

# Integrating Environmental Justice and Sustainability in Social Work Practice



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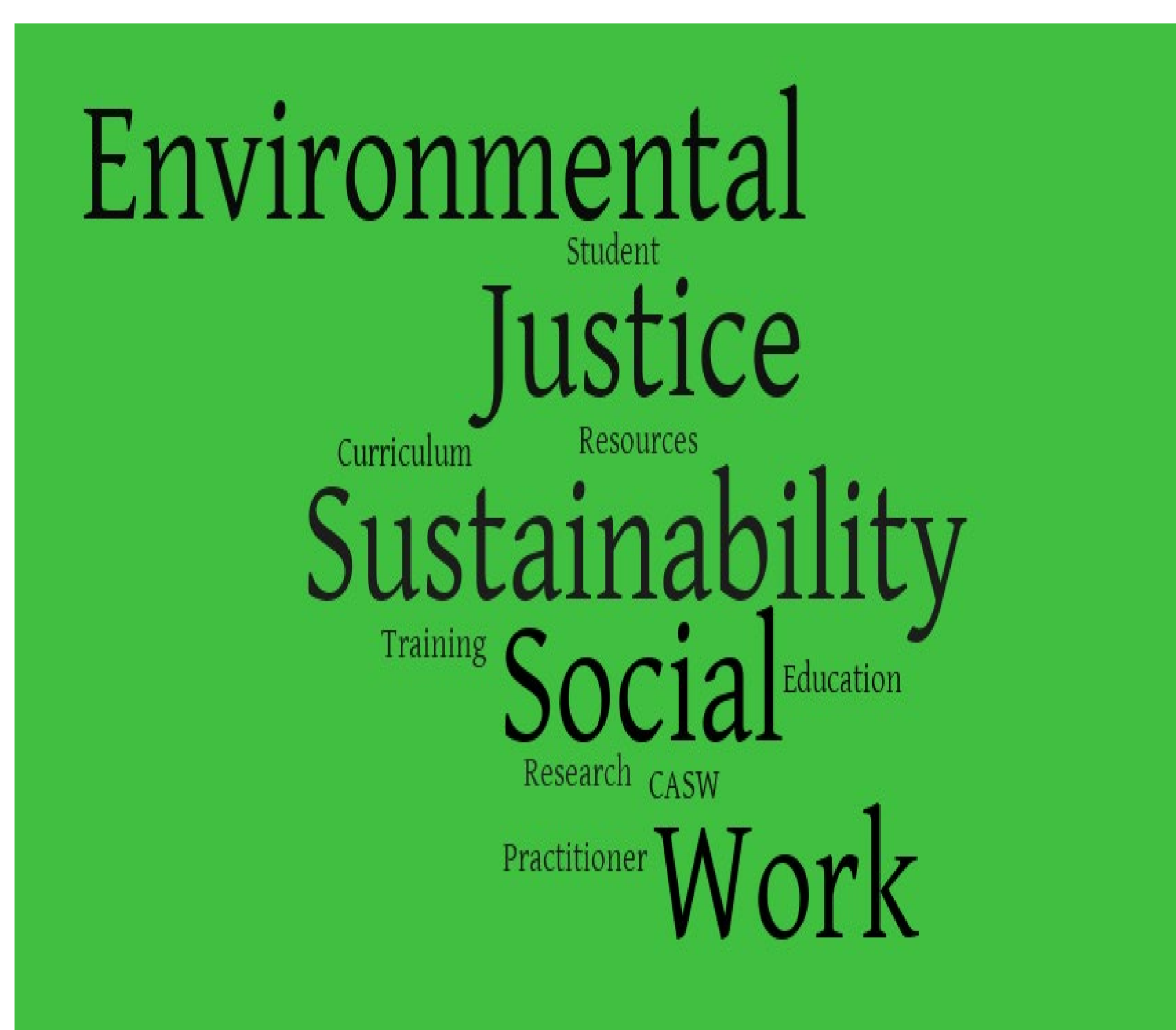
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## Abstract

- The impacts of climate change, ecological degradation, and environmental injustice are dramatically affecting the quality of all life on Earth for people and the planet. Social workers have a critical role to play in reconciling divergent interests, values and worldviews, toward just outcomes particularly for marginalized groups.
- The goal of this study is to understand how environmental justice and sustainability can be advanced in diverse areas of social work practice in Canada.
- This study seeks to 1) explore conceptualizations of environmental justice and sustainability in social work practice; 2) identify new opportunities and challenges at the micro, mezzo, and macro level in social work practice; and 3) document and exchange resources, practices, and strategies that support the integration of environmental justice and sustainability in social work practice.
- It is expected that the project will create new knowledge that informs professional development, policy and position papers, and leads to the creation of new practice resources.

## Introduction

- The social work profession is at an important developmental milestone in determining what constitutes social work practice from a human rights and global justice perspective, to ensure justice and equality as well as civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural rights (Drolet et al., 2022; Jarvis, 2013; Liu & Flynn, 2021; Maschi et al., 2019).
- As a profession founded in principles of social justice, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) acknowledges the reality of climate change and encourages social workers to educate, advocate, and be the change they want to see in the world (CASW, 2020). Social work in Canada is at the beginning of a recognizable environmental turn (Wilson et al., 2022).
- Despite the increase in scholarly attention, students (Decker Sparks et al., 2019) and professionals (Nesmith & Smyth, 2015) report challenges incorporating consideration for the environment into their practice.
- Therefore, all 43 accredited Canadian schools of social work will be required to expand their curriculum to effectively support practitioners and students in their efforts to integrate sustainability and environmental justice in their work.



## Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be used by social work institutions and educators, to inform curriculum development and training programs for new and practicing social workers.

This study will assist the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) to develop and implement evidence-based policies and strategies for advancing environmental justice and sustainability in social work practice. The study will uncover a critical understanding of the opportunities and challenges to incorporating sustainability and environmental justice in Canada and serve as a catalyst for further research.

## Research Questions

1. How are environmental justice and sustainability understood and applied in social work practice in Canada?
2. What new socio-environmental vulnerabilities, issues, or concerns are emerging in social work practice?
3. What professional development opportunities exist to support practitioners and students in integrating environmental justice and sustainability into their practice?
4. What is needed to transform social work practice to better integrate environmental justice and sustainability?

Are you a social work student, practitioner or educator?

Participate in our study.

English/Anglais

Français /French



## Methodology



- The study utilizes a mixed method approach to address the research questions:
- **Phase I:** Quantitatively explore the current engagement status of environmental justice and sustainability among Canadian social work practitioners and students through the use of an online self-administered survey questionnaire.
- **Phase II:** Qualitatively examine the challenges, concerns, and opportunities to better integrate environmental justice and sustainability into social work practice through focus group discussions covering the geographic regions of Canada.
- **Study Participants:** Social work practitioners and social work students are being recruited to participate in the study (March-April 2023).

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