

Transformative Social Work: Anti-Oppressive Practice with a Green Social Work Lens

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Introduction

With the growing impacts of environmental-related emergencies on communities around the world, the call for climate action is more imperative than ever. Climate-related emergencies have a significant impact on mental health and socio-economic dimensions. The trauma experienced creates an immediate and severe need for mental health and social services. A community's ability to recover from climate-related emergencies is dependent on its ability to adapt and respond to disasters. "Green Social Work" connects the importance of social and environmental justice – climate justice – in a holistic approach. An anti-oppressive social work practice can bridge the gap between marginalized communities with climate justice offering a humanist lens when dealing with disaster responses and recovery by transforming policy towards more effective and sustainable resources.

(Dominelli, 2012; Payne, 2020)

Environment Injustice

Environmental injustice is most obvious when communities are disproportionately impacted by or exposed to environmental risks and hazards while restricted access to essential environmental services. Environmental Justice and sustainability are closely intertwined.

The Facts:

- Climate change is projected to lead to an additional 250,000 deaths annually between 2030 and 2050.
- Some countries are more affected than others by climate change due to their resources and adaptability.
- Low-income communities are at a higher risk of climate change hazards such as floods, storms, and droughts due to inadequate infrastructure and health care.
- Coastal areas and small island nations are more susceptible to the impacts of climate change.
- Indigenous populations that rely on subsistence farming have limited options for adapting to climate change threats.

Center for Sustainable Systems, University of Michigan (2023)

Community Resilience

Community Resilience depends on the adaptive capacities of individuals and their community in response to adversity.

Quality of resilience is related to psychological well-being as mental health issues among disaster affected populations is two to three times higher as they experience higher levels of:

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Trauma
- Stress

A community-based participatory research study by Lalani and Drolet (2019) interviewed community members and social service providers of Southern Alberta small towns and rural communities to investigate the impact by the Southern Alberta 2013 floods on the community member's mental health.

It was discovered that rural communities need additional assistance, concern, and consideration. Green Social work can advocate for a community's mental health, fortitude, and welfare while considering the associated environmental issue.

References

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What is "Green Social Work"?

"Green Social Work", pioneered by Lena Dominelli (2012), combines social work approaches and environmental issues with a new dimension. Green Social Work transforms socio-political and economic dimensions to ensure policy changes and sustainable social transformations that enhance the well-being of all of humanity and the planet.

Green Social Work aims to promote:

- Equality
- A thriving and sustainable physical environment
- Social inclusion
- Resilience in social, physical, and policy
- Sustainability
- Fair resource distribution
- Empowerment

Green social workers, in collaboration with residents and specialists, uses comprehensive strategies that unite people in safeguarding their physical, social, economical, and cultural aspects disaster recovery.

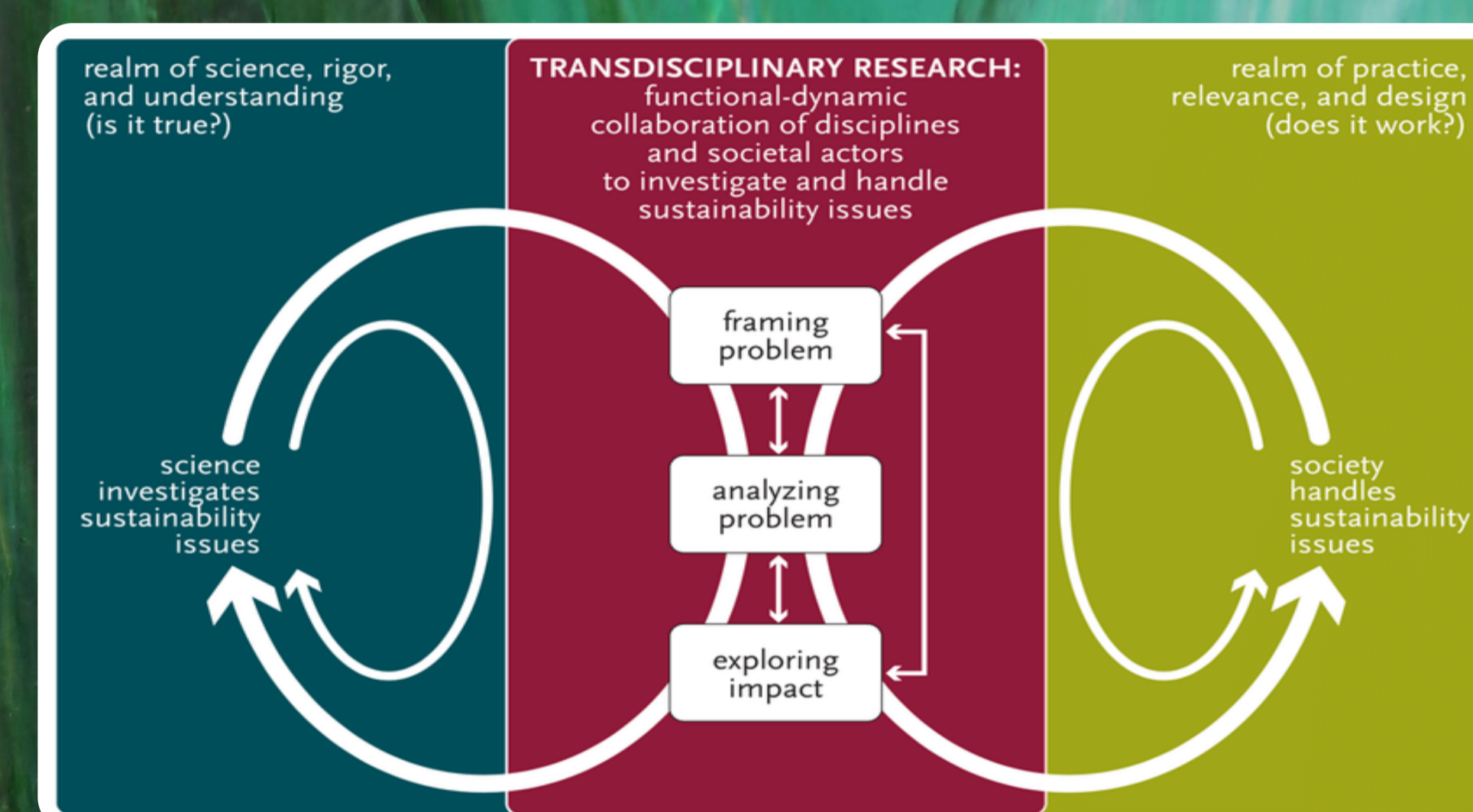


Follow the QR code to watch a webinar by Dr. Lena Dominelli as she discusses current social work climate disaster research and what this means for frontline practitioners.

The Critical Role of Social Work in Environmental Justice

- Advocate for social and environmental rights.
- Support the motion to protect the environment, enhancing the well-being of humans, physical ecosphere, and environmental justice.
- Promote diverse local, national, regional and international partnerships to promote residents' well-being and the earth's health and exploitation.
- Empower marginalized individuals and communities impacted by environmental policies and practices.
- Mobilize residents to protect their local environment.

Payne (2020)



Transdisciplinary Benefits to Green Social Work

The multifaceted effects of environmental emergencies severely impact a community's physical health, mental health, and overall well-being. These intricate challenges must be tackled through a combination of integrated and transdisciplinary expertise and approaches.

Transdisciplinary Research's impact Green Social Work

- Increases capacity to address emergencies with a multi-dimensional lens.
- Enhances comprehension among difference societal proportions.
- Helps Social Workers better mobilize their expertise.
- Enform meaningful policy change and decision making.
- Strengthen capacity to effectively respond to environmental emergencies.
- Encourage the integration of the Green Social Work into the educational system.

Wu & Greig (2022)

Recommendations

Social workers duty and ethical obligation to enhance the quality of living for everyone.

Payne (2020) proposes three areas of practice where social workers play a role:

- Social workers are advised to consider the influence environmental degradation** has on clients' health as they increase the risk of cot deaths, hindered lung development, obesity, and mental health issues.
- Enhance the availability of outdoor spaces** as they can help improve individuals' mental well-being and foster community integration.
- Social workers can help the transition towards a new social agreement** by creating connections between environmental and social transformations while raising awareness about the detrimental effects of excessive consumption and production.