

## International Network for School Social Work

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#### School Social Work Services in China under the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The lives of children around the globe have had to change under the pandemic. In the case of China, the communist parties and governments, from central level to village level, have been utilizing tough measures to prevent spread of the virus. One of the results was that school children were forced to stay at home. Like the practice in most of other regions and countries, the schools can conduct online teaching for facilitating learning at home. However, it has also been reported by the media that a number of the students are very stressed and presenting various psychosomatic issues because of the social distancing. Against this background, the authors are going to share their experiences in South China, including in two cities of the Pearl River Delta (the region nearby Hong Kong): Guangzhou and Zhuhai.

**Connecting with the students and passing updated information to them.** Through the online groups of social media (Wechat) for both students and their parents, the first author and her colleagues publicized the latest scientific knowledge of epidemic prevention every day. They also regularly contacted the students to understand their situations at home. Furthermore, the school social workers have been keeping communication with at-risk students, including those living in single-parent or poor families, and those experiencing mental health issues. They paid special attention to those students in high-risk regions like Wuhan city and Hubei province (the origin of the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, a thousand km north of the Pearl River Delta), understanding their local protective measures, the return-to-school plan, the difficulties they are facing, and sharing the latest news and information of anti-epidemic policies in Guangzhou with them.

**Providing materials for epidemic prevention to students in need.** The first author and colleagues understood that many at-risk students lacked materials for epidemic prevention, like surgical masks and sanitizer. They successfully allied with the local NGOs (e.g. Guangdong Lions Clubs) and with governmental bodies for donating the materials. →



**Organizing online activities for facilitating students' learning.** Online activities with the themes: 1) self-planning; 2) the knowledge of anti-

epidemic; 3) the power of role model; and 4) social advocacy, were offered by a social work team of the first author. All of the activities aimed to develop a positive attitude, as well as helping the students protect their physical and mental health. The team of school social workers also supported the schools' online teaching, for example coordinating communication between teachers and parents. They have also launched online workshops for supporting parents to guide children's learning at home.

In Zhuhai, the arrangements of fieldwork placement at school have been terminated by the epidemic since February. However, the second author and her supervisees were still working online for the students and teachers. For example, the teachers informed the second author that some of the students did not attend online classes on time. Therefore, the school social work placement students, who were supervised by the second author, decided to share ideas for helping the students rebuild their schedule and work habits. They used the platform of Wechat to deliver the information and also produced some interactive activities by inviting the students scanning QR codes to open a web-page of data collection (like Google Form) for sharing their responses.

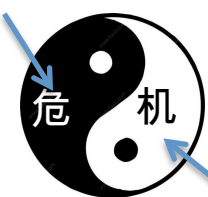
**Preparing to resume study at school.** Schools in Guangzhou have been gradually allowing students to come back to school since the mid of May. School social workers are thus busy preparing for the return of students. Apart from setting up the school environment with the teachers and school personnel, they are now also conducting telephone calls and even home visits to prepare them so as to minimize the impact on their psychosocial well-being and academic performance after the long stay at home. Mental health activities and meetings are being developed for the students who are graduating. They are also producing a guidance manual for the students, their parents and the teachers to help them adapt to the return to school.



Although the experiences shared were based on the situations of the two cities in South China, the third author has observed that similar practices are found around the country. A number of online activities, with themes from simply recreation to reflecting on the meanings of life and preparing for life after the pandemic, were produced by the social workers and corresponding agencies. They uploaded their video production, and even broadcast their activities online, through popular online platforms (like Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok) for school-aged people. The authors believe that these online initiatives should be popular not only in China, but also well utilized in other countries. The future of our next generation is being drawn together by the power of the Internet.

Based on the foregoing sharing, the implication to the practice of school social worker in China and abroad could be twofold: On the one hand, during the pandemic, the physical boundary for providing school social service is shown as becoming blurred. This would decrease the uniqueness of the roles of school social worker. On the other hand, school social workers could utilize Internet and the related applications for effectively providing their services to the students without the limitations bounded by being physically present in the school.

(Danger)



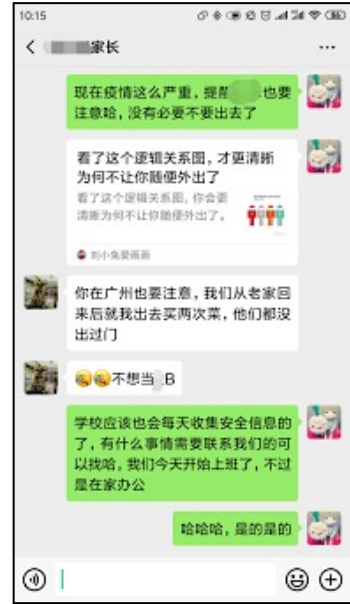
The Pandemic of COVID-19 is a devastating global crisis. Nonetheless, according to the traditional Chinese cultures for translating the term “crisis” (*weiji*, 危机), which could be a *dialectic process between danger and opportunity*. The profession of school social work in China has contributed skills to minimize the dangers of epidemic for the students, and to use knowledge and methods in creative new ways.

(Opportunity)

# Materials prepared by school social workers to be used online



Sharing the students' pictures drawn at home for cheering up with one another via Wechat



Publicizing the latest scientific knowledge of epidemic prevention to the students



Summarizing the questions of the students related to those disruptions on their daily schedule and learning habits, under the pandemic

Using QR code for inviting the students joining online activities

