

Practice of School Social Worker with Children for Facilitating Social Needs in Sri Lanka

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Abstract - School social workers adopt ecological perspectives to facilitate children with social needs. The purpose of this study is to explore school social work practice in Sri Lanka to cater the children with social needs. A semi structured interviews was conducted with selected five school social workers. The interview questions were about their practices as a school social worker, daily activities especially effective support activity for students with social needs, student's school life and their home, especially difficulties for supporting their families. Findings reveal that School Children with social needs around social problems, social relationship problems, structural and systemic problems such as child poverty, mother labour migration, lack of housing, lack of love and affections, lack of acceptance, love and kindness, belongingness, lack or inadequate security for the children. These social needs related lack of emotional and social developmental needs lead to impact on children's educational performance. School social workers are very proactive in applying social work generic skills in school context in Sri Lanka. This study provides evidences for professionalizing the social work profession and enhances school system to provide guidance and consultation to school administrators, policy makers and practitioners focusing the significance of fulfilling the social needs of children during each stages of life via school social work programmes.

Keywords: School Children with Social Needs and School Social Work Practice

I. INTRODUCTION

School Social work is an 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 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 for the holistic development of the school going children. The school hires the social worker to work for the enhancement the school's ability to meet its academic mission, especially where home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving that mission. Therefore, school social workers are specially trained to work with students in schools. School social work practice is concerned not only with the resolution of crises and identified problem situations but also with facilitating

opportunities for positive interactions and transactions between all groups in school system and structure.

School is the secondary social institution which embosses a child's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development from primary level to secondary level education. Families and schools traditionally have been viewed as the social institutions with the greatest effect on the development of children. Communities however have received increasing attention for their role in socializing youth and ensuring students' success in a variety of societal domains.

School social work is well established in some of these countries and is being introduced in others (Marion, H.Feb; 2018). Schools need help to keep children in school despite barriers to education such as disabilities, physical and mental health problems, drug use, adolescent pregnancy, and learning problems. Many school social workers help children with their family problems including domestic violence, divorce, child abuse, homelessness, and family illnesses. They usually address problems within the school system such as discrimination, bullying, and inappropriate discipline by staff. School social workers also join with communities to work on community-wide problems that impact school performance such as violence, crime, decaying neighborhoods, lack of community services, racism, and poverty. As they work on resolving the problems that interfere with learning, school social workers defend the right to education that respects the dignity, worth and culture of every child whatever their differences from mainstream culture (Marion, H.Feb; 2018)

Toffler and Toffler (1995) asserted that school-family-community collaborations are one way to provide a caring component to today's often large, assembly-line schools. Benson (1997), Crowson and Boyd (1993), Dryfoos (1998), and others have suggested that schools must reach out into the community in an attempt to strengthen the social capital available to children. School-community partnerships can take a variety of forms. The most common linkages are partnerships with business which can differ significantly in focus, scope and content. Other school- community linkages

involve universities and educational institutions, government and military agencies, health care organizations, faith-based organizations, national service and volunteer organizations, senior citizen organizations, cultural and recreational institutions other community-based organizations and community volunteers that can provide resources and social support to youth and schools. The school social worker's role is to develop interventions and strategies that shore up the resiliency of all members of the school community. Academic success can strengthen a student's self-esteem, while academic failure can contribute to the opposite outcome. Social and behavioral success can increase a student's ability to bounce back from hard circumstances.

II. SOCIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

One of the most frequently cited frameworks was developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), building upon several foundational research studies and meta-analyses (e.g. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Under the CASEL framework, the skills for building positive relationships, managing emotions, and making decisions are all organized across five core SEL competencies. Each competency can be thought of as an umbrella that encompasses related functional skills, though in some cases these skills overlap across competencies: Five Core SEL Competencies (CASEL framework: 2017) Self-awareness: The capacity to reflect on one's own feelings, values, and behaviors Social awareness: The ability to view situations from another perspective, respect the social and cultural norms of others, and celebrate diversity. Relationship skills: The ability to initiate and sustain positive connections with peers, teachers, families, and other groups Self-management: The set of skills that includes self-motivation, goal setting, personal organization, self-discipline, impulse control, and use of strategies for coping with stress Responsible decision-making: The ability to make choices that consider the well-being of oneself and others Each of the core competencies are developed throughout the life span and are all vital to success, not only during the K-12 years but also in post-secondary education and the workplace. It should be noted that since social and emotional learning is a lifelong process, parents, teachers, school administrators, social workers and other professional subsequently have the dual responsibility of supporting SEL among their students and continuing to refine and develop their own SEL competencies.

These should be recognized in the school and in the home, be logical and natural to add, in the church. But poses of this paper the school and the home centers considered. Social organization takes place naturally when there is something to do. In the words of one of the leading educators, "when occupations are made the articulating centres" of home life and of school life, the social nature of

the child grows and expands. Some educators are telling us how this can be accomplished in schools. The school is not a place for the acquisition of knowledge only. It is where the social instinct is recognized, while all of the powers of the body, mind, and soul are unfolding and developing, under wise guidance. In order to fully accomplish this, the life of the school and home must supplement each other. Were the school social centers, our parents and teachers would meet on common ground for the furtherance of a better social spirit among all sorts and conditions of children. How this can be accomplished in the home is only now beginning to occupy the attention of educators and parents alike. Professor Henderson, in *Education and the Larger Life*, after finding that the public schools are in session for less than one-half of the year and for less than one-fourth of the day, urges the importance of instructing the home on the question of its larger social duties. He says: It may be that the social purpose is divided between the school and the home, giving seven-eighths of the total year to the home. If this large share belong properly to the home, it would seem that by far the more important part of education consists in instructing the home, and that a true normal school ought to devote seven-eighths of its time to the enlightenment fathers and mothers, and one-eighth to the narrower pedagogy But this is not done, and, as we all know, even in the schools question of parenthood and its tremendous social duties is hardly upon at all in school settings. The recognition of these social needs means the recognition of proper activities. In the olden time, when the household was the center about which all forms of industrial occupations clustered, there was plenty to occupy the time of the children of the family. Now that the industrial occupations have largely passed out of the home, there is great need to recognize the lack proper home interests for children. Our great material prosperity has destroyed the simplicity of our lives. The complex organization of the present household overlooks the help that the boys and girls in the family might furnish. Such work, when the home and the school are properly correlated, can be made educative and developing. While, in a sense, the work is not vital as in the old days when the household and neighbourhood systems prevailed, still a household can be conducted upon scientific and ethical principles, so that the children can receive a valuable training and education, physically, intellectually, and morally. This however, means that we must simplify our own and our children's lives. It means that the children must co-operate actively in the work and the life of the home, and that the parents must participate rather than direct. The strenuous demands of the outside world upon the members of the family often lose to it that tranquillity which must exist for the fructifying of highest social life. Owing to the tendency of our civilization specialize; many most vital things have passed out of the home. And these must be restored; otherwise the home is in danger. Children need other interests; they need play social intercourse with their mates. This interest should be understood and directed by the combined judgment of the teacher and parent. In some neighbourhoods this is well met by the schools, with their public playgrounds, under the

supervision of specialists. A human rights approach calls on school social workers to practice in a way that allows for maximum participation of service users in decisions that affect them, addresses power differentials, considers the social context, and privileges an intersectional, strengths based, trauma informed, and recovery-oriented approach.

III. SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

School social workers all around the globe are increasingly utilizing information from research about how to support the resiliency which is usually defined as the capacity to bounce back from difficulties. It is sometimes helpful to imagine someone that you know or have known who had to deal with some difficult circumstances in life. But, despite the challenges, this person has found ways to move past the events and stressors and become successful in life in a variety of ways with and without professional help. What we know is that resilient individuals have developed the following keys to success: They feel connected to others and they feel validated as competent human beings they feel that their opinion matters.

Schools provide daily experiences for children in which their resiliency is either supported or shattered. Every day, school social workers provide services to children and adolescents who “have been dealt a heavy hand”, in other words they are dealing with difficult challenges through no fault of their own. Additionally, teachers, administrators and families are encountering personal and professional challenges. The school social worker’s role is to develop interventions and strategies that shore up the resiliency of all members of the school community. Academic success can strengthen a student’s self-esteem, while academic failure can contribute to the opposite outcome. Social and behavioural success can increase a student’s ability to bounce back from hard circumstances. Difficulties with forming relationships and managing behavior in and out of the classroom can make it hard for the young person to handle the rest of the stressors in life. School social workers look for ways to encourage students to have recreational, athletic, social and peer experiences that support pro-social bonding. Additionally, traditions, celebrations and rituals within families and classrooms are important components of that pro-social bonding.

They can work with youth, families and teachers to teach students how to set healthy physical and psychological boundaries. Every student needs to have experiences in the classroom and beyond, in which they can have a meaningful role, have their voice heard and begin to develop leadership capacity. Students who are balancing difficult circumstances with school responsibilities need to have opportunities for developing life skills in the areas of time management, decision making, problem solving and communication strategies. The student’s potential needs to be developed around a strengths-based philosophy, encouraging a young person’s capacity to “be all they can be” and to “push through and around” obstacles. Creativity is the hallmark of

school social work practice, as the professional social worker individualizes what needs to be done, what needs to be provided and what programs need to be developed. Often, the caring and supportive individual in a school’s life may not be a parent or caregiver. School social workers understand that a teacher, social worker, principal, clergy, grandparent, neighbour or coach may provide that relationship. Making sure that each child or teen on our caseload is well connected with at least one unconditionally caring adult is crucial in a school environment for fulfilling social and emotional needs.

In Asia,(ANSSW, 2019) there are common student issues at schools. For example, nonattendance at school, delinquency, child abuse, game addictions, bullying, locked ins, dropouts, child poverty, family problems, etc. Also, there are common themes of school social work practice. For example, case management, home visits or outreach approach, advocacy, communication skills of school social workers, the development of social resources, collaboration of school-family-community, etc.

In Sri Lanka, School social work projects have been implemented on a pilot basis in a few Sri Lankan government schools from time to time since 1969 and in private school since 1996 (Vasudevan.V, 2008).These projects are initiated as field practice by the students and the National Institute of Social Development. The common school social work practice related students’ projects fulfill role of school social workers and social needs of school children of the following services:

1. Working with children with economic, social and behavioral problems
2. Referral services
3. Improving the school attendance among the children
4. Working with children who have dropped out of school
5. Working with groups with special needs
6. Building up social relationships between all stake holders of the school system
7. Linking resources available in the family, community and the schools
8. Helping to find resources for infrastructure facilities of schools
9. Developing peace building programmes among the school children
10. Empowering children regarding issues such as child abuse, children’s rights and responsibilities

Teaching and learning are geared towards the development of the whole child as a contributing member of society. However, today’s children face varied problems of growing up in a complex society that prevent them from benefiting fully from their education. Poverty, ethnic conflicts, changing cultural values, warfare and the absence of mothers who are working in domestic labour in the Middle East are some of the major problems affecting school children in Sri Lanka. Classroom teachers do not have the

time to help children deal with these issues. School social work services are needed to assess situations, link children with resources and support and guide them to move on to a better quality of life.

IV. SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

School social work practice includes working with the child, his parents and teacher, school administration and management. On the one hand, the school social worker will have to understand the total developmental needs such as physical, social, emotional, spiritual and psychological needs of the child. Developmental needs are fulfilled through the establishment of personal professional relationship with the child and his or her environment by offering professional support culturally appropriate localized service delivery.

The school social workers examine the role performance and role expectations on the part of the parents, teachers and pupil and will have to interpret the situation in a more objective manner so that the role expectations of parent, child and the teacher may be more realistic to fulfill the social needs of school children. In this process worker must enlist the support of the child, parents, teachers (school system) and outside public and private agencies and resources.

The school children in many cases do not see himself/herself as the root of the problem, but rather as the victim of the system. It takes skill to work with an unwilling participant who is probably not enthusiastic about seeing the social worker. Social work practice skills related direct social casework and group work services, counselling of parent groups and helping them understand the problems of the growing child and the basic needs of his personality, interpreting to the teachers the problems and limitations of the pupils and making the pupils understand the expectations of the teachers and of the school system, Skill to understand the effect of deleterious social, cultural and economic conditions on the child and his parents and to enlist the support of the community through social action programme for the amelioration of these conditions, Skills in mobilizing community resources and services for the benefit of the children, skill to develop and maintain liaison between the school and the important fields of social work-child welfare, corrections, mental health and legal services for children and families, skill to facilitate leadership in the coordination of interdisciplinary skill among pupil services and multi-disciplinary professionals.

Role of social worker is basically working with individuals, families, group and organizations, community and policy levels which encompass the ecological systems of an existing society.

School social workers often operate from an ecological systems perspective of practice.(Tan,K, Battle S, *et al*, 2015). This approach emphasizes the influence of social

factors on student functioning (Allen-Meares, 2007 cited from Tan,K *et al*;2015). There is strong evidence illustrating the relation between student achievement and proximal and wider social-economic contextual influences (Rumberger, 2011; Sipple, 2007 cited from Tan,K *et al*;2015). School social workers hat counseling school children with problems is one of their many roles. Teachers refer children with social work needs to school social workers.

Despite this resistance in school environment, the school social worker has some advantages in this situation. Knowing that changes in a child's behavior may not happen quickly, she can take the time needed to establish rapport, develop a trusting relationship, engage the various resources of the school and family and keep working on the problem as long as it takes. Groups of children with similar problems can also be brought together to extend the benefits to more pupils. In an age that looks for quick fixes using short-term therapy and medication, the school social worker can be flexible with how to use time and a variety of counseling methods. Another benefit is that a psychiatric label as a prerequisite to counselling does not apply when a school social worker provides the service.

Despite the advantages of working in a school, the school social worker has many challenges. Since school is secondary workplace for school social workers, there is plenty of groundwork to do to gain the trust of the school administration and teachers, claim a reliable workspace, work out referral procedures and obtain parents' permission to work together with children and their environment.

V. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore school social work practice in Sri Lanka to cater the children with social needs. A semi structured interviews was conducted with selected five school social workers with pre - explanatory note of the research and the interviewer explained research construction by word of mouth and document of consent was given.

The interview questions were about their practices as a school social worker, daily activities especially effective support activity for students with social needs, student's school life and their home, especially difficulties for supporting their families. All five interviews were conducted in using trilingual instruction in minimizing the cultural and language barriers.

The total time allocated per interview was 60 minutes and the individual consent and recording was done during the interview. The total number of interviews conducted was five with the participants of school social workers who are currently working in school settings. Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Council of Tokai University in Japan (No.15-20, 2016) and Academic Affairs Board and the Council of the National Institute of Social Development in Sri Lanka.

VI. FINDINGS: A BRIEF PROFILES OF SCHOOL'S SOCIAL WORKERS

All five school social workers have social work qualifications in Diploma, Bachelor and one of them have masters level qualification as well. They are working a minimum of 5 to 20 years of experiences in school social work practice. All five schools are urban centric and having primary to secondary school education. All school social workers are working within school system as well as neighbourhood and community. Findings reveal that School Children with social needs around social problems, social relationship problems, structural and systemic problems such as child poverty, mother labour migration, lack of

housing, lack of love and affections, lack of acceptance, love and kindness, belongingness, lack or inadequate security for the children. These social problem and social relationships related lack of social developmental needs lead to psychological impact on children's educational performance and social skills for enhancing inter relationships at family, community and schools.

VII. FINDINGS: CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The following Table 1.illustrates the main three categories of school social work practice involved by all five school social workers and their concerns in Sri Lanka.

TABLE 1 THE CATEGORIES OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN SRI LANKA

Main and subcategories of social work practice	Professionalization of social work practice	Type of social needs	Social work activities in schools
Children with social needs	Unawareness at policy level. There is lack of research and addressing the social needs of children at policy level	Social needs are self -awareness, social awareness, Relationship Management , Decision making Self - management	School social work activities related to social needs and common awareness are appreciated and valued by school system
Social Work practice skills	Methods and levels of social work practice such as case work and case management, group work, community work are in place International code of ethics for social workers adopted by school social workers	Individual developmental needs, parental capacity needs and socio environmental needs are being assessed by school social workers using the assessment skills and working with other professionals.	Home visit, case conference, psychosocial support activities, life skills programme, child rights programme, decision making skills, educational support coaching class are being done by school social workers Formal and informal resource link done by school social workers and teachers as well Role of mediation between teachers and parents immense in meeting the social needs of children. Parents teachers association used as platform for addressing the social needs of children. Encourage parental participation in school activities Intervention with school children in residential home.
Professionalization of social work profession	Non-Availability of government approved position on School Social Worker. Lack of legal recognition Non establishment of social work unit in schools Dearth of number of professional school social workers	Social Sanction on professional school social work Public awareness on role of school social worker	Establishment of Social work unit in few schools Students social work practice placement Social work activities are done with counselling unit.

VIII. FINDINGS: CHILDREN WITH SOCIAL NEEDS

School social workers involve activities with children to address social needs to fulfil their developmental needs of their stage of lifespan. This study aligned with school social

work practice based on Five Core SEL Competencies (CASEL framework: 2017) and well connected with collated qualitative data from school social workers. School social workers involve inactivities to meet social needs of children in combination of socio emotional learning in their

environment. All social workers promoted self-awareness programme which is to develop personality through reflection on their own feelings, values, and behaviors using the life skills programme and activities related identifying their strengths and weakness for continuous development. Social awareness related programme to develop ability to view situations from another perspective, respect the social and cultural norms of others, and celebrate diversity for promoting harmony among the school children. Further, school social workers address social problems such as poverty, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, lack of housing, mother migration and etc. Interpersonal Relationship skills promoted to develop ability to initiate and sustain positive connections with peers, teachers, families addressing the issues related to lack of parental love and affection, lack of acceptance by teachers, lack of feelings of belongingness and protecting children from abuse. Self-management related activities include personality building activities using group activities for enhancing self-motivation, goal setting for their career, time management, self-discipline and use of strategies for coping with school education related stress. School social worker promote important skills in decision-making ability to make choices that consider the well-being of children themselves based on their best interest for promoting to fulfill child developmental needs linking school social work project based on home- school -community partnerships. Although social and emotional learning is a lifelong process, parents, teachers, school administrators, social workers and other professionals laying foundation for better citizenship practice as evident children even small kids are facing many challenges in school and they gain negative experiences from outside the home and schools. School vicinity face problem related to drug addiction, children have to develop the skills to avoid and self-safely from that situation. Therefore, social emotional learning is vital for a particular student who has the strength to avoid these situations and he needs skills for making a good decision by his/her own. This study reflects that school social workers perform interventions at multiple levels to foster and advocate for 21st century life and career skill development and assessment among youth. For instance, practitioners can lead efforts to utilize such tools in school and community programming (e.g., afterschool programs) to facilitate continuous improvement processes geared toward developing these skills in youth

IX. FINDINGS: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

School social work practice focused on school system and its environment. Therefore, all five school social workers practice focused on person in environment and system perspectives from micro level to macro level practice such as case work, group work and community work in building home- school – community partnerships. School social workers are very proactive in applying social work generic skills in school context. Their school social work programmes were appreciated by their higher authorities in

education as evident that one the provincial director had asked “why we can’t spread these services to other schools and there is a need of school social workers in most of the school settings” however, school social worker face challenge with school day to day administrators who think that education is more important rather than doing social work programme as school social workers also face limitations to conduct school social work programme was noted in this study. They also involved in evidence-based assessment in collaboration with multi- disciplinary professionals and use home visit, family group discussion, case conference, formal and informal resource link and motivate parental participation. Role of social workers in facilitating parents and teachers association, school development societies are very significance activities for macro practice in Sri Lanka. All school social workers involved range of school social work activities micro level practice to macro level practice as evident that “we develop decision making skills training program for students. Child rights program for teachers and students, parents and well-wishers to empower children's rights. Family support service program focuses to build good bond with among children and parents by linking resources with the needy children those who are with social needs. Moreover, “there are parents who have family problems which can be address through school social work unit however; we do not have structure in schools. However, we intervene them to help them to make decision on their own to solve their family problems and make aware their duties related to their children’s education. Therefore, School system plays vital role for parenting which can be achieved via school social work practice as evident that “we find parents who have extra marital relationship or who have broken families or single parents living here and parents who are working in a different place so that family support system and ability to follow both parental care is need that I have seen it as a family problem that children experience can be addressed in school social work practice.

X. FINDINGS: PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

All five qualitative interviewees emphasized throughout the interview that lack of professionalization of social work profession. “I am so satisfied with my job. When workers look at the recruitment system in Sri Lanka, Social workers or School Social are not included in the schemes of employee recruitment system in the government sector”. Some private schools have realized the importance of the school social works at school settings and recruit school social workers these days, but not in government sectors. School social workers further expressed their concerns such as Non-Availability of government approved position on School Social Worker, Lack of legal recognition, Non establishment of social work unit in schools, Dearth of number of trained professional school social workers contributed to awareness of school social work practice in school settings to work with children with social needs. Since lack of public awareness and social sanction due the

fact of legal recognition for the profession, school social work intervention limited to social needs and children and parents are not aware for seeking the professionals. When problem arise in the classroom, that classroom teachers who themselves offer informal support or referred to school social workers are intervening in the school settings. A few private schools established Social work units. However, school social work unit is necessary for public schools which already have career guidance and counselling unit and teachers for career guidance and counselling. Social work students are being placed in the schools for social work activities. All school social workers expressed that their school social work activities related to social needs and common awareness on life skills building among the school children are appreciated and valued by school system. Two school social workers stated that “With our experiences working with students’ problem which needs social work unit should be exists in schools and a particular offer should be allocated. There should be recorded and evidenced based practice with approval” However, it is not yet communicated to policy makers.

XI. IMPLICATION OF THIS STUDY

This qualitative study poses implication for school social work practice with children with social needs. Although not often emphasized, role of school social workers may be placed at multiple levels to foster and advocate for policy and multi-disciplinary team practice in Sri Lanka. For instance, school social workers utilize home-school and community approach to facilitate continuous improvement in school system. Additionally, social workers practice in collaborating with others, such as teachers, parents, community service providers and multi-disciplinary professionals to foster social work opportunities that enhance social needs of children and families. This study provides evidences for professionalizing the social work profession and enhances school system to provide guidance and consultation to school administrators, policy makers and practitioners focusing the significance of fulfilling the social needs of children during each stages of life via school social work programmes. Further, school social workers may advocate for policies that support facilitating the development of social skills. It is significant for school social workers to emphasize for achieving sustainable development goals in 2030.

XII. CONCLUSION

To enhance success in adulthood stage, school children should be prepared to achieve full potential adult to fulfil complex social needs. Therefore, it is vital for school social work to enhance how to fulfil social needs each other for building social relationships. This study presented three emerging concerns on social needs of school children, social

work practice skills and necessary for professionalization of social work for enhancing child friendly learning environments in Sri Lanka. School social workers concern predominantly towards professionalization of social work with legal recognition which is repeated during the interviews. Moreover, School social work interventions may enhance students’ ability to utilize opportunities not only meeting social needs but also holistic development. More research also will brighten the significance of school social work education, research and practice.

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