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Social Work in the Era of Climate Crisis: Building Community Resilience Through Adaptive Interventions.

Trabajo social en la era de la crisis climática: construcción de resiliencia comunitaria a través de intervenciones adaptativas

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The climate crisis has a significant impact on the deployment of social work functions, as it exacerbates inequalities in disadvantaged communities. This study indicates that professional practice must move beyond the traditional focus on remediation and immediate solutions and adopt a stance of social intervention.

Methodology: The research is based on a narrative review that results in a theoretical proposal aimed at modifying professional practices and reformulating more conscious social policies. **Results:** This perspective highlights the need to advocate for community resilience by fostering local capacities and neighborhood support networks. The results show that strategies that integrate traditional ecological knowledge with scientific information are the most effective for promoting collective learning and reorientation in the face of difficulties. The social worker is not limited to facilitating specific social processes but also mediates and catalyzes community agency and its associated networks. **Conclusions:** Finally, the research demands that social policies include the principle of adaptation in their design to ensure citizen participation in social contexts. In this sense, forging a sense of resilience is a practice of territorial climate justice.

Keywords: Resilience, Social Inequality, Social Justice, Community Action, Disadvantaged Group.

JEL Classification: Q54, I38, R58.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La crisis climática tiene una repercusión significativa en el despliegue de las funciones del trabajo social puesto que acentúa las desigualdades en las comunidades desfavorecidas. Este estudio denota que el quehacer profesional debe superar el enfoque tradicional de reparación y soluciones inmediatas y asumir una postura de intervención social. **Metodología:** La investigación se apoya en la revisión narrativa que deviene en una propuesta teórica la cual busca modificar prácticas profesionales y reformular políticas sociales más conscientes. **Resultados:** Esta óptica resalta la necesidad de abogar por la resiliencia comunitaria fomentando las capacidades locales y las redes de apoyo vecinal. Los resultados manifiestan que las

estrategias que asumen el conocimiento ecológico tradicional con la información científica son las más efectivas para promover el aprendizaje colectivo y la reorientación ante las dificultades. El trabajador social no se reduce a facilitar determinados procesos sociales. También media y cataliza la agencia comunitaria y sus vínculos asociados. **Conclusiones:** Finalmente, la investigación exige que las políticas sociales incluyan el principio de adaptación en su diseño de forma tal que se asegure la participación ciudadana en los contextos sociales. En este sentido, forjar un sentido de resiliencia es una práctica de justicia climática territorial.

Palabras clave: Resiliencia, Desigualdad social, Justicia Social, Acción comunitaria, Grupo desfavorecido.

Clasificación JEL: Q54, I38, R58.

INTRODUCTION

The foundations of social work are being reconfigured by the 21st-century climate crisis, which demands an energy transition and an adaptation of social protection systems (Mason et al., 2022; Nenning et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2023). This event has become associated with profound social justice, where groups are often excluded and bear the consequences. In this sense, the traditional intervention model is insufficient because its scope stems from the conception of a remedial approach to addressing pre-existing problems.

Social workers play a crucial role in climate change adaptation, community resilience, advocacy, and policy influence (Nagoshi et al., 2025). This research is based on the need to redesign professional practices in complex contexts. Vulnerability and resilience are conceptually intertwined in socioecological systems, where adaptability is a key mechanism that promotes resilience to natural hazards (Boori et al., 2021; Lanlan et al., 2023). Thus, the study focuses on the degree of effectiveness of adaptive interventions, thereby contributing to building community resilience from the core. This perspective focuses on fostering endogenous capacities and self-care mechanisms that communities already have.

The article draws on a documentary review to characterize the relationship between socioecological vulnerability and human agency (Pirasteh et al., 2025; Sharov & Tønnessen, 2021; Xu et al., 2024). Thus, it is evident that effective adaptation goes beyond the simple application of external techniques. Social work can improve people's resilience to climate events by identifying and strengthening their diverse assets, including spiritual capital (Maamari, 2024). In this regard, it is understood that social learning processes must be fostered through adaptation and collective human agency. Human agency in the face of socio-ecological change and increased community human agency are fundamental to creating paths of resilience in the face of processes occurring at multiple scales (Greene et al., 2022). The social worker thus functions as a bridge between territorial knowledge and institutional resources. The structure of the article allows for a first exploration of the review's findings that articulate the principles of interventions. These alternatives are then questioned, and

the elements that support future social systems and programs are proposed. Thus, the objective of this study is to contribute to a professional framework that supports communities in overcoming climate impacts and evolving toward sustainable and equitable systems.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Disaster social work practice requires a radical perspective and collaboration with environmental justice movements to address the impact of climate change on people, animals, and nature (Papadopoulou & Teloni, 2022). Research is structured around a theoretical framework that includes socioecological vulnerability. This term refers to the combination of the social dimension of vulnerability and the ecological dimension (Snyder et al., 2021). The first dimension is determined by structural aspects such as impoverishment and dynamics of rejection, and the second relates to the risks of experiencing climate hazards. From this perspective, the environmental crisis increases the intensity of predetermined inequalities and produces systems marked by the social disadvantage of minority communities. A socioecological perspective on vulnerability can help address challenges in the diversity of users, capture the complex social reality of vulnerability, and enable transferable knowledge across populations (Tang et al., 2025). The concept of adaptive community resilience emerges as a central point in the solution to this problem (Boston et al., 2024; Gungör & Elburz, 2024). This concept is understood as the collective capacity to incorporate knowledge, restructure ideas, and modify patterns in a scenario of constant change. From this, resilience is formed at the confluence of critical infrastructures and community support networks, cultural memory, and territorial knowledge systems. A community disaster resilience management tool supports the identification of vulnerable areas, adaptive strategies, and the efficient allocation of resources before, during, and after a disaster (Luleci et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023). Along these lines, community agency acts as a catalyst for resilience, providing it with strength and a collective focus. This concept also encompasses the capacity of certain social groups to unify criteria and carry out decision-making processes in a joint and participatory manner. This meaning of agency is seen in group activities such as citizen oversight of natural resources, community management of temporary and foster homes, or legal protection of land. Social workers can help meet the needs of climate refugees by facilitating community empowerment and education, promoting policy change, and educating about climate change (Franco et al., 2024). This also means that social workers can mitigate the climate crisis through future planning, proactive disaster management, addressing eco-anxiety, and promoting environmental justice (Nyahunda, 2021; R et al., 2024).

Adaptive capacities thus function as a mediator between vulnerability and resilience. Resilience as self-governance, which involves identity, the good life, local coping strategies, and supportive infrastructure, is a key component for communities to adapt and transform in the face of complex changes (Korosteleva & Petrova, 2022; Suleimany et al., 2022). These capacities are associated with the set of resources and availability that a community has to evolve and implement effective adaptation strategies. Furthermore, they encompass accessibility to information related to

climate change and participation in decision-making assemblies and oversight of common materials. Adaptive pathways, developed by communities, are crucial for improving combined physical, economic, and community resilience (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Integrating community resilience and social capital into community-based disaster management systems increases residents' willingness to participate in preventive measures, improving their adaptive capacity and awareness (Lin & Lee, 2023).

Ultimately, adaptive interventions constitute the practical framework for applying the above. They function as professional accompaniments to flexible and dynamic processes. Importantly, their design reaffirms the existence of tangible uncertainties and ambivalences present in socio-ecological systems and gives greater significance to systematic learning over the structured implementation of certain predefined procedures. A successful intervention, then, requires a strong capacity to promote community agency and increase adaptive capacities. This enables communities to navigate the climate crisis with dignity and autonomy. Adopting a collaborative and community-centered approach to disaster management, establishing community crisis response teams, and empowering non-governmental organizations can significantly strengthen community resilience to disasters (Lin & Lee, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The study is methodologically based on a narrative documentary review. This procedure allowed the authors to achieve a critical synthesis, highlighting criteria often overlooked in studies with other designs. This review allowed for the interpretation of the ambivalences that arise within the framework of socioecological vulnerability and community agency.

The research process proceeded through several interrelated stages. Initially, a search was conducted that encompassed the scientific literature published in specialized databases on social work, environmental sociology, and development studies. Reports from foreign organizations and information from the work of community organizations were also included. No specific quantitative criteria were followed to select these materials. The goal was to provide theoretical input and enrich the conceptual content in Latin American contexts.

Following this line of thought, the final result of the review was organized in terms of information and materials, establishing categories that would facilitate further analysis. The categories were not extracted from the literature review; they emerged from the critical reading and interpretation. Climate justice, local adaptive capacities, and the intersection of social vulnerability and environmental risk constituted the main thematic points found. Thus, the analysis promoted an interaction between these terms and the results that stood out in the reviewed documents.

The central paradox of the analysis was to critically interpret and summarize the results. The research revealed the tensions and ambivalences that exist in the creation of scientific knowledge, so its scope transcends a simple description of what was found. Social work, understood from its classical theories, was analyzed in its convergence with current paradigms addressing the climate crisis. Therefore, a

realistic foundation was established that demands the redesign of professional interventions in adaptive issues.

As for the final stage, it was conceived by the author of the article itself. In this sense, the results are presented as a constructed narrative that indicates the need to advocate for resilience from the perspectives of agency and community participation. Finally, the narrative review concludes, resulting in a theoretical proposal that seeks to modify professional practices and reformulate social policies that are more conscious of and adapted to the specific needs of vulnerable territories.

RESULTS

The review demonstrated that successful socio-environmental interventions, which, from a systems thinking perspective, require a flexible and dynamic design (McAlister et al., 2022), are formulated precisely based on these characteristics. This criterion entails abandoning conventional paradigms and adopting innovative methodological practices that adapt to changes in the territory. Socio-environmental models, which, to be more useful in supporting policies and management, must be integrated with other tools such as data visualization and adapted to specific contexts (Will et al., 2021), can be more effective in decision-making and policy formulation. Thus, adaptive planning is considered an urgent need for implementation, so that communities are able to build and inspect their own strategies and adjust them based on daily experience. The study emphasized that resilience, which, according to adaptive measurement frameworks, has a relational dimension that underpins it (Tariq et al., 2021), is fundamental to community capacity. The document review highlighted that community support networks are the first solution communities turn to when confronting environmental crises. These informal social relationships are more successful than adopting measures stemming from regulatory public policies if they are educated and supported professionally.

Likewise, the significance of conventional ecological knowledge is understood, which, as eco-social and environmental management approaches highlight, is a fundamental way to foster the creation of significant adaptations (Mastrángelo et al., 2024; Spatscheck, 2024). Therefore, strategies that incorporate these lessons learned with technological alert systems are more successful in terms of disaster reduction. Therefore, it is recognized that combining these novel and traditional practices produces more accessible and modern solutions adapted to the culture of the context. Community-based organizations, which, according to evidence from health and environmental crises, can rapidly identify and address social and health inequities, develop rights-based and ecologically conscious actions, and support communities with unique challenges (McCauley, 2021; Shannon et al., 2023), are key actors in planetary health crises.

Along these lines, the study showed that social structures promote post-disaster recovery and mitigate the effects of disasters. Coordinated community support during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to empirical evidence and literature reviews, promotes psychological bonding, community identification, and unity (Bełdyga, 2022; Bowe et al., 2021), leads to greater well-being and a reduction in depression and anxiety. Community-to-community support, according to studies

in fishing contexts and urban environments, is critical in the first weeks after a disaster for resilience and for overcoming the disruptions caused by natural disasters (Chen et al., 2023; Obregón et al., 2024), and constitutes a fundamental pillar for early recovery. Thus, communities with collective leaders and participatory dynamics within their fabric find their bearings and restructure more quickly and optimally. This criterion even defines the evolution or level of recovery that communities achieve over long periods, being greater than in uncoordinated or collaborative communities. Research highlights that social intervention is based on an adaptive capacity approach. From this perspective, the possibility of promoting and increasing the resources available to each community to cope with environmental events is anticipated. Ultimately, there is a need to modify professional welfare practices and direct them toward approaches that, according to evidence of local adaptation in Pacific contexts and geographical development, propose community agency as a fundamental element of adaptation (Colloff et al., 2024; Turner et al., 2025; Vincent, 2023).

DISCUSSION

This study provides findings that deepen existing theory on climate justice. Intersectional climate justice, which proposes a conceptual framework for urban planning and seeks to address multiple intersecting socio-environmental inequities (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022), addresses the underlying factors that reinforce racial and gender inequalities, differential vulnerabilities, and the politics and ethics of care. The confirmation of the climate crisis determines the reproduction of social inequalities, which, according to climate policy, public health, and pediatric research analyses, aligns with research that interprets climate change as a fundamental political problem (Godden et al., 2022; Parsons et al., 2024; Schmeltz, 2021). It also follows that vulnerability should not be understood as a transitional stage. Rather, it is the product of the impact of processes and dynamics of exclusion and rejection. Climate change negatively impacts vulnerable populations, whose adaptation and mitigation mechanisms, according to evidence from the Global South, are often ineffective, thus perpetuating socioeconomic and political inequalities (Ngcamu, 2023; Sharma & Srikanth, 2021).

In this context, emphasis is placed on the implications of social work in these concepts. This discipline needs to overcome its superficial paradigm and begin to implement intervention strategies that are part of the environmental dimension of its profession. Associated with this, it is noted that community resistance evolves into processes that simplify the execution of procedures and focus on current innovative practices. Thus, professionals play a fundamental role in facilitating collective learning and promoting community empowerment.

Research argues that implementing this approach requires so-called programmatic practices. Therefore, the development of co-managed early warning systems that merge technical learning with the environmental warnings typically perceived by communities is called for. These systems are more effective when based on previously used networks. Furthermore, the construction of community banks for resilient seeds and techniques for water resource management is highlighted. From

this perspective, the goal is to improve food security in the face of environmental events and, through community food strategies, grain banks, and a relational understanding of autonomy, strengthen community autonomy (Goris et al., 2025; Méndez-Villamizar et al., 2024; Sharma, 2024). Designs must be formulated from a participatory approach, giving due weight to the criteria of community members as the first experts on the terrain. This article demonstrates that the future of intervention is also influenced by institutionalization processes regarding risk management committees, which, according to studies on corporate governance and operational management, are fundamental for sustainable practices and integrated reporting (Ahmed, 2023; Malik et al., 2021; Zainuddin et al., 2022). It is important to note that, during the period surrounding and culminating in the outbreak of an environmental event, these scenarios foster collective decision-making and the humane and empathetic distribution of resources. It follows that, when these committees coincide with social protection programs, greater protection of human and material resources is achieved.

Following this line of thought, professionals in this field are required to adopt a new paradigm of social ecology and adaptive management. In today's world, social workers require new knowledge and experiences that allow them to decipher the socio-ecological reality of communities. In this way, it will be possible to jointly design and think with communities about a more sustainable and equitable future in a changing and unpredictable global context.

CONCLUSIONS

Research demonstrates that social work has been influenced by the environmental crisis. This analysis determines that social work professionals must evolve toward practices that implement an adaptive approach that advocates for community resilience. The results show that the most successful interventions are those that promote community agency and enhance their risk management capabilities.

In this way, resilience is verified as a group practice rather than a product of techniques and theories. The fundamental paradigm is based on social capital, community support networks, and the collective learning that communities exhibit. Thus, the most effective strategies are applied as a result of the articulation of community resources and collaborative decision-making.

The study specifies that integrating historical ecological knowledge with scientific early warning systems is a highly beneficial strategy for community adaptation. The systematization of knowledge results in alternative solutions that go beyond the scope of quantitative protocols.

Social work professionals focus their work on promoting collective learning and community agency. Therefore, their primary task is to connect communities in such a way that resources are provided that promote their autonomy. This strategy demands the adoption of a perspective that advocates for critical accompaniment.

This research highlights that future social policies must include the principle of adaptation in their design. Thus, social protection programs must be linked to climate risk management and enable community participation throughout all stages of intervention. In line with the above, the sustainability of these practices is possible

thanks to their ability to maximize and understand the diversity of solutions to extreme climate situations.

Related to the above, the study declares that the climate crisis constitutes an ethical and political issue for the discipline of social work. Therefore, building a community resilience framework becomes a dynamic of climate justice implemented from the ground up. Communities adopt new, innovative tools to strengthen their autonomy and respect their right to sustainable life.

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FINANCING

None

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None

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