



International Network for School Social Work

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Where School Social Work is Needed Now

There is little information about services to children in schools in many parts of the world, including much of Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Mediterranean. Although there are occasional articles in professional literature about the need for school social work, it is much more common to find articles about issues in schools that teachers are ill-equipped to handle, but with no mention of school social work as a possible intervention. For example there are many articles from around the world about bullying, poverty, behavioral problems, homeless students, poor attendance and other issues that schools could assign to school social workers to manage.

There is interest in developing school social work in several countries and social workers have published articles in professional journals documenting the need. Various articles can be found on the ERIC Institute of Educational Services <https://eric.ed.gov> or in the International Journal of School Social Work <https://newprairiepress.org/ijssw/>.

Publications

Sierra Leone

A needs assessment was done in Sierra Leone by interviewing teachers and administrators regarding the socio-emotional needs of children. The article concluded with a recommendation to employ school social workers. The results were published in 2017 and the paper is available online at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020872817725144>. The teachers interviewed identified many problems among pupils, including hungry pupils, pupils lacking school supplies, poor attendance, disruptive behaviors in class and lack of accommodations for pupils with disabilities. None of the school principals reported having a social worker at their school, but expressed eagerness to use the service. UNICEF is involved as a partner with the government of Sierra Leone to address the educational needs of vulnerable children, and in an enrolment drive that focuses especially on girls. So far there seems to be no mention of using social workers.

Turkey

The possibility of introducing school social work in Turkey has been explored in articles published by professional social work researchers since 2015. Studies have focused on early school leaving, social problems in school, attendance, diversity and social justice issues. Researchers have

concluded that school social workers are needed but to date the Education Ministry has not placed any social workers in schools.

Jordan

In 2017 Huda Alhajjaj published a dissertation exploring the need for school social work in Jordan. Focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured discussion with teachers, social workers, and parents in Jordan. Findings indicated that social workers are needed to address numerous challenges among students. Available at <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=school+social+work&pg=9&id=ED577984>.

Uganda

Julius Omona published an article in 2018 about a school social work pilot project in Uganda and reported positive outcomes. Complex social problems followed a prolonged war, affecting children's education. The pilot project had a positive effect on the schools, the children and their families. Available at <https://newprairiepress.org/ijssw/vol3/iss1/2/>.

Who is advocating for school social work

In **Botswana** and **Sri Lanka**, schools of social work have introduced courses on school social work and field placements in schools in order to demonstrate how schools can employ social work skills. Professional social work associations have also advocated for school social work, for example in **Morocco** and **Barbados**. The Barbados Association of Professional Social Workers has rallied the teachers' union, UNICEF, legislators and churches to demand that the government place social workers in schools to help children who are falling through the cracks due to abuse, injustice and inequality <https://www.barbadosadvocate.com/news/put-social-workers-schools>.

A repetitive theme

It may seem that the theme is repetitive. Social workers conduct studies and find that schools need social workers to help the children with problems so they can learn. This is the case in any country. The problems that interfere with the children learning vary, but it all comes down to problems in the community, the school, the family or the child, often all of this. Social work is prepared to solve problems and respect the local culture too.

Children in every culture follow a similar developmental path towards maturity, within their local culture and now as part of global 21st century life. It is not easy. From time to time they need confidential help in their growing up. It makes it easier if the helping person is located in the school.

Every country is pursuing goals of entering children into schools from an early age through tertiary education. The schools need help to keep the children in school and learning successfully. In some cases the parents cannot afford to let their children attend school because they are needed to help at home or to earn money for the household. Families cannot afford school fees, uniforms, clothes, school books or school materials. Communities are affected by conflict, disease, environmental problems and poverty. Schools are inadequately prepared to help children with learning problems or disabilities. Sometimes the schools lack toilets, running water and basic equipment. The problems are so diverse that the school system needs specialists whose sphere of action covers it all. This is a tall order. School social workers are the team members that find solutions for diverse problems.