

Books and Chapters 2021

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1.	An Eco-Social Work approach to Community Resilience During the Covid 19 Pandemic	Dr.Mary Angeline Santhosam



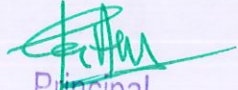
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An Eco-Social Work approach to community resilience during the Covid 19 Pandemic




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The social work sector is changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic as it has provided time to reassess people's relationship to nature. Ecosocial work has begun to encompass green social work, interprofessional green care practices and bring people into contact with nature (Bowling, 2017; Dagnan, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014; Dominelli, 2012; Ramsay & Dudgey, 2010; Power & Dinkel, 2018). Ecosocial work has utilised insights from 'green social work' and 'environmental social work' – concerned with how environmental issues, such as extreme weather events, pandemics and climate change, affect people and communities.

(It does note green social work has a critique of the movement towards green and production and a demand for green forms of social development that care which makes it different from the other two approaches.)

COVID 19 highlights an environmentally linked issue wherein communities seek suitable solutions and lifestyle changes according to its severity. A green social work perspective underlines the importance of environmental protection to human well-being and argues that the profession adopts one to address disasters, including health pandemics. This perspective promotes anti-oppressive approaches that encourage ethical behaviour, social and environmental justice and human rights in response to COVID-19. A green social work perspective adopts a holistic, environment-friendly, transdisciplinary, relational and political power relations slant to the 'person-in-the-environment' to encompass environmental and socio-economic, political and cultural contexts within which humans live and act (Dominelli, 2012).

The pandemic altered everyday routines and limited time spent in natural surroundings. The pandemic highlighted the importance of the natural world and social work's environmental issues to increase social isolation and separation from the natural world. Ameliorating this can be addressed by



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of community work in the practice of eco-social work (Besthorn, 2002; Coates, 2003a; Coates, 2003b; Coates, 2004; Hillman, 2002; Marlow & van Rooyen, 2001; McKinnon, 2001; Muldoon, 2006; Ungar, 2002). This paper will consider social work students understanding of Eco-Social Work and include narratives of community resilience to COVID-19 in rural communities. This paper further considers how such narratives emanating from the ECOLAB initiative for building community resilience can enhance community resilience in India.

COVID-19 and Eco-Social Work

The pandemic brought social workers into disaster response, recovery and disaster response, recovery, and disaster preparedness planning. This highlighted the importance of the natural world and environmental issues in social work. Environmentally-focused social work considers the environment as a living entity having a direct effect upon the functioning of humanity as a whole. Social work practice adopts skills and theories of human behaviour and social systems to resolve social problems. This profession also focuses on the 'person-in-environment'. Social work plays a major role in tracking environmental threats to human wellbeing using eco-social work.

Eco-social work is a subfield of social work that focuses on the systemic, symbiotic relationship between all living organisms and ecological systems on the planet earth. Although there is no universally accepted theoretical framework for eco-social work, environmental challenges, such as extreme weather events and climate change, influence individuals and communities. Individuals, families, organizations, communities, and all levels of government are all served by social workers at various levels of the practice ranging from the front lines of service delivery to advocacy, psychosocial support and public policy formulation and implementation. Eco-social approaches help address the everyday routines altered by the pandemic and are tackling to make lifestyle changes that will deal with the severity of the condition and enhance resilience.

Study Approach




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This paper addresses the human challenges of COVID-19 stories of resilience at the community level in India. Secondary data is extensively used to compile the information acquired from accounts reported in newspapers and official reports. The researchers adopted the qualitative research methodology to study community resilience as an eco-social approach.

This study's primary objective is to understand the role of social workers in eco-social work during COVID-19. The secondary objectives were to narrate the role of Eco-Lab an initiative to build resilient communities using the eco-social work approach. An Eco-Lab is an initiative that addresses a cleaner, safer and healthier environment by protecting people and vital resources and building resilient communities. The tertiary objective was to share stories of community resilience in villages in India. We will first describe the Eco-Lab initiative begun by social work students and narrate the stories of community resilience in India.

Community Resilience through an – Eco-Lab initiative

Community resilience is the ability of a community to improve a community's capacity to withstand, adapt to and recover from adversity by enhancing day to day community health and wellbeing and reducing a negative disaster impact. Resilient communities promote individuals and communities to strengthen to meet spiritual and extreme changes. Building community resilience can depend on physical and psychological health, economic wellbeing, communication, social connectedness and integration involvement of organizations, civic-mindedness, and responsibility. Self-reliance was the mantra that demonstrated community resilience in rural communities in India.

Unnat Bharath Abhiyan (UBA): Transformation and Change in Communities

Unnat Bharath Abhiyan (UBA) is the flagship program of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Eco-Lab is a unit of UBA unit that student volunteers joined hands with local people to build communities in adopted




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prepared and trained to use their skills to address environmental problems or adversities like COVID-19. Empowerment is the most widely used intervention tool in social work, and social workers are trained to use this to build resilient communities.

Partnerships with NGO's to improve communities

The college set up Eco-Lab, Nazareth Emergency Relief and Rehab Foundation (NERF). This Eco-Lab designs programs and initiatives that protect people and nature in the adopted communities. The Eco-Lab provides basic needs and livelihood trading for the community in the villages. The Eco-Lab further assists migrant populations in adapting to new situations and helps them to alleviate the problems they face. It also works towards improving the living conditions and the surrounding ecology of the community. NERF, through Eco-Lab, initiated the "Feed the Need Programme" that distributed food packets every Wednesday to homeless people on the platforms and roadsides of Kovilpathagai. The students at Nazareth College sponsored the food, and close to 30 packets of food were delivered to homeless people and are still being distributed every week.

Examples of Eco-Lab Community Initiatives in a number of villages




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Food Grains Distribution to Kovilpathagai Community

Students supporting self-help groups

Chandramma grows 40 varieties of chemical-free crops on her rainfed plot in Bidakanne village in the Medak district of Telangana. "I have enough food to last through the lockdown and beyond," she says during a Vikalp Varta webinar. Chandramma and thousands of Dalit farmers contributed 20,000 kg of food grains to Medak district's COVID-19 relief measures. And they provide 1,000 glasses of nutritious millet porridge daily to health, municipality, and police workers in Zaheerabad town nearby. Having achieved anna swaraj (food sovereignty) and self-sufficiency, the women are now feeding others.

In Kuthambakkam village near Chennai, small-scale industries like grain processing or solar fan-bulb kits provide income security that has helped families avoid urban migration. Kuthambakkam's former sarpanch Elango Rangaswamy has come up with a solar-powered process of disinfectant

important role in the war against germs. Many remote rural villages find it challenging access disinfectants due to a lack of knowledge on disinfectants and the economic constraints of not being able to afford one from the market.

Crisis management through social media

In Kunariya village in Kutch, Gujarat, sarpanch Suresh Chhanga set up a crisis management team and used social media to raise awareness about the pandemic. They organized a complete health survey. The villagers ensured that 316 needy families received all necessities with the help of panchayat funds and local donations. When I phoned Chhanga, he excitedly recounted how the village keeps its children busy. "We realized that they are stuck at home, bored or even sometimes facing the aggression of anxious adults, so the panchayat has encouraged elders to teach them whatever special skills they had — music, crafts, cooking, traditional technologies, gardening."

In Tamil Nadu, the predominantly tribal village of Sittilingi in the hilly Dharmapuri district mobilized itself as soon as Kerala announced the first COVID-19 case in January. The village went into disaster control mode, using public announcements to spread awareness, initiating physical distancing, mask-wearing and public sanitation, and isolating returning migrants. Local tailors were asked to stitch masks in bulk. On 1,600 square feet of land, they started growing different fruits and green vegetables, and within three months, the women's hard work paid off, attracting women from 11 more villages to join the initiative.

Role of Social Work Students as Eco-Social Workers

A key component of building resilience is empowering communities to decide on issues that affect their own lives. Self-help groups (SHGs) play a significant part by creating and strengthening local institutions. Self-help groups play an essential role in bringing communities together to plan, implement, and manage various development initiatives. They also help in promoting local economic development. No single nonprofit or community can build

communities become self-reliant and strengthen their resilience. We train our students to identify the root causes of social problems, reach out to the communities and help them become self-sufficient. This article addressed a few resiliency stories from Avadi and a few secondary data from newspaper reports to help the readers understand that resilience of communities has been observed throughout India. There are many stories that can be added to this article.

Conclusion

Social work, a people-based profession that focuses on person-in-environment and the pandemic of COVID-19, became an environmental issue that changed the role of social workers working with communities. The social workers promoted community resilience to recover from this adversity. Eco-Lab helped students prepare communities to face the challenges of the pandemic and empower them. This process was possible with the community acceptance and participation and their readiness to face similar situations in the future. Efforts in building community resilience can be focused on four areas – physical and psychological health, economic wellbeing, communication, social connectedness and integration involvement of organizations, civic-mindedness and responsibility. Community resilience as a framework can help to understand a community's persistent capacity to overcome and rebound from adversity.

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