 2009; Wang, 2012). We salute devoted and enthusiastic Chinese social workers for rising to the occasion, against many odds, in developing disaster social work in a land perpetually challenged by natural hazards and now facing climate change. On a more pragmatic note, more must be done by the government, the China Association of Social Workers and tertiary education institutes, in promoting the welfare of practitioners, particularly those who work in disasters and post-disaster situations as there is extensive literature on the stress experienced by disaster workers though little can be found on how organisations can help workers (Cronin et al, 2007; Newburn, 1993). In the case of China, where disaster social work is in its nascent stage, the need to nurture and develop young social workers is an important task and a long-term investment for the profession to continue developing. Whilst the Chinese government, social work educators and front line social work practitioners have been active and creative agents of the advent of the “Spring of Social Work” in China (Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2008), we are confident that with the clients and communities we have been engaged in Sichuan and beyond, disaster social work in China could experience the next spring as we continue to consolidate our efforts and reflect upon lessons learnt in the process of post-disaster reconstruction and redevelopment.

Reference

- Ang, J. (2007). Disaster preparedness and social work. In: *International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Asia Pacific Regional Symposium*, Kuala Lumpur, West Malaysia, 27-29 August.
- Banerjee MM and Gillespie DF (1994) Linking preparedness and organizational disaster response effectiveness. *Journal of Community Practice* 1(3): 129-142.
- Becker SM (2007a) Psychosocial care for adult and child survivors of the Tsunami disaster in India. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 20(3): 148-155.
- Becker SM (2007b) Communal Rebuilding after destruction: The World Trade Centre Children's Mural Project. *Psychoanalytic Social Work* 10(1): 27-41.
- Bian HM Wei KN Feng H and Zhang QW (2009) A study of social workers' involvement in the relief and reconstruction efforts following the 5.12 Wenchuan earthquake. *China Journal of Social Work* 2(3): 211-219.
- Bormann S Klassen M and Spatscheck C (2007) *International Social Work: Social Problems, Cultural Issues and Social Work Education*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Bourassa J (2009) Psychosocial interventions and mass populations: A social work perspective. *International Social Work* 52(6): 743 - 755.
- Cahill KM (2007) *The pulse of humanitarian assistance*. New York: Fordham University Press and The Center for International Humanitarian Cooperation.
- Chou YC (2003) Social Workers involvement in Taiwan's 1999 Earthquake Disaster Aid: Implications for Social Work Education. *Social Work & Society* 1(1): 14-36.

- Cronin MS, Ryan DM and Brier D (2007) Support for staff working disaster situations: A social work perspective. *International Social Work* 50(3): 370-382.
- Dominelli L (2009) *Introducing social work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dominelli L (2012) *Green Social Work: from Environmental Crises to Environmental Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dodds S and Nuehring E (1996) A primer for social work research on disaster. *Journal of Social Service Research* 22(1): 27-56.
- Drumm RD Pittman SW and Perry S (2003) Social work interventions in refugee camps: An ecosystems approach. *Journal of Social Service Research* 30(2): 67-92.
- EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database. Disaster profiles. Retrieved from <http://www.emdat.be/> (accessed 23 Jan 2013).
- Gallespie DF (2008). Disasters. In: Mizrahi T and Davis L (eds) *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 60-65.
- Gillespie DF and Murty SA (1994). Cracks in a post disaster service delivery network. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 22(5): 639-660.
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007). *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*. Geneva: IASC.
- Iravani MR and Ghojavand K (2005) Social work skills in working with survivors of earthquake: A social work intervention – IRAN. *Social Work & Society* 3(2): 265-272.
- Javadian R (2007) Social work responses to earthquake disasters: a social work intervention in Bam, Iran. *International Social Work* 50(3): 334–346.
- Jordan (2006). A case study: How a disaster mental health volunteer provided spiritually, culturally, and historically sensitive trauma training to teacher-counselors and other

- mental health professionals in Sri Lanka, 4 weeks after the Tsunami. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* 6(4): 316-325.
- Ku HB, Ip D, and Xiong YG (2009) Social work in disaster intervention: Accounts from the grounds of Sichuan. *China Journal of Social Work* 2(3): 145-149.
- Liu BZ and Zheng Y (2010) Analysis of the development of social work in post-earthquake reconstruction. *Journal of Aba Teachers College* 27(4): 11-14,22. (in Chinese)
- Liu Y Lam CM and Yan MC (2012) A challenged professional identity: The struggles of new social workers in China. *China Journal of Social Work* 5(3): 189-200.
- Liu Z (2009) Post-disaster reconstruction and social work development in the Chinese mainland. *China Journal of Social Work* 2(3): 221-223.
- Liu Z (2010) The effectiveness and problems of social work interventions in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction: Using 5.12 Wenchuan earthquake as a case study. *Natural Disaster in China 2010*(7): 8-10. (in Chinese)
- MacCormack CF (2007) Coordination and collaboration: An NGO view. In: Cahill KM (ed) *The pulse of humanitarian assistance*. New York: Fordham University Press, The Center for International Humanitarian Cooperation, pp. 243-261.
- Mathbor GM (2007) Enhancement of community preparedness for natural disasters: The role of social work in building social capital for sustainable disaster relief and management. *International Social Work* 50(3): 357-369.
- Mileti DS (1999) *Disasters by design: A reassessment of natural hazards in the United States*. Washington, DC: John Henry.
- Newburn T (1993) *Disaster and After: Social Work in the Aftermath of Disaster*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Newhill CE and Sites EW (2000) Identifying human remains following an air disaster: The role of social work. *Social Work in Health Care* 31(4): 85-10.

Ng GT (2008) The essence and elements of Chinese culture: implications for cross-cultural competence in social work practice. *China Journal of Social Work* 1(3): 205-207.

Ng GT (2011) Social work with Chinese characteristics. *China Journal of Social Work* 4(1):1-3.

Ng GT and Sim T (2012) Post-disaster school relocation: a case study of Chinese students' adjustment after the Wenchuan earthquake. *International Social Work*. Epub ahead of print 12 October 2012. DOI: 10.1177/0020872812456051 (This on-line version of this article can be found on:

<http://isw.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/10/12/0020872812456051>)

Padgett DK (2002) Social work research on disasters in the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy: Reflections from New York City. *Social Work Research* 26(3): 185-192.

Peng SM (2009) On government-oriented social work NPO and reconstruction after the catastrophe: With an example of Shanghai L NPO. *Social Science Journal* 2009/2: 64-69.
(in Chinese)

Rock LF and Corbin CA (2007) Social work students and practitioners' views on the need for training Caribbean social workers in disaster management. *International Social Work* 50(3): 383-394.

Rogge ME (2003) Children, poverty, and environmental degradation: Protecting current and future generations. *Social Development Issues* 22(2/3): 46-53.

Shaw R Takeuchi Y and Uy N (2009) *Climate change, adaptations and indigenous peoples - Policy note*. Thailand: UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for Asia & the Pacific.

- Sim T (2009) Crossing the river stone by stone: Developing an expanded school mental health network in post-quake Sichuan. *China Journal of Social Work* 2(3): 165–177.
- Sim T (2011) Developing an expanded school mental health network in a post-earthquake Chinese context. *Journal of Social Work* 11(3): 326-330.
- Sim T (2010) Social work and disaster management. *Summit on Public Administration* 2010(10):31-48. (in Chinese)
- Sim T and Ng GT (2008). Black cat, white cat: A pragmatic and collaborative approach to evidence-based social work in China. *China Journal of Social Work* 1(1): 50-62.
- Streeter CL Murty SA (1996) *Research on Social Work and Disasters*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Tsang AKT and Yan MC (2001) Chinese corpus, western application: The Chinese strategy of engagement with western social work discourse. *International Social Work* 44(4): 433-454.
- Tumelty D (1990) *Social Work in the Wake of Disaster*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Twigg J (2004) *Disaster risk reduction: Mitigation and preparedness in development and emergency programming*. London: Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), Overseas Development Institute.
- Wang SB (2012) Social work's mandate to practice and develop – using post-disaster school social work as a case study. *Academia Bimestris* 1: 82-89. (in Chinese)
- Webster SA (1995) Disaster and disaster aid. In: Edwards RL (ed) *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (19th ed). Washington: NASW Press, pp. 761–771.
- Yanay U and Benjamin S (2005) The role of social workers in disasters: The Jerusalem experience. *International Social Work* 48(3): 263–276.

Yuen-Tsang WKA and Wang S (in press) Social Work in China, *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed). New York: Elsevier.

Yuen-Tsang AWK. and Wang SB (2002) Tensions confronting the development of social work education in China: Challenges and opportunities. *International Social Work* 45(3): 375-388.

Yuen-Tsang WKA and Wang S (2008) Revitalization of social work in China: the significance of human agency in institutional transformation and structural change. *China Journal of Social Work* 1(1): 5-22.

Zakour MJ (1996) Disaster Research in Social Work. *Journal of Social Service Research* 22(1): 7-25.

Zakour MJ (2006) Social work and disasters. In: D. A. McEntire (ed) *Disciplines, Disasters and Emergency Management*. Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Management Institute, pp. 124-140.

[Total number of word in references: 1,289]