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PO Box 121
Botsford, CT 06404
www.nacsw.org
888.426.4712

**SOCIAL WORKERS' FAITH AND SERVICE DELIVERY TO NATURAL
DISASTER AND TERRORIST VICTIMS: INSIGHTS FROM SIX
NATIONAL STUDIES**

By: Leola Furman, Torill Danbolt, and Einar Vetvik

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Social Workers' Faith and Service Delivery to Natural Disaster and Terrorist Victims:

Insights from Six National Studies

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Leola Furman, Associate Professor Emeritus, University of North Dakota

Torill Danbolt, Assistant Professor, Diakonhjemmet University College, Oslo, Norway

Einar Vetvik, Associate Professor, Diakonhjemmet University College, Oslo, Norway

Abstract: It is often difficult to determine what kinds of religious and spiritual interventions and assessment tools Christian social workers approve of, and use, in their practices. Six national samples will be used to examine multiple views on the integration of religion and spirituality in disaster and trauma relief.

Disasters affect individuals and communities around the world (Dahlberg). Whether a disaster occurs in the form of flooding, tornado, hurricane, or terrorist attacks, such events can impact migration, traumatic stress and mental health in diverse service populations, including vulnerable populations, and the larger community (Rosenfeld). The religious and spiritual orientations of individuals and communities can serve as a source of strength and resilience, but also as a source of existential crisis. Faith can play a positive role in Christian social workers' practices and provide a compatible interpretive framework that enhances core social work values, which can open avenues of resilience, reconciliation and forgiveness in the aftermath of traumatic events (Hugen). Furthermore, the supportive use of religious and spiritually based assessment and helping interventions can serve as vehicles that both express and model God's Love.

Although there have been major strides forward in the professional integration of religion and spirituality, it is often difficult to ascertain what kinds of religious and spiritual helping activities and assessments Christian social workers employ in their practices, and to what extent they approve of such activities. In response to these concerns, Christian social workers were selected from six independent national samples in the US (1997, 2008), United Kingdom (2000), Norway (2002, 2011), and New Zealand (2006). Respondents in each country reported their level of agreement regarding the appropriateness of raising the topics of religion and spirituality, respectively, with clients suffering the effects of a natural disaster. Christian social workers were significantly less likely ($p < 0.001$) in the UK, Norway, and NZ, to feel that it was appropriate to raise the topic of religion, when compared with US workers in 1997 and 2008.

Christian social workers in the UK and Norway also were significantly less likely ($p < 0.001$) to approve of raising the topic of spirituality, than Christian workers in NZ and the US (1997 and 2008). Such significant differences bring to the forefront the complexity and challenges of integrating religious and spiritual helping activities when aiding disaster victims. The comparative findings can be used to inform theory construction and curriculum design, to advocate for the acquisition of skills that permit practitioners to deliver services to disaster victims that also take into account their religious and spiritual needs, and to build a knowledge base that will aid social workers in their disaster relief work.

Dr. Furman has lived through a natural disaster, and Professors Vetvik and Danbolt have experienced the effects of a terrorist attack in Norway. From this vantage point, the presenters will be discussing, within the context of terrorism and disaster relief, various approaches and interventions used by social workers for integrating religion and spirituality in practice, and exploring when and how to integrate religion and spirituality in practice with clients that conforms to professional standards for ethical practice. The findings offer insights on how the primary intervention of incorporating religion in practice is perceived by Christian social workers in the US, and in other countries.

Bibliography

Dahlberg, D. (2002). Organizational involvement in disasters. *Social Work & Christianity*, 29(2), 103-121.

Hugen, B. & Scales, T.L. (Eds) (2008). *Christianity and social work*. Botsford, CT: NACSW.

Rosenfeld, L., et al. (2005). *When their world falls apart*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.

NOTE: Summary tables of selected findings will be distributed only to participants.