

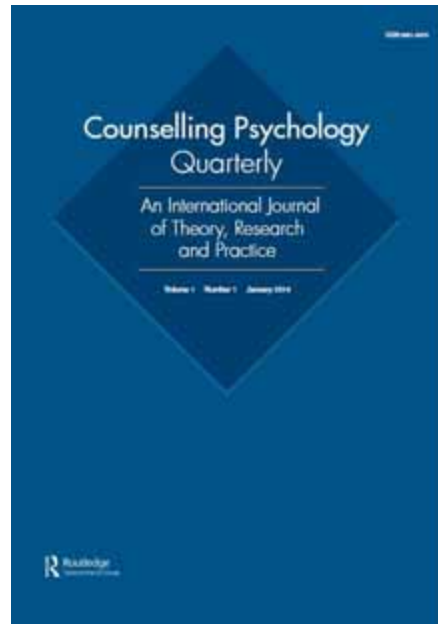
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**Social justice disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy: The case of the
Northern California wildfires**

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Social justice disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy: The case of the Northern California wildfires

Using our professional experiences with natural disaster relief, as well as existing theory, the authors introduce an equity-oriented framework—*Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy*. We then present the case of the 2017 Northern California wildfires using responses from 259 individuals who were living in the region of the Northern California wildfires—the most destructive fires in California state history. We collected qualitative and demographic data on each participant three months after the fires ended. Qualitative data included detailed written reflections to a prompt from each participant in response to an online questionnaire. A thematic analysis using open, axial, and selective coding was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the context, circumstances, and outcomes of recurring themes, concepts, categories and their relationship to core themes. Results reveal six themes including: loss and displacement; physical and psychological impact; exploitation; social inequities against vulnerable communities; community strengths and support; and the need for support and services. The themes highlight essential directions for Counseling Psychologists working with survivors in response to a natural disaster. We offer recommendations for training, theory, counseling, and research, as a means for supporting and advocating for clients psychologically, socially, and emotionally in the context of a natural disaster. Keywords: disaster relief; wildfires; Counseling Psychology; social justice; equity focused

Social justice disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy: The case of the Northern California wildfires

The eruption of Hawaii's Kilauea volcano, the devastation of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and other islands of the Caribbean, and the earthquake in Mexico City. These are just three examples of the many natural disasters that occurred throughout the world in 2017. These disasters deeply transform communities in complex ways and pose numerous logistical and practical challenges for relief efforts. Regardless of the geographic location and setting, there is a need for Counseling Psychologists to offer equity-oriented psychological support to impacted communities; support that is strengths-focused and rooted in local culture (Imura, 2006). However, there is a dearth of literature exploring the numerous possibilities for equity-oriented counseling practices in disaster relief efforts (Bowman, & Roysircar, 2011; Parham, 2011; Rosen, Matthieu, & Norris, 2009; Tominaga, 2018). Moreover, although Counseling Psychology training programs often include courses in crisis intervention, the majority of students in these programs do not have the opportunity to engage in meaningful disaster relief counseling due to multiple practical (difficulty of traveling to a disaster site) and professional (need a specific level of training or clearance) challenges.

In fact, the authors conducted a targeted content analysis of the curriculum in Counseling Psychology doctoral programs in the U.S. revealing that crisis intervention courses are rarely required, and when included, they do not focus specifically on disaster relief training. The handful of courses that do specialize in disaster relief are in public policy and administration programs, or programs that focus on emergency management. Hence, there is an inherent bias in Counseling Psychology for professional practice models underscoring individually-based

services that offer limited attention to culturally meaningful, liberatory, and social justice disaster relief, advocacy, and counseling in solidarity with impacted communities (Bolin, & Kurtz, 2018).

In this manuscript, we begin by drawing on personal experiences to offer an analysis of the sociocultural and political positioning of our disaster responses and to capture the patterns of power relations we observed within emergency management systems. We then present a new theoretical approach, *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy*, emergent from our personal narratives. Finally, we present data from the recent Northern California wildfires (also known as the Northern California firestorm) to illuminate key issues facing Counseling Psychologists working with impacted communities.

Background

The first author (we will add name after blind review)

My interest in disaster-response emerged as a result of frequent exposure to earthquakes in Mexico. As a Mexican citizen, I witnessed how impoverished and indigenous communities suffered from hazardous conditions in part due to the corporate interests of emergency managers and the presence of political neglect and corruption within emergency management systems. What started as an analysis of the inflexible bureaucratic nature of systems that excluded specific communities in the context of disaster, transformed into active expressions of solidarity with disadvantaged communities, years later. Today, as a Counseling Psychologist, my disaster responses focus on resisting and confronting oppressive forces within hegemonic emergency relief systems.

In 2017, I organized and led a disaster-response team to assist evacuees displaced by Hurricane Harvey and the Northern California wildfires (Author Citation, 2018). My primary role as a disaster-response supervisor involved training Counseling Psychology students to create a safer space in which hurricane and wildfire survivors could efficiently secure relief resources. Before engaging in any form of humanitarian assistance, students were asked to examine the power of their position as disaster-responders and to envision how they would challenge dominant relief systems that perpetuated the exclusion of some communities and or that interfered with community solidarity and equity. The objective of this examination was to help students understand that social power matters in disasters and to take on the challenge of dismantling systemic oppressive practices within emergency management systems. Once students increased their awareness, training centered around the use of a systemic, equity-focused, and strengths-based approach to disaster-recovery.

Using a systemic, equity-focused, and strengths-based approach to disaster recovery, Counseling Psychology students became sensitive to the unique stressors and presenting concerns of underserved communities, in particular, undocumented families, LGBTQ individuals, and others at the intersections of systems of oppression. Students noted that while the majority of crisis-responders had kind and compassionate intentions, the design and structure of evacuation shelters and emergency management systems, failed to address the urgent needs of some communities, including transgender individuals and mixed-immigration-status families. Inadequate outreach to these communities left survivors unprotected and exposed to additional post-disaster stress. Therefore, our disaster-response team created a humanitarian tiered response (Author Citation, 2018) that substantively outreached to underserved communities by (1) raising

funds through compassionate crowdfunding to purchase gift cards for marginalized individuals, including non-citizens and at-risk transgender evacuees, (2) using social media tools (e.g., facebook and twitter) to communicate with local agencies that we had funds available for communities that were not adequately assisted at evacuation shelters, (3) and using SMS to organize disbursement of supplies across local organizations. As a result of the successful implementation of this tiered response, our students established an extensive network of connections and productive collaborations with grass-roots organizations which facilitated the promotion of the fair, nurturing, and caring treatment of displaced marginalized communities. Our students understood that as agents of social change, they had an ethical and professional responsibility to respond to social power in different hazard contexts, be in solidarity with communities on the margins, and take collective action to address their unique challenges.

The second author (we will add name after blind review)

My commitment to social justice disaster relief is influenced by an “unnatural” disaster of another kind--the 911 attacks. I was headed to the World Trade Center when the 911 terrorist attacks happened. I recall seeing the plane sticking out of the tower, smoke, and confusion. Bewilderment soon turned into chaos. Then the impossible happened, the towers both came down, and there was dust and gnarled metal everywhere. I spent the next several weeks working on the ground with other volunteers, psychologists, charity organizations, gathering supplies, clothes, and other necessities and trying to understand what services we--as Counseling Psychologists--could provide. What I did not realize was how much this horrific event would illuminate the existing oppressive structures already in New York (Crane et al. 2014). Many businesses in low-income communities were forced to close leaving employees scrambling for

jobs across the Hudson River (Bram, Orr, & Rapaport, 2002; Davis, 2011). Power and cell phone lines were quickly restored in wealthy neighborhoods and delayed in low-income areas (Ross, 2011).

After several weeks, I was invited to work along with other psychologists, politicians, and community members to better understand the impact of the 911 attacks on the experience of Asian and South Asian Americans--many of whom perished when the buildings collapsed. What the media failed to cover was that many of the employees and service workers in the World Trade Center were Asian and South Asian American. This work continued for more than a year, and we discovered that many in this community were struggling with the unfair emergency management policies implemented following the attacks. For example, “immediate, nuclear” family members only and not extended family members, received financial support from emergency management agencies. Therefore, extended family members who were supported by victims who died in the Twin Towers, received no financial support. I presented these findings on New York 1 news and in a series of workshops, published manuscripts, and conference presentations (Asian American Federation of New York, 2003; Author Citation, 2006; 2007). I also worked for several years with the New York Department of Education to provide systemically embedded relief efforts in New York City schools (Author Citation, 2015). This work involved culturally responsive and sustainable workshops and trainings for teachers and counselors as advocates who could continue to create equitable systems of support (e.g., counseling services for students, families, staff who experienced trauma from 911) for impacted communities.

When I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area from New York, I continued my interest in disaster relief and recovery with the Samoan community in San Francisco as well as in American Samoa and Western Samoa. In 2009, a massive earthquake and tsunami struck the Samoas. American Samoa--protected by the United States--received water, electricity, and much-needed supplies soon after. However, Western Samoa received limited media attention and support. I worked closely with the Samoan-American community in San Francisco to gather supplies and identify needed resources with local politicians and community organizations. One great need that emerged was “on the ground stress management training” in Western Samoa for teachers to work with the many students who saw their peers, friends, and family members perish when the tsunami struck the many schools along the coastline of Western Samoa. I organized a series of disaster relief and stress management training workshops for teachers and community workers in Western Samoa and provided direct support to the students and teachers there in the form of arts and culture-based counseling programs. The training involved recognizing, assessing, and addressing students who were having difficulty coping with the disaster. This work continued for a few years to ensure the many stages of recovery were addressed and supported.

In these two examples, as well as others, I found that the communities I partnered with had incredible strengths that fueled relief efforts. I realized that working in solidarity with these groups entailed working across multiple ecological settings--such as schools, community agencies, neighborhoods and homes and holistically--supporting their emotions, relationships, physical health, and logistical needs. I also found that there were no few quick fixes in these efforts and that I needed to manage the many crises at hand but more importantly, work collaboratively and systemically to develop long-term support systems.

Social justice disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy; An equity-oriented framework for disaster response

Reflecting on our disaster relief experiences, relevant literature, and our work training graduate students in Counseling Psychology programs, we identified an urgent need for a more equity-focused approach to disaster relief, advocacy, and counseling. Historically and presently, disaster relief (Rostis, 2012) and humanitarianism more generally, are colonizing processes that pathologize impacted communities as “helpless” “victims” who need to be saved by outsiders from the dominant and privileged group. Rostis (2012) contends that the role of colonialism in humanitarianism discourse serves a purpose in setting up “helper” and “victim” dichotomies that are hierarchical in nature. These helper and victim dichotomies highlight how relief efforts are not caring practices, but regulatory ones that impose disciplinary structures. We believe Counseling Psychologists are uniquely situated to offer equity-centered disaster relief advocacy and counseling given our strong focus on client strengths (Smith, 2006), stress-management (Tominaga, 2013), self-awareness (Miller, 2012), collaboration, ecological systems, and the development of the whole person (Bowman & Roysircar, 2011).

We introduce an equity-oriented framework—*Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* to provide direction for Counseling Psychologists in response to a natural disaster. Using our professional experiences with natural disaster relief, as well as existing theory, we present the following critical components of our equity-oriented framework: (1) collaborating with local communities to fight inequities; (2) identifying and promoting community strengths; (3) working holistically with impacted communities; (4) understanding the impact of the disaster across multiple ecological contexts; and (5) developing long-term systems of support.

We believe that *collaborating with local communities to fight inequities* must first involve the counselor entering a community space in a way that maintains the integrity and humanity of the group members (Author Citation, 2007; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). Similar to Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Hacker, 2013), *collaboration with communities* highlights the equal engagement of community members at all stages of the relief efforts from the first point of entry to the long-term planning phases. Similar to CBPR, collaboration with local communities also emphasizes the creation of shared goals, flexible roles, open communication and trust, which align with community strengths as priorities for a successful partnership.

Collaboration with local communities also mandates exploration and awareness of the counselor's positionality such as their biases, worldview, racial identity, and the intentions behind the relief work (Author Citation, 2008). It is also critical to examine the community's history and the quality of previous partnership experiences with "helpers." In the second author's prior partnership with the Samoan American community, a Samoan American collaborator informed us that they had encountered negative experiences with university-based "collaborators" who had gathered data and never returned despite their promises for social transformation. We contend that social justice disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy has the potential to develop meaningful relationships with impacted communities and involves shared decision making, culturally-informed interventions emergent from local realities, traditions, and a needs assessment (e.g., Fine, et al., 2002).

A participatory approach was used when developing post-911 interventions for New York City public schools, (Author Citation, 2007). The second author and colleagues (2007)

collaborated closely with a group of students and their family members, recent immigrants to the US, who survived and experienced displacement after 9-11. These students met weekly to develop a trusting and open partnership and a clear understanding of the oppressive geopolitical structures inherent in New York City schools. Throughout the several years of the programs, the student collaborators engaged in every step of the program (Author Citation, 2013). The coherent and active involvement of youth collaborators strongly supported the development of a sustainable and culturally responsive school-based program (Author Citation, 2008). Since the program development took place in solidarity with local communities impacted by 9-11, they highlighted community strengths.

Especially relevant in disaster relief efforts is the process of *identifying and promoting cultural strengths* since this process can offer validation and humanizing experiences to the communities involved. Specifically, we assert that effective disaster relief, counseling, and advocacy begin with a genuine belief that communities possess the strengths, knowledge, and agency to thrive despite the nature of the disaster. At its center, cultural strengths (e.g., Author Citation, 2012) empower historically targeted community members through their meaningful interactions with family and friends and their balancing of the multiple ecological settings they frequently navigate. For many communities, cultural strengths are embedded in cultural beliefs about the groups' own traditions and challenges and their relationships across family, cultural, institutional, and generational contexts (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Paris, 2010).

Our *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* framework highlights a holistic perspective that underscores the different ways that communities are impacted by a disaster--psychologically, spiritually, relationally, financially, legally, physically--the list goes

on. These multiple aspects of our selves are thrown off balance when a disaster strikes. Therefore, disaster response interventions must recognize how they interact and inform presenting issues (Tominaga, 2008). By seeing the complexity of individuals in the context of a disaster, we attempt to interrogate the process of pathologizing impacted communities as helpless “victims” who need saving. This holistic approach resonates with the values of Counseling Psychology and warrants more attention in the disaster relief context (Tominaga, 2013; 2018).

Decolonizing disaster relief entails *understanding the impact of the disaster across multiple ecological contexts* such as one’s home, neighborhood, work, shelter, hospital, and other settings (Roysircar, Podkova, & Pignatiello, 2013; Tominaga, 2018). All too often, “victims,” impacted relief workers (Holaday, & Warren-Miller, 1995; Paton, 1990), and their families (Paton, & Kelso, 1991) are displaced and “treated” in a temporary setting that is new, uncomfortable, and destabilizing. Disaster relief efforts must realize how ecologies play a role in Counseling Psychologists’ clinical practice and advocacy (Tominaga, 2018). We have adopted the ecological systems’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) notion of development-in-context to our approach to *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy*.

According to Bronfenbrenner, nested within five environmental systems that exert bi-directional influences within and between the systems, are human development and human functioning. The *microsystem* consists of an individual’s biology and immediate settings (e.g., family, neighborhood, shelter, work, firefighters, etc.). The *mesosystem* comprises links and connections between multiple immediate environments (e.g., impacted individual and shelter, family and neighborhood). The *exosystem* involves developmental influences from settings

where the individual does not have an active role in (e.g., availability of medical care choices based on distance from home; temporary housing locations, closure of work setting due to disaster). The *macrosystem* encompasses the cultural context (e.g., political system, racial/racist climate), including the values and customs of the society. The *chronosystem* refers to the socio-historical circumstances and conditions that accompany or transition throughout the individual's course of life (i.e., women's right to vote, etc.). We believe that counselors must engage and practice in these multiple systems to best support communities affected by natural disaster.

Disaster relief is a non-linear, dynamic, and complex process that requires long-term *systems of support* to assist survivors in their psychological recovery (Maeda et. al, 2009; Tominaga, 2018). After disaster strikes, significant effort goes into the development of early support systems but the longer-term needs of survivors are often underestimated, especially the long-term needs of impoverished and marginalized communities. The level and duration of support offered during disaster relief depends on each community's recovery needs, including the size and scope of the disaster, the community's ability to bounce back, and the presence of unique challenges that delay recovery for marginalized communities. For many survivors, psychological reactions will be temporary and functional recovery will occur without the need for long-term clinical interventions. For other survivors however, psychological reactions can be severe and long-lasting, and if not addressed, can result in poor long-term health (Hoffman & Kruczek, 2011).

To maximize the health of communities, Counseling Psychologists need to recognize that the process of recovery from a natural disaster often takes years. Second, Counseling

Psychologists must understand that to help survivors grow, thrive, and be better prepared for future adversities, creative and thoughtful preventive education (Tominaga, 2008) and rehabilitative clinical services must be available to those who need long-term services; these clinical services must be integrated into different sectors (e.g., school districts, hospitals, non-profit agencies) to obtain broader outreach and to help improve social ties and the establishment of social networks (i.e., between survivors and community organizations). These social ties between different stakeholders can help facilitate long-term community development and resilience (Orui, Harada, & Hayashi, 2017), as well as adequate referrals to appropriate sources for more severe mental health concerns or needed medications (Bowman & Roysircar, 2011).

Counseling Psychology has examined the role of counselors in disaster relief from large-scale natural tragedies to the 9-11 terrorist attacks (Farrell, Keenan, Ali, Tareen, Keenan, & Rana, 2011; Inayat, 2002; Weissbecker, 2009). We provided narratives of our experience in disaster relief to help establish a *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* approach. We now present qualitative data from individuals impacted by the most recent 2017 Northbay wildfires—the most destructive fires in California history—to highlight the critical role of Counseling Psychologists.

Method

The 2017 Northern California wildfires

On October, 2017, a series of 250 wildfires raged through Sonoma, Napa, Lake, Solano, and Mendocino counties prompting a state of emergency and threatening communities and property across Northern California (Watershed Emergency Response Team, 2017). These wildfires, the

most destructive and costly wildfires in California's history, blazed over a period of 23 days and burned at least 245,000 acres, forced 100,000 individuals to evacuate, destroyed an estimated 8,900 structures, and took the lives of 43 people (California Wildfires Statewide Recovery Resources, 2017). As fires spread, Napa and Sonoma County residents experienced exposure to extensive areas of fire damage and copious amounts of wreckage and debris. Although first responders deployed immediately after an Emergency Proclamation was announced by California's governor, the speed, size, and erratic nature with which the fires expanded, heavily impacted the amount of damage and loss that occurred in rural terrain, residential homes, and public infrastructure. According to Sonoma County fire investigators, a combination of powerful and dry winds, a susceptible landscape parched by drought, blown transformers, and fallen power lines may have ignited at least two of the small fires (Press Democrat, 2018). As advocates and Counseling Psychologists we wanted to conduct research to best understand how to support individuals from impacted communities following disasters.

Participants

Our final sample of 259 participants consisted primarily of women ($n = 219$), white ($n = 222$), and heterosexual ($n = 218$) individuals. They were mostly 55-65 years old ($n = 94$) and with income under \$59,000 ($n = 83$). Educational attainment was varied; some reported high school or less ($n = 11$), others had at least two years of specialized training or some college ($n = 36$), an undergraduate degree ($n = 78$), and a graduate degree ($n = 99$). Of our 259 participants, 163 of them were displaced at the time we conducted the survey and 93 of them had experienced partial property damage or total property loss.

Procedure

The current study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (IRB Protocol #954). Data collection for the present study was conducted three months after the Northern California wildfires from January 10, 2018, to January 29, 2018. Participants were selected through a non-probabilistic and convenience sampling of individuals affected by the fires (Lavrakas, 2008).

We established an initial survey team composed of two graduate research assistants and the first author, a Counseling Psychologist. The survey team investigated which counties were most affected by the Northern California wildfires and identified Sonoma and Napa counties as the most affected. We distributed the online survey across educational institutions, county agencies, professional associations, community clinics, ethnic minority associations (e.g., Latino Service Providers), and multiple non-profit agencies in both counties using a research website on a secure server. Individuals directly exposed to the fires and aged 18 to 65 years old signed an online consent form and completed the confidential survey.

Online survey

The survey consisted of demographic information questions about age, gender identity, education, ethnicity or race, household income, and sexual orientation. The participants also reported on their location during the fire, explained whether they experienced property damage or loss, and indicated if they were displaced and/or forced to relocate as a result of the fires. These questions were asked to better understand the degree of direct exposure to the wildfires. The narrative portion of the survey consisted of single question “*What else can you tell us about your experience with the Northern California wildfires?*” Due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic and the range of possible responses, we felt this question would allow for different

kinds of themes and experiences to emerge. The use of a single open-ended question has been used extensively in the study of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (Monson, Lonergan, Caron, & Brunet, 2016).

Epistemological position

Our epistemological positioning is based on a constructionist paradigm (Charmaz, 2000) that articulates a stance of multiple social realities in an empirical world. We believe that humans' views of the world are influenced by our history and cultural context. Like Charmaz (2000), we propose that, "Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts (p. 524)." To construct theory as an outcome of our interpretation of participants' stories, we explored the values, beliefs, and ideologies of participants and considered their voices throughout our study (Charmaz, 2001).

Analysis

To adopt an epistemological fit with our position, we selected thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017) using open, axial, and selective coding. The second author and four research assistants (graduate students in Counseling Psychology) trained in qualitative coding used *open coding* (Strauss, 1987), which entailed multiple readings of the data for any recurring terms, codes, categories, and themes that had potential meaning for our research. This generated more than 25 possible themes. The research group then organized similar themes and concepts into groups and used *axial coding* to gain a deeper understanding of the context, circumstances, and outcomes of these categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An example of axial coding involved the following concepts: losing one's home, missing a pet, the death of a loved one, moving from

location as a result of loss, and others. These concepts were grouped into one theme, which we termed “Loss and Displacement” and possible relationships between the subcategories were analyzed. We next performed *selective coding*, which involved coding in terms of one core theme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and connecting it to other categories (Strauss 1987). This process encouraged us not only to think carefully about each category, but also continually compelled us to improve and reexamine our core themes. The research group met multiple times to group the themes until they reached consensus on a final list of six themes. The second author and two of the research assistants then read through all of the data to confirm these were the most meaningful and prevalent themes for the purposes of the research (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005).

Methodological integrity

We believe that our study’s research design and procedures support our research goals and our social constructionist epistemological positioning. To meet trustworthiness standards (Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, Josselson, & Suárez-Orozco, 2018, we practiced prolonged engagement, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yeh & Inman, 2007). Peer debriefing was utilized to investigate aspects and sections of the data that may be influenced by the researcher’s perspective. The authors met regularly during the analysis process to review the data and emerging themes. In these meetings, they reviewed ideas and interpretations of the data for critical and constructive feedback.

Authentic closeness and prolonged engagement with the phenomenon under study was achieved through deep immersion with participants’ written questionnaire responses. In addition, the first author, in her capacity as first responder, invested sufficient time in areas impacted by

the Northern California wildfires, which provided first hand exposure to the reactions of survivors during and in the aftermath of the wildfires. Reflexivity was managed by intentionally acknowledging and discussing the researchers' assumptions, biases, and effect on the data and our interpretations. Upon a reflection of key biases, we concluded that we brought not only our professional and research knowledge to this study, but also our lived experiences as individuals who have experienced the deleterious effects of natural and social disasters.

With this background in mind, we asked ourselves---Could these personal experiences impact our ability as researchers to effectively engage in open, axial, and selective coding? We concluded that our deep sense of responsibility for valid data collection and analysis, and our loyalty to an ethical code of conduct, served as present and constant reminders that the phenomena under study had to be analyzed in a manner that reflected the realities of the participants (Levitt, et al. 2018).

Professional standards and ethical principles

This research study was grounded in the professional standards and ethical principles of the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2018). We considered and used professional standards and ethical principles regarding respect for persons, informed consent, beneficence, justice, and sensitivity to the care and protection of participants. Knowing that the participants in our study had endured traumatic experiences as a result of the wildfires, careful thought was put into the questionnaire to prevent harm to participants. We believe that ensuring scientific rigor in research on vulnerable populations is an ethical responsibility due to the need for accurate data that can inform intervention efforts that currently have serious consequences on the lives of natural disaster survivors. In addition, we also offered

opportunities to debrief and share our findings with participants. While responding to disasters, we noticed that certain groups were left out of assistance. Having lived these experiences ourselves and standing as ethical professionals in the field of psychology, we are motivated to voice our concerns and to advocate on behalf of groups who have remained invisible.

Findings

Results reveal six themes: (1) loss and displacement; (2) physical and psychological impact; (3) exploitation; (4) social inequities against vulnerable communities; (5) community strengths and support; and (6) need for support and services. Below we describe each theme and provide demonstrative quotes, noting the gender identity and age range of the respondent.

Loss and displacement

Almost all of the participants described the multiple losses they experienced as a result of the Northern California wildfires. These losses extended beyond the death of a family member and included losing beloved pets, important photos, property such as houses and cars, and other material possessions. For example, one woman shared:

I lost my home and my cat. My best friend died a week later. My dog died the month after. My cat was found. My family and friends took over and helped me every step of the way. People from all over the country helped me out. I had hundreds of people helping me. I'm usually the one helping people out, but it reversed. (Female; 45-54 years old)

From this quote, we can see that the participant not only suffered and struggled through many losses but was also able to receive help and support from others and reverse a pattern of mostly giving and not receiving from others. She was also grateful and open, revealing possibilities for emergent strengths during difficult times (Tominaga, 2018). With these many losses also came feelings of displacement--as most of the participants experienced multiple

moves, homelessness, and uprootedness as they navigated the tremendous impact of the fires. As one man wrote,

Great sadness about the loss of so many great possessions. Displaced for at least 18 months while I move forward with the rebuilding. Sorry to see some of my elderly neighbors leaving the area. My pets have become a greater issue and responsibility as I move to my new homes. I wonder how my future will be. Did I do something to deserve this tragedy? (Male; 55-64 years old)

As you can see from the above quote, the many losses experienced by these survivors not only involve the loss of possessions but also the loss of relationships with neighbors, peers, and loved ones. The losses and displacements also raised larger existential questions about the reasons for the losses and all the challenges displaced individuals are facing. Another person wrote,

My whole family was affected, as well as all our closest friends losing homes and us being displaced from school and eventually our rental home. Also our every year sports teams and practice areas. My college student daughter and I also lost our part time jobs. I eventually lost my full time job because we were displaced. I became unemployed and homeless and my son was displaced from his school. (Female; 35-44 years old)

What was most apparent was how these losses were intertwined with other losses and influenced notions of self, identity, and purpose. For example, the loss of a job, is not only the loss of income and sense of place, but also a loss of identity and future planning. This is further illuminated by the quote below:

I have been devastated by all that has happened all that has been lost and all the future opportunities that are now lost to me. I will never recover from this, as I lost all my art and photography. I was working on for my future. I have lost every family photo for the past 5 generations. I've lost all my family heirlooms, especially those from my sister who died at age 24 and my 99 year old grandmama who passed away a few years back. (Female; 55-64 years old)

Another participant wrote, "Unless someone has suffered a complete loss like us, it's impossible to understand the extent to which your stuff defines your life and shapes who you are as an individual and a family" (Female; 35-44 years old).

Many of the participants who lost their homes had to move multiple times, resulting in feelings of uprootedness and a lack of security. For example, one participant wrote, “Initially, it felt as if we were on vacation and would ultimately go back home. Not, the case, at least until the rebuild. I’ve moved 7 times since the fire, and expect to move at least once more” (Female; 25-34 years old); “Our house was a total loss. We also lost three cats. We just moved for the third time. Hopefully we will be here until we rebuild” (Female; 45-54 years old).

Being displaced had a significant effect on people’s feelings of separation, isolation, and disruption. As one person explained, “I feel separate from others, especially people who did not lose their homes. I feel disconnected from people who lost their homes and are back to life as it was before the fire” (Female; 45-54 years old). Moreover, the reality of loss and displacement cannot be separated from the dramatic ways “victims” experienced feelings of trauma as well as other difficult reactions. The next quote is not just about loss, and not just about displacement, but about the myriad of ways that the fires impacted folks at a much deeper level--psychologically, physically, and also in terms of our identities.

The trauma of nearly losing our lives, escaping through a harrowing journey in the middle of the night, losing virtually all our material possessions and our home, being displaced, then also how it triggered earlier and intergenerational traumas - perhaps all of that trauma is expected. But there is also the trauma arising out of uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity of its aftermath. Our sense of identity is forever altered; also, what truly matters. Our sense of possibility is wounded; also, our sense of belonging. The losses arising out of the fire are staggering and at times ineffable. Yet, at the same time, so are the blessings. All of it, simultaneously present and interconnected. It's a stunning experience, truly. One flowing in vitality even in the midst of our despair. (Male; 45-54 years old)

Physical and psychological impact

The Northern California wildfires also had a tremendous effect on individuals’ physical and psychological well-being as participants suffered from multiple physical and mental health

concerns. These included respiratory difficulties, sleep disruptions, trauma/PTSD, anxiety, and avoidance. Some of the experiences related to physical symptoms included: “My hair started falling out and my menstrual cycle stopped” (Female; 45-54 years old); “I was displaced due to breathing difficulties. I left the state, but had to return for an important meeting that happened regardless of the fires. Respiratory difficulties have persisted” (Female; 55-64 years old); and

I was taken to the ER 12 hours after feeling my first chest pain that I was experiencing. I was a top priority in the ER. I figured I was having some sort of asthma attack or some type of lung problems it turned out that I had a stress induced heart attack and my heart inflamed. After spending 4 nights in the hospital I was discharged. I stayed at my grandmothers house for about 1 and a half months. My cardiologists would not let me work for 2 weeks (I’m a Nurse Assistant for dementia and Alzheimer’s). (Female; 18-24 years old)

These quotes underscore the seriousness of the physical symptoms that developed and persisted as a result of the fires and how they complicated an already challenging situation, especially for those with preexisting medical conditions. During the fires, various health clinics burned down, many health care workers had their homes destroyed, so if someone was suffering from a physical problem, finding help and receiving treatment could also pose difficulties.

Intertwined with physical issues were multiple mental health issues emergent from the disaster. As mentioned, these included a range of symptoms from anxiety to PTSD. Also, many participants described the interrelationship between the two and how the fires retriggered previous traumatic feelings: “I believe I developed trauma from that evening. To this day, when I smell smoke, I feel panicked. I have avoided going to the burn sites” (Gender variant; 55-64 years old);

I was already diagnosed with PTSD prior to the fires from the abusive family I grew up in (physical abuse). During the fires, I felt like it was never going to end, like I was suspended in time. [...] I had several anxiety attacks when I looked at the thick smoke in the air, feeling overwhelmed and feeling like I could not continue living here, but I had no choice.” (Female; 55-64 years old)

Many individuals who experience trauma described in detail how “[The fire] triggered earlier and intergenerational traumas” (Female; 45-54 years old). As participants shared, “I now quietly freak out whenever I see a fire truck or ambulance driving with their sirens on. I now tear up if I see something on tv or online that is heartwarming” (Female; 45-54 years old). “I also try to avoid the burn areas. Even though the grass is growing back on the hills, I still cry every time I see the burn areas” (Female; 55-64 years old). Participants noted the potentially long-lasting impact of the fires.

I’m sure that we will all be very hypervigilant for years to come. Now I just feel weary of my year long cancer scare and surgical recovery, the loss of my pet and the intense stress and anxiety the fire created. I can see it in my face, with new lines, wrinkles, I’ve aged and not in a good way. (Female; 55-64 years old)

These strong emotional reactions not only impacted the victims of the fire but also relief workers; “I used to be a firefighter and was traumatized when I was entrapped in a fire. I quit firefighting after that. The Sonoma fires were very triggering for me and re-traumatizing” (Male; 35-44 years old).

Exploitation

In the aftermath of the Northern California Wildfires, many people experienced exploitation from rent inflation, insurance scams, and larger systemic issues related to the rebuilding of the community. These troubling concerns were especially difficult when coupled with existing physical, emotional, and logistical problems. For many individuals who lost their homes and were displaced, the reality of how companies and professional organizations were exploiting these trying times became glaringly apparent. As different participants shared, “Did not have rental insurance at the time... the impacted rental market is heartbreaking and terrifying” (Female; 35-44 years old); “While I did not lose my housing, I’m a renter, and am now watching

not only house prices but also rents increase more than ever. I am worried that I will be priced out of this area” (Female; 35-44 years old);

Impacted community members describe how they could see and experience exploitation from different aspects of their lives. This exploitation illuminated existing issues with economic disparity and changing neighborhood landscapes.

My family, and many others in my immediate circle of friends and family, were either kicked out of homes they were renting by the rich who owned them, or lost their jobs, or could not move into better homes or jobs because of the fires. People are not recognizing the real problem of economic stratification, and gentrification. (Male; 35-44 years old)

Finally, one person noted how this type of exploitation will have long-term effects on the community and its members as they try to rebuild,

While others have been displaced by landlords who lost their residences and need to move into formerly-rented properties. Long-term impacts to the community (cost of building supplies, rental housing, shortage of contractors needed to rebuild, etc.) will be felt over time. (Female; 55-64 years old)

These encounters with exploitation influenced how individuals reacted emotionally and managed their ability to navigate very challenging times. As an individual explained, “Insurance now controls our life decisions, our sense of freedom” (Male; 45-54 years old). Another participant shared:

Feeling overwhelmed with many moves due to still being displaced; feeling angry and helpless because our landlords lied about getting paid by their insurance company and then refused to clean the house we rent from them; feeling desperate because we need a lawyer but can't afford one; stressing about how we will afford to front the money to get our home cleaned until we can sue the landlord to recoup our money. (Female ; 45-54 years old)

These many examples of exploitation were interrelated to larger social injustices impacting vulnerable communities that were exacerbated after the fires.

Social inequities against vulnerable communities

In the wake of the Northern California wildfires, social inequities previously overlooked became more evident and pronounced (Bolin & Kurtz, 2018). For example, existing injustices amongst vulnerable groups such as the homeless and undocumented communities became even more prevalent, and some were quick to point out the lack of support or resources for these groups. These inequities were in part impacted by the exploitation of construction and rental companies mentioned previously. As participants shared:

“Issues of social class in the area were acutely visible as certain people were deemed more worthy of help than others ("good" homeless people vs. "bad" homeless people)” (Female; 55-64 years old). Another woman shared,

The long term effect of the fire was that I could see how Sonoma County could take care of the homeless people who live here-- and how they don't. The City of Santa Rosa has declared a Homeless Emergency but they've done almost nothing for the people traumatized by homelessness. (Female; 55-64 years old)

In fact, many participants seemed deeply concerned with the struggles of marginalized communities. “Those who were suffering prior to the fires are suffering worse now”.... “As soon as the flames were out, the homeless and undocumented went even more ignored” (Female; 35-44 years old).

This strong concerns contributed to strong emotional reactions such as anger and cynicism and a need to identify long term solutions for these many inequalities.

...I realized, after the fires, that no one cared about one another at all in times of non-crisis, so as soon as the flames were out, the homeless and undocumented went even more ignored, predatory renters were ignored, largely, and the people who had been talking so closely and volunteering all dissipated quickly, neighbors stopped talking to neighbors, no one has bothered connecting since. ...I feel much more cynical towards humanity than I did prior to the fires, I see my community in a very poor light, I realize they are more unreliable than I thought they were before, I see them as more selfish than before, and I am really quite sickened to be associated with this area, which is so corrupt and greedy that it cannot help people like my friends whose home went up in a blaze. I'm not depressed by this. I'm angry. We are educated, with stable jobs, middle class with some security here, but we aren't so privileged that we cannot see that those who were suffering prior to the fires are suffering worse now, and also, that many people here learned nothing other than how

to make themselves feel like saviors and/or heroes in the short term while doing nothing to help others at all in the long term and not maintaining a sense of strong community either, but quickly returning to their bubbles. (Female, 35-44 years old)

Despite the outpouring of support and the media attention to these fires, some participants pointed out that the resources that were collected were not distributed to those most in need:

I also work in mental health and homeless services, and have been devastated and outraged, as all people who are boots on the ground in frontline work with these catastrophically vulnerable neighbors are by the way that the community has further abandoned our chronically homeless population, here. ... I really, really thought that all that love and compassion, and at least some small portion of the immense financial funds raised immediately for fire victims...would reach out and include the people I care for. It has not. The chronically homeless have been even more objectified, stigmatized, excluded and ghosted. (Female; 45-54 years old)

Community strengths and support

Following the devastating wildfires, various systems of support were created and utilized by those affected. Community assets and support systems ranged from religion, to support from friends and neighbors, and many expressed appreciation and feelings of relief from the strength from those around them. For example, some of the feelings of strength from religion include:

Through it all we trust in a big God who has a plan for us. Even though our home is gone and our dreams are no longer possible right now we trust that there is something greater for us that we just don't know about yet. (Female; 25-34 years old)

Other participants noted the important role of religion as a source of strength, “but I know that God is bigger than it all and will bring beauty from the ashes!” (Female; 45-54 years old); “I feel like as a church, a family and a community we have become stronger and more compassionate. I am proud of my community” (Female; 55-64 years old).

I am a woman of faith and this event assured me there is a real God that took care of us. Our house was only smoked damaged as it was surrounded by our neighbor's burned houses in the Fountaingrove area. Truly, a divine miracle. God is good!” (Female; 55-64 years old)

Participants also recognized the important role of loved ones, friends, and family members during the wildfires and the months afterwards. “The amount of support my family has

received has been truly overwhelming” (Female; 25-34 years old); “I also recognize that without my husband, I would not be able to handle the recovery nearly as well. Having a partner to share the burden with makes all the difference in the world. We give each other strength” (Female; 45-54 years old); “I fell apart several times and had to reach out on the phone to my female friends who were supportive” (Female; 55-64 years old); “I was lucky to receive significant emotional support from co-workers, friends, and family in the weeks directly after the fires” (Female; 25-34 years old);

The participants also seemed very appreciative of the strong support and generosity from the community near and far. This highlighted the positive aspects and emergent strengths from this horrible disaster. “They also reminded me of how human we are all in times of distress, and that the community we live in is amazingly supportive” (Male; 35-44 years old);

The outpouring of help & generosity I witnessed was amazing. The base camp set up by the fire crew was unlike anything that is ever seen. While I cry and experience rapid heartbeats if I have to drive past the burn areas I know it will be better. What uplifts me most is the pride I feel for my community. We are Sonoma Strong!” (Female; 55-64 years old)

Need for support and services

In the midst of the wildfires, many individuals affected by the fires were left emotionally and mentally drained. For some, they still relived these traumatic experiences and were having difficulty finding ways and time to care for themselves along with their loved ones. As individuals navigated complex relief systems and logistical issues, they often did not prioritize, or know where to find mental health support. One woman (45-54 years old) shared “Instead of helping my kids pack up to evacuate, I just shut down. I did not become hysterical or emotional. My brain just checked out.” And a local student stated,

Last semester after the fires, I stopped doing the majority of my schoolwork for the remainder of the semester because my mental health deteriorated so much during and immediately following

the fires. I only started to get back on track at the end of the semester, after I had missed multiple assignments in all of my classes (and broke down crying/hyperventilating in front of one of my teachers because of this). I am currently taking a winter intersession class and am still experiencing a lot of difficulty doing my classwork. My mental health is also not back to what it was prior to the fires. (Gender variant; 25-34 years old)

The fires not only impacted local students and parents, but people at their jobs were expressing a need for counseling and support.

I also ran out of my free trauma counseling and do not have enough money to pay for more. My trust in people to help me and give me information is now less than before as I got almost no help from anyone. Previous traumas have resurfaced and I find my job much harder and less pleasant than before. I feel like the forgotten neighborhood and the forgotten person. I used to be very resilient and self reliant and now I question myself and my decisions. I did not used to be afraid at night. (Female; 55-64 years old)

In other circumstances, the people in great need of help were the actual relief workers who were increasingly stressed during this traumatic and horrific event. “I experience secondary trauma while providing mental health care to fire survivors.” (Transgender male; 45-54 years old).

I am a county disaster relief worker--initially I lost long hours while in the process of being evacuated..then had to work long hard hours filled with anxiety over being able to respond to my children’s needs as well as show up and be available for the needs of the community. (Female; 55-64 years old)

Other disaster relief workers and volunteers also shared their need for support and services, “I spent the entire time running an animal evacuation center and never focused on myself and my mental needs. There was no time for that” (Female; 25-34 years old); “Volunteering has been exhausting but necessary” (Female; 25-34 years old); “I am a Sonoma county employee and as such, had to work while I was evacuated. I don’t feel the county or community supported me well. I’m depressed all the time” (Female; 25-34 years old); “As a person in the helping profession, I struggled with my responsibility to care for the individuals who I serve through my work and my need to take care of my personal safety and the safety of

my family” (Prefer not to answer; 35-44 years old). These various quotes reveal how there needs to be support and mental health services at multiple systemic levels.

Discussion

We build on the current natural disaster literature (Tominaga, 2008, 2013, 2016) to offer a comprehensive equity-oriented framework that addresses the unique experiences of survivors and the complexity of their health and psychological needs. We integrated our own disaster response experiences with the results of our qualitative research on the Northern California wildfires to introduce the *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* framework. The findings from 259 participants revealed the following six themes: loss and displacement; physical and psychological impact; exploitation; social inequities; community strengths and support; and the need for support and services. These themes underscore the oppressive forces that often structure emergency management systems and offer support for the critical components of our *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* framework. We believe that the critical components of our framework take into consideration the sociopolitical adversities and inequities impacting survivors, and sensitize disaster responders, including those working in emergency management systems, to the unique stressors and strengths of communities impacted by a disaster. Next, we outline the connection between the themes and the critical components of our framework.

Collaborating with local communities to fight inequities

The findings from our study revealed that the emotional experiences of community members were exacerbated by the “exploitation” they experienced from companies and professional organizations (i.e., rent inflation, insurance scams, and larger systemic issues related to the

rebuilding of the community) (Norris, 2017; West-Olatunji, & Goodman, 2011). Illuminating the existing oppressive structures already in Northern California, participants acknowledged that “social inequities against vulnerable communities” were more evident and pronounced in the aftermath of the fires. According to participants, members of marginalized communities, including the homeless and undocumented communities, experienced limited access to support and resources. Our themes “exploitation” and “social inequities against vulnerable communities” offer support for our social justice framework which involves the counselor entering a community space in a way that maintains the integrity and humanity of vulnerable group members (Author Citation, 2007; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005).

Identifying and promoting community strengths

Participants in our study reported that “community strengths and support” systems are helping their current recovery process and indicated feeling moved by the support they experienced from individuals within and outside their communities. They also identified feeling grateful for the critical role of loved ones, friends, and family members during the wildfires and the months afterwards. Our theme “community strengths and support” resonates with our social justice framework which proposes that disaster work begins with a genuine belief that communities possess the strengths, knowledge, and agency to overcome adversity before, during, and after disaster (Mathbor, 2007).

Working holistically with impacted communities

Many participants in our study suffered serious “physical and psychological impact,” including respiratory difficulties, sleep disruptions, trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and avoidance as a result of exposure to the wildfires. Because health care was difficult to access as a result of the destruction

of medical infrastructure, participants, including fire evacuees and relief workers, did not receive medical treatment when it was needed. For participants with a history of trauma, the fires retriggered memories and or feelings related to previous traumatic experiences. This theme of “physical and psychological impact” underscores our emphasis on how individuals must be addressed *holistically* and understood across multiple ecological settings (Miller, & Pescaroli, 2018; Spokane, et. al., 2011).

Understanding the impact of the disaster across multiple ecological contexts

The results of our study also suggest that the Northern California wildfires significantly affected individuals, families, disaster responders, communities, medical infrastructure, employment settings, and other contexts (Tominaga, 2018). In our “loss and displacement” theme, participants experienced multiple losses as a result of the wildfires, including loss of possessions and belongings, property, employment, and relationships (e.g., neighbors, peers, family members); which points to the destructive nature of these wildfires (Rosen, Matthieu, & Norris, 2009). These losses, in turn, elicited concerns about participants’ sense of security, stability, and purpose (i.e., existential questions) in different environmental contexts (e.g., work, home, neighborhood). For participants who experienced displacement, feelings of isolation and disruption emerged. Tominaga (2018) discusses this as the *Three Stressors of Disaster*, shock or fear of the disaster, loss of a person, place, or mementos, and change of the daily life. Our framework builds upon these ideas to further elaborate upon the impact of unstable housing, and constant displacement on one’s sense of self. The theme of “loss and displacement” supports our framework’s proposition that clinical services need to be integrated into different sectors (e.g., school districts, hospitals, non-profit agencies) to obtain broader outreach and to help improve

the establishment of social networks between survivors and community organizations (Tominaga, 2018).

Developing long-term systems of support

Participants in our study expressed a serious need for counseling and support. Findings illuminated how Counseling Psychologists must be willing to offer thoughtful preventative and rehabilitative clinical services to disaster survivors long-term (Henley, Marshall, & Vetter, 2011; Ireni, 2014). Supported by the theme “need for support and services,” our framework encourages Counseling Psychologists who are interested in developing meaningful and trusting long-term relationships with impacted communities, to enter disaster areas in a way that maintains the integrity and humanity of disaster survivors and that battles the social inequities impacting them.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that warrant mention. First, our questionnaire, comprised of short answer and open-ended questions, was limited because we did not have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions as in an interview. However, we wanted to survey as many individuals as possible during a short window of time to insure multiple voices were reflected, so the method was deemed relevant for the context of the natural disaster. Moreover, the sample was predominantly white, European-American, and low-income (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018) which limits our exploration of the impact of the Northern California wildfires among a culturally diverse group or among the most vulnerable communities such as the undocumented, LGBTQ, or chronically homeless populations. These demographic data are limited but do in fact, represent many of the individuals impacted by the fires. Our findings are not generalizable, and are not intended to be, and reflect the perceptions

and experiences of this specific group only. Given the contextual nature of our questionnaire, we have only collected data three months after the fires ended. Hence, we do not know the immediate, nor the long-term impact of the fires on the community. Certainly, these participants might portray and reflect on their experiences differently at a later point in time. Given the diversity of individuals impacted by the Northern California wildfires, it is likely that the shared themes of our participants do not represent the full range of experiences of all natural disaster survivors in the region. These limitations notwithstanding, the current study provides initial information that can help Counseling Psychologists better understand the loss, displacement, physical and psychological impact, need for services, exploitation and social inequities experienced by vulnerability communities, and the community strengths and support available in the aftermath of disaster.

Additionally, this study provides valuable information to Counseling Psychologists and mental health agencies about the possible reactions survivors may experience post-disaster, and offers insight into how they can work holistically with impacted communities across multiple ecological contexts (Tominaga, 2018). We argue that the data collected from the recent Northern California wildfires, illuminated key issues facing Counseling Psychologists working with impacted communities.

Clinical implications

We believe that our equity-oriented framework makes important contributions to disaster response work. However, for these contributions to be actualized, it must be feasibly implemented into clinical practice and training. We argue that this framework is uniquely

theorized with the values of a Counseling Psychologist in mind and thus can be implemented. Following an ecological, strengths-based, and social justice approach, Counseling Psychologists may incorporate this equity-oriented framework into their clinical practices with disaster survivors, with marginalized and underserved communities on the ground, to advocate in the larger Counseling Psychology field (e.g., advocate for the inclusion of disaster response training in Counseling Psychology curriculum), and our broader society. The ecological implementation of this framework may have significant ramifications because clinicians, clients, and our society can benefit from disaster relief that responds to communities that have been ignored by current relief efforts.

Regardless of whether our framework is applied within the context of the clinical session, in the community, or beyond, it should be executed in systemic, holistic, ecological, sustainable, and equitable ways to facilitate the development of meaningful long-term relationships that are rooted in local culture. When seeking guidance in our framework, Counseling Psychologists must keep in mind that disaster relief is a non-linear and complex process that requires flexibility, willingness to engage in continuous learning, and a drive to assist different stakeholders, especially underserved communities, in the long-term restoration of their community (Jacobs, Leach, & Gerstein, 2011).

Based on the themes of our study and the critical components of our framework, we recommend that Counseling Psychologists seek disaster response training that: (1) emphasizes the importance of being sensitive to the ecological forces impacting disaster survivors and that teaches cultural interventions and strategies that help protect the dignity, integrity, and well-being of marginalized communities; (2) trains students on the dynamics of power, cycles of

oppression, and gross social inequities that influence the psychological and physical health of disaster survivors; (3) informs Counseling Psychologists and Counseling Psychology graduate students about the safe, inclusive, and local community resources, non-profit institutions, public programs, and social networks that are designed to advocate for survivors post-disaster; (4) encourages practitioners and students to engage in long-term disaster-response volunteer experiences to improve sustainability and develop long-term systems of support; (5) trains practitioners and students to engage in self-examination to increase their understanding of how their own sociocultural identities, shape their social statuses, privileges, and areas of marginalization, and how these may impact their relationship with disaster survivors; (6) and uses simulations to recreate the scene of real disasters (e.g., noise, smoke and other physical factors) and to expose students to human behavior under the physical conditions imposed by a large scale disaster (Cassidy, 2002).

Case illustration

Using the *Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* framework, the first author organized and led a disaster-response team with a mission to support and assist fire evacuees who were displaced and living in an emergency shelter. This effort incorporated the priorities of our framework and our training guidelines (listed above) by working in solidarity with Sonoma County community leaders, graduate trainees in Counseling Psychology from three campuses, and Counseling Psychology faculty. The efforts addressed logistical needs (such as the distribution of supplies, relocation assistance, and clean up services), as well as advocacy, case management, crisis intervention, and direct services to those who were the most vulnerable. This

disaster-response team also created brave and safe spaces for victims to process their grief, loss, and trauma.

Conclusion

The authors introduce an equity-oriented framework—*Social Justice Disaster Relief, Counseling, and Advocacy* based on the relevant literature and their previous experience. We then present the case of the 2017 Northern California wildfires using responses from 259 community members who were impacted by the California North Bay wildfires. The findings reveal 6 themes including: loss and displacement; physical and psychological impact; exploitation; social inequities against vulnerable communities; community strengths and support; and the need for support and services. We believe the themes and our theoretical framework highlight critical perspectives counter colonizing disaster relief approaches and promote collaborative and equitable approaches for Counseling Psychologists working with communities in response to a natural disaster.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributor

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Table 1. Participant Characteristics, Displacement Status and Property Damage

Measure	<i>N</i>
Female	219
Male	35
Transgender	1
Gender variant	4

18-24 age	6
25-34 age	46
35-44 age	57
45-54 age	51
55-64 age	98

Heterosexual	216
Bisexual	20
Gay, Lesbian, Queer	13
Other sexual identity	10

White	222
Hispanic or Latino	12

Native American	12
Asian	4
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	12
Other race or ethnicity	8

High School or GED education	11
Associate Degree	36
Bachelors Degree	78
Masters Degree	75
Doctorate Degree	24
Other	35

Under \$59,000 income	83
\$60,000-\$79,000 income	42
\$80,000-\$100,000 income	35
\$100,000-149,000 income	55
\$150,000 or more income	42
Other	2

Participants displaced at the time of survey	163
Participants not displaced at the time of the survey	96

Number of participants with property damage	93
Number of participants without property damage	166

Notes. N is based on a sample of 259 participants.