Original Paper

Recommendation of School Social Work Activities to Address Students Issues in Vietnam

Dang Thi Huyen Oanh[1*]

[1] Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

[*] Dang Thi Huyen Oanh, Faculty of Social Work, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam

Abstract

Bullying and physical violence, truancy, self-harm and other mental health issues are increasingly experienced within the school population. In being a crucial part of addressing such issues and the more traditional areas of poverty, family relationships and parenting, child abuse and neglect, home-school relationships, support for children with disabilities, school social work has become a specialist area of professional practice with a growing evidence base of effectiveness. This paper aims to explore issues related to middle-school students in Vietnam and their needs in school social work activities to address those problems. Implications for school social work research and practice which are recognized as a key area for students' wellbeing are discussed.

Keywords

school students, social work, school issues, school social work, middle school

1. Introduction

Vietnam, a country of some 94 million citizens has grown markedly since winning the war at great cost in 1975 and then introducing market reform in 1986. Integral to sustaining a commitment to equal opportunity and social justice for all citizens has been the national education system. Another commitment to citizens' wellbeing has been the government endorsement in 2010 of the professional development of social work. The Vietnamese government through MOLISA (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs) officially classified social work as a profession. Following Decision 32/2010/QD-TTg by the Prime Minister on the Development of Social Work as a Profession, the government allocated $US130 million for the training and development of social work staff. Now more than 50 universities and colleges offer social work degrees at some combination of bachelor, masters and PhD level. Many offer a special focus on developing the skills, knowledge and values for school

social work practice. While an increasing number of research projects, including action research, and students on placement at schools are evidencing the value of this profession in the school setting, there is as yet no legal and financial base for the employment of professional social workers in schools within the national educational system.

In Vietnam, there are specific cultural issues underlying the emergence of intractable problems in schools. The school environment plays an important role in the life of Vietnamese children due to both the emphasis on education and the many hours they spend in school per week. While most children become productive citizens and achieve academically, many others have had negative experiences affecting their future. Both schools and families have high expectations of students' academic performance. This pressure results in stress, anxiety, school avoidance and even suicide. Vietnam, like other school systems in the world, must contend with bullying, physical violence, truancy, self-harm, antisocial behaviours, and other mental health issues (Pells et al., 2016). Furthermore, other challenges for schools include serving areas with high rates of poverty, difficulties in family relationships and parenting, child abuse and neglect, the need to bridge home-school relationships, and supporting children with disabilities (Pells et al., 2016). Thus, school social work is a necessary field and specialized area of practice that can effectively address these issues (Villarreal Sosa & Ha, 2020). The aim of this paper is to explore the current problems among students and assess the need for school social work activities to address this.

2. Method

We distributed survey questionnaires to 200 students studying from grade 6 to grade 9 at 02 survey schools. Therefore, the number of samples to analyze was 200. After obtaining the results, we use statistical software in social sciences (SPSS 16.0) for processing and analysis. Before data collection, school principals, homeroom teachers received consent letters from the authors. Students were also not surveyed if they confirmed orally that they did not want to participate. The researchers were introduced to the students by homeroom teachers who explained the purpose of the survey. This research received approval from the Hanoi National University of Education Research Ethics Committee (HNUE-REC).

3. Result

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of students participating in the study. Eligible participants were from one middle school students in Hanoi, Vietnam. As described below, we recruited 250 students including 44.8 % female (N=112) and 55.2% male (N=138). Student from grade 6th and grade 7th was the same number (N=80) (N=108), and the 9th grade was 90.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic		N=482	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	138	55.2
	Female	112	44.8
Grade	6	80	32.0
	7	80	32.0
	8	90	36.0

The results in Table 2 showed that students faced several issues in which, the most popular was "poor academic performance" with the highest rate at 87.2%. 88.4% of students reported that the most difficulties related to their love and friendship and then was game addiction as reported. Other issues also reported as cheating in exams, vocational orientation, school violence or disrespect to teachers.

Table 2. Students' Issues in School

	Poor academic performance (N)	Cheating in exams (N)	Games online addiction (N)	Vocational Orientation (N)	Love and friendship (N)	School violence (N)	Disrespectful to teachers (N)	Others (N)
Yes	218	57	212	43	216	43	53	29
No	32	193	38	207	34	207	197	221
Total	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250

There are several factors related to student's issues in school. The most popular reported wasp psychophysiological characteristics (66.5%), then was family-related factors (60%), lack of life skills and values (50%), lack of school social work and school counselling services (45.7%) and others including lack of coordination between family-school-community, study pressures and rapid development of information technology (Table 3).

Table 3. Factors Related to Students' Issues in School

Order	Factors	Percentage
1.	Psychophysiological characteristics	66.5%
2	Family-related factors	60%
3	Lack of life skills and values	50%
4	Study pressure	27.2%
5	Lack of coordination between family-school-community	37.3%
6	The rapid development of information technology	21.1%
7	Lack of school counselling and school social work services	45.7%
8	Lack of career direction	20.1%
9	Others	8.1%

Table 4 showed the different needs for school social work in Van Canh school. Participants reported that the most important was the cooperation between school and social work training schools to form a professional practice room on social work at the school (72%), school social work training for homeroom teachers (70%) and other staff in school (65.5%).

Table 4. Students' Needs

	Needs	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Slightly Important (%)	Not important (%)
1	Homeroom teachers are trained in school counselling and social work	70	20.1	3.4	6.5
2	Subject teachers are trained on how to integrate school social work into classrooms and experiential activities, etc.	49.4	40.9	5.5	4.2
3	Other staff in schools are trained school social work	65.5	23.6	12.0	0.9
4	Forming psychological clubs to support students	42.9	28	13.9	15.1
5	Having school social work department	40.9	39.7	11.9	7.5
6	Having 1 or 2 school social workers	46.2	37.7	10.7	5.5
7	The school form a professional practice room on social work at the school.	72	18.1	2.4	7.5

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study reflect several issues that students have faced within school like in the previous study (Dang et al., 2016; Le et al., 2011; Nguyen & Fahey, 2001; Villarreal Sosa & Ha, 2020). The results of this study show that the problems faced by students were diverse and complex. This showed that there is still a lack of supportive activities of school social work. From the actual situation, the need for school social work has been raised. This is the orientation and basis to build a school social work.

The school social work training provided opportunities for a greater understanding among school teachers of the role of the school social worker, including psychosocial assessment, needs assessment, addressing issues such as bullying and mental health challenges such as suicidality, multi-tiered systems of support, and the evidence-based process. The importance of school climate and environmental factors was an issue for both students and teachers. Tier 1 or universal interventions are needed in order to address these issues in preventative ways, including teacher training around issues such as inclusion and mental health. Second, there is a need to continue to explore issues of equity and differences in ethnic groups and expanding ideas about what inclusive education means. There were few inclusive schools or classrooms for children with disabilities, and some of those that did "include" children with disabilities needed additional support with developing appropriate accommodations beyond simply having them present in the classroom without full participation in classroom activities. Finally, there are serious and unrecognized mental health concerns among the children in Vietnam. Though mental health concerns exist, there are few school and community resources to address them(Phuong et al., 2013). School social work can provide vital services in counselling centres in schools, as well as provide important linkages to community resources when available. The concept of school mental health a focus on prevention and universal intervention was also introduced during this project. In addition, school social workers can provide professional development to teachers to support them in including students with mental health challenges in the classroom and reducing stigma.

This paper also recommends some possible solutions for developing school social work in Vietnam.

Firstly, establishing a reputation for effectiveness. While Vietnam lacks a nationally established practice base, it should not need the sixty years needed in Victoria to establish a good reputation with citizens and government decision-makers. Considerable research is already being conducted by Faculties of Social Work and students are having an impact through their placement. A key task is to raise social awareness as to school social work and its effectiveness in practice.

Secondly, National Commitment: To move closer to closing the circle between professional education as school social workers and professional practice at the national level requires a legal and financial commitment from national decision-makers. Part of this will be overcoming the silo thinking common in bureaucratic structures. For social work to flourish in a host organization it needs acceptance and commitment from the host whether health or education—both essential government services for

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national wellbeing. The other aspect is that decisions to employ social workers should not come out of local budgets as the schools with the least resources are the most likely to benefit from social work services. The government needs to recognize and officially categorize professional school social workers in the school staff system with school social workers having an appropriate professional salary code.

Thirdly, for faculties of social work: to further develop collaboration between universities and with organizations in school social work at all levels to fully tap expertise and experience in training and practicing social work. This would enable enrichment of learning materials and the creation of a network for training, researching and practicing school social work. School social work curriculum in Vietnamese universities should meet agreed professional standards and be continuously updated. Collaboration would support the publication of textbooks and other resources in the field of school social work. The school social work programs should be practicable and relevant while aware of international standards. For students to achieve the necessary beginning competency in these on graduation, it could be possible to lengthen and structure placements in schools to strengthen the learning. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Ministry of Labours, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) could cooperate to organize courses to train and license graduate social workers as school social workers.

And last but not least piloting a Vietnamese Model This has advantages but one of the strengths of school social work is the ability to respond to context and culture. So what works in one school will only be partially transferable to schools in general. So while perhaps a range of pilot projects could be held in different settings it might be possible to extend the employment of social workers in schools by defining the term counsellor to cover both psychologist and social workers. In Australia, for many positions, both professions are recognized as certified in counselling skills.

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