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Community Service Perspectives on Climate Change and Social Justice in Western Australia

Doreen Wijekoon ^a, Naomi Joy Godden ^b, and Georgia Beardman ^b

^aSouth West Aboriginal Medical Service, Bunbury, Western Australia, Australia; ^bCentre for People, Place and Planet and School of Arts and Humanities, Bunbury, Western Australia, Australia

ABSTRACT

Social workers increasingly recognise the relationship between social injustice and climate change, which is underpinned by oppressive systems of power such as colonialism, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Climate change exacerbates existing structural inequities, with disproportionately negative impacts on marginalised populations. In their work across diverse fields of social work practice, community service organisations (CSOs) have an important frontline role in supporting communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In the state of Western Australia (WA), a group of CSO leaders and university researchers commenced a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) program about climate justice and community services. In the first FPAR cycle, they undertook a survey, interviews, and workshops with CSO workers to examine social justice impacts of climate change in WA. CSO workers generally self-reported a low understanding of social justice and climate change. They identified climate impacts across themes of health, economic injustices, discrimination and access, housing and displacement, and gendered injustices. The authors contend that as climate change intensifies, CSOs must embed climate justice in their operations and services so that they might adequately prepare for, and respond to, the social justice impacts of climate change.

IMPLICATIONS

- Increased understanding of workers' perspectives of the social justice impacts of climate change in Western Australia can identify knowledge gaps in the community service sector.
- Embedding a climate justice lens can assist CSO operations and programs to prepare for, and respond to, the social justice impacts of climate change.

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Critical contemporary literature draws a distinct link between social injustice and climate change (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014), and increasingly recognises that systems of power such as colonialism, racism, capitalism and patriarchy are major contributors to the climate crisis (Porter et al., 2020; Sealey-Huggins, 2018; Sultana, 2022). In Australia,

CONTACT Naomi Joy Godden  n.godden@ecu.edu.au

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there is growing evidence that climate change exacerbates existing structural inequities, with disproportionately higher risks for vulnerable and marginalised populations particularly due to disasters such as drought, floods, and bushfires (Alston, 2013; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Ellis & Albrecht, 2017; Leonard et al., 2013; Nursey-Bray & Palmer, 2018; Shaw et al., 2015; Weeramanthri et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). These groups are usually excluded from climate policy development and decision-making processes (Godden et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2018). With social work's focus on social justice and human rights, climate change is a critical issue for our profession.

We are social workers and climate justice researchers at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Doreen is a woman of colour, a recent migrant to Australia, who completed her Honours Degree in Social Work while conducting this study. Naomi is a white woman and Senior Research Fellow with 20 years' experience in community services. Georgia is a white woman, who has also completed her Honours Degree of Social Work, and worked as a Research Assistant while preparing this manuscript. We live in regional towns on the lands of the Wardandi Noongar people in Western Australia (WA), a state that comprises one third of Australia's landmass.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2021) has predicted, with high confidence, that WA will continue to be severely impacted by the changing climate. The IPCC warns that climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme events, such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, fires, and severe storms and cyclones, affecting WA households, communities, businesses, critical infrastructure, essential services, food production, the economy, and employment. A recent critical analysis of WA's climate policy found that the WA Government has failed to consider and plan for the social justice impacts of climate change, instead prioritising technological decarbonisation (Godden et al., 2022). The policy starkly contrasts with the WA Government's world-first public inquiry into climate change and health (Weeramanthri et al., 2020). In an Inquiry hearing, the CEO of WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS) (peak body of WA's community service sector with 500 + member organisations) said:

Central to the work of WACOSS is our vision for an inclusive, just and equitable society. We contend that, unchecked and unaddressed, climate change blows our vision out of the water. Everywhere we look, climate change entrenches disadvantage. Those who have contributed the least to causing it, who [*sic.*] are now the ones who will be, and already are being, hit the hardest. (Louise Giolitto cited in Climate Health WA Inquiry, 2019)

Beyond the *Climate Health WA Inquiry*, there is limited localised evidence of direct and indirect social justice impacts of climate change in WA. In this article we sought to enhance this evidence base by discussing a study that examined the social justice impacts of climate change in WA from the perspectives of workers in WA community service organisations (CSOs). CSOs are nongovernment organisations that provide services, programs, facilities, and advocacy to enhance community wellbeing. Western Australian CSOs work in many fields of social work practice, such as mental health, disability, family and domestic violence, and housing and homelessness; and they regularly engage with communities on the frontlines of climate change. CSOs often employ social workers alongside other community, health, and management professionals. As approaches such as Ecosocial Work (Forbes & Smith, 2023) and Green Social Work (Dominelli, 2018) gain traction, it is relevant to analyse community service workers' perceptions of climate

injustices. In doing so, we reinforce that the community service sector and social workers within the sector are integral to “just” climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster response (Mallon et al., 2013; Victoria Council of Social Service [VCOSS], 2019).

Methodology

In 2019, WA CSO leaders and ECU researchers commenced a long-term feminist participatory action research (FPAR) project that aimed to transform knowledge, practice, and action regarding climate justice in the WA community service sector. FPAR involves ongoing cycles of action and reflection as communities and stakeholders codesign and coproduce research and action to address social injustices (Godden et al., 2020). FPAR has principles of inclusion, collectivity, solidarity, and reflexivity, and promotes critical intersectional analysis of injustice (Chakma, 2016; Schurr & Segebart, 2012). Participatory and creative methods are used to generate knowledge and mobilise collective activism for structural change (Seppälä et al., 2021).

To begin this climate justice FPAR partnership, a Steering Committee was formed of Western Australian community service organisation CEOs and leaders interested in climate change and social justice. The six group members were predominantly white, female, and urban, representing diverse CSOs in fields such as housing, aged care, and mental health. The Committee and researchers undertook a first cycle of research to examine (1) CSO perspectives of the social justice impacts of climate change in WA; (2) CSO responses to climate change; and (3) opportunities to embed climate justice in the sector. The Committee codesigned the research methods and participated in data analysis and interpretation to identify key learnings and plan collective action. Two-monthly meetings were held throughout the first cycle of FPAR to coproduce, oversee, and reflect upon the research process. The study received ECU Human Research Ethics Committee approval (approval number 2019-00630-GODDEN).

The research question relevant to this article was “What are community sector workers’ observations of the social justice impacts of climate change in WA?” This question relates to Aim 1 of the first cycle of FPAR. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected with people working in the WA community service sector, through an online survey, follow-up semistructured telephone interviews (one hour), and in-person workshops (three hours). WACOSS promoted the survey through their online members’ newsletter, recruiting a snowball sample. The survey was open between 9 September 2019 and 16 October 2019. After completing the survey, respondents could provide their contact details for a follow-up interview and/or workshop. Four telephone interviews were held in September and October 2019, and three more in August and September 2020 as part of Doreen’s Honours project. Two workshops were held in November 2019 in Bunbury (ECU campus) and Perth (WACOSS office).

Authors examined results related to community service perspectives of social justice and climate change in WA; other study foci are reported elsewhere. Through Google Forms, the online survey asked respondents to identify extreme weather events that directly or indirectly affected their WA clients and communities in the past decade. Respondents also self-rated their understanding of the relationship between climate change and social justice, on a scale with measures of low, low-medium, medium-high and high. The survey then asked respondents to share observations of social justice

impacts of climate events on their clients in the past decade, by selecting all applicable options from a comprehensive list of issues identified in existing Australian literature. We used frequency analysis to count responses for each item.

Interviews and workshops were facilitated by Doreen and Naomi, and involved in-depth, semistructured discussions to provide more information about the participant's survey responses. Interviewees were asked to share more details and examples about their observations of climate injustices in WA. In the workshops, small groups also discussed observed climate injustices, and wrote discussion notes and reported back to other workshop attendees for collective reflection. All interviews and workshops were voice recorded and transcribed.

We used a constant comparative method to code and map themes in the qualitative interview and workshop data. As a coding strategy, we used simple questions to analyse the transcripts such as: what climate impacts are mentioned? Who is impacted by a climate event? Frequency analysis was used to count each climate impact that was raised. This process uncovered recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2021). We coded the data using constructed codes (Alston & Bowles, 2018) based on the list of climate impacts provided in the survey (such as financial stress, mental health, and marginalisation from services). We then used axial coding to form connections between codes, and selective coding to identify categories between qualitative and frequency data. This led to the establishment of six key themes, shared below in "Results". Reflecting the FPAR methodology, the collated qualitative and quantitative results were presented to the Steering Committee for further collective analysis and interpretation. Notes from this discussion informed our reporting.

The total sample included 57 survey respondents, seven interviewees, and 28 attendees across two workshops held in the regional city of Bunbury ($n = 8$) and the capital city of Perth ($n = 20$). Some community service workers contributed to more than one phase of data collection. Demographic data were collected about survey respondents. Most survey respondents were female ($n = 38$), and generally aged between 25 and 65. Two people identified as First Nations (Aboriginal) and three as a person of colour. Over half the survey respondents ($n = 30$) held a CSO leadership position, such as CEO, President, Director, or Manager. Most respondents were located in Perth ($n = 37$). Survey respondents worked for thirty-three CSOs and two universities. (We recognise that universities are not community service organisations. However, two academics from universities were included in the sample as the academics engage in research, education and advocacy alongside the WA community service sector). The most common fields of practice were housing/homelessness ($n = 24$), advocacy ($n = 22$), financial support ($n = 21$), disability ($n = 21$), Indigenous support ($n = 21$), families and relationships ($n = 19$), domestic violence and sexual assault ($n = 18$), information, advice, and referral ($n = 18$), youth ($n = 17$), and mental health ($n = 17$). Most CSOs worked in urban ($n = 41$) and regional ($n = 43$) areas, with only some in rural ($n = 17$) and remote ($n = 12$) areas. We interviewed four women and three men, and 23 women and five men participated in workshops.

Results

In this section, we share community service workers' observations of social justice impacts of climate change in WA. The most observed extreme weather event

for survey respondents was bushfire (n = 34), followed by heatwave (n = 26), drought (n = 18), hailstorm (n = 18), cyclone (n = 13), and flood (n = 10). All participants had observed or been exposed to some social justice impacts of climate change. However, of the 57 survey respondents, 60% self-rated as having low (n = 9) or a low-medium (n = 24) understanding of the relationship between climate change and social justice, and just 10% had a high level of understanding (n = 6).

In the following subsections, we present detailed findings regarding CSO workers' observations of the social justice impacts of climate change across the most common themes of health impacts of climate change, economic injustices, discrimination and access, housing and displacement, gendered injustices, and other issues. Each subsection includes a table showing the number of survey respondents, interviewees, and small workshop groups who observed issues related to the theme, along with qualitative findings from interviews and workshops.

Health Impacts of Climate Change

CSO workers indicated they have observed a range of health impacts of climate change in WA (see Table 1), most commonly mental health issues; overheating, dehydration, or extreme cold; lack of access to nutritious food; and physical illness and/or injuries.

Mental health was the main climate health issue discussed in interviews and workshops. A male interviewee (Interviewee 1) shared that residents of a rural town experienced "mental health dark days" and a "sense of hopelessness" after a serious bushfire, citing feelings of displacement and disconnection from homes and land. Referring to the same bushfire, a female interviewee (Interviewee 7) explained how the stress of losing a home and job can lead to mental ill health. Emerging phenomena such as ecological grief also was highlighted, including the emotional toll of environmental change on communities. For example, a male workshop participant said:

Solastalgia is a fancy word for a loss of a sense of place, and it's hard to quantify things sometimes, but particularly for Aboriginal people when their identity is so tied to a certain place and land, the land changes and seasons change and that's hard to come to terms with sometimes. (Workshop 2)

Similarly, a female workshop participant discussed the challenge of ecological grief for people on low incomes, "because they are just surviving and carrying massive grief

Table 1 Observed Health Impacts of Climate Change in WA

Observed social justice impacts of climate change in WA	No. of survey respondents (out of 57)	No. of interviews (out of 7)	No. of small groups in workshops (out of 5)
Mental health issues	27	3	4
Overheating, dehydration, or extreme cold	20	3	3
Lack of access to nutritious food	20	0	3
Physical illness and/or injuries	19	0	3
Disrupted access to medicines, health services, and other forms of health management	15	1	0
Substance use	13	0	0
Limited care during and after climate events	9	1	1
Disability	8	0	0
Suicide	7	2	1
Loss of life	6	1	2

and great senses of powerlessness” (Workshop 2). Another female workshop participant highlighted that young people in farming communities can experience mental health challenges due to climate-induced agricultural difficulties. She described youth perspectives on climate change:

[Young people say] “I am not going to bother doing my exam. What’s the point? There’s nothing really to live for anymore”—like quite profound expressions and grief and they’re huge risks as well. (Workshop 2)

There was limited discussion about other health impacts of climate change in interviews and workshops. A female participant in Workshop 1 discussed food insecurity and food price increases, and observed some First Nations people produce alternative food.

Economic Injustices

Participants identified several economic injustices attributed to climate change in WA, shared in Table 2. The most observed economic injustices were increased cost of living for heating and cooling; financial stress; economic difficulties to respond to stressors, such as extreme heat and health issues; and difficulties adapting homes to cope with weather conditions.

During the interviews and workshops, participants explained they had observed community members facing increased costs of living due to the impacts of climate change: for rent and mortgage repayments, insurance, and heating and cooling their homes. A male interviewee said that during a bushfire in a rural town:

... many people lost their jobs, some people had to pay the mortgage for a house that they no longer had, and on top of that they had to pay rent, experiencing severe financial stress. (Interviewee 1)

A female workshop participant also explained that “lack of savings and insurance means that people don’t have financial resilience when bad events happen ... again, inequity and wealth play out” (Workshop 2). Participants identified increased costs for heating and cooling homes for people with heat regulatory issues, especially older people and people with disabilities. A female interviewee (Interviewee 4) advocated improving energy performance in public housing to reduce energy costs.

Table 2 Observed Economic Injustices of Climate Change in WA

Observed social justice impacts of climate change in WA	No. of survey respondents (out of 57)	No. of interviews (out of 7)	No. of small groups in workshops (out of 5)
Increased cost of living for heating and cooling	34	2	4
Financial stress	31	6	3
Economic difficulties to respond to stressors such as extreme heat and health issues	29	2	5
Difficulties adapting homes to cope with weather conditions	29	1	4
Poverty	20	1	0
Unemployment	15	1	1
Economic difficulties in transitioning to new industries	6	1	0
Post-disaster scammers	1	0	0

One female interviewee discussed the absence of equitable economic initiatives for regional communities to transition from fossil fuel extractive industries:

In places like [town], there's a lot of industry over the last 10 years and it's been closing down. The shops have been going. The bank has closed. [People] living there know that there's an inevitable closure of the mine and the powerplant, but there's no clear processes on what's going to replace that, so there's that kind of experience that they're dealing with that others aren't. (Interviewee 6)

Participants also identified financial constraints for CSOs to respond to climate injustices: “money would be one of the resources [needed] to provide practical assistance” (Interviewee 7).

Discrimination and Access

Participants observed that climate change exacerbates discrimination and lack of access in WA (see Table 3). The most frequently discussed issues were difficulties for some people accessing community activities and social support networks; reluctance to seek mainstream emergency services due to fears of lack of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity; discrimination, prejudice, and abuse; difficulties accessing emergency/climate information; and marginalisation from services.

During the interviews and workshops, CSO workers identified that First Nations Peoples and people with disabilities are most at risk of discrimination and experiencing access barriers in the context of climate impacts. Several workshop participants highlighted that First Nations Peoples face marginalisation and discrimination during and after climate events due to existing policies, discriminatory attitudes, and racist stereotypes in the broader community. A male interviewee described pervasive racism in WA's Wheatbelt region, which increases the risk of climate-related discrimination against First Nations Peoples in the area:

... the Indigenous population is treated very, very unfairly. There is discrimination against them that still harks back from the old days of the white Australia policy where they were second-class citizens. It shocks me ... [the] social injustice is quite bad. (Interviewee 3)

A female interviewee also explained:

Table 3 Observed Issues of Discrimination, Access, and Climate Change in WA

Observed social justice impacts of climate change in WA	No. of survey respondents (out of 57)	No. of interviews (out of 7)	No. of small groups in workshops (out of 5)
Difficulties accessing community activities and social support networks	13	1	3
Reluctance to seek mainstream emergency services due to fears of lack of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity	12	1	1
Discrimination, prejudice and/or abuse	11	2	2
Difficulties accessing emergency/climate information	11	2	1
Marginalisation from services	10	5	2
Limited mobility and difficulties accessing public spaces (such as evacuation centres) and support services	5	2	4
Disrupted access to education	4	2	0

... a lot of people are like, “oh, maybe we should listen to Aboriginal people, our First Nations People[s], around cultural burning, because they have the answers about how to do this”, but as soon as it looked like that emergency was over, they suddenly no longer needed to listen. (Interviewee 6)

Two female participants discussed risks for people with disabilities during climate incidents; for example, one said “in the deaf community or with other intellectual difficulties—they cannot hear what’s happening, and they become lost as no one could tell them what is happening [before and after an emergency]” (Interviewee 4). Another female interviewee questioned the support offered to people with disabilities:

... how often [is] sign language [included?], how often do they include clear instructions around what people can expect so that those people that are neuro-diverse can actually participate equally within a conversation or a discussion ... ? (Interviewee 6)

A female interviewee working in rural communities confirmed that people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by a lack of services in evacuation centres:

We see a lack in the basic facilities such as having accessible bathrooms, but there ... [are] quite a few places that have got adult change facilities with change tables and showers, but if not, and then there is a risk for the disabled people in the evacuation centres. Then the disabled people could have the feeling that they might be the first lot of people to perish within the “changed environment” ... People with disabilities might develop a fear with the new environment not being viable for them. (Interviewee 4)

Participants acknowledged their experiences align with growing evidence that climate change disproportionately affects marginalised peoples, especially in rural communities. A female interviewee expressed:

... anything that affects the community affects minority groups even more. So, in a disaster, they are going to be further isolated and further marginalised [and] those groups would probably suffer more than the mainstream society ... (Interviewee 7)

Housing and Displacement

Participants observed that climate change exacerbates housing and displacement issues in WA (see [Table 4](#)), with the most frequently observed issues of homelessness; destruction of property; overcrowded and/or poor housing; and displacement from home, community, or traditional lands.

A male interviewee who worked with a rural community following a bushfire described difficulties for people returning home after several weeks in a temporary evacuation centre:

Table 4 Observed Housing Impacts of Climate Change in WA

Observed social justice impacts of climate change in WA	No. of survey respondents (out of 57)	No. of interviews (out of 7)	No. of small groups in workshops (out of 5)
Homelessness	24	3	2
Destruction of property	19	2	1
Overcrowded and/or poor housing	16	0	1
Displacement from one’s home, community, or traditional lands	15	5	3
Destruction of cultural sites	6	0	1

Table 5 Observed Gendered Injustices of Climate Change in WA

Observed social justice impacts of climate change in WA	No. of survey respondents (out of 57)	No. of interviews (out of 7)	No. of small groups in workshops (out of 5)
Family and domestic violence during and after extreme weather events	11	4	2
Child protection issues	9	1	0
Unpaid care labour	7	0	0
Unequal gendered relations	6	2	0
Traditional gender roles and relations	4	1	0
Lack of safety in evacuation centres	1	2	1

It took months for people to go and see their land. People who lived in [town] throughout their life [felt] as [though] they are losing ... a large proportion of their life due to the disaster, and their unwillingness to accept that [the] climate is changing and moving is becoming a generational thing. (Interviewee 1)

A female interviewee also discussed climate change and displacement for First Nations communities, stating “Aboriginal communities are experiencing displacement and [their] culture [is] being lost ... Lost through changing weather and their access to land has been removed” (Interviewee 6). Several female participants observed an increased number of people experiencing homelessness, including living on the streets, due to climate change-induced displacement.

Gendered Injustices

Some participants observed that climate change in WA exacerbates gendered injustices, with key issues of family and domestic violence during and after extreme weather events; child protection issues; unpaid care labour; and unequal gendered relations (see Table 5). Participants who worked with a bushfire-affected community shared observations of increased family and domestic violence. A male interviewee identified “farmers [who perpetrated] domestic violence against their partners, maybe [as] they [had] lost everything ... they turned to alcohol-related domestic violence” (Interviewee 2). A female interviewee (Interviewee 4) also stressed that women’s domestic labour burden increases during and after climate events, reinforcing unequal gendered relations and traditional gendered roles.

Other Issues

Participants identified other social justice issues linked to climate change in WA. Some included legal access to justice, transport during extreme weather events, health impacts of mining pollution, and increased interpersonal conflict and tensions. A female participant explained that in her experience, top-down decision-making on climate change adaptation is inherently unjust, because it excludes the voices and experiences of people most at risk: “... decisions are made in the city by people that are not living those realities” (Interviewee 6).

Discussion

This article has considered the research question “What are community sector workers’ observations of the social justice impacts of climate change in Western Australia?” The

results indicate that workers are observing climate impacts across themes of health, economic injustices, discrimination and access, housing and displacement, gendered injustices, and other issues.

The findings contribute to existing knowledge that people in WA who receive a low income and/or experience poverty, marginalisation, and inequity may be disproportionately affected by climate change because they have less resources with which to cope, adjust, and recover (Weeramanthri et al., 2020). The findings reflect other WA literature that extreme weather affects agricultural communities, coastal locations, and First Nations communities, and can devastate livelihoods and climate adaptability (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Leonard et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2015). Participants identified insufficient funding as a probable constraint for CSOs to respond to climate change, which may reflect government unwillingness to sufficiently include CSOs and marginalised groups in climate decision making and policy development (Godden et al., 2022). These findings may point to the influence of neoliberal capitalism in WA climate governance and resource allocation.

Participants' views align with existing evidence that First Nations Peoples may be disproportionately affected by extreme weather events (Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia [AHCWA], 2019; Leonard et al., 2013; Nursey-Bray & Palmer, 2018; Weeramanthri et al., 2020). Participants have observed First Nations Peoples experiencing climate-induced changes to Country, and that mainstream policies may disregard First Nations knowledges of adaptation pathways. The findings further emphasise the relationship between climate change and colonialism, and the need for just approaches to climate change adaptation that are community controlled and First Nations led (Future Earth Australia, 2022). The "history of colonisation and the ongoing dominance of entrenched Western governance regimes needs acknowledging" (Nursey-Bray & Palmer, 2018, p. 2) when developing culturally secure adaptation.

Existing WA literature indicates that extreme weather patterns may cause mental ill health and ecological grief amongst young people, those who have lost livelihoods and income, and First Nations Peoples whose identity is deeply rooted in place and Country (Ellis & Albrecht, 2017; Weeramanthri et al., 2020). The study's findings confirm that this may be the experience of other Western Australians, with CSO workers observing some people struggling to preserve their sense of belonging, place, and identity in a changing climate.

Furthermore, participants perceived that climate change negatively impacts women in WA, particularly with increased family and domestic violence, financial tensions, and domestic and emotional labour burdens during and after climate events. This reflects existing literature that, due to entrenched patriarchy, climate events are not gender neutral, and gender inequality is overlooked in Australian climate discourse (Alston, 2013; Parkinson & Zara, 2013; Shaw et al., 2015). Interestingly, despite some literature suggesting climate change intensifies disparities for marginalised groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ peoples (Gorman-Murray et al., 2017; Ogie et al., 2018), participants in our study did not specifically identify these impacts. This is most likely due to the small sample size, and lack of representation of those communities amongst participating CSOs. Gorman-Murray and colleagues (2017, p. 37) explain that "vulnerability to disasters is not inherent to particular social groups but results from existing marginality", and we urge CSOs to recognise social differences, such as economic resources, sexual orientation, place and age, when considering

climate injustices. Individual experiences of climate incidents depend on “context-specific power structures based on social category” (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014, p. 421).

Our study revealed that participating WA community service workers generally had a low level of understanding about the relationship between climate change and social justice. This is concerning for two key reasons. One, most study participants held CSO leadership positions and are likely to lead organisational policy and practice development; and two, many participating CSOs directly support communities and population groups at disproportionate risk of climate change. This knowledge gap must be addressed through education, capacity strengthening, and increased resourcing for WA CSOs to effectively respond to complex and intersecting social injustices as climate change worsens (VCOSS, 2019). Further, social work education is pivotal to preparing social workers for the inevitable intersection of climate change and their practice (Dominelli, 2018; Forbes & Smith, 2023). For this reason, Ecosocial Work is an approach for *all* fields and domains of social work.

Limitations

Although the study’s sample size and scope limit generalisability, the results strengthen existing literature that climate change has a social and economic toll on vulnerable communities in WA. Notably, this first cycle of our long-term FPAR study focused on the social justice impacts of climate change in WA and did not examine individual and community resilience and coping, despite evidence in the literature (AHCWA, 2019; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Nursey-Bray & Palmer, 2018; Robertson & Barrow, 2020). We acknowledge that a narrowed focus on climate injustices may perpetuate a victim narrative rather than resilience. However, climate resilience literature often overlooks how systems of oppressive power contribute to climate change and that climate events worsen inequalities (Porter et al., 2020; Sealey-Huggins, 2018; Matin et al., 2018). This study makes a critical contribution to climate scholarship.

We acknowledge that the Steering Committee and study sample were predominantly female and white, reflecting broader demographics in Australian social work and CSOs. Through reflexive dialogue and deep listening, and after sourcing funding, the second FPAR cycle has a stronger focus on decoloniality and intersectionality. The second cycle involves coproducing a Climate Justice and Resilience Toolkit for the WA community service sector. The FPAR program has an Aboriginal Governance Group and a Lived Experience Advisory Group, and the Toolkit is coproduced alongside diverse community members with lived experience of climate injustices. The third cycle of FPAR will involve applied research as CSOs implement the Toolkit in practice.

Conclusion

Climate justice issues are increasingly prominent in WA, and CSOs play a critical role in assisting communities to prepare for, cope with, and recover from disasters. This study provides insight into the perspectives of community service workers about a diverse range of social injustices in WA’s changing climate. CSO workers who participated in the study are witnessing climate injustices in health, finances, access and inclusion, housing, and gender relations. We contend that localised and sectorial analysis of

climate injustices are necessary to strengthen scholarship, policy, and practice for “just” approaches to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster responses that centre the human rights of marginalised peoples (see, for example, Future Earth Australia, 2022). This complex work is enhanced significantly by the unique knowledges and experiences of CSO workers on the frontline of climate change. The study highlights the importance of the community service sector embedding climate justice into organisational knowledge, practice and policy, and social work’s role in supporting sectorial change.

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ORCID

Doreen Wijekoon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3362-4325>
 Naomi Joy Godden  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9881-3365>
 Georgia Beardman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0971-4064>

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