Role of Social Workers in Disaster Risk Management in India: An Analysis

Dr.B.Ramalingam[1*],Dr.M.Narsaiah[2]

[1*]Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Telangana University, Nizamabd, Telangana, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Telangana University,Nizamabd, Telangana, India

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	India, which is perched uneasily where nature frequently turns harsh, is subjected to constant shocks: cyclones roar in mercilessly, floods carve courses through communities, earthquakes shatter cities, and factories occasionally fail with lethal power. Affected most those with little to start with, always. Here, the focus shifts to social workers, who subtly alter their role in managing these crises throughout time—long before sirens ring, when turmoil ensues, and even years later, when memory fades but scars endure. Consider the flooded streets of Kerala in 2018; remember Gujarat trembling beneath debris in 2001; then consider the creeping suffocation of lives during the coronavirus outbreak. Helpers came in not only with supplies but also by providing a place for bereavement, assisting with the recovery of income, and piecemeal rebuilding neighbourhoods. They fill in the gaps that policy ignores, but their presence is subtle and goes far under official replied.
	Naturally, social workers are specifically mentioned in India's 2005 catastrophe law and national authority (NDMA). However, actual practice frequently falls short; too few are stationed where decisions are made, supplies are scarce, and their function isn't always regarded as crucial during emergencies. These experts establish direct connections between impacted communities and responsible authorities during catastrophes. They influence how help reaches individuals who are most in need because they listen first, particularly when it comes to emotional scars following trauma.
	They make sure that the voices of girls, elderly people, children, and other marginalized groups are heard during reconstruction operations. However, significant gaps continue to exist: training seldom adequately addresses crisis response, social work is rarely present in local planning groups, and evidence of program impact is still hard to come by.
	Incorporating catastrophe social work into college coursework is one way to fix this. Quick-deployment units should be formed by qualified social workers. In times of crisis, policies must make sure they participate in decision-making circles. If these steps are skipped, emergency responses might stick to antiquated aid-focused practices. Handouts alone won't build true strength, as the 2015–2030 Sendai plan outlines. The present articles will focus on Role of Social workers in Disaster risk management particularly in India and also examining NDMA 2005.
	Keywords: Disasters, Social Work, Floods, Policy, Disaster Risk Reduction, NDMA

I. Introduction

Disasters show up often here - shaped by terrain, weather, human choices. Though small on the map, this nation faces a heavy share of Earth's violent turns. Roughly fifty million lives touch crisis yearly, simply because they live where they do. Damage piles high, eating into national income like steady erosion.

From mountains to coasts, India faces many kinds of natural dangers due to its varied landscapes and weather patterns. Because cities grow fast and industries spread, new types of risks show up - ones caused by

people and machines. Though small in size compared to the rest of the planet, nearly one out of every twelve global disasters strikes here. Each year, more than fifty million individuals face harm from these events, with damage draining resources equivalent to over two percent of national income. When sudden floodwaters swept through Uttarakhand in 2013, lives changed overnight. Earlier waves - a deadly tsunami in 2004, poison gas leaking in Bhopal decades before - left deep marks too. Even slow-moving crises like the recent pandemic pushed systems to their edges.

Back then, handling disasters in India meant mostly handing out aid, run through government systems and civil protection units. A big change came when new laws arrived - the Disaster Management Act passed in 2005, along with forming the NDMA. Because of these steps, planning began focusing less on reaction, more on stopping harm before it happens, reducing damage, getting ready ahead. As things moved forward, people trained in social work started playing key roles, linking expert crisis actions with real-life needs during rebuilding.

Beginning with people rather than plans, social work shapes disaster responses by seeing environments as interconnected layers. Instead of zeroing in only on buildings or supply chains, it notices how power gaps shape survival chances. Rooted in ideas like ecosystem balance and personal resilience, the field pushes back against one-size-fits-all fixes. When crises hit, helpers guided by fairness ask who gets left behind - whether due to wealth gaps, identity labels, or physical access. These concerns keep relief actions from deepening old wounds masked as neutrality. Yet in India, proof of what works lives scattered across reports, case notes, and local programs without clear threads linking them. Little is gathered about methods that stick, results measured, or rules changed because of frontline insights.

This paper looks at how social workers operate during different stages of disasters in India, while also digging into the systemic barriers that hold back their impact, yet offers ways to boost their role in disaster management systems. Though focused on local realities, it ties international approaches to India's distinct cultural and bureaucratic landscape, which shapes how support unfolds when crises hit.

II. Theoretical Concepts and How They Help Us Understand Ideas

2.1 Ecological Systems Perspective
Looking at disasters in India, social work often follows a model seeing people shaped by layers of environment - small circles like family, wider ones like policies - all affecting risk or strength. Because of this view, it becomes clear how living areas divided by caste can make flooding worse in city slums. Tribal groups relying heavily on forests face unique threats when weather patterns shift. Instead of focusing only on damage after an event, helpers examine broken connections between neighbours, weakened services, lost traditions - what truly holds communities together. Each layer influences recovery in ways not always obvious at first glance.

2.2 Trauma and Resilience
When disaster strikes, social work steps into spaces where pain meets strength. Unlike clinical psychology, which often focuses on one person at a time, this field treats hurt as shared ground - something carried by groups, not just individuals. India faces extra challenges: talking about emotional struggles is still frowned upon, clinics are few, so helpers adapt fast - using whatever tools they can find. Out in neighbourhoods, they set up support that respects past wounds while using local strengths. Bouncing back means more than recovery - roots matter, prayers help, shared history holds things together.

2.3 Rights Based and Participatory Ways
Rights come first in how India handles crisis care today. People caught in emergencies are seen not as passive receivers but as holders of entitlements. What changes is who gets heard during rebuilding efforts. Frontline helpers now push for voices usually ignored when officials take charge. Marginalized groups - like Dalits, Adivasis, minority populations - often face silence when plans unfold. Yet space opens up when practitioners insist on inclusion through law-grounded methods. Old habits fade slightly when participation becomes non-negotiable. Those once pushed aside start shaping what aid looks like. Real influence grows where process once blocked access. Power shifts, even if slowly, under this model.

III. Disaster Management Rules and Systems in India

3.1. Disaster Management Authority
Now things are changing slowly. The year 2005 brought India's Disaster Management Act into life, shaping how crises are handled across the country. At its core stands the National Disaster Management Authority, guiding state and district bodies beneath it. Early days saw reliance mainly on engineers, along with those running systems. Back then, ideas from social sciences barely entered the room - social work even less so. Today, however, attention is turning toward broader perspectives. Fresh changes in the law, alongside

updated federal guidelines, put greater weight on emotional wellbeing and local participation. Out of nowhere, openings appear for those trained in helping people through tough times.

3.2 National Disaster Management Guidelines
Right off the bat, the 2009 NDMA guidance on psychosocial care shows something obvious - skilled social workers must be present when disasters hit. Not long after, the 2016 disaster plan backs up that idea without hesitation. Instead of dropping aid blindly, real effort goes toward connecting with people where they live. Behind every relief move should be someone who sees family patterns clearly, notices quiet hierarchies, grasps unspoken community rules. Mapping risk isn't enough if nobody talks to those most at danger. Success hides in follow-through, which means rebuilding lives, not just handing things out. Because crises don't stop hurting once cameras leave. Social workers bring tools others lack - listening closely, spotting hidden needs, staying past the headlines.

3.3 Connecting to Global Sustainability Targets
Working alone? Not India. Part of global efforts like the Sendai Framework (2015–2030), plus committed to Sustainable Development Goals - Goal 11 stands out, aiming for cities that are resilient and liveable. Prevention matters just as much as reaction when storms hit or systems fail. Root issues such as overcrowded urban areas, poverty, and harm to nature can't be ignored. Enter social workers - they link emergency aid with long-term progress. Rebuilding homes means nothing if risks remain unchanged beneath the surface. Their role shifts recovery from quick fixes toward lasting change where people live.

IV Emergency Response Actions

Flooding in Kerala during 2018 left trails of confusion, yet helpers arrived fast. Not far from soaked tents, counsellors began organizing spaces where messages could flow without clutter. Instead of waiting, they moved early - linking displaced groups with official channels that often felt distant. While supplies poured in, these guides made certain meals respected faith habits and family customs. Reuniting relatives became routine work, done quietly, without announcements. Clarity took root because someone stayed present, sorting noise into direction.

When crisis hits, social workers often turn to Psychosocial First Aid. Not therapy - just presence, stability, a hand on a shoulder. Calm replaces panic, one moment at a time. Practical steps matter most: water, shelter, someone to listen. Connection begins in small moments, like sharing silence or walking together. During the 2001 Gujarat quake, helpers moved fast through broken buildings. They offered steady voices where fear had ruled minutes before. Attention shifted quickly - not everyone needed doctors, but some did. Spotting deep distress early made space for proper care later. Help came quietly, without fanfare, exactly when it was due.

When trouble strikes, social workers stay alert for anyone left behind. Inside crowded shelters, separate toilets appear just for women, thanks to quiet efforts behind the scenes. Spaces pop up where kids can play without risk, guarded by steady eyes. Help reaches disabled individuals - not handed down, but built into daily routines. Tensions sometimes spark between communities forced together; someone is always watching, noticing old divides resurfacing through small slights or silence.

4.1 Recovery and Rehabilitation Phase
When the emergency fades, social workers change pace. Healing takes time - sometimes many months, sometimes longer. In this phase, they stay close to families, guiding them past complicated rules to claim aid, fix houses, or find work again. Following Cyclone Fani in Odisha during 2019, helpers logged each household touched by disaster. That record keeping made certain women without husbands and those with no land still received support - since powerful voices tend to crowd out quieter ones when help is handed out.

Money matters quickly after disaster strikes. Still, long-term survival weighs heavily on aid efforts too. Following the 2004 tsunami in Tamil Nadu, support arrived not by wiping out old ways, yet by opening new paths alongside them. Fishing families gained access to small loans because helpers pushed through red tape. Pressure built until lenders eased terms, freeing people from crushing repayment cycles.

Fixing broken houses always takes time. Families shaping their own spaces - that idea wins trust among helpers, mainly because traditions matter just as much as shelter itself. Safety stays nonnegotiable; flood resistance, quake readiness - they check those boxes every single time. When voices rise, usually about soil rights or missing documents, particularly hitting hard on marginalized groups like Dalits or folks living in unplanned areas, someone neutral steps close to balance the scales.

4.3 Mitigation and Advocacy
Big changes happen when social workers step into lawmaking, challenging systems that deepen crisis harm. Take the Bhopal gas leak of 1984 - efforts didn't fade after headlines did. Instead, years unfolded with demands: health services expanded, land got cleared, families received what was owed. This kind of work proves immediate aid is only part; long-term justice shapes its true core.

When disasters strike, they track injustices like forced removals or how women face harm in shelters. Not simply filing reports - these findings fuel lawsuits and new rules. Courts have used such evidence in disputes over where displaced families can live. Even laws like the Forest Rights Act gain strength through these efforts when villages start over.

V. Specialized Areas in Disaster Social Work

5.1 . Disasters risk

Floods, quakes, and storms cut deep into lives across India - not only breaking homes but shaking minds too. Trauma sticks long after waters recede or rubble clears; nightmares return nightly for some, while others numb pain through alcohol or pills. Grief shows up in silence, anger, withdrawal, sometimes never named at all. One mental health expert per hundred thousand leaves most without anyone to talk to. Neighbours lend ears when professionals can't reach them. In makeshift tents or school halls, small circles form where people share names of those gone, stories of what stayed behind. These gatherings are not clinics, yet they hold space for healing anyway. When parents are gone or schools lie in ruins, children find shelter in calm corners made by helpers offering games and steady days. Rituals held together by neighbours can mend what broken systems leave behind. Healers mix familiar customs with quiet support, knowing grief has its own old ways of moving through people. Alcohol creeps in when men feel the ground vanish beneath them after floods or war. Programs built nearby aim at stopping harm before it takes hold, shaped around those most worn down by crisis.

5.2 Protecting People Who Are More at Risk

When disaster hits, those already struggling face deeper hardship. Because of this, support work gets more focused. Consider women. If households break apart, chances of abuse and forced labour rise sharply. To respond, helpers form safety circles at shelters, keeping close tabs on female survivors. These teams push hard for medical care during pregnancy or monthly cycles - needs brushed aside too often, particularly where leadership leans male. Young ones torn from parents require swift attention. Out here, social workers jump into action, linking through nationwide groups to reconnect families. Because when disaster hits, schooling often slips - kids, particularly girls, might be kept home to earn or care, so advocates press for steady learning chances. Older adults and those living with disabilities run up against unique hurdles. Access matters: shelters and rebuild zones must work for wheelchairs, hearing aids, canes; supplies reach hands, checks arrive on time, no matter where someone lands. Among the most overlooked? Dalits and tribal populations. When powerful communities manage aid, caste bias sometimes rises. Watched closely by helpers on the ground, these situations see pressure to balance access so overlooked people are not left out.

5.3 Coordination and Networking

When disaster strikes, many players must step in - officials, nonprofit teams, global bodies, alongside townsfolk. What holds it all? Social workers do. Meetings start because they arrange them, voices connect across rooms where jargon might otherwise block understanding. Updates flow smoothly since these professionals manage records showing supplies delivered, locations covered. Forgotten corners get noticed under their watch - remote hamlets often missed when help spreads wide. Their work keeps threads tied without flash, just steady effort behind motion.

VI. Social Work Impact- Case Studies

6.1. Bhuj

Not long after the ground stopped shaking in Bhuj, something shifted quietly but deeply in how helpers showed up. People from TISS, alongside small neighbourhood groups, stayed close to villages rather than rushing through assessments. From door to door, residents shared what was lost - details that government tallies often missed, particularly where roads ended and footpaths began. This listening changed everything about rebuilding homes. Rather than handing keys to construction firms, families were trusted to lead the work. Satisfaction grew not because things looked better on paper - but because roofs matched monsoon rains, walls echoed old ways, lives fit inside again.

Out here in Kutch, social workers started something different - spaces where children come first after disaster hits. Not just classrooms, really, but shelters of routine, where lessons continued even when everything else had cracked apart. Because these spots gave kids both study time and room to breathe, they slowly changed how people thought about safety. Before long, what began small slipped into official plans across the country. How protection works in crises now carries traces of those early makeshift hubs.

6.2 The 2018 Kerala Floods and the Shift to Digital Social Work

That year Kerala drowned under floodwaters. Still, its people found a way through digital tools. Messages spread fast online instead of waiting on slow channels. A platform called Kerala Rescue emerged from shared ideas between helpers and coders. Over fifteen thousand lives changed because it existed. Some entries listed expectant mothers. Others marked those on dialysis. Elderly names filled rows too - each flagged for swift

movement. Help arrived quicker when data guided hands. Not every solution was high tech - but pairing care with phones made space for miracles.

Once the floodwaters pulled back, struggle stayed behind. Crops lay flat, animals gone, hearts heavier than before. Help arrived through local outreach, quiet efforts slowing a rise in despair among those who farm. Tensions bubbled where strangers shared tight spaces - different beliefs, old divides - all forced into one sheltered space. Support teams stepped in, not just feeding bodies but calming frayed nerves between neighbours who barely knew each other.

6.3 The Bhopal Gas Tragedy 1984 to Present Still Unresolved

Few years short of forty since the Union Carbide disaster, helpers remain close to those still living with it. Out of makeshift rooms they treat long-term sicknesses, while circles form where mothers without husbands share stories alongside children shaped by birth struggles. Pressure never drops on authorities to clear poisoned soil and tainted wells. Still present, always moving.

Years after that single night, Bhopal keeps bleeding. Not in sudden bursts, but drop by heavy drop. People who work in communities there won't let silence bury what happened. Company promises? Government reports? They met them all with evidence - generation after generation falling ill. Courtrooms became their battlegrounds, file by dusty file stacked high. Names, symptoms, stories taped together when records vanished. Memory becomes medicine when power looks away.

6.4 Covid 19 Pandemic Years of Quick Adjustments

Suddenly, Zoom became a lifeline instead of just another app. Meetings moved online because streets emptied out fast. Talking through screens felt strange at first, yet it kept connections alive. Help came in new shapes when old ways vanished overnight. Trains named for labourers started rolling again thanks to quiet coordination. Food reached hungry hands even when cities froze in place. Screens replaced doorsteps, but care still found its way through. When lockdown hit, reports of abuse climbed sharply - social workers stepped in fast, showing up where needed most. House by house, they moved through overlooked neighbourhoods, correcting false claims about vaccines. Kids without either parent? Staying with family became the goal, not group homes. Relatives were supported so little ones wouldn't be placed away.

Beyond every crisis, social workers reshaped support systems - introducing warmth, community roots, and sharper results instead of old routines. One moment at a time, they shifted how aid feels, bringing it closer to people through trust rather than structure. From chaos emerged quieter strengths - local voices leading, care becoming personal, methods turning practical. Not only did responses evolve, but the heart behind them widened too.

VII. Barriers Faced in Disaster Social Work

7.1. Lack of proper preparation

Most plans claim social workers belong in disaster efforts, yet they rarely show up where decisions happen. Run mainly by officials and officers, local disaster teams often leave them out completely. Since no regulations require expertise in social care, positions go to whoever happens to be around - often people without proper preparation. Missing trained voices means losing touch with what affected communities truly face.

7.2 Capacity and Training Gaps

Truth is, social work courses across India pour energy into therapy settings and neighbourhood projects instead they skip over crisis response. When emergencies hit, many helpers arrive unprepared - no clear grasp of urgent procedures, international relief benchmarks, or simple emotional triage steps. University syllabi lack uniform teaching on disaster roles so outcomes swing wildly depending on luck. One graduate might handle chaos calmly, another could struggle through confusion.

7.3 Resource Limitations

Steady cash keeps disaster social work alive, yet most dollars vanish into fast fixes instead of lasting care. Headlines grab attention first, which is exactly when wallets open widest. When news moves on, so do funders, leaving gaps right where healing should grow. Groups push to maintain crews nearby, though empty promises thin out over months. Help pulls back just as roots begin to form, abandoning effort mid-stride. Needs linger long after cameras pack up, yet support rarely stays that long.

7.4 Ethical Dilemmas

Caught between urgent needs and deep-rooted norms, social workers face real tension when crises hit. Moving carefully through cultural expectations becomes key, particularly where male-dominated systems shape daily life. Safety for women and kids must be weighed against tradition, yet ignoring either can backfire fast. Immediate aid often flows easily; avoiding long-term reliance on it does not. Remaining impartial helps access power, but silence can mean accepting flawed choices. Pushing too hard risks expulsion - holding back risks harm just the same.

7.5 Missing Documents and Incomplete Research

When crises hit, few track exactly how social workers help people. This gap means lessons rarely turn into clear guidelines or stronger rules. Studies usually zoom in on fixing infrastructure instead of mending community ties. As a result, quiet efforts by helpers fade behind louder narratives about concrete and steel.

VIII. Strengthening disaster social work in India

8.1 Disaster planning

Disaster planning ought to sit right at the heart of social work education. Exploring theories behind crises opens doors to understanding deeper patterns. Those hit hardest often face layered disadvantages - these realities deserve close attention. Mapping weak spots using tools such as GIS brings clarity where words fall short. Instead of just talking, learners might try out psychosocial first aid during exercises. Trauma support skills grow stronger through repetition, not lectures. Familiarity with guidelines like the Sphere Handbook shapes reliable responses. The Core Humanitarian Standard offers another anchor point. Real growth shows up when students step into live settings. Practice runs, like mock emergency drills, build readiness without risk. Placements with agencies such as NDMA or SDMA connect classroom ideas to street-level truth.

8.2 Policy Integration

Now would be right to revise the DM Act (2005), giving social workers roles across all stages of disaster response. At district levels, planning must include dedicated funds for mental health aid and safeguarding those most at risk. Procedures ought to clearly define responsibilities - running shelters, reconnecting separated families, guiding recovery efforts fall under what social workers handle.

8.3 Forming Fast Action Groups

When crisis hits, help should arrive fast. Picture teams ready - social workers trained, local and national, stepping into chaos without delay. These groups keep things steady, guided by clear ethics every step. Instead of confusion, there is structure. Working beside disaster forces, they align efforts quietly, efficiently. Not side by side, but woven together - response that moves as one.

8.4 Strengthening Community-Based Organizations

Right when things go wrong, neighbourhood teams step up fast. Because they're already there, they handle emergencies before anyone else shows up. Support from social workers strengthens these local circles over time. Instead of waiting around, people organize on their own terms. In remote spots or crowded areas alike, home-grown efforts hold things together until more help comes through.

8.5 Research and Documentation

A new disaster social work research hub might change India's emergency response for good. Instead of copying ideas from elsewhere, it builds methods right here, using local insight and real experience. Knowledge moves faster when stored in one clear place, shared openly across regions. By teaming up with universities, studies stay rooted in community voices - not just theory. Answers emerge where people live, not only in reports or offices.

8.6 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Out of thin air, disaster support can't appear. Working alongside climatologists, city designers, or wellness researchers shapes stronger responses to deep issues like lack of resources or damaged ecosystems. When emergency aid links with long-term climate planning, solutions stick around longer than temporary patches. Real strength grows slowly, not in bursts.

IX. Conclusion

Role of social workers is very much crucial in India in operating Disaster risk management. Floods, storms, and quakes strike India more fiercely now than before. Because of this shift, handling crises means going beyond fixing bridges or handing out tents. At its core, the response must centre lives, fairness included.

A fresh face in crisis zones often means change happens slower than it should. Because of the training of social workers, these professionals understand community struggles well, so solutions tend to be grounded instead of rushed. Even then, during floods or pandemics, leaders overlook them every single time. What shows up more is hesitation, not help. Truth sits deeper than pipes or power lines. Not every fix lives in blueprints or budgets. Change sticks when people address fear, neglect, and silence - those quiet forces turning storms into lasting harm. Voices rise where helpers listen first. Support grows through trust, not speed. Fair outcomes start long before rebuilding begins.

One step at a time, India must treat disaster-related social work as essential. Not just talk, but actual training, sharper rules, because without skilled people, progress stalls. Meeting global pledges like the Sendai

Framework depends on it. So does hitting Sustainable Development Targets. Resilience grows where support is steady, not scattered. When communities face crisis, presence matters more than plans.

When the dust settles, fixing a broken bridge quickly matters less than restoring people's sense of worth. Holding neighbourhoods intact often hinges on quiet efforts behind the scenes. Fairness in healing doesn't happen by accident. Support from trained helpers shapes whether progress sticks. Leave that piece out, and something stays missing. Any way the role of social workers in disaster risk management is highly appreciable in India and social workers always have respect.

X. Reference:

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