Significance of School Social Work: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: School is one of the important units in developing child's personality and after school family follows in child's personality. Thus the family and the school are the central places for the development of children but due to the absence of a close school, home and community liaison our education system suffers from number of impediments. The present paper shows how school social workers can play a significant role in enhancing conducive school and family environment for effective learning. In addition it illustrates the vast scope of social workers in the education setting.

KEY WORDS: School social work, School Social Worker, Teacher's Mental Health, Development Academic Performance, Parental Participation, Children's Performance, Guidance

INTRODUCTION

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Nelson Mandela). The statement not only signifies the vital role of education but also the importance of schools or educational institutions. The purpose of schooling is the transmission of culture, the process by which the culture of a society is passed on to its children. As one of the most stable and formal socializing agent, the school is expected to both train the individual for practical occupations and skills and to provide with basic societal values, like respect to elders, obeying civic norms, etc. (Saldana, 2013).

Henslin (1999) states, that school are the agents responsible for socializing groups of children and young people on specific skills and values in a society. The school system has become the glue that holds the society together by bringing dynamism as well as acting as a stabilizer. It probably contributes most to social conformity (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997). The school system responds to society's needs, and complies with society's demands, for trained workers, intellectual and well-educated citizens (Saldana, 2013).

Counts (1932) has commented, "we are convinced that education is the one unfailing remedy for every ill to which man is subject, whether it be vice, crime, war, poverty, riches, injustice, racketeering, political corruption, race hatred, class conflict, or just plain original sin. We even speak glibly and often about the general reconstruction of society

through the school". In the contemporary world, schools are expected to teach young minds knowledge and expertise for career, life-skills, value education, conflict resolution, and sex education. Thus, education is becoming all-encompassing and the role of school is expanding.

The schools provide plenty of opportunities to the child to habituate themselves in moral ideal just like family. Seemingly, it is true that schools "undo developmental deficiencies caused by familial socialization process" (Robinson, 1978) There are many reasons why schools are given so much importance today, salient ones are stated below:

Now days, joint family systems are giving way to smaller units like nuclear families. In ancient and medieval times, joint families and extended families played many significant roles including provision of education, life-skills, moral education, inculcating values. However, in the present times, most of these roles have been taken up by other agencies outside the family system (Panda, 2005). And, the school system became the primary source of imparting education to the children. Other than providing technical education or vocational training, schools are playing significant role in imparting values, perceptions and life-skills, which traditionally have been the scope of roles of families, particularly grandparents.

However, shrinking role of family system has put additional responsibilities on the school system. How the schools are coping with these surplus tasks and duties? Are the teachers overburdened or school authorities have employed additional staff like psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, other than teacher to accomplish these tasks?

Among several professionals working in the school system, one of them is social worker, who is equipped with various skills, principles, methods and scientific knowledge. The social workers with these skills can play an important role in the personality growth of the student.

Educationists have stressed that for optimum development of children there should be strong inter-linkage between the school system and the parents or families. Social workers working in the school setting are the connecting link (see

Robinson, 1978). Oftentimes, there are gaps in the relationship of the pupil with his/her school or within the family or between the school and the family – all these affect the development of children. The gaps between the school system and the family have repercussions on gaining benefits of education. Social workers have been professionally trained to fill-in these gaps in the school setting.

School social workers are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with the pupils having problems in adjusting in their social environment, coping with studies, anxiety, issues related to developmental tasks, scholastic backwardness, truancy, school phobia. Social workers deal with school administrations as well as students and families and facilitate school system in achieving its objectives. School social workers play wide range of roles preventive, management, supportive, promotive, mental health intervention, crises-management and support services. As part of an interdisciplinary team to help students succeed, social workers also facilitate community involvement in the schools while advocating for student success.

School Social Work Association of America (2009) maintains that 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 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. They are appointed by school-authorities to enhance the school's ability to meet its academic mission, especially when home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving that mission.

In the globalized world, the roles of school social workers are becoming broader and more complex. In a classroom, children from all sections of society, with differential sets of abilities and capabilities, problems and challenges are present. Social work practice rests on a wide range of skills such as counseling, networking, referring, educating, advocating, and so on. School social workers may work one-on-one with teachers, families, and children to address individual situations and needs. They become part of joint efforts to make schools safe and educational process enriching for everyone. There is a scope of school social workers to work with teachers too on their mental health issues, particularly in the light of ever-expanding roles and challenges encountered by the teaching community in the present social setting.

The school social worker is becoming a useful professional to assist children who are marginalized – whether economically, socially, politically, or personally – to participate in the process of empowerment through education. Social workers help in making the education process effective. To do this, their central focus is working in partnership with parents on the pupil in transaction with a complex school and home environment.

Further, in Indian setting, we do not have common school system. There are private schools and government owned and government aided schools, each type having its own set of strengths and challenges. Government schools, largely caters to children coming from economically weaker sections. Here, the school faces challenges in terms of school drop outs and maintaining quality education. School social workers often have to deal with problems like lack of motivation among parents, no conducive home environment for studies, resistance in sending girl children to school, first generation learning and such others (Gandhi, 1990).

In private schools, with the government's inclusion policy, an increased level of heterogeneity is seen among the pupils of same class and school social workers may encounter problems like bullying, drug addiction, familial problems impacting academic performance, emotional and sexual problems, adjustment with peers from different cultural backgrounds, and so on.

Talking about the status of school social work in India, Gandhi (1990) observes that many social work practitioners and educators have believed that school social work in India has not become a movement and it is still at the experimental stage. The education departments of central and states governments have not yet accepted this service as an integral part of their school system. It is only a few private or aided schools in prominent cities which have employed social workers in their schools. The growth achieved so far is attributed to the efforts made by colleges of social work, child guidance clinics, associations of trained social workers, few progressive educationalists and local Parent Teachers associations (Gandhi, 1990).

Due to the absence of a close school, home and community liaison our education system suffers from number of impediments, specific among them are – high dropout rates, mental health problem, adjustment problems, biasness in favor of children from higher socio-economic strata and schools catering for the elite group having no touch with social realities.

Even in contemporary times, there is a debate among the educators and practitioners of social

work whether social workers have been able to carve a special place for them in school setting or are still struggling for their identity and recognition.

OBJECTIVES

A thematic review is done below with twin objectives – one, challenges in the education system, which, in turn, reflect the scope of school social work in the Indian setting and two, existing status of school social workers, the roles played by them and the impediments encountered

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Battle and Lewis (2002) identify the significance of education in today's world. They state that in this era of globalization and technological revolution, education plays a vital role in the development of human capital and is linked with an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living. In the same wavelength, Sexton (2000) brings out that education ensures the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to increase their productivity and improve their quality of life. This increase in productivity also leads towards new sources of earning which enhances the economic growth of a country.

There have been many studies done to examine the factors that influence students' performance. Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004) categorize these factors as student factors (personal motivation, aspirations, personality types, adjustment abilities, etc.) family factors (socio-economic condition, parental educational levels, family culture in relation to education, etc.) school factors (teachers' attitudes, infrastructure, management, and such others) and peer factors (peer pressure, bullying, acceptance in group, and so on). Besides other factors, socioeconomic status is one of the most researched and debated variable that contribute towards the academic performance of students. Adams (1996) finds that the socioeconomic status of learners affects the quality of their academic performance. The researcher cites the reason as the low socio-economic status has negative effect on the academic performance of students because the basic needs of students remain unfulfilled and hence they do not perform better academically. Adeyinka (2009) too confirms the findings of the above study with his research work that maladaptive behavior arise when parents lack responsibility of their parenthood and that children from economically disadvantaged background are more likely to have poor academic performance because they lack some basic amenities such as food, clothing and shelter.

Further, Roberts (2007) examines the theory of Educational Productivity propounded by Walberg (1981) that determined three groups of nine factors based on affective, cognitive and behavioral skills for optimization of learning that affect the quality of academic performance. Aptitude includes ability, development and motivation; instruction covers amount and quality; and environment contains home, classroom, peers and television. Another interesting aspect illustrated by many research findings is that the academic performance of students heavily depends upon the parental involvement in their academic activities to attain the higher level of quality in academic success (Barnard, 2004; Henderson, 1988; Shumox & Lomax, 2001).

Hussain (2006) studies 'guidance' as a factor in academic performance. Students often face a lot of problems in developing positive study attitudes and study habits. He demonstrates that guidance is of the factor through which a student can improve his/her study attitudes and study habits and is directly proportional to academic achievement. Children who are properly guided by their parents perform well in the exams. Guidance from teachers also affects the performance of students.

Let us now look at the challenges from the teachers' side. Bolu-steve and Sanni (2013) maintain that in order to identify hidden talents among their pupils, teachers themselves should be multi-talented and sensitive enough to recognize talents among children. They claim that, unfortunately, Indian teachers frequently do not focus on this and are more concerned about their subject knowledge. International schools expect their teachers to help students in drama, debate, dance, music, art and craft and many other activities. It is not possible to develop well rounded students if teachers are not well rounded themselves. Likewise, Bhatnagar (2012) laments that newspapers are full of news items of corporal punishment, physical abuse and sexual exploitation, kidnap, rape by the teacher perpetrator on children-victims, thereby blotting the image of Indian teachers in the international arena. He questions the credibility and character of such teachers in the Indian society that has traditionally given utmost respect to the teachers equating them with the God. Teachers' arrogance, perpetration and uncalled for behaviors drift the students away from the school system. Due to these factors, school is not a place of attraction for children.

The research studies reviewed above shows that school systems are of prime importance in the social development and national development. Academic performance of a child in the school is dependent on many factors other than his/her hard work and motivation. These factors are – socio-

economic status, parental guidance and encouragement, learning environment at school and home and such others. Teachers' mental health also plays crucial role in students' learning and overall education process. Peck and Mitchell (1962) discuss the poor mental health in teacher. They suggested that a maladjusted teacher who is suffering from anxiety or personal problem cannot avoid communicating his insecurity to his students.

The White House conference Preliminary reports (1930) – "Mental Health may be defined as the adjustment of individuals to themselves and the world at large with a maximum of effectiveness, satisfactions, cheerfulness, and socially considerate behavior and the ability of facing and accepting the realities of life".

Today in this complex world where nobody have time for them also and everybody is moving or racing for this materialistic life. Therefore the mental health is a growing concern for all people especially for young ones and old people, because both need others to support and if they don't get positive response their mental health starts decline.

The new educational policy (1986) as well as National Mental Health Policy (1982) stressed on the need for promotion and prevention of mental health and related problems .Childhood is the most vulnerable period in the entire life spam of man. In the initial period of childhood or early childhood,

family is the very convenient place for promoting child's mental health. But at school child spends half of his day in school and rest with the family and friends. At this age they are highly dependent on their environment (School, home, friend circle) so their mental promotion also depends on both the child and the stress on support system presents in his family school and community (Dr. Marry Venus Joseph – Mental health in classroom).

According to Institute of medicine,1989 almost 3% of school age children suffers from serious mental illness such as psychosis, depression, suicide thought , serious attention problems, or obsessive-compulsive disorders. So for the development of a child it is very much important to identify the child having psychological problems at early stage of life and then target them for intervention. Otherwise these psychosocial problems are turned school dropouts, drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile delinquency etc. Children who are not doing well in school may suffer from these kinds of psychosocial problems and are unlikely to perform well in school a later in life.

Division of Mental health, WHO, 1994 gave a model framework for school mental health programmes.

Figure 1 :
A Model Framework for School Mental Health Programmes
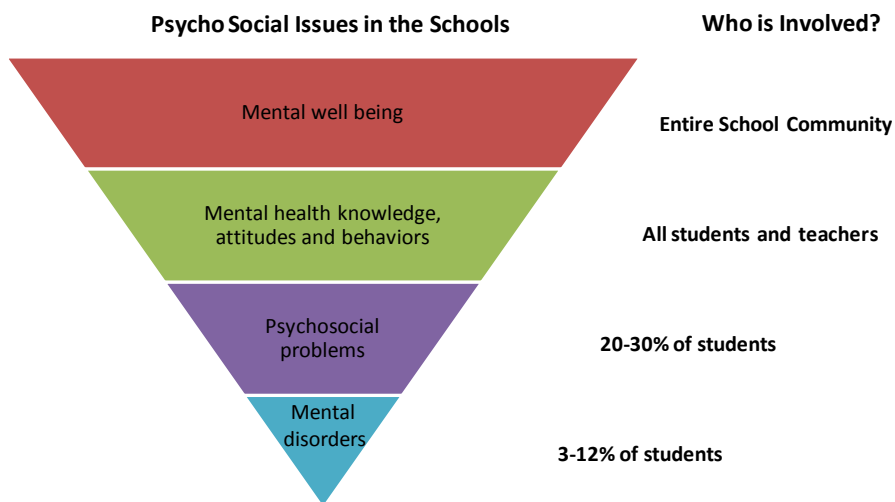
The **figure explains** the psychosocial and mental health issues present in the schools and also indicates who is likely to be affected by issues like issues of men wellbeing and psychosocial competence will affect the entire school (students, teachers, administrators etc.). So there is need for specific mental health programmes which may

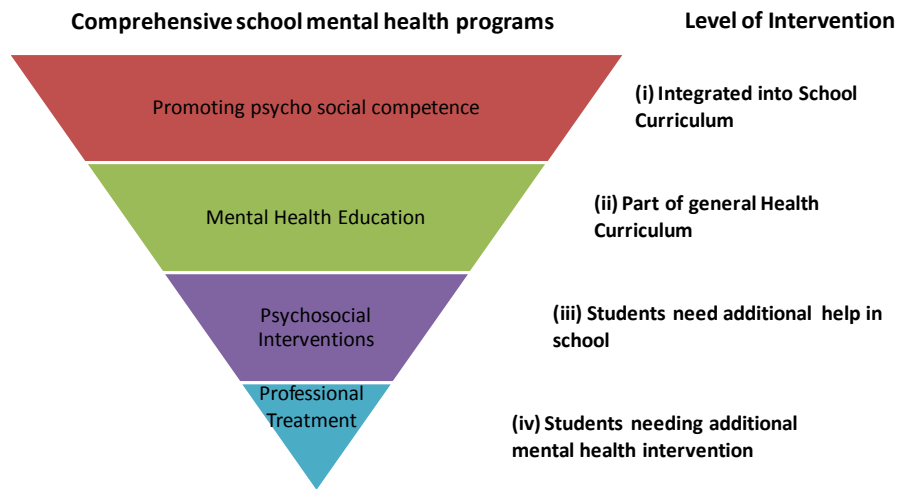address these issues and create a healthy school community.

Mental health knowledge, attitudes, and behavior affect all students and teacher. So interventions may be useful for identification and handling of psychosocial and mental health problems.

WHO has also given an intervention model (division of mental health, WHO 1994).

Figure 2 :
Intervention Model

For the effectiveness of the programme all the four levels are needed but the focus is generally seen up to only one or two levels at first. However the importance of school has also been recognized increasingly by the policy makers and school education is considered as a means for national and social development is developing countries. So this intervention model seems helpful for achieving the desired goal.

The review of literature, beyond doubt illustrates the vast scope of social workers in the education setting. They need to work with students, their parents and other family members and school authorities and teachers. Though teachers are the backbone of school system, social workers can play no less important role in facilitating all the actors (student, school and family) perform their roles effectively. Let us now examine the status of school social work in India.

Gandhi (1990), in her book on school social work highlights some experiments indicating various models being used as social work intervention in India. The following three experiments are relevant in the context of the present research.

1. First experiment was initiated in 1971 by Nirmala Niketan, a college of social work, in collaboration with Municipal Corporation School of Greater Bombay catering to the children of slums and resettlement colonies. The college took the initiative of introducing social work services in Municipal Schools. The focus of the programme was on providing home, school, and community relationship so that the learning environment can be made conducive.

2. Another experiment was carried out by Pune Palan Shikshak Sangh (PPSS) – the Pune branch of Maharashtra state Parent Teacher Association has been actively associated with the school of social work programme since 1960. Here the Parent body was rigorously involved in the school programme for the overall development of the children.

3. Like Nirmala Niketan experiment, New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) in Delhi initiated social work services in 1985 to attain universalisation of elementary education and to check the high dropout rates prevalent in the schools. Before employing school social worker, the education department of NDMC noted that 14 percent of the children of the age group of 6-11years residing in its area were not attending school and further the dropout rate prevalent in its school at primary level was as high as 45%.After the induction of professional social workers, designated as student welfare workers in the NDMC schools, the percentage of children not attending school fell from 14 percent in 1964 to 1.5 percent 1978-79 and of dropout rate which as high as 45 percent in 1964 was reduced to two percent in 1979. Looking at the above data one cannot deny the contribution of professional social workers both towards the achievement of universalisation of elementary education and in reduction of

drop out in primary schools of New Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Some research studies in India (Joshi, 1996; Aggarwal and Kapoor, 1998) also suggest that family awareness on the importance of education and parental participation in children's education contribute to better academic performance of children's in school. The school social workers indeed can play a significant role in enhancing conducive family environment for effective learning.

Bowen (1996) in her article "A role for school social workers in promoting student success through school family partnership" highlights a social work intervention that enhanced parents' ability towards creating home conditions, which help in learning and promoting family involvement in home learning activities. The intervention was carried out by both teachers and parents with the academic and behavior problems of the five targeted kindergarten and first grade students. The findings support other research studies indicating that parents' educational involvement promotes students' achievement.

In another study, Henderson and Berla (1994) observe that students' school performance at the beginning of the intervention was assessed by teachers' qualitative descriptions of academic social behavior. Parents' perceptions of performance were also documented before the intervention began. The assessment of students' performance during and at the end of the intervention was based on the perceptions of teachers and parents. Parents and teachers perceived a variety of favorable results because of the social work intervention. Most significant of these results were improvement in students' academic and social behaviors and improved parent-teacher communication. Other notable positive effects of interventions included more positive teacher's perceptions of student's future progress and parents' increased knowledge of their children's learning styles and need, greater self-esteem among students and greater parental satisfaction with school.

Result of the intervention suggest that school social workers can promote student and school success by directly facilitating school family communications and ensuring that educational resources are shared with parents. The small sample size and lack of experimental group makes it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger social context.

Reddy (1995) has conducted a qualitative research to access the performance of dropout children with ecological perspective so as to offer a suitable plan of intervention. Findings infer that the poor economic status, unhygienic and poor living conditions, lock of awareness, negative attitudes of parents, unattractive conditions in schools, negative image of teachers as perceived by parents and children, and the poor performance of teachers, lack of interventions to motivate parents etc. are some of the factors responsible for the non-enrolment and dropouts among the disadvantaged groups. Social interventions in the form of massive awareness and counseling programmes to motivate parents, children and community were suggested. For attitudinal and pedagogical changes teacher's training programmers were recommended. Indeed, school social work has wide scope to make significant contribution in this regard.

Joshi (1996) has studied the effectiveness of social work intervention in improving the health and growth of under-five children belonging to urban slum community. To evaluate the impact of social work intervention before and after treatment, experimental and control (group) date were compared and analyzed for suitable statistical measures. The finding of the research study pointed out that social work intervention improved the health of under-five slum children as also the knowledge and attitude regarding healthcare of under-five amongst the target women.

Collaboration between social work and education is widely recognized as a valuable partnership for the social and educational needs of disadvantaged children and their families. Research studies in India and around the world suggest that parent's investment in children education is the most effective way to boost learning achievement. Following studies form West show the effectiveness of intervention in school setting with disadvantages children and families.

A multi-dimensional study by Bronstein and Kelly (1998) highlights significance of school social workers. In the study, the social worker took the role of mediator between home and school, spending increasing time consulting teachers, and meeting family members. The most critical factor identified was the need to develop an intensive home base family outreach treatment plan.

Another research study by Bowen and Bowen (1998) had implications for school social workers intervention with individuals and groups. It examines the interplay of home environment risk factors, teacher's support & student academic performance and effective investment in schooling. The study examines student academic achievement (grades) and education investment (or perception that school participation is meaningful) as salient outcome variable that can be expected to promote the long term desirable goal of high educational attainment. The result of the research study

suggests that home and academic culture proved to be an important factor for the student achievement. After teacher's support, home had the second strongest direct effect on the educational investment. The authors claim that school social workers can target student's home and academic culture in variety of ways.

Kumar (1989) maintains that attitudes of teachers and students towards school social work programme are likely to influence effectiveness of social work practice in schools. She examines the content and mode of their functioning. Her study was based on the premise that the mere fact that the school social worker provides professional intervention does not necessary mean that such intervention has been successful in achieving its objectives. She has stressed a need to evaluate contemporary social work practice in schools because there is not much conceptual clarity about the specific measurable objectives of school social work practice against which the professional activities of practitioners may be appraised.

Kumar suggests that the supervision inputs by school social workers in the community by services and programmes need to be re-analyzed. This would result in image building of the school social workers distinctly different from that of a teacher and school psychologist.

Conclusion

The review of literature done above provided an insight into the roles and effectiveness of school social work. However, a few research gaps may well be delineated. The studies are geographic and culture specific and therefore the results may not be homogeneously applied to other settings. School social work in India is still in its nascent stage. There is high level of variability among the designation, role, position, status, authority and the support system available for social workers in the schools. In fact, schools do not exhibit uniformity even in terms of recruiting social workers. There is a need to conduct study that reflects this contextual variability in terms of social work response in various schools, with presence or absence of social workers.

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