



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT: WHAT BRINGS COMMUNITIES TOGETHER?

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ABSTRACT

Communities carry an essence of “we-feeling” which transcends beyond their geographical setup. Several individuals form groups, which later develop into communities. The meanings and definitions of communities differ according to nature, discipline and contexts. Similarly, each community has its own characteristics. Communities come together, especially in times of crisis. This is due to several factors such as community resilience, community cohesion, community capital etc. The paper looks into community resilience, the Hyogo Framework for Action, community engagement and the roles of social workers in bringing a community together. There is a need for enhancing and developing communities and building a resilient world. Resilient communities can decrease the impact of disasters, hazards and other crises. There is a need for developing resilient communities through social work interventions as well as employing multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary efforts. These can be generated as models of practice in a global context based on the nature and type of communities as each community possess unique traits.

Keywords: Community, resilience, community resilience, disaster, community engagement, social work

1. INTRODUCTION

By definition, communities are characterised as groups of individuals living within a specific geographical space and sharing common values and beliefs. These communities are basically just a group of individuals who are otherwise detached and leading their own lives with some elements of interconnectedness and mutual dependency. When faced with an adversity or challenge such as disasters and hazards, the individuals in communities have shown a propensity of coming together and working towards a shared goal or objective. So, what motivates these individuals or community members to come together to confront the challenge? Each individual resonates with a certain degree of communal responsibility and attributes of social cohesion. After all, humans are considered social animals by nature as Aristotle stated. Individuals cannot live alone, they are socially tamed to live in co-dependence with the people around them. One of the factors which differentiate humans from other animals is the socialization process acquired by us and our reasoning toward community togetherness. Togetherness is what structures groups into communities and an engaging community become resilient together.

2. COMMUNITY

Community is a term that differs in meaning based on the context. Community is a derivation of two terms of Latin origin – ‘com’ and ‘munis’, which translates to ‘to serve’ (Kingston, 2020). Another derivation is from the Old French term ‘comunité’ which means ‘commonness’ or ‘everybody’. Another Latin term ‘communitatem’ (communitas) is also associated with community (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2017).

Being a multidisciplinary term, there exist numerous definitions of community (stated by sociologists and other experts in the field). The majority of definitions of community fall into two types. In one, the primary focus is location or neighbourhood. The remainder are concerned with the concept of relationship, of solidarity or communion, of engagement, which may extend beyond a specific locality (Pradeep & Sathyamurthi, 2017).

Communities can be considered as complex systems consisting of people belonging to multifaceted cultural or religious groups or differentiated by terms of occupation or income earned. Despite these differences which exist within communities, many become closely knit, to achieve a common goal. This may be initiated by the mutual feeling of oneness or cohesion felt by its community members.

Fellin (2001) defines communities, formally, using three dimensions. To him, communities are “social units with the following dimensions:

1. A functional spatial unit meeting sustenance needs;
2. A unit of patterned interaction; and

3. A symbolic unit of collective identification” (Hardcastle, Powers, & Wenocur, 2004).

Each community differs from one another and is unique as thumbprints. Each community will have a different and diverse range of resources, which can be tangible or intangible. The judicious and optimum use of these resources depends on the capacity and cohesion of the community members.

3. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The etymology of the term ‘resilience’ can be rooted back to the Latin term ‘resilio’ which means to ‘jump back’ (Klein, Nicholls, & Thomalla, 2003). Twigg (2007) provides the following meanings for community resilience:

- i. Capacity to jump back or recover after the occurrence of an event
- ii. Capacity to tolerate stress or detrimental dynamism, through adaptation or resistance
- iii. Capacity to maintain rudimentary functions and structures during disasters (Twigg, 2007).

Focusing on community resilience infers enforcing greater stress on what communities can achieve for themselves while working together. It means strengthening the capacities of communities instead of focusing on vulnerability to disaster or disastrous events (Twigg, 2007). To Tainter and Taylor (2014), resilience is the ability to come back from a setback and also achieving goals of sustainability (Zhou, Perera, Jayawickrama, & Adeniyi, 2014).

The concept of ‘community resilience’ is nearly universally regarded as positive, as it is linked to increased local capability, social support, and resources, as well as a reduction in the risk of miscommunication and trauma (Patel, Rogers, Amlôt, & Rubin, 2017). Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (CART, 2013) defines community resilience as “*the ability of community members to take deliberate, purposeful, and collective action to alleviate the detrimental effects of ad-verse events*” and as “*a strategy to support and foster enhanced disaster preparedness and community recovery from such events*” (Pfefferbaum, et al., 2013).

Walpole and others (2021) state community resilience as “*a complex concept to measure owing to the fact that it emerges from the interdependencies of social, economic, natural, and physical systems*” (Walpole, Loerzel, & Dillard, 2021)

Ganor and Ben-Lavy (2003) have defined resilience by providing a focus on the innate capacities of the community as “the ability of individuals and communities to deal with a state of continuous, long term stress; the ability to find unknown inner strengths and resources in order to cope effectively; the measure of adaptation and flexibility” and as “the ability of a community to stick together and to help itself as a group, as well as the families and individuals in its midst” (Ganor & Ben-Lavy, 2003)

Norris and others (2008) state that community resilience is born out of four key factors of adaptive capacities which combinedly form a disaster preparedness plan – social capital, economic development, community competence and information and communication (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). They view resilience as a metaphor (when concerning people and their environment) and as a theory. Norris et. al. views community resilience as a set of capacities and as strategies for promoting effective disaster preparedness and response.

Community resilience is not something that is attained overnight. It requires long-term planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (PIME) of activities. It requires an investment that is organised and uses the inherent potentials, values and resources within the community. The resources include its members, organisations and institutions, capital, services and all other natural resources.

Ganor and Ben-Lavy (2003) provide six basic ingredients which constitute community resilience:

- i. Communication: Communities’ real-time information transmission about the hazards faced by it, services which can be provided and the resources which can be utilised should be communicated.
- ii. Cohesion: Community members need to support one another and ensure particular consideration for the weaker members of the community.
- iii. Coping: It refers to the ability of the community to respond immediately or take action. Coping necessitates the presence and proper operation of organisations specifically designed to deal with trauma and provide assistance in times of crisis.
- iv. Cooperation: Communities need to rely on themselves and the resources they have rather than waiting for assistance from outside. A community needs to have enhanced degrees of responsibility at the local level.
- v. Credo: It refers to the vision of the community which lays focus on a new and better future. It is considered a beam of hope.
- vi. Credibility: A new type of leadership is necessary, one that is not based on the community’s old politics, but one which is more original and focused on grassroots leadership that originates from inside the community, one that embodies the community’s uniqueness and goals (Ganor & Ben-Lavy, 2003).

Similar to communities being unique, the resilience patterns also differ among communities. Each community exhibits its own level of community resilience. This community resilience can be measured using various scales developed by experts in various fields. Some of the scales include the Community Resilience Assessment Tool by American Red Cross, Transcultural Community Resilience Scale (Cénat, et al., 2021),

PEOPLES (Kammouh & Cimellaro, 2018), Conjoint Community Resiliency Assessment Measure (Leykin, Lahad, Cohen, Goldberg, & Aharonson-Daniel, 2013), Community Resilience Index (CRI) (Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2020) etc. All the scales contain distinct domains or dimensions through which community resilience is measured. Another tool of analysis is the CoBRA (Community-Based Resilience Analysis) developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Drylands Development Centre. It is a tool which measures community resilience using certain indicators. The CoBRA methodology has four objectives:

- i. To identify the priority characteristics of disaster resilience for a target community
- ii. To assess the achievements of these characteristics by the community at the time of the assessment and also during the previous crisis/disaster
- iii. To identify the strategies and characteristics of households that are disaster-resilient
- iv. To identify the most highly rated interventions or services in building local disaster resilience (UNDP Drylands Development Centre, 2016).

Measuring community resilience can help not only in understanding where a community stands in terms of disaster risk reduction and preparedness but also in addressing challenges and shortcomings and improving the existing patterns to develop resilient communities. Learnings from communities that display a high level of community resilience can be adapted as model communities, and their practices can be studied so as to develop similar resilient communities.

Norris et. al. (2008) provide five steps that can be taken up by communities for enhancing their resilience to disasters:

- i. Economic resources are a major instrument for communities while battling disasters. Communities need to develop their economic resources which can lead to bridging the existing inequalities and reducing social vulnerability. Economic diversity should be created so that the community leaders can focus on equitable distribution of resources post-disaster.
- ii. Community members should actively participate in every step of the mitigation process. They should also have access to the social capital of the community. The resources of the community should be integrated into the response plan so as to judiciously use them.
- iii. The key to the rapid mobilisation of emergency and ongoing support services for disaster survivors is pre-existing organisational networks and relationships. There needs to be an understanding among systems so as to implement programmes quickly and efficiently.
- iv. Interventions that can enhance and protect natural social support systems in the aftermath of disasters need to be developed. This can lead to increased social cohesion among community members and enhance community resilience.
- v. Communities should exercise flexibility and focus on developing reliable and trustworthy information and communication resources that function in the face of uncertainty (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008).

Disaster research joins collective efficacy that comes from neighbourhoods with higher cohesion to more prominent community resilience, reflected in quicker recoveries from natural disasters (Borkowska & Laurence, 2021). Wiepking (2020) states that individuals come together collectively and assist communities and by helping others they make a sense of the crisis, their roles and how it adds meaning to their lives. She also states that informal network structures already existed within developing nations and individuals tend to regularly help one another (Rolland, 2020).

The key elements of resilience-building include multiple stakeholders, interconnected systems, multidimensional risk and contexts, and resilience capacities (United Nations, 2010).

Daniel Lerch (2017) talks about six foundations that are essential in building community resilience. These include:

- i. **People:** Lerch states that the power of envisioning the community's future and building its resilience resides with the members of the community. What needs to be achieved for community resilience is set up by the community members. They are the primary stakeholders of the community and have ownership and responsibility for resilience building.
- ii. **Systems thinking:** Communities are complex, interrelated systems with various subsystems. They are also affected by external factors which challenge them. The resilience of communities contributes not just to its members but also the global social-ecological system as well.
- iii. **Adaptability:** A resilient community is one which adapts to changes, but adaptation is an ongoing process in communities as the challenges faced by them are dynamic.
- iv. **Transformability:** There exists a need for constant adaptations and transformations for a community when they are faced with big challenges. If the adaptation process is slow, the challenges may exceed the capacity to cope and ultimately threaten the overall resilience. Transformability depends on three attributes in resilience science, viz., acceptance, options for transformational change and capacity for transformational change.
- v. **Sustainability:** Community resilience needs to be sustained so that other communities or future generations and ecosystems can be benefitted.

- vi. **Courage:** Courage is an important attribute needed to confront challenging situations and it should be present at the individual level as well as the community level. Courage provides the ability to take risks and build community resilience (Lerch, 2017).

4. HYOGO FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION (2005-2015) AND SENDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (2015-2030)

The Framework for Action 2005-2015 was presented in Hyogo, Japan at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in 2005 (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005). The goal of the conference was to reduce disaster loss significantly by 2015 in terms of the lives, social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries.

The Hyogo Framework for Action provided a list of five priorities for action:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

HFA has brought in significant development to the disaster management and risk reduction practices among communities. It has also progressed the Millennium Development Goals. A report for the Department for International Development (DFID, 2007) summarised HFA into five thematic areas:

1. Governance
2. Risk assessment
3. Knowledge and education
4. Risk management and vulnerability reduction
5. Disaster preparedness and response (Twigg, 2007).

HFA was endorsed by 168 member states of the United Nations in January 2005 (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005).

The limitations of HFA include the challenge of transforming national policies into local action, and the inability to address the underlying causes of vulnerability and exposure, particularly the small-scale disasters faced by developing nations (Oxley, 2013).

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) was formed as a successor to HFA. It was adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015. It attempts to guide multi-hazard management of disaster risks in development at all levels and across all sectors. The Sendai Framework has four priority areas:

1. Understanding disaster risk
2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience
4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and building back better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction (UNISDR, 2015).

The government of India was one among the first nations in the world to implement action towards the priority areas of the SFDRR. The National Disaster Management Plan of India, 2016 was formulated based on the Sendai Framework with the aim to make India disaster resilient and reduce the loss of life associated with disasters. India also established a National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2016).

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - WHAT BRINGS COMMUNITIES TOGETHER?

According to World Health Organization, community engagement is defined as “the process by which community benefit organisations and individuals build a long term relationship with a collective vision for the benefit of the community” (World Health Organization, 2017). With four main characteristics – communication, involvement, connection and strategy (Darzin Software, 2020), community engagement facilitates partnership to implement programmes of community resilience (Wells, et al., 2013).

Community, even though by definition they are termed as “close-knit” or sharing “we-feelings”, are often bound by geography and not by feelings. What often binds or brings together a community is the need to achieve a common goal or purpose. Disasters or hazards pose a threat to the existence of communities. The goal of all the community members will be to sustain and battle the challenges brought by the disaster. Community members with inherent leadership qualities emerge from situations of stress and tend to motivate others to become resilient. These leaders have the ability to prepare the community to adapt to the new situation and motivate them towards recovery. The UN report on Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies states working together toward building resilience as a dynamic, organic and iterative process (United Nations, 2010).

Communities become resilient through engagement, social cohesion and mutual support. Another vital component is effective communication. There needs to be strong communication among the community members. Collaboration results from community communication which leads to effective participation and the generation of clear and precise ideas and thoughts towards recovery. Risk communication, crisis communication and public health communication become part of this. Information and communication technology (ICT) can promote positive outcomes in communities while battling any disaster. Early warning systems and communications can help communities prepare for challenging situations together.

Patel et. al. (2017) identified nine core elements of community resilience. This includes:

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| 1. Communication | 6. Resources |
| 2. Community networks and relationships | 7. Economic investment |
| 3. Local knowledge | 8. Preparedness |
| 4. Governance and leadership | 9. Mental outlook (Patel, Rogers, Amlôt, & Rubin, 2017). |
| 5. Health | |

According to research carried out by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 2011, a resilient community shows six characteristics. A resilient community:

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| 1. Is socially cohesive. It can identify problems, prioritize them and act on them. | 4. can manage its natural resources |
| 2. is healthy and knowledgeable and meets its basic needs. | 5. is well-connected |
| 3. Have economic opportunities. It offers a wide range of employment opportunities. | 6. has well maintained and accessible infrastructure and services (University of Groningen, 2013) |

With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, more virtual or online communities also emerged. Many communities, due to the protocols of social distancing came together through virtual platforms to address the issues faced by the communities. Rheingold (1994) defines virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 2000). As per a study in India, over 38.8 per cent stated that online or virtual groups have become more important as compared to other nations (29.5%) (Business Line, 2021).

A study conducted among 9121 respondents in India shows that 5.4 per cent of people belonging to the age group 21-30 years exhibit a high practice of prevention measures of COVID-19 (Sathyamurthi & Devi, 2020). Data like these can be used to analyse the various factors such as age, gender, level of education etc. which make people work more towards community resilience. These categories of the population can be provided with more training opportunities so as to develop them into leaders of the community.

Indigenous knowledge or traditional knowledge is a key element which can strengthen communities and help them in disaster management. This knowledge might not be understood by experts while doing scientific research or study of the area. This knowledge, when added with scientific knowledge can help in the development of ideal disaster management plans as well as resilience-building plans. When communities engage together, solutions can be formed within themselves, while making use of their indigenous knowledge and resources. UNESCO has a programme named ‘Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programme’ or LINKS which fosters the incorporation of local and indigenous knowledge in global climate science and policy processes (UNESCO, 2016). This indigenous knowledge should also be incorporated into decision making regarding disaster management and resilience building. The ISDR’s 2008 report talks about indigenous knowledge for disaster risk reduction. It shows cases studies from various countries where indigenous knowledge has helped in disaster risk reduction even before scientific technologies. The report stresses the need for integrating local knowledge with modern technological advancements (UNISDR, 2008).

Communities, even though different in nature and characteristics, mostly show the behaviour of coming together as one, while faced with some adverse situations. People tend to come together toward achieving a common goal. When individuals have the feeling that the community is with them, rather than for them, they take organised efforts to sustain the community. Bringing people together for a common task or a positive change may be challenging. But with the right people to lead, those who are able to motivate others, guide them and facilitate them, individuals can be brought together and work as a group. These people in lead may be considered the ‘catalysts’ of the community. Social cohesion is a challenging task as there may exist individuals with conflicting ideologies, and also individuals who are cliques or isolates. But while facing a crisis, individuals need to be able to come together and work as a group. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how crucial community engagement and social cohesion are during a pandemic.

6. ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

The concept of community has many dimensions in community social work viz. social, relationship, spatial, civic, virtual, identity, commonality and intentional (Pradeep & Sathyamurthi, 2019). There are many experts who help communities in becoming resilient as well as socially engaged. The combined efforts of academicians and experts in disaster management, medicine, social work, social policy, psychology, and other disciplines are critical to community-based disaster management or disaster response team. Social workers have crucial roles to play in engaging the whole community towards becoming resilient. Community social workers are like social engineers or social architects who construct rapport among community members, remove hurdles and bring the community members together as one. Community social work is considered unique as it motivates the community members to be actively involved along with the social worker (Pradeep & Sathyamurthi, 2016)

Many communities show inborn characteristics of coming together as one when faced with a crisis. People with natural leadership skills emerge from within the community and will help in leading the community in preparedness, response and recovery during crises. Social workers play a vital role in identifying these people as well as other community members with strong positive attributes which can benefit the community as a whole. Social workers can help the community members to identify and prioritise their goals, identify and pool community resources, and work towards becoming resilient together.

The role of social workers is not limited to mobilising communities and assisting them in achieving the desired goals. They also help the community members to help themselves by taking up the roles of facilitator, educator, guide, social advocate etc. In a study conducted among twenty-five professional social workers in Kerala, more than half of them (52%) engage in interventions at all the three levels i.e., community or neighbourhood level, organizational or inter-organizational level and societal level, in their work with communities (Pradeep & Sathyamurthi, 2021).

Vulnerability assessment is a critical element in disaster management. Social workers can conduct an assessment of vulnerable populations in communities and prepare specific training modules for those members. Social workers can also sensitise community members to provide importance to the vulnerable population during and after a hazardous or disastrous event has occurred.

With changing social patterns and systems, the roles of social workers have also changed over time. The social workers are provided with more spectrum of work while working with communities towards achieving resilience. Crisis management and disaster management also form one of the core areas where social workers play a vital role. From spreading awareness to promoting social action, social workers are in every step of the process towards bringing communities together.

The efforts of social workers can cause a ripple effect at the community level (Florida State University, 2020) and motivate other communities in following the same. Social workers can assess and measure a community's resilience, social cohesion and social capital and make use of the social work methods, tools and techniques to develop model communities. This can be further developed as theories and practised globally depending on the nature of the community, and hence work at the macro-level of social work. As the theme of the World Social Work Day (15th March) 2022 states 'Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind' (International Federation of Social Workers, 2021), social workers can also employ a multidisciplinary approach including experts from other fields such as disaster management experts, psychologists, doctors, etc. Transdisciplinary efforts can also be taken up utilising the efforts of non-academicians, and the community members who form the nucleus of the team. Diverse members in a group can bring in diverse opinions, thoughts and ideas which can be collaborated and formulated into the ideal or needed one.

7. CONCLUSION

Communities, even though diverse in nature, are unified by their sense of belonging. Each community paves a different path toward attaining resilience and fruits a different goal while doing so. Community resilience is an important aspect that needs to be studied so as to reduce the impact of hazards and disasters in the future. With the pandemic, the world saw many communities fighting together as well as the failures of those who were not able to achieve this. Learnings can be inferred from these to develop communities to become more resilient, making them less vulnerable to destructive social changes. Community engagement and social cohesion can also positively increase the overall well-being of community members. Studying what brings any community to come together as one helps in understanding the distinct characteristics of the communities, the resources within it and how they can be utilised judiciously. Being part of a resilient and engaging community means the community members are well-coordinated, motivating and offering mutual support, and evolving together towards positive growth.

Reviewing Hyogo Framework's updates, it can only be considered partially successful. With the increasing number of hazards, calamities and disasters, there is a need for revision of the frameworks of HFA towards building resilience. There is also a need to include the enhancement of grassroots-level activities at the village or community level to improve disaster resilience. The Sendai Framework and its priority areas should be taken into consideration while forming disaster management plans by nations.

Social workers and policy developers have vital roles to play in developing resilient communities. There needs to be multidisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary efforts towards this. This can mould the future for less risk-affected communities instead, more strong communities which stand together. What begins in small communities can be taken up to larger communities and in end, develop global communities as well. Indigenous knowledge needs to be incorporated with scientific knowledge, which can aid in the development of highly resilient communities. There is a need for developing ideal or model communities and spreading this to develop more such communities. Building resilience is not just limited to the community members but also the various stakeholders, institutions and systems associated with the community. There is a need to co-build all these systems together to construct and enhance resilient communities.

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