

Integrating School Social Work into The Professional Social Work Paradigm

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Abstract

School Social Work is a specialized area of practice within the broad field of the social work profession. School social workers bring unique knowledge and skills to the school system and the student support services team. They are instrumental in furthering the purpose of the schools - to provide a setting for teaching, learning, and for the attainment of competence and confidence. School social workers are hired by school authorities to enhance the ability to meet its academic mission, especially where home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving that mission. In India, School Social work is still on an experimental stage. But they are the real need of the present society as school plays an important role in the personality development of a child.

The Establishment of School Social Work

Social work services in schools first began independently in New York City, Chicago, Boston, and Hartford during the school year of 1906-1907 to meet the social service needs of children and to improve communication between the home and school. The first board of education to initiate and finance a school social work program was in Rochester, New York, in 1913 (Shaffer, 2006).

During this century of school social work, school social workers have grown significantly in numbers and the focus of the service has changed in response to important influences of the times. A focus on school attendance in the early 1900's showed the need for professionals who understood the influences of living conditions, socioeconomic status, poor health, family and community on academic performance, behavior, and attendance at school (Shaffer, 2006). The foremost responsibility of the school social worker at that time was home-school-community liaison. Although school social work has evolved considerably with the dynamic changes of society and school social workers function as change-agents more so than ever before, school social workers today continue to serve as the vital link between home, school and community.

School social workers are expected to apply their professional training in schools in order to support student success. Through specialized school social work programmes that strengthen the home/school/community partnership and address barriers to student learning, school social workers serve as catalysts in promoting student wellbeing and successful completion.

Theoretical framework and services:

Traditional model: School social work is structured around a range of ever expanding practice models. Alderson first described these as the traditional-clinical model; the school change model whose major focus was the dysfunctional conditions of the school; the community school model which urged school social workers to employ community organization methods; and the social interaction model which de-emphasized a specific methodology and required the worker to intervene with the systems interacting with the target system. While many school social workers use an approach that draws on components from all of these, the traditional model, focusing on working with students with social and emotional difficulties and their parents, continues to predominate. In the clinical model, school social workers work primarily through casework methods supplemented by group methods with students and family members. In today's practice, a greater emphasis is placed on evidence based and promising intervention methods (Raines, 2008).

School-community-pupil relations model: Of all the models, this one, first articulated by Lela Costin, seems to be the most comprehensive. It focuses on the school, community, and student and the interactions among the three. In this model, school social workers serves as mediators, negotiators, consultants, and

advocates for students and school personnel, listening to student grievances. They also set up informal groups for students, teachers, and other school personnel. This model also encompasses the evaluation by the school social worker of characteristics of students, the school, and community conditions that may affect the availability and quality of educational opportunities for target groups (students with chemical dependency, disabilities, and so on). They are grounded in social learning theory and systems theory.

School-Related Problems

If the school's consequences for problems are effective, there is no need to further punish children at home. That would be "double jeopardy." However, there are times when parents need to take action.

Behaviour Problems

When students have persistent difficulties, they may have attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or they may have lost or never had a bond with a significant caretaker. Older children who show sudden changes in behavior may have been traumatized or become involved in substance abuse. In addition to seeking evaluations for such problems, parents can:

- Require daily school reports to stay in close contact with teachers.
- Offer rewards on days when students bring home a good report.
- Withhold privileges (TV, video games, etc.) until an acceptable report is brought home.
- Take away important privileges while students are serving out-of-school suspensions.
- Write essays about what can be done to prevent further suspensions.
- Investigate medication or herbs for children who may be hyperactive.

HOMEWORK AND POOR GRADES

Asking the school to have children tested for learning disabilities or attention disorders if academic problems have been present since the third grade or earlier. It may be needed to be persistent. Employing any of the strategies below that will be helpful:

- After eating a snack, children should finish homework before watching TV or playing.
- Require a study hour until grades improve.
- Require children to bring home a satisfactory daily or weekly school report to have evening or weekend privileges. Parents can consider shortening restrictions if children are responsible enough to bring home a report.
- Arrange rewards for good school reports if this motivates students.
- When parents are engaged in many other power struggles with children, it may be best for young people to experience the natural consequences of failure until other issues improve.

Skipping Classes and Truancy

Children who miss school may be experiencing peer pressure or developing serious conduct problems. However, anxiety due to panic or fears of looking foolish can require therapy. It is common for children to have "school phobia" in fifth through seventh grades due to the transition to larger schools. Allowing children to avoid school can aggravate problems, immediate action has to be taken to get them back on track:

- Verify attendance and withhold privileges unless children have been in school all day.
- In serious cases, accompany students to school and escort them between classes.
- If children refuse to go to school, physically carry them and enlist the aid of other adults if needed.
- Do not allow children to stay or come home early unless they have a temperature.

School Reports

Many schools have their own form to communicate with parents when students are having academic or behavioral problems. If none are available, parents can use the generic forms below. Minimum standards can be set for students to gain rewards or to have evening and weekend privileges:

- **Rewards:** Stickers, special snack, prize from a grab bag, purchase points etc

- **Privileges:** Television, video games, telephone use, visiting with friends, leaving the house, stereo, CD or cassettes, computer use, snacks.

Understanding Children's School problems

School problems of children usually cannot be resolved quickly or cured with a magic potion. Instead, they are often chronic and require regular management. To be effective, however, parents and teachers must first understand how children learn. What skills are required for school success? How do strengths or weaknesses in particular skills affect a child's mastery of particular subjects? Often the reasons a child struggles at school may be very different from the reasons another child struggles. It is important, however, to take the time to understand the underlying factors that contribute to these struggles rather than hastily shifting focus to grades or achievement levels. Dr. Nancy Mather at the University of Tucson and Sam Goldstein have developed a framework for understanding why children experience problems in learning. They call this framework the "building blocks of leaning."

There are ten blocks of learning, each of which contains a set of related learning skills. The blocks can be divided into three distinct groups which then stack together to form a pyramid. At the ground level of the pyramid are the four foundational blocks: attention/impulse control, emotions and behavior, self-esteem and the learning environment. The middle level contains the three processing blocks: visual, auditory and motor. The top level contains the three thinking blocks: language and images, and completing the pyramid strategies. Some of these blocks are more important than others for certain types of learning. (Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., a neurodevelopment psychologist,

Overcoming Underachieving: An Action Guide to Helping Your Child Succeed in School and Lonely, Sad and Angry: A Parent's Guide to Depression in Children and Adolescents)

The foundational Blocks: They provide the support system for all learning. Just as the foundation of a building must be strong enough to support the entire structure erected upon it, these four blocks must be strong enough to provide support for further learning to occur. The ability to pay attention is basic to all learning. Skills in the block of attention/impulse control allow children to focus on the relevant requirements of a learning task. The blocks of emotions and self-esteem contribute to how a child feels about himself or herself as well as to a willingness to stick to tasks until they are completed successfully. The environmental block concerns providing the child with a safe, supportive, appropriate climate for learning at home and in school. To succeed in learning a child requires efficient attention and impulse control, healthy emotions, a positive attitude towards self and learning and a loving, consistent, supportive environment. Strengths in the foundational blocks help children learn to compensate for lesser abilities and to persist in the face of difficulties. Strong foundational block skills, however, do not guarantee that children will avoid all school difficulties. Weaknesses within the processing or thinking blocks also affect school performance.

The Processing Blocks: On the second level of the building blocks of learning are those involved with the processing of information through sight, hearing and touch. These are what educators refer to as the visual, auditory and motor skills. These skills facilitate learning and enable children to perform tasks that tend to be secretarial in nature, such as hearing and writing down assignments, taking notes or recognizing words. The skills in the processing blocks allow children to take in information, to discern its various pieces, to memorize and to perform tasks involving symbolic learning such as the concept that a digit stands for a number of objects. Once children master these processing skills, they usually do not have to spend very much time during learning tasks concentrating upon these. For example, after learning to recognize a word in print, a child will usually recognize it automatically when it is encountered in the future. Children struggling with learning in the early elementary grades often experience difficulty in one or more of these processing blocks. In fact, weaknesses in the auditory block account for the majority of children experiencing problems learning phonics. Yet other children may experience problems with visual tasks, such as those involved in remembering what a word looks like. Another may struggle to place letter sounds in correct order to spell a word. Still another may do poorly with the motor aspects of learning such as cutting, forming letters with a pencil or drawing. As with the foundational blocks, a child with adequate processing skills will be able to perform various tasks but these skills alone do not guarantee school success. They do, however, guarantee that children will often master basic academic skills well in the early grades.

The Thinking Blocks: At the top of the pyramid the thinking blocks include skills related to language, images and strategies. Thinking with language involves understanding spoken and written language, expressing ideas in reading and writing and learning vocabulary. Thinking with images involves reproducing complex patterns, understanding and judging visual relationships and reasoning with mathematics. Finally, thinking with strategies involves the ability to think about your thinking. This includes the abilities to plan, organize, monitor and evaluate on an on going basis. The skills in the thinking blocks help children understand meanings, comprehend relationships and apply previously gained knowledge as they perform school tasks. For example, these skills help children read to learn. Before writing a story or a report, a child must brainstorm and organize relevant information. To solve a word problem in mathematics a child must read the problem, sort the relevant information, decide what is being asked and perform the correct calculation.

All tasks leading to school success depend upon the ability to sit still and concentrate and the motivation to keep trying. Certain types of tasks are highly related to the thinking blocks; other are more closely aligned with the processing blocks. Children who experience difficulties within the skills of the processing blocks experience different types of learning problems than children whose difficulties are with skills within the thinking blocks. Problems in both of these areas may be made worse by weaknesses in the foundational blocks. These variations occur because the foundational, processing and thinking skills play different roles in children's abilities to learn efficiently.

Thus a School social worker can make use of this model while dealing with the problems of children. But before that an awareness and recognition of School social worker is a must. It will definitely become an instrument of a professional social work if recognized and supported properly

Methodology

Methodology is the systematic and scientific description of how a particular study has been carried out.

Motivation for the study:

School has assumed an increasing responsibility for the total personality development of the students, yet there are a number of occasions where maladjustment of children may be seen in schools. Along with this, the problem becomes worse when the same child is not understood either by teachers or by its parents. Hence there is a requirement of analyzing the needs arising for School Social workers who can help the child by creating an environment where the child can have better adjustment and also to help the parents and teachers to understand their child's problems.

The researcher has chosen this topic because much research studies have not been done in this field and also as socialworkers have not been given or paid more attention to. The researcher wants to widen the scope of School Social Work and also wants School social workers to be appointed in the school.

Objectives:

1. To assess the knowledge regarding School social work among teachers and students
2. To study the psycho-social problems of students and their understanding by the teachers.
3. To assess the need for a School social worker

Universe and scope of the study: The Universe of the study is limited to 5 particular Highschools in Moodbidri Region. Only High school teachers and Highschool students are covered under the study.

Research Design: The study tries to assess the knowledge regarding School social work among teachers as well as students and the need for a School social worker. It also tries to describe the psycho-social problems faced by children and understanding of those problems by the teachers. Thus Descriptive Research Design was used for the study.

Sampling Design: Five particular highschools are taken as sample for the said study. High school students of classes VIII, IX, and X and also the High school teachers are taken into consideration for this study. 50 respondents among the students and 10 respondents among teachers were taken into consideration for this study. Hence the ratio will be 5:1, where students from each class will be selected on the basis of systematic

random sampling method and 2 teachers from each school will be selected on the basis of purposive sampling

Data Collection: The tool of data collection is Interview schedule.

Processing and Analysis of Data: The collected data was classified, tabulated and presented. Statistical methods like Average method were used.

Limitations:

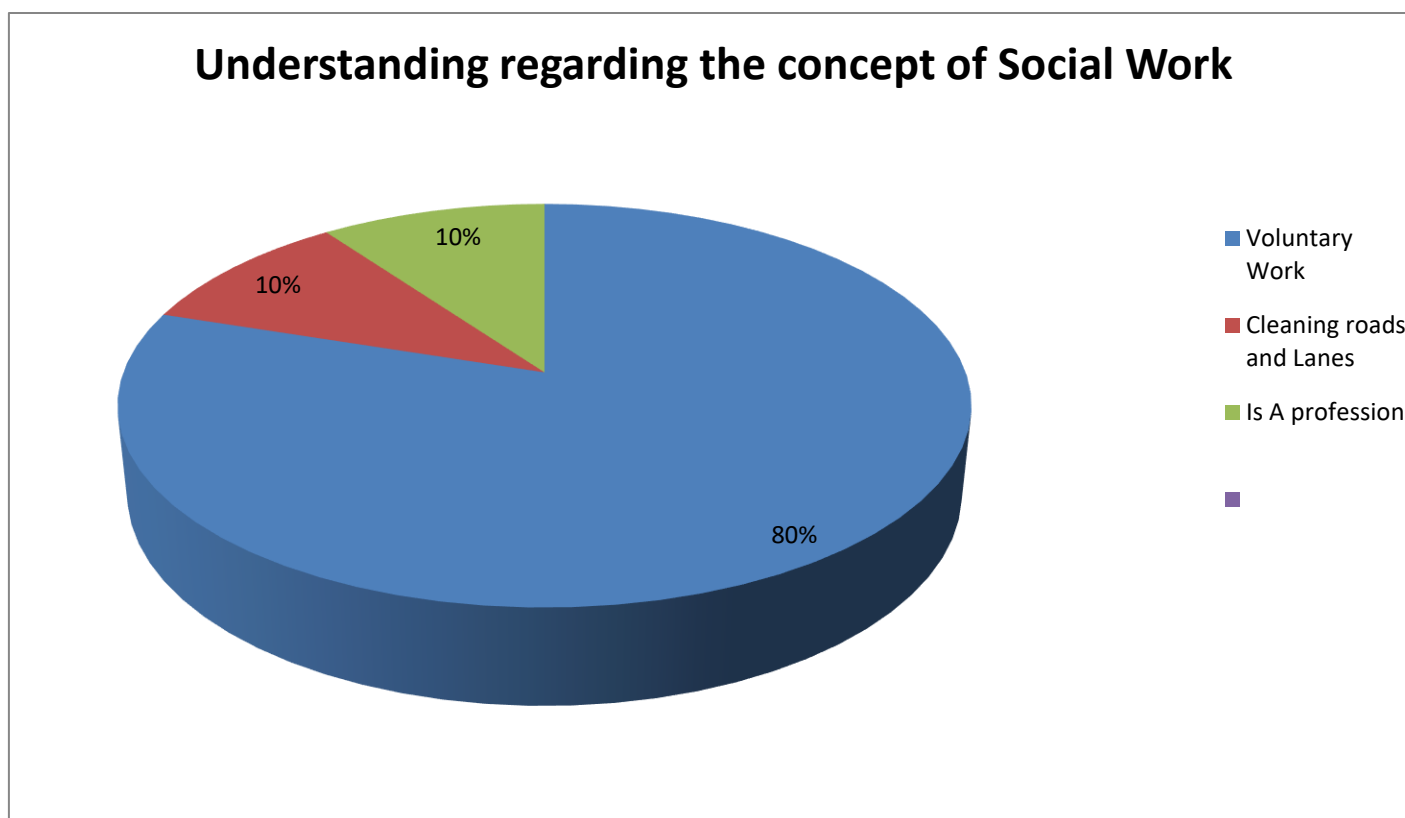
- As the sample size is small the conclusion drawn may not be accurate.
- School timings was another constraint
- Study focuses on only Highschools.

Analysis and Interpretation:

The purpose of analysis is to arrange, tabulate and summarise the completed observation in such manner that they yield answers to research questions.

Knowledge regarding School Social Work among teachers and students

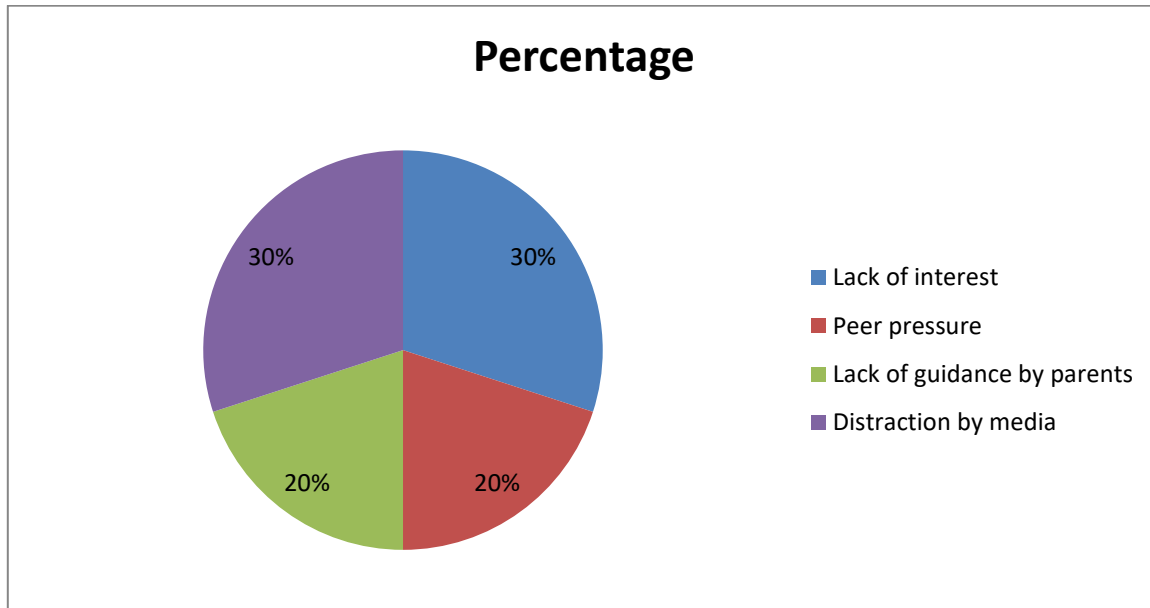
Teachers understanding regarding social work



From the above chart, it is evident that majority, i.e., 80% of the teachers opined that Social work means Voluntary work, 10% of the respondents expressed that social work means cleaning the roads and lanes while only 10% of the respondents were aware that social work is a profession.

The researcher feels that even though social work profession is gaining importance; people do not have an understanding about social work profession.

Teacher’s understanding regarding the problems of students



In the above chart it is evident that 30% of the respondents opined that the common problem among students is lack of interest towards learning, 20% of the respondents are of the opinion that it is the peer pressure, 20% of the respondents said that lack of guidance by parents is also a problem among students and 30% of the respondents expressed that distraction by media is the major problem among students. The researcher observes those major problems found among students are lack of interest and distraction by media. It was felt that understandings of the psychological problems of the student by teachers are very less.

Need of School Social Worker and Opinion regarding School Social Worker

Opinion \ Need	Yes, cannot be solved by teachers	Yes, Lessen the burden of teachers	Yes, solve the problems of children	Yes, as they are more specialised	Yes, understand the students better	No difference to be found	No, As it increases the problem	Percentage
No difference in presence or absence	20%	10%	-	10%	20%	-	-	60%
Yes, Students psychologically better known	-	-	-	10%	-	-	-	10%
Yes, Listen the burden of parents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	---
Yes, solve the problem of children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30%

Lessen the burden of teacher	-	-	-	20%	-	-	-	--
Total	40%	20%	405	60%	40%	-	-	100%

From the above table it is seen that 60% of the respondents say that there is no difference in presence or absence of a school social worker where 20% say that school social worker is needed as some problems cannot be solved by teachers alone, 10% of the respondent say that they are more specialized in the field and 20% of the respondents say that it is needed as they understand the student better.

Major Findings

Knowledge regarding School social work:

- 80% of the respondents said that social work means voluntary work
- 80% of the respondents also opined that social work means helping one another.

Teachers understanding regarding students problems:

- 40% of the respondents are able to solve their student's problems which are usually related to lack of concentration and lack of interest in studies.
- It was also found that the teachers always discuss the problems of students with colleagues or parents rather than taking the help of a social worker.

Psycho-social problems faced by students:

- 72 % of the students feel that most of the problem in the class room is due to the poor relation with teachers.
- 40% of the respondents opined that they are not interested in studies and the reason mentioned by them was peer group influence.
- It was also found that only 20% of the respondents remains isolated from the group.

Need of a school social worker:

- 60% of the students say that they expect guidance from school social worker.
- 80% of the students opined that there is a need for school social worker who can understand them and can solve their problems

Conclusion

Based on the study it was concluded that there is a need of a School Social Worker as there are many problems which teachers face while teaching the students and dealing with their problems. At the same time children also face many problems in school with their teachers, friends and also with their parents at home. The major finding of the study is the lack of knowledge about Professional social work as well as school social work among both teachers as well as students.

Thus the researcher wants to conclude that there is a need of a school social worker who can solve the problems of both teachers as well as of students. It is in the presence of a school social worker that an awareness regarding Professional social work can also be done.

Suggestions

1. An awareness about the need of a school social worker in school settings can be created
2. It is suggested that the teachers should conduct more of group activities to create interest among students regarding learning.
3. School social workers should be appointed in all schools to help the students and teachers to cope with the stressful situations that they face in their everyday life.

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