



Role Of School Social Workers In Dealing With Problems Of Adolescents : A Mental Health Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present modern society has more number of advancement in every field of human life at the same time the problems of human also increased. This advancement is reflecting an adverse effort on adolescence. Once upon a time there was an only one breadwinner of the family and they were happily lived their life but today both mother and father are working and the problems are not ended up rather its increasing. Nobody is taking responsibility to look after their children and it creates more problems among them and the present school system also creates more pressure to the adolescence and teachers are also not in position to look at the problem of the every student which is directly affecting the adolescence behaviour, psychologically and mental problems. This situation can be avoided with the support of appointing school social workers in schools. The school social workers are trained in a way to solve the problems of individuals, groups, communities and society and it's a duty of the government to recognize the social workers and appointing social workers in school settings. The present paper tries to discuss the problems of adolescence and highlights the role of social worker in school settings.

ADOLESCENCE AND THEIR STATUS

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (age of majority). The period of adolescence is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, whose cultural purpose is the preparation of children for adult roles. It is a period of multiple transitions involving education, training, employment and unemployment, as well as transitions from one living circumstance to another.

WHO defines adolescence as the period of life between the ages of 10-to 19 years. The adolescent struggles to develop his individuality while still conforming to societal norms. Rapid urbanization and modernization have exposed them to changes in society. The resultant breakdown in family structure, excessive or minimal control confuses the adolescent and makes him/her especially vulnerable to maladaptive patterns of thinking and behavior. Healthy adulthood depends upon successful resolution of these emotional and behavioural problems. Treading on this tightrope, most adolescents go through to adulthood normally. All adolescents may not be so fortunate, to get the ideal societal support for this smooth transition. Some develop maladaptive patterns in emotional and behavioural spheres this augers ill for the individual's future resulting in depression, delinquency and suicides among other problems.

Of late there has been a rise in the prevalence of mental illness and maladaptive behaviours among adolescents. WHO estimate shows that up to 20% adolescent have one or more mental or behavioural problems. Studies conducted in different parts of the world show that prevalence of behavioural and emotional problems in adolescents ranges from 16.5% to 40.8% and in India it is in the range of 13.7% to 50%. As adolescents form one fifth of India's population, this means a sizable disease burden on the society. Lack of data on the subject precludes an assessment of the magnitude of the problem which is essential for effective health care planning.

School social workers provide mental health services in schools and have specialized training to meet students' social-

emotional needs. Schools often are one of the first places where mental health issues are recognized and addressed (Hennessy & Green-Hennessey, 2000; Hoagwood et al., 2005). School social workers serve as the primary mental health providers for students and may be the only counseling professionals available to students and their families to initially identify and provide interventions for those issues.

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

The profession of school social work began in the 20th century, fueled by immigration, life struggles, social conditions, and poverty which affected the development and expansion of educational opportunities for all children (Allen-Meares, 2006 & Agresta, 2004). Over the time of the Great Depression (1930s) social workers refocused their earlier commitment to changing adverse conditions in the schools and acting as the link between home, school, and community; therefore, school social workers sought a specialized role in providing emotional support for troubled children (Hall, 1936). Then in the 1940s and 1950s there was a shift and the term visiting teacher was replaced with the term school social worker and the profession adopted a more of a therapeutic and clinical approach for individual children within the schools (Agresta, 2004).

They have special expertise in understanding family and community systems and linking students and their families with community services essential to promote student success. School social workers' training includes specialized preparation in cultural diversity, systems theory, social justice, risk assessment and intervention, consultation and collaboration, and clinical intervention strategies to address the mental health needs of students. They work to remedy barriers to learning created as a result of poverty, inadequate health care, and neighborhood violence. School social workers often focus on providing supports to vulnerable populations of students at high risk for truancy and dropping out of school, such as homeless, foster, and migrant children, students transitioning between school and treatment programs or the juvenile justice system, or students experiencing domestic violence. They work with teachers, administrators, parents, and other educators to provide coordinated interventions and consultation designed to keep students in school and help families

access the supports needed to promote student success.

The role of the school social worker as outlined in the SSWAA School Social Work National Practice Model includes:

- Provision of evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services.
- Promotion of a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence.
- Maximization of access to school-based and community-based resources (SSWAA, 2013).

THE CRITICAL NEED FOR SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Research indicates between 18-20 percent of students have mental health issues significant enough to cause impairment to major life functions yet only one in five receives the necessary services (Kaffenberger, Seligman, 2007). Furthermore, certain students, including students with disabilities, students of color, and students from low income families, are at greater risk for mental health challenges, but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services (Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006). Students with untreated mental health issues may develop more significant problems which can greatly impact their educational experience and result in poor educational outcomes and possibly dropping out of school.

School social workers design and implement school-based programs to promote a positive school climate among all students. They work with the entire student body to identify students in need of more intensive interventions and connect these students to additional services in the community where needed. School social workers serve as a resource to the principal and other educators, providing consultation and training on identifying students with mental health needs and a referral process when services are sought. Working more closely with individual students and their families, school social workers also create a bridge between the school and the community when linking such services. This coordination is critical in a successful school and community partnership to maximize limited resources, facilitate better service delivery, and maintain communication between partners.

GOALS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER

The goal of each school social worker is to provide every student with the opportunity to develop to his or her maximum potential.

As part of a coordinated system of Student Services, School Social Workers assist students in making better use of their school experience. The services primarily address the needs of those students experiencing social, emotional, learning and behavioral difficulties in the school setting. These difficulties may be presented as poor academic achievement, lack of motivation, difficulty remaining focused on tasks and truancy.

The School Social Worker works cooperatively with teachers and other school personnel regarding the needs of groups or individual students.

The School Social Worker provides an essential coordination and liaison services involving the student, family, school and community.

Social Work Activities in the School

A. School Functions and Services

1. Help teachers to identify children whose needs suggest referral for school social work and/or other services. These needs may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ◆ hostile or aggressive behavior
- ◆ withdrawal or isolation

- ◆ attendance problems
- ◆ learning difficulties
- ◆ neglect or deprivation
- ◆ health problems

2. Consults and plans with teachers and other school personnel regarding students or groups.

3. Works individually with students to help them solve problems

4. Works with small groups of students to assist in their adjustment.

5. Provide and participate in faculty meetings, group activities, committee work and staffing.

6. Completes social developmental history reports or psychosocial assessments on students who have various needs affecting their success at school.

B. **Working Relationships** of the school social worker in the school setting involve significant levels of interaction with the following persons:

1. Principal

The school social worker should maintain a close working relationship by keeping the principal informed in all matters relating to school social work services within the school. School social work services are effective in that setting only if planning and implementation are a joint endeavor. The school social worker interprets professional practice to the principal and faculty. The principal of each school is charged with the administrative responsibility of providing adequate office space, telephone availability, a locked file cabinet, and privacy in which the school social worker can conduct interviews and conferences and make essential telephone calls with no risk to confidentiality.

2. Teacher

The relationship between the school social worker and the teacher should be a partnership to address student needs. Each one draws on a professional knowledge in defining what will be helpful to the needs of the student. The partnership is designed to work toward a solution of the problems experienced.

3. Family

The school social worker serves as a liaison between the school and family. The role is designed to function in the following ways:

- a. Help parents to understand and meet their children's needs
- b. Expand the understanding of school personnel as to the ways in which home situations affect a student's adjustment.
- c. Facilitate home and school communication, which includes parent involvement in the child's school life.
- d. Assist parents in understanding the many facets of the school setting as well as the various programs and procedures.
- e. Organizes parent groups to discuss topics related to child development and student learning.
- f. Encourages parent involvement

4. Other School Personnel

School Social Workers maintain working relationships with other educators to share information and provide follow-up services. Other school personnel include district level staff, staff from other schools, bus drivers, etc.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Provide comprehensive school social work services to parents, students and school staff, addressing barriers that limit a student from receiving full benefit from their educational experience. Respond to referrals from school administration, parents, teachers, the Student Support Team, the Special Education Committee and others by providing direct services

and by assisting families in accessing appropriate community resources.

ESSENTIAL TASKS (These are intended only as illustrations of the various types of work performed. The omission of specific duties does not exclude them from the position if the work is similar, related, or a logical assignment to the position.)

- Serve on student support teams and special education committees at assigned schools in the division.
- Review student records to identify previous barriers and/or interventions.
- Conduct parent interviews to acquire socio-developmental information as needed for special education referrals.
- Analyze information gained through record reviews and interviews to determine environmental impacts and appropriate resource needs; integrate gained information into a written report and oral presentation.
- Attend and participate in Manifestation meetings.
- Interview students and parents to discuss issues related to non-attendance and develop a plan of action.
- Assist the school in following school board regulations for excessive absences and truancy; attend student support team meetings and court intervention.
- Develop and implement professional development training for educational staff and parents, as requested.
- Provide individual and/or group counseling in response to school-wide crises.
- Respond to referrals requesting verification of residence.
- Participate in professional development activities aimed at current trends and best practices for the provision of comprehensive school social work services.
- Conduct home visits as a method to access the family and conduct interviews in response to school referrals.
- Maintain an ongoing liaison with community agencies and other resources to meet student needs; refers parents and student to agencies when appropriate.
- Perform related work as required.

CONCLUSION:

Poor mental health awareness, limited school and other community-based services combine to make adolescents an underserved population in our country. The combination of ignored psychosocial problems and the lack of mental health services in our country amplify the risk of precipitating academic underachievement and rising delinquent behavior among the adolescents. There is a need to raise public awareness about the prevalence of these often "hidden" emotional disorders in Indian adolescents. Therefore there is a great need for social workers in school setting and they only can address all the adolescents issue better than the teachers. But unfortunately in India, no social workers in public school and there only the prevalence of problems is also more and not addressed by anyone. Even the management schools are also not recognizing the importance of social workers hardly very few management schools only has the social workers. This situation has to be changed and should help the adolescents to achieve their goals and give clear crystal ideas for solving their problems independently.

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