

Social Work In Times of War: Surviving Invasion and Learning from Disaster Interventions for Ukraine

Lena Dominelli

Stirling University

Email: lena.dominelli@stir.ac.uk



BE THE DIFFERENCE

Context

- The cacophony of an unexpected war in a peaceful Europe catches Ukrainian social workers unprepared.
- Putin's aggression, a combination of ethnic nationalism, a land grab, and scooping up of Ukraine's resources including minerals, fossil fuels and fertile agricultural land is an assertion of masculine bullying consistent with hegemonic, patriarchal controlling masculinity.
- Survival and defence of Ukrainian homes – identity and belonging provide a powerful motivating power.
- An unjust David and Goliath scenario captures peoples' imagination.
- Putin's War exacerbates the climate crisis and destroys world security – food, fossil fuels which are funding his War, and peace.
- Global solidarity is a crucial ingredient in maintaining morale.
- Social workers display solidarity through their international, regional and national organisations.



Chaos and uncertainty the texture of daily life

- Imagine the scene – a damp, dark bunker, the only light from your smart phone and torches; babies crying, adults weeping, students trying to study, teachers trying to teach, social workers risking their lives between curfews to provide services to isolated families – women, children, older people, disabled people; food and medicines in short supply.
- Putin attacks built infrastructures, e.g., power, communications, water, homes.
- Chaos and uncertainty are woven into everyday life as the ‘new normal’.
- Questions without answers.
Why is no one dealing with Putin’s violation of international law?



Supporting Ukrainian social workers

- Ukrainian social work academics, practitioners and students ask for solidarity and help through the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and their regional associations.
- Approached through IASSW on 24 Feb 2022 and engaged in solidarity which began as simply listening to what the Ukrainian social workers wanted. Darja Zavirsek and Lena Dominelli key representatives for IASSW.
- Formation of Social Workers for Peace (SW4P) in late February with support of IASSW, BASW (British Association of Social Workers) and University of Stirling (no additional resources). Donations through Ukrainian organisations continue to be sorely needed.

Social Work for Peace (SW4P): A Bottom-up Model of Solidarity

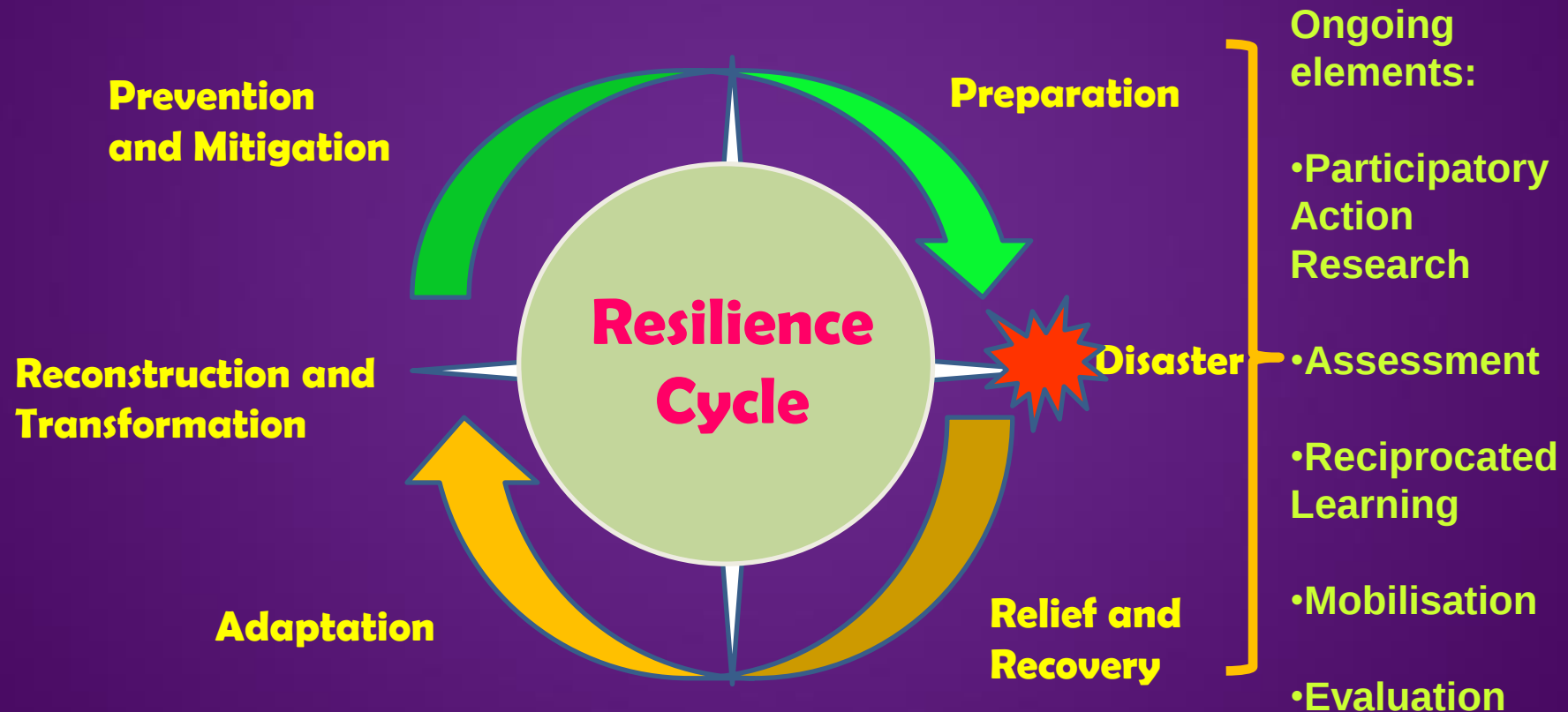
SW4P – a network to support, endorse and express solidarity for Ukrainian social workers globally.

Ukrainians request:

- Donations, mainly monetary (made to organisations based in Ukraine as more inclusive and know local needs, e.e.g, Ukrainian Red Cross), but also resources like power generators as hard to obtain.
- Information giving and sending messages asking for support to the rest of the world.
- Training to address issues social workers face and enabling students to graduate this year. These are:
 - Trauma-informed practice (individual and collective).
 - Violence in War, especially the rape of women and young girls, masculinity and war, women's bodies as symbols of the nation.
 - Community social work.
 - Disability.
 - Disaster-based social work.
- Eventually tensions emerged in Ukrainians' views and approaches to the people of Russia supporting Putin's assaults, many of whom did not know of the War (sold as a 'military operation to protect Ukrainians from neo-Nazis').
- Mentoring as a form of needed support and promote self-care.
- Recognising and celebrating social workers who risk their lives, some have been raped and killed.
- Promoting self-care and peer support as a way of surviving in tough circumstances.
- Preparing for the reconstruction phase should begin now.



Disaster Risk Reduction Cycle



Lessons Learnt

The lessons learnt from the Assault Against Ukraine so far cover the following:

- Peace cannot be taken for granted but constantly worked for and maintaining it requires vigilance.
- Global solidarity is crucial in maintaining morale in a war-torn country and among external supporters.
- Support should be physical, emotional and intellectual.
- Financial donations sent to local organisations to purchase materials locally are preferred.
- Responses to grassroots demands include mentoring of social work academics, practitioners and students.
- Social work education and training to include disaster interventions including war at all levels of the curriculum (MSc at Stirling).
- Understanding the impact of hegemonic masculinity, substance abuse (alcohol and drugs), abuse and torture of women, children and other men, and use of women's bodies as symbols of the nation and significance to men humiliated by attacks on women.
- Recognise social workers' courage to deliver services while risking their lives, and promote self-care in extreme circumstances.
- Support of displaced persons/forced migrants has to occur internally and externally.
- Support of externally displaced persons/forced migrants includes:
 - practising to uphold social justice, human rights, environmental rights, and anti-oppressive principles of practice.
 - creating welcome packs with essential information about the locality, its services and organisations.
 - having safeguarding procedures in place for all new arrivals.
 - ensuring that resources are available for the new arrivals and people who feel 'left behind'.
 - preparing the local population for their arrival and arranging cross-cultural social events.
 - helping Ukrainians to document war crimes to hold war criminals accountable for their actions.
 - understanding individual and collective forms of trauma.
- Being aware of and working through all the phases of a disaster.
- Making the destruction of the environment by discharging military ordinance a crime against humanity and an environmental crime.
- Social workers need to be prepared to support people against the world bullies who can attack any country at any time.
- The Russian assault on Ukraine is serious because Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, violating its Charter and making a mockery of the international rule of law. **What can social workers do about this? Discuss.**
- **Should Russia be removed or suspended from the Security Council? Discuss.**
- **What lessons can you apply that are relevant to your situation? Discuss.**

