

Exploring the Path of School Social Work Intervention in High School Students' Mental Health Education

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to explore the path of school social work intervention in the mental health education of senior secondary school students, emphasising its key role in improving students' mental health. By analysing the roles and responsibilities of school social work and its application in the mental health education of high school students, this paper proposes a targeted pathway that is expected to improve the mental health problems of high school students.*

Keywords: *school social work; high school students; mental health education; intervention pathway*

1. Introduction

In recent years, mental health problems have become a social problem of global concern, not only in adults and occupational groups, but also increasingly spread to China's primary and secondary school students, especially showing a trend of "underage". 20 April 2023, the Ministry of Education and other seventeen departments issued the "Comprehensively strengthen and improve the work of students in the new era of mental health special action plan (2023-2025)", which aroused great concern of the whole society about the mental health education of youth ^[1]. On 20 April 2023, the Ministry of Education and seventeen other departments issued the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health Work of Students in the New Era (2023-2025), which aroused a great deal of attention from the whole society to the mental health education of adolescents. High school students are an important stage of adolescence, and they face multiple pressures such as academic pressure, interpersonal relationship challenges, and self-perception development. These challenges may lead to mental health dilemmas such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues, which can seriously affect their academic performance and quality of life. Considering that high school students spend most of their time in school, school is not only a place for knowledge transfer, but also an important environment for the development of students' comprehensive literacy. Therefore, mental health education for high school students is becoming more and more important in school education. In this context, school social work has emerged as an important role, not only assisting students to solve their personal and academic problems, but also taking on the important role of mental health education. The multiple roles of school social workers, such as supporters, coordinators and counsellors, provide senior secondary school students with the necessary support and resources to help them overcome their mental health problems and move towards a healthier and stronger future.

2. The role of school social work in the mental health education of senior secondary school students

2.1 Role overview

2.1.1 Supporters

As supporters, the main task of school social workers is to provide emotional support and encouragement. They develop close relationships with students, listen to their worries and concerns, and provide a safe environment for them to express their emotions. The role of a supporter is similar to that of a trusted friend who can help students overcome difficulties, increase self-esteem, and cope with emotional challenges. Their presence provides an outlet where students can share problems and emotions, which can help reduce anxiety and feelings of isolation.

2.1.2 Coordinators

School social workers also serve an important role as coordinators. They coordinate resources within and outside the school to meet the needs of students. This includes working with families, teachers, health care providers, and other social service agencies to ensure that students receive the necessary supports and services. Coordinators work to help build a diverse support network to help students with academic and mental health concerns. They coordinate resources to make it easier for students to access professional mental health services, educational resources and social benefits.

2.1.3 Counsellors

School social workers also take up the role of counsellors to provide professional counselling services. They are able to identify students' mental health problems and provide them with counselling and guidance to help them cope with their difficulties. Counsellors' work includes assessing students' needs, developing individualised intervention plans, and providing mental health education and skills training. Through counselling, school social workers are able to help students understand their emotions and behaviours, find ways to solve problems, and improve their mental resilience and self-management skills.

2.2 Duties and tasks

2.2.1 Development of programmes

Developing a plan is one of the first tasks of school social workers. They need to work with students, families, teachers and other relevant stakeholders to identify students' mental health needs and develop an individualised support plan. This plan includes setting clear goals, developing appropriate strategies, and determining a timeline for implementing and evaluating the plan. By developing a plan, school social workers are able to provide individualised support to each student to ensure their needs are met.

2.2.2 Crisis intervention

Another important responsibility is crisis intervention. High school students may face a variety of emergencies such as suicidal thoughts, family crises, and violence. School social workers need to have crisis management skills to be able to provide timely support and intervention in emergency situations [2]. They need to act quickly to establish emergency contact with students, assess the situation, and take appropriate measures to keep students safe. Crisis intervention is one of the responsibilities of school social workers, and ensuring that students receive timely help when they are in danger is an important part of their job.

2.2.3 Education and training

School social workers also undertake educational training aimed at raising awareness of mental health in the school community. They provide training to students, families, teachers and other professionals to impart mental health knowledge and skills. Through education and training, school social workers are able to help school communities better understand mental health issues, reduce mental health discrimination and improve the quality of mental health support. In addition, they can promote mental health awareness in the school community and encourage positive mental health practices.

3. Paths of intervention for school social work

3.1 Mental Health Assessment

Physical health assessments typically use a variety of tools and methods to ensure a comprehensive and accurate diagnosis. These include interviews, questionnaires, psychometric tests and observations. Through interaction with students and relevant stakeholders, school social workers can gain an understanding of students' emotional states, behavioural patterns and mental health history. Questionnaires and psychometric tests provide objective data to help assess students' mental health. Observations of students' behaviour and interactions in the school environment also provide important information. Using a combination of these tools and methods, the assessor is able to build a comprehensive profile of the student and better understand their needs. Following a mental health assessment, school social workers need to analyse and interpret the data in order to develop an effective

support plan. This process requires a synthesis of all the information collected, including the student's self-report, family background, and psychological test results. By carefully analysing and interpreting the data, staff can identify mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem issues, etc. in students.

3.2 Individualised Intervention Plan

Individualised intervention plans need clear goals that are measurable, specific and well-defined so that progress can be tracked during the intervention. Goals can involve improving the student's emotional state, increasing self-esteem, reducing anxiety, etc. Each student's intervention goals should be tailored to his or her unique needs to ensure that the plan is relevant. In developing an individualised intervention plan, school social workers need to integrate a variety of resources, including support agencies within and outside of the school, families, social services, etc. These resources will be used to implement the intervention plan and ensure that the student receives comprehensive support. For example, the plan includes counselling, social skills training, family support services, etc. The integration of resources helps to provide comprehensive support to meet the diverse needs of the student. Once an individualised intervention plan has been developed, the plan needs to be effectively implemented and progress monitored. School social workers will work with the student to actively promote the implementation of the plan. They will provide regular support sessions, training, coaching, etc. to help students achieve their goals.

3.3 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

In the mental health education of senior secondary school students, continuous monitoring and assessment is an important part of school social work. To monitor the mental health status of senior secondary students on an ongoing basis, school social workers use a variety of assessment tools such as standardised psychological tests, questionnaires and interviews. These tools help staff to quantify the mental health status of students for regular comparison and analysis. Through the use of assessment tools, staff are able to detect trends in mental health problems and identify progress or deterioration of problems in a timely manner. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation also includes assessing the effectiveness of the intervention plan^[3]. School social workers will assess whether the programme is achieving the stated goals and whether the student is making progress in terms of mental health. This process often includes feedback with students, families, and other relevant stakeholders to obtain their views and opinions.

4. Examples of the application of school social work

4.1 Emotion Management and Conflict Resolution

Emotion management involves helping students identify and understand their emotions as well as providing skills to deal with emotional distress. This includes emotion recognition, emotion expression, and emotion regulation. School social workers can help students better manage their emotions by teaching emotional intelligence skills, such as emotion recognition and calm responses. In addition, they can provide individual or group counselling to give students the opportunity to share and deal with emotional issues. Conflict resolution involves helping students learn to deal with interpersonal conflicts, including conflicts between peers and family members. School social workers can guide students in conflict resolution skills such as positive communication, compromise and building healthy relationships. They can also organise conflict resolution training to help students better understand the root causes of conflict and find solutions.

4.2 Stress management and anxiety relief

High school students are often under academic stress, examination pressure and future uncertainty, which can lead to anxiety problems. School social workers are tasked to help students manage stress and relieve anxiety effectively. Stress management involves teaching students to cope with challenges, set reasonable goals, develop effective time management strategies and find healthy ways of coping. School social workers can provide stress management workshops and individual counselling to help students build skills to cope with stress. They can also encourage students to participate in physical activities, relaxation techniques and hobbies to reduce stress. Anxiety relief involves providing support

and skills to cope with anxiety. School social workers can teach students deep breathing, meditation, and other anxiety relief techniques. They can also provide emotional support so that students have a safe space to express anxious feelings.

4.3 Addressing Violence and Bullying

Addressing violence and bullying is essential to maintaining the mental health of high school students. School social workers need to intervene and take steps to prevent and address these issues. Addressing violence includes intervening in acts of violence between students, such as bullying, fighting, and aggression. School social workers can teach students conflict resolution skills, such as non-violent communication and compromise, to reduce the incidence of violence. They can also assist students in understanding the consequences of violence and provide safe reporting mechanisms. Dealing with bullying requires school social workers to take proactive measures to prevent bullying incidents and support victims. They can organise anti-bullying activities, train teachers and students how to recognise and report bullying, and provide counselling and psychological assistance to support victims.

5. Challenges and response strategies

5.1 Human and Resource Constraints

School social work is usually faced with limited human resources. School social workers usually have to cover a large number of students, and students have different mental health needs and require individualised support. As a result, manpower constraints may make it difficult for social workers to give in-depth attention to each student or to provide adequate counselling and support. This may have a negative impact on students' mental health, especially when faced with emergencies. Resource constraints include financial and physical resources. Mental health support usually requires a budget to support activities such as counselling, training, and workshops. If a school has limited financial resources, it may not be able to provide adequate mental health support services. In addition, material resources, such as office equipment, counselling rooms and materials, may also be limited, thus affecting the effectiveness of school social work. To overcome human and resource constraints, school social work can adopt some strategies. Firstly, co-operation and collaboration can be sought to work with other school staff, social service agencies and mental health professionals to support students. Secondly, more financial support can be sought to secure funding from government, charities or alumni to expand mental health services. In addition, school social workers can continually look for ways to improve efficiency to ensure that resources are used optimally.

5.2 Student privacy and confidentiality issues

School social workers need to strike a balance between respecting students' right to privacy and meeting their support needs. Students may face sensitive mental health issues such as suicidal thoughts, family problems or abuse. In such cases, school social workers must ensure that the student's information is handled confidentially to avoid the negative consequences that could result from a breach of information. However, when a student's safety is at risk, such as a risk of suicide or violent behaviour, school social workers may need to take the necessary steps to protect the student's safety while respecting privacy. School social workers must comply with legal disclosure requirements, such as child abuse reporting obligations [4]. At the same time, they have an ethical responsibility to ensure that students feel safe and respected in their support. This requires them to wisely weigh legal requirements against ethical principles to ensure the best interests of students. To address student privacy and confidentiality, school social workers can help students and parents better understand disclosure policies and practices through transparent communication and education. They can explain the circumstances under which information must be disclosed and how student rights and privacy are protected.

5.3 Interdisciplinary co-operation and teamwork

School social workers often need to work with professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, family therapists, etc. to ensure that students receive comprehensive mental health support. Specialists from different professions can provide different levels of treatment and counselling to meet the diverse

needs of students. This collaboration helps to ensure that students receive professional, targeted support, which improves the effectiveness of mental health education. School social workers also need to work closely with educators and school administration. Educators can provide important information about students' academic performance and behaviour, which can help to provide a comprehensive picture of students. Collaboration with school administration can help ensure that schools provide adequate resources and support to meet students' mental health needs. School social workers also need to work with the student's family and community to provide integrated support. Families and communities are an important part of a student's life, and their support and involvement is critical to a student's mental health. School social workers can assist in building bridges between families and schools and provide family support services to ensure that students are appropriately supported in a variety of settings.

6. Conclusion

School social work has a key role to play in the mental health education of senior secondary students, providing comprehensive support, promoting interdisciplinary co-operation, and handling privacy and confidentiality issues with care. In the future, with the use of technology, integration of mental health education and training and development of social workers, the quality of mental health education for senior secondary school students can be further improved to produce healthier, more confident and successful students.

References

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