

The Impact of School Social Work Services on Students Academic and Social Development

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Abstract

Within the larger field of social work, school social work is a specific area of practice. However, school social work is still in need of recognition in a nation like India. The majority of schools lack social workers who are qualified and equipped to handle children's issues in school environments. In all the educational institutions, teacher-student interaction is highly vital. But due to the lack of attentive monitoring, inadequate personal supervision and emotional support, many concerns other than general academics are not addressed by the instructors of today. As a result, the need for a professional service to handle children's problems at school becomes unavoidable. Social work specialists may offer effective and meaningful responses to various problems in school setting and can establish conducive learning scenario. As a result, the researcher made an effort to conduct an empirical investigation of how educators view the necessity of social work practice in classrooms. A questionnaire was distributed to 40 randomly chosen teachers from four coeducational schools in Ajmer City of Rajasthan in order to gather data. In the present study descriptive research methodology has been utilized and data obtained were analysed using simple percentage. The findings indicate the problems experienced by the school teachers with their adolescent school children and emphasize the necessity for social work specialists in schools to address these specific issues.

Key Words

School Social Work, School Teachers, Behavioral Problems, Interventions, School settings.

Introduction

Within the larger field of social work, school social work is a specific area of practice. The educational system and the student services team benefit from the special knowledge and abilities that school social workers contribute. School social workers work with young children in their school and family surroundings, aiding them to achieve tasks linked with their learning, growth, and development, and so make them to fully realize their intrinsic dignity, capability, and potentiality. For long years, school social workers have been worried about dealing with numerous challenges of young children at school. They are regularly relied on to help students, families, and instructors in addressing problems such as absenteeism, social withdrawal, overaggressive tendencies, malpractice, rebelliousness, and the adverse consequences of physical, emotional or behavioural difficulties of children. But in India, most schools have no qualified or trained social workers to address the concerns of the students and also school officials. Hence, the current study is an effort to assess the perception of teachers towards the requirement of social work practice in the schools.

Need for Social Work Practice in Schools

Because of the lack of close monitoring, inadequate personal supervision and emotional support, many issues other than general academics are not addressed by the teachers of today. Hence, the need of professional help to deal with the issues of young children at school becomes inevitable in present and future as well.

Scope of School Social Work

In most of the industrialized countries, professional social work practice in school context is highly regarded and acknowledged. However, school social work is still in need of recognition in a nation like India. Traditionally, in our cultural setting, most of the concerns of children in school are dealt by the academic experts like teachers. But owing to different obstacles and constraints like severe work load, objectives on more pass percentage, and very rigid system many school teachers find a large distance between them and pupils. In most circumstances, their interaction with children becomes quite vital. When it comes to assisting schoolchildren of all ages, professional social workers are essential. Traditionally, school social workers operate as liaisons between the home, the school, and the community. School social workers have partnered with teachers and other school professionals in advancing the aims of education. With their special interdisciplinary understanding, school social workers are a valuable member of the school team. School social workers contribute to programs geared for students at-risk due to a range of issues, including, where teachers leave off, school social workers take up. They may be the experts most qualified to deal with the psychological and social problems that can impede academic advancement. Through counselling, crisis intervention and prevention programs, they help young people to overcome the obstacles in their lives, and as a result, give them a greater chance at succeeding in school.

Functions of School Social Worker

In a school setting, school social workers may perform a variety of tasks such as:

- Conducting psycho-social assessments and social histories.
- Assessing students for substance use, support systems, physical and emotional functioning, barriers to academic performance, peer issues, suicidal/homicidal ideation, and similar issues.
- Developing and implementing development plans and discharge plans that support student self-determination.

- Providing direct therapeutic services such as individual, family or group therapy regarding specific issues.
- Providing crisis management services, including assessing for safety.
- Advocating for student services and student's interests.
- Providing case management services including, referrals to community resources, collaboration with other professionals.
- Providing trainings and workshops to teachers, school staff and parents.
- Conducting regular home visits.
- Identifying and resolving ethical issues.
- Managing and supervising staff.

Beneficiaries of School Social Work

School social work services are basically focused on the benefits of children such as:

- Primary students having difficulty making the transition to school.
- Students who have a developmental delay which impacts on their academic functioning.
- Students undergoing a transition (i.e., move from another state, change of school, change in family composition, divorce, remarriage, death, etc.).
- Students who are experiencing social/emotional behavioural difficulties in the school, home, or community.
- Students experiencing difficulty within their home environment.
- Students encountering addiction problems.
- Students experiencing pregnancy or parenthood.
- Students at risk for dropping out of school.
- Students experiencing learning difficulties or disabilities.
- Students experiencing poor attendance.

Additional Roles School Social Workers Serve

The following roles may be additionally served by school social workers:

- Publishing materials for parents and professionals.
- Research in the area of school social work
- Writing, contributing to, and coordinating the publishing of documents for local school systems
- Liaison with the government bodies of education, community, civil society organizations and social services
- Liaison with international, national, state and provincial school social work organizations and practitioners (International Network of School Social Workers, 2001).

The aforementioned has provided an overview of how social work practice might be used in a school setting. The school social worker encounters particular difficulties because of their non-judgmental attitude and tolerance for each person in their cultural background. Required to be both a part of the system as well as its mediator, the school social worker provides a crucial contribution to the lives of the student, family, school and community.

Purpose of the Study

Considering the enormity of problems among young children and the need of professional aid to deal with the issues of the children at school, the researcher would like to make an attempt to expose the perception of teachers on the need and scope of social work practice in the schools. In our cultural setting, teachers are expected to manage a variety of co-curricular and disciplinary responsibilities in addition to teaching our kids. Due to their lack of specialization, instructors' attempts to settle disputes amongst students and deal with each child's behavioural problems are typically unsuccessful. Therefore, the researcher felt to approach the teachers to illustrate their perception towards the need of social work practice in schools so that many problems may be professionally addressed.

Review of Literature

A review of the research studies that are relevant to the present study is as follows.

The North Carolina School Social Worker Evaluation Process (2011) states that School Social Workers help create a positive school environment where individual differences are respected and understood. They educate school staff about the link between a supportive school climate and student achievement, and they recognize how culture, family, community, and personal experiences influence student learning. School Social Workers also identify emerging issues within the home, school, and community and help staff understand how similar behaviours may have different meanings across cultures. They acknowledge the impact of students' social, emotional, psychological, and environmental factors on academic performance and emphasize the importance of early intervention and prevention. Additionally, they work closely with parents to encourage their active involvement in the child's education and develop intervention plans that address student needs and promote academic success.

Jonathan B. Singer and Karen Slovak (2010) conducted an exploratory study to understand school social workers' (SSWs) experiences, beliefs, and attitudes related to youth suicidal behavior across elementary, middle, and high school levels. Surveying 399 SSWs from the Midwest Council on School Social Workers, the study found high involvement with suicidal students: 88 percent had worked with such cases in the previous two years, with nearly all high school SSWs reporting such involvement. Most participants felt confident and well-prepared to conduct suicide assessments, identify risk factors, make referrals, and follow school policies. The study also revealed no significant differences in perceived knowledge or preparedness among SSWs across different school levels. However, respondents reported limited graduate-level training

in managing youth suicidal behavior. The findings highlight the need to strengthen suicide-related training in social work education and call for further research on SSWs' preparedness and experiences across school settings.

Mark Cameron and Sandra M. Sheppard (2005) examined the link between school disciplinary practices and students' academic and psychosocial difficulties. Their study showed that disciplinary actions are closely associated with poor school performance and emotional or behavioural problems among affected students. The authors identified three main pathways through which discipline may negatively influence students: disciplinary actions can contribute to psychological problems, ineffective or contradictory disciplinary approaches may reinforce misbehaviour, and punitive practices can harm students' relationships with the school. Based on these findings, the authors emphasize that school social workers and other professionals should use this understanding as an assessment framework to guide effective interventions for children who face disciplinary measures.

Studies by Kansdorf et al. (2002) and Viggiani et al. (2002) provide useful insights into collaboration between social workers and teachers, but their findings are limited because the research involved social work interns rather than full-time school social workers, and the methodologies offered limited generalizability. The studies reported that students, teachers, and interns all benefited from collaborative practices and viewed the interventions positively. Parent participation also increased in the intervention classrooms. Social work interns gained a better understanding of the challenges teachers face in their daily work, while the researchers noted that teachers benefit from additional support for individual students. Most importantly, the studies suggested that students profit from timely and accessible social work interventions.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model emphasizes that students develop within interconnected systems of family, school, and community, and this perspective guides school social workers in understanding student behavior and needs. This model also forms the basis of parent involvement frameworks developed by Joyce Epstein (1995) and Susan Swap (1993), which highlight various forms of family-school interaction and the positive outcomes these interactions create for students, parents, and schools. The services and interventions provided by school social workers align with these models, as they focus on building supportive relationships with parents and strengthening the family-school connection to enhance student well-being and achievement.

Epstein (1995) examined the role of the school social worker-parent relationship and presented a model outlining six types of family involvement in schools: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration. His work illustrates how school social workers engage with each type of involvement and the benefits these interactions provide for students, parents, and schools. According to Epstein, every form of family involvement contributes positively to student development and strengthens the overall school-family partnership. The first type, parenting, focuses on the home environment, which Epstein identifies as the foundation of a child's learning. He emphasizes that parents influence academic success by maintaining a safe and healthy home setting, and school social workers play a key role in supporting families to create such environments.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the study

- To study the socioeconomic particulars of the teachers.
- To identify the problems faced by the teachers while dealing with school children.
- To find the perception of teachers on the need for social work practice in schools.
- To give suitable suggestions for the scope of social work interventions in schools.

Research Design and Sampling Procedure

The researcher adopted descriptive research design for this study. The present research study is focused on the perception of teachers on the need for social work practice in schools. For which 40 teachers from four coeducational schools within Ajmer city were randomly selected using lottery method. Two school is managed by private concern and another two is under the administration of state government. Initially the researcher approached the head of the institution and explained the purpose of the study. Then after, the researcher got permission to meet the teachers personally only when they are on free time. Before data collection the researcher met the individual teachers in person and explained the role of social worker in educational settings. After deliberate discussion and very careful orientation on the scope of social work practice in educational institutions, the researcher collected data from the teachers through self-structured questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher used the self-structured questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire dealt with demographic particulars of teachers, problems faced by the teachers with their young school children, and their perception on the need for social work practice in school. This study has employed descriptive research design and data collected were analyzed using simple percentage.

Findings of the Study

Demographic Profile of Teachers

Almost more than half (56%) of the respondents are female, majorly (67%) of the respondents are within 30-40 years of age. 89 percent of the respondents are graduate teachers. Slightly less than half (47%) of the respondents were from government school. 63 percent of the respondents teach to the secondary level classes. More than half (52%) of them have earned 5 – 10 years of teaching experience. Majority (72%) respondents were married.

Difficulties faced by the Teachers

Majority (72%) respondents face great challenges with academic related problems of the school children. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents expressed that many young children have poor self-concept or self-esteem. More than half (55%) of the respondents opined that developing good morale of the children is quite challenging. More than half (52%) of the respondents agrees that they need to make great deal with interpersonal relationship among the school children. 71 percent face huge difficulty to deal with listening or poor concentration of the children. Majority (87%) respondents felt that they were predominantly engaged with academic pursuits and have very least time to spare for other needs of children. 62 percent respondents agreed that dealing with psychological problems of adolescent children were quite challenging. Nearly half (52%) of the respondents opined that involvement of most parents in the academic pursuits of their children is not satisfactory. Majority (69%) respondents opined that adolescent children were least concerned about their personal hygiene and health issues. Majority (63%) respondents felt very difficult to address sensitive issues like sexual related problems among school children. Majority (72%) respondents felt that managing children with behavioral problems are very challenging. 76 percent opined that they are not helpful to the children in dealing with the psychological problems such as depression or anxiety.

Opinion of Teachers on the Need for Social Work Practice

Majority (88%) teachers agreed that social workers can play an effective role with academic team. 68 percent accepted that social workers can provide professional counseling services for school children. More than half (52%) of them agreed that social workers can make necessary psychosocial assessment of the child in need. 74 percent opined that social workers can deal better with psychological issues like anxiety and depression among school children. Fifty-eight percent of them felt that social workers can improve better interpersonal skills among the school children. Exactly half of teachers opined that social workers can help school children to acquire necessary social and life skills. 57 percent expressed that social workers can play effective role in the personality development programs for school children. 68 percent respondents opined that social workers can make effective treatment plan for needy child. 65 percent expressed that social workers can be helpful in addressing the sensitive issues of the child. Majority (69%) teachers agreed that social workers can cater professional assistance in the implementation of student welfare programs. 77 percent of them opined that social workers are needed to provide special care to the differently abled children. 79 percent felt that social workers are need for effective association between parents and teachers, teachers and students as well. Good majority (83%) of teachers opined that qualified and trained social workers are needed to be appointed in schools on fulltime basis.

Discussion

From the above statistics, it is very evident that majority teachers confront variety of challenges when they deal with students in school, particularly with adolescent age group. Most of the difficulties addressed by instructors were highly challenging and frustrating to them. Apart from normal academic challenges, the teachers failed to address a number of issues pertaining to the child's personal and psychological components. These sorts of challenges and issues have a tremendous impact on the academic performance, success and mental health of the school students. Due to the lack of professional services, teachers cannot handle most of the unique requirements of the children at school and because of the lack of such support system many schools are confronting disadvantageous situation that may be easily avoided. The instructors surveyed expressed a strong appreciation for the necessity for social workers in schools. Additionally, they urge social workers to address some of the schoolchildren's behavioural and personal issues as a top priority. They also agreed that school social workers shall provide comprehensive services for everybody in schools. Therefore, the requirement of professional social work assistance in schools becomes imperative. The attitude of teachers on the need for social work practice in schools is quite positive and beneficial for implementation of effective interventions.

Suggestions

- Since school social work practice is unfamiliar in the majority of Indian schools, the idea of professional school-based social work practice needs to be immediately raised nationwide.
- All the academic professionals like school administrators, school head masters, primary and secondary level teachers, school supporting staff, parents and other members of school personnel must be sensitized on the importance of school based social work services and interventions that can be implemented for the smooth and successful functioning of schools.
- Ministry and Educational departments at Central and State level should be initially approached for implementing professional social work services in schools.
- Qualified and professionally trained social workers must develop an association of network among themselves as a professional body that would successfully function at local, state and national level.
- For the purpose of exchanging the most recent techniques and effective models of social work practice in all contexts, such a national association or institution of social workers should organize national and worldwide summit or conference.
- To raise the bar for trained social workers nationwide and get official recognition, standards, and certification for practice, an exclusive council for social work education and practice must be established.
- Social workers can offer school based services freely to the development of children belong to marginalized and vulnerable groups, notably in government schools.
- Social work interns or BSW/MSW students shall be necessarily put in schools for field work training and can make a visibility of school based social work services for school personnel and general public.
- In order to strengthen and disseminate the uniqueness of this practice, BSW/MSW social work students will be granted an exclusive field of specialization in "School Social Work."
- School social workers will undertake numerous school-based research projects, particularly those that address children's issues at school and/or issues related to school administration. All state and federal government schools will employ qualified and professionally trained social workers as full-time service providers.
- Social work practitioner and social work students can make and implement effective life skills and soft skills.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that teachers strongly feel there is an abundant need for social workers in schools. They want trained professionals to handle important issues like students' social and behavioural problems. Teachers also agree that school social workers should offer helpful services such as special sessions on interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, career guidance, motivation, and other support programs for students and staff. Social workers help connect the home, school, and community. They also work with community agencies whenever needed. Every school should have a full-time school counsellor or social worker. School-based social work helps improve the social and emotional development of children and supports their families. This strengthens children's well-being and academic performance. Social workers help students and their families deal with personal and social problems that affect learning. Overall, school social workers provide programs that promote safe, disciplined, and drug-free school environments, helping students succeed both in education and in life.

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