



Human Service Organizations in the Disaster Context

Kate van Heugten

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Human Service Organizations in the Disaster Context explores the efforts of human service practitioners to support communities facing the impacts of large-scale hazardous events. Using the stories of frontline workers and managers who lived through devastating earthquakes in Canterbury, New Zealand in 2010 and 2011, and drawing on international research and sociological theory, van Heugten astutely analyses the challenges and opportunities that arise. In the immediate aftermath of disasters, there is often a surge in altruism giving rise to hope for improved social cohesion. This hope wanes when negative impacts fall unequally on people living in poverty and other vulnerable populations. Political, financial, and professional interest groups vie for power and local citizens' voices are frequently overruled. Human service workers act as boundary spanners, networking between organizations to draw attention to the concerns of vulnerable people, and to advocate for human rights and social justice.

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