



International Network for School Social Work

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Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

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Some Discussion about School Social Work in Ho Chi Minh City

Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Bích, MSW

Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education

The fast pace of change, exposure to potentially harmful media and pressures at school are reflected in an increase in problems among school children. Young people experience academic pressure from school and high expectations from parents. Although achievement levels are high in Vietnam, many students experience stress from academic demands, and psychological problems are increasing. In the 2020 - 2021 school year, there were about 1.74 million students at all levels in Ho Chi Minh City. The densely populated city experiences heavy traffic, traffic jams, flooding, and overloading of hospitals and schools, adding more sources of stress for school children. In recent years, high schools have experienced problems such as school violence, dating problems, depression, social evils and difficult family situations. Many parents are too busy to have time to care about their child's education and families are affected by an unstable economy. School attendance is also affected by these situations.

About school social work in HCM City

Recognizing the need to address social problems that affect children's progress in school, the Ministry of Education and Training has developed policies and plans to develop social work in schools. Various steps have been taken to start to implement the program. From 1999-2001 teachers from the Open University of Ho Chi Minh City deployed a pioneering model of social work at two schools (Chu Van An in District 1 and Hung Phu in District 8) to help solve problems related to learning, emotions, teacher/student relationships and family problems. Next, Save the Children Sweden collaborated with the Department of Population, Family and Children of HCM City to build school counseling at 8 schools and this too contributed to the formation of social work.

Since 2018, social work has a clearer legal basis. The Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular No. 33 on guidelines for social work in schools. In 2019 the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education implemented training courses on social work in high schools, designed to introduce the goals, functions and tasks of social work according to guidance from the Circular.

Since HCM City has not yet implemented school social work, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (a key school implementing the Bachelor of Social Work training program) conducted a

study of the situation in HCM City to assess the views of stakeholders on the need for social workers in schools. The authors (Dr. Võ Thị Tường Vy, Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Bích, M.Sc, Dr. Hoàng Tuấn Ngọc and Lưu Mạnh Hùng, M.Sc) conducted this study to help determine future steps. Following a review of both foreign and domestic literature to identify criteria for the study, information was gathered from 300 subjects who are key stakeholders in the schools, including teachers, administrators, and collaborators working at schools in HCM City in 2020.

Results of the study¹

The survey assessed the participants' views on the need for school social work. The results show that most of them highly appreciate the need and feasibility. It is interesting to note that, although social work activities have not been officially implemented in schools, the results showed that there are teachers who have participated in doing social work tasks such as prevention, intervention, and coordinating networks to help many pupils solve problems in school. According to these teachers, they faced many difficulties due to lack of time, lack of knowledge about counseling and integrating children, lack of skills to communicate with difficult parents, and not being trained in social work. The study's results showed that social work in schools is too new to be adequately used and most teachers have not yet been trained on social work in order to be able to implement social work skills in schools. The schools are still not ready for doing social work's tasks because of the lack of human resources. Finally, schools have too many things to do, so it is hard to add tasks suited to social work and to coordinate with other agencies outside of school.

Conclusions

In summary, we think that having one social work worker in each school is necessary. To date, most of the high schools have not really implemented school social work activities, but only school counseling. Currently the schools do not have access to and are not fully aware of the role and meaning of school social work services. Consequently, HCM City Department of Education and Training has been developing plans to raise awareness of social work for schools.

In addition to conducting this study to help inform the implementation of school social work, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (HCMUE) is contributing to awareness of social work for high schools by sending internship students to the schools. The interns are implementing social work activities, helping pupils who have learning difficulties, counseling on mental health and providing life skills education. We have supervised and supported students as well as high schools throughout the process of introducing interns practicing social work at the schools. The internships are also valuable for preparing students to practice social work skills in schools, so that when schools need to recruit social work workers, students will be better prepared to apply.

HCMUE has also developed and implemented a short-term training course in counseling and social work for high school teachers and other school staff in HCM City and neighboring provinces under a cooperation plan with the Departments of Education and Training. However, the challenge is now that high schools have not yet built a plan for introducing school social work. Many factors are at work in this. However the author and colleagues are looking forward to the sharing of international experiences on how countries have successfully introduced school social work and provided the necessary training. We believe that these gradual steps with careful planning and training will help to make the eventual program more effective.

¹ For research results of the study "Current situation of social work in Ho Chi Minh City" please contact Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Bích at bich.ctxh2017@gmail.com