

ARE SOCIAL WORKERS THE MISSING LINK IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NOVI SAD?

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Abstract

Increasing levels of poverty, social inequalities, broken marriages, domestic violence, health problems and other (social) problems present challenges that often have negative implications for school attendance and success at school. Given this fact, the school system should provide more consistent support by introducing social workers to schools. In the theoretical part of the paper, a brief overview of the history of the social work in schools, that is, the basic postulates of school social work before the beginning of the 21st century will be presented. Following this, the normative bases of the social work profession in education in the Republic of Serbia will be presented, i.e. it will be pointed out whether and in what way it is possible to implement this profession in the education system. In the empirical part, the paper will attempt to answer two research questions: whether secondary schools in Novi Sad perceive the need for social workers, and whether social workers recognize the need of their profession in educational system. Data were collected through interviews (structured questionnaire) that examined the perceptions of professional associates (pedagogues, psychologists, and social workers from Center for Social Work, Novi Sad) about the need for social workers in secondary schools in Novi Sad. The aim of the research is to analyse the perceptions of professional associates on the values and need for social work services in schools.

Key words: social work, social workers, educational system, school social work, needs.

ДА ЛИ СУ СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАДНИЦИ КАРИКА КОЈА НЕДОСТАЈЕ У НОВОСАДСКИМ РЕДОВНИМ СРЕДЊИМ ШКОЛАМА?

Апстракт

Све већи степен сиромаштва, социјалних неједнакости, развода бракова, насиља у породицама, проблема са здрављем, ту су и други (друштвени) проблеми који представљају изазове који често имају негативне импликације на похађање школе и

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школски успех. С обзиром на то, школски систем би требало да обезбеди конзистентнију подршку ученицима увођењем социјалних радника у школе. У теоријском делу рада, приказаће се кратак осврт на историју социјалног рада у школама, односно приказаће се основни постулати истог пре почетка 21. века. Након тога, приказаће се нормативне основе професије социјалног рада у образовању у Републици Србији, односно видеће се да ли је и на који начин могућа имплементација ове професије у систем образовања. У емпиријском делу, рад ће покушати да одговори на два истраживачка питања: да ли новосадске средње школе виде потребу за социјалним радницима, и да ли социјални радници препознају потребу за својом професијом у школама. Подаци су прикупљени путем интервјуа (структурирани упитник) који је испитао перцепције стручних радника (педагог и психолог из школа и социјални радници из новосадског Центра за социјални рад) о потреби социјалних радника у средњим школама. Циљ истраживања јесте анализа перцепција стручних сарадника (педагога, психолога и социјалних радника) о вредностима и потреби за услугама социјалног рада у школама.

Кључне речи: социјални рад, социјални радници, систем образовања, социјални рад у школи, потребе.

INTRODUCTION - ROOTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The role of schools is not only to educate, but also to provide an environment where the potential of the child will be maximized. In order to reach this potential, it is important to involve the child, parents, school and community in the education system. Obviously, the social worker plays an important role in facilitating the connection between school, community, students and parents. Such links are crucial in breaking down barriers to educational attainment.
(McKinnon, Kearns and Crockett 2004, in McDavitt, 2017, p. 40)

The profession of school social work has emerged in the context of the expansion of social work in many countries. The prerequisite for the development of the profession of the social worker in the educational system was the introduction of compulsory education for all children at a time when education was no longer reserved only for the elite, but became part of the preparation of all children for modern life (Pushkina, 2017). The history of the profession of school social work dates back to the 19th century in the UK. What has led to this is the confrontation with poverty, social injustice, the inexperience of parents who have not been educated, etc., and for these reasons no connection was made between the school community and its students. In accordance with the above mentioned problems, there is a need for social workers, who were originally called “supervising officers” in charge of the cooperation between the *school* and the *local community* in order to promote understanding and communication. That is, these workers were hired as advocates for equal rights and as field workers who went on home visits (Čekerevac, 2020).

Initially, their work was not funded by the state but through various civil society organizations. Later, an initiative was formed to change the existing (social) policies, and the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) was founded in 1884 in the UK. Its original role was to provide a link between the school and the family of students who were marginalized (Allen-Meares, Washington & Welsh, 1996).

On the other hand, the introduction of the profession of the social worker in educational systems across the United States began somewhat later, in the 20th century. Regardless of the geographical area, it was obvious that bridges had to be built between the community, school, immediate family's needs and long-term educational opportunities for students (McDavitt, 2017). Initially, in the United States, this activity took place through the so-called "visiting teachers" who worked in schools in Boston, New York, Chicago, etc., in the period between 1906 and 1907 (Kelly, 2008). The idea was for them to use "social work methods" to improve children's individual success at school, as well as the link between family, school and community resources. Oppenheimer (1925) also pointed out to the need for this connection, believing that non-cooperation between school and family can extremely violate the rights of the child, as did Mary Richmond (1922) who saw this project as a strategic basis for building school-family-community relations. Richmond describes the qualifications and roles of visiting teachers where she states that "the visiting teacher is a social worker, preferably with classroom teaching experience" (Richmond, 1922: 198). Namely, the visiting teacher gets to know *the social network of students and families*, and that is exactly what enables them to follow cases every day, react to situations, provide consultations to school staff and use their knowledge gained about the individual in their environment (Oppenheimer, 1925). Precisely for these reasons, visiting teachers played a unique role in the community due to their knowledge of the dynamics of the student environment on the one hand, and the school system on the other. These school experiments, when it comes to the social work profession in schools, have resulted in better opportunities and progress in the education system and overall community development. In light of this, other schools, districts and states also undertook the initiative of visiting teachers, which later encouraged school-based services.

If we look at the European context, it could be said that the emergence and development of social work in educational institutions is different in terms of the time of introduction, structure and goals. In addition to the above-mentioned Great Britain, in the 1940s, the Nordic countries launched an initiative to introduce social workers in schools, primarily to prevent various psychosocial problems of students (prevention was reflected in the form of group work with students, development of new programs, consultations with relatives, etc.). In the 1960s, the social worker became an integral part of the school system in Germany and Poland, and

then in the 1980s, in other European and non-European countries, such as Switzerland, Russia, Latvia, Hungary, etc. (Čekeravac, 2020). It is important to mention that in the former Yugoslavia, i.e. in today's Republic of Croatia, in the 1970s, there were attempts to introduce social work into the educational system. However, despite some examples of good and successful practice, the wider employment of social workers in schools remained inconsistent and sporadic. Some of the reasons for discontinuous and inconsistent employment of social workers in schools were the frequent changes in legislation, political context, etc. (Gavrilović, 2013). Similar situation can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. Republika Srpska, where in the period from 1974 to 1985, only 19 social workers were employed in the educational system, and the reason for this is considered, similarly to the territory of the Republic of Croatia, insufficiently clear legal regulations and the lack of a strategy for the development of this profession in the education system (Bašić, 2010). On the other hand, the social work profession was introduced in educational institutions in 2008 on the territory of Republika Srpska, but the whole process was very slow and often incompatible with the real needs of students. This introduction of the social work profession is regulated by the *Law on Primary Education* which recognizes social workers as professional associates, i.e. as an important part of the school team (Official Gazette of the Republic of Srpska, 2017).

Similar attempts to introduce professional social work were recorded in the Republic of Serbia when the Faculty of Political Sciences implemented a project in several schools in Belgrade in the 1980s. Despite the satisfaction with the project and good results (i), this attempt to introduce a social worker in schools remains inconsistent, which is supported by the fact that there are currently almost no social workers in high schools in Serbia (except in some extreme situations) (Čekerevac, 2020). A new attempt was recorded in 2019, when the project "Social worker at school" was piloted with the aim of effectively connecting the social protection system and the educational system. However, the project lasted for only three months and covered one municipality, i.e. four primary schools. The project was set up with the support of the local self-government and the initiative of the Center for Social Work of the Municipality of Stara Pazova. The project is designed with the idea of monitoring and analyzing the social conditions and needs of students in order to take appropriate measures to overcome any difficulties (Center for Social Work Stara Pazova). Despite the positive results of the project and the satisfaction of the actors involved, there is no relevant information on the future and continuation of this project.

Contrary to this, examples of good practice are recorded in Slovenia, where the social work profession existed in schools even when Slovenia was part of former Yugoslavia. Namely, the Counselling Department in primary schools consisted of a pedagogue, psychologist, defec-

tologist and a social worker (Popov & Spasenovic, 2018). The main activities of social workers were to monitor and support the psychosocial development of students, work with school staff and parents, as well as to cooperate with the community. Similarly, in Macedonia, *the Law of Primary Education* and *the Law of Secondary Education* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, 2017) stipulate that professional associates in the school include a pedagogue, psychologist, sociologist, social worker, defectologist and librarian. The basic role of social workers is reflected in supporting students to fulfill their full potential on the academic, emotional, social and behavioral levels. In accordance with that, the role of social workers in the field of designing and implementing developmental and preventive activities in school is emphasized (Popov & Spasenovic, 2018).

Given that the above mentioned social work services in schools have evolved and changed over time. If we summarize the abovementioned, some of the crucial responsibilities of school social workers have been: helping teachers understand that the negative social environment (poverty, child labor, domestic abuse, child labor, etc.) greatly influences school attendance, mediation between schools and families and community, prevention programs, etc. From all of the above, it can be concluded that social work in schools a few decades ago was not the same as today's social work - the path was often unclear, perspectives were changing, roles were often modified, etc. Today, its function is primarily a holistic model of social work that has multiple roles, which will be discussed later.

Normative bases of the social work profession in the educational system in the Republic of Serbia

The Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2020a) in Article 8 emphasizes the goals of education, i.e. states *the full intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical development of each child, student and adult, in accordance with his age, developmental needs and interests* as an indispensable goal of the education system. Given that social work is an activity that (among other things) seeks to improve the overall functioning of individuals, groups and communities, we can say that this goal is intrinsically linked to the role of social workers in society. On the other hand, the Law recognizes that *professional work in the school is performed by professional associates, namely a psychologist, pedagogue and librarian* (Article 135). *Depending on the needs of the school and the program that is being realized, additional support and professional work can be performed by a social worker, defectologist, speech therapist and an andragogue.* According to *the Law*, psychologists and pedagogues have the status of professional associates, while social workers are proposed just as associates.

Legal frameworks recognize this profession in the domain of the education system, but in practice it is completely absent, even though

there is an expansion of social problems. From the above, the fact arises that the educational system in the Republic of Serbia *does not deal continuously and consistently with the social problems* of students, but only sporadically, i.e. in extremely drastic and individual cases. In contrast, Gavrilović (Gavrilović, 2020) points out that social work in school should become a link between all actors in the community who synergistically affect the continuous well-being of the individual, the development of school as an environment within which the individual should enjoy their rights and fulfill their capacities. That is, the social work(er) together with the school and the community should promote a holistic approach when it comes to the well-being of students, as well as their families.

If we look at *the Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2020b), we notice that the goals are explicitly amended with regard to the *respect for racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sex and age equality, tolerance and respect for diversity* (Article 2.), which also represents the basic values of social work. That is, social work promotes social justice and social changes that are moving towards equality, supports people in overcoming various social problems and empowers their users so that they can overcome certain problems with their own strengths and potentials. Namely, when it comes to the above-mentioned expansion of social problems, frequent divorces, poverty, premature consumption of alcohol and/or various psychoactive substances, frequent physical confrontations in and out of the school yard, these are just some of the problems that require response and the holistic approach we have mentioned before.

Analyzing the existing principles of our educational system, the current problems of our community, as well as the goals of education and upbringing (Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia, 2020a; 2020b), it is clear that there is room for the implementation of the social work profession in schools. However, the question that arises is why the social work profession has been neglected in our schools, while a large number of countries on all continents have affirmed, recognized the importance and legally regulated the social work profession in schools long ago. That is, it is important to point out that our *Law* acknowledges the *possibility*, but not the obligation, of employing social workers, as is the case with pedagogues or psychologists.

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE AND ROLE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

The dynamics of social development of a society are linked to the widening of social problems, especially in the context of education. The role of social work in educational institutions is essential, primarily because of its large role in the field of inclusion of marginalized children in

the education system. Given that social work focuses on the well-being of the individual in terms of increasing and developing their capacities, it could be said that social work services cannot be separated from inclusive education (Balli, 2016).

Although social workers have a great deal of responsibility and different roles in the school system of education, there are several basic tasks common to all school social workers. As a member of the team and the school community, the social worker is expected to be in constant contact and communication with other members, to apply his assessment to various roles in direct service, consultation and development programs, to be capable to do direct intervention with children and parents in various forms of cooperation (individual, group and family modalities), and to participate in the creation of development programs (Constable, Kuzmickaite, Harrison, & Volkmann, 1999). Research by Frey and George states that the primary goal of social work in schools is to allow students to function and learn without disturbances in the school environment. In other words, effective practice of social work in schools consists of cooperation, counseling, developing behavioral plans and education, and the training of other participants in the school system towards more demanding students, in the context of daily student experience at school. They work, mainly, with individual students, but can set up and run different groups of students as well as parents (Frey & George-Nichols, 2003).

NASW Standards of Practice for School Social Workers (NASW, 2008) provide a list of factors that affect students' ability to actively pursue learning. These are mainly family changes, drug and/or alcohol abuse within the home environment, poverty, violence, abuse and neglect, transition or housing instability, etc. School social workers can implement early intervention, prevention and intervention strategies in areas such as networking, counseling, case management and participation in the design and monitoring of different education policies. According to the aforementioned list of threatening factors, school social workers are there to support these students, in which case they advocate for the right to an education that respects the dignity, value and culture of the individual. Similarly, O'Donnell believes that social work in schools plays a key role in developing and connecting students with the necessary resources and support, to maximize their potential in the educational process (O'Donnell, 2000).

NASW also emphasizes the unique contribution of the school social worker to the interdisciplinary team, allowing the family, the school and the community an interdisciplinary approach (NASW, 2002). Accordingly, membership of interdisciplinary teams requires (1) interdependence; (2) ability to perform new professional activities and take on new tasks as needed; (3) flexibility; (4) collective ownership of goals and (5) process thinking (Bronstein, 2003). What is often a problem in this context is that teachers and other school staff do not understand the role

of school social workers, and as a result, do not value them. Avant (2014) conducted a study on the role of school social workers in implementing response to intervention. During the research, school social workers stated that they were often considered pseudo-administrative staff. First of all, teachers did not regard them as important members of the school staff and did not include them in various interactions. The lack of understanding certainly has negative implications for the students themselves.

Research (Balli, 2016) considers that "one of the most important aspects of school social workers is to monitor students in a family context and further strengthen the relationship between school and parents" (Balli, 2016, p. 175). Accordingly, it could be said that social workers have an active and integral role in the lives of students and their families, and on the other hand they remain an underutilized resource within school facilities. Hayne argues that, although the primary mission of the education system is academic development, the school should take more responsibility for social and "silent" issues (Haynes, 2002). As teachers develop students' potentials through the transfer of knowledge, skills and values, social workers can support students' well-being so that they are ready to learn. This means that social workers in this context play a key role as partners with schools to provide students with support in reaching their full intellectual, emotional and social potential (Huxtable, 2013). Specifically, it follows from the hypothesis that the daily lack of attention in schools for the psychological, social and emotional well-being of students has led to maladaptive behavior within classrooms. Closely related to this are lower academic achievement, chronic failure in school progression, impairment of mental health, etc. (Haynes, 2002). According to NASW:

School social workers represent an integral link between school, home, and the community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as with students and families, providing leadership in school disciplinary policy-making, mental health interventions, crisis management and support services. As part of an interdisciplinary team that helps students succeed, social workers also facilitate community involvement in schools by advocating for student success. (NASW, 2017: 1)

Boyle and co-workers were concerned with implementing the skills needed to be an effective social worker in the school system. The following are relevant: ability to evaluate and treat students properly; direct practice and experience - having practical skills to work with individuals, groups or the local community; the ability to counsel individuals on mental health issues, working with students with emotional or behavioral problems; the need for home visits with certain students; ability to work in groups; having the knowledge to establish and maintain professional/supportive relationships; ability to collect and possess information about a particular problem or information; ability to identify client's ca-

pabilities and strengths; ability to develop a plan to improve a situation or chance of solving a problem; ability to use legitimate and recognized research interventions; work within the value system and ethics of the profession of social worker, etc. (Boyle et al., 2006).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH

1. Providing a more complete picture of the role of social workers in schools,
2. Analysis of the perception of professional associates (psychologists, pedagogues, and social workers) on the need for social workers in secondary schools,
3. Pointing out the need for social workers in high schools in Novi Sad

H1: Pedagogues and psychologists believe that the existence of social workers in schools would contribute to a more effective solution to students' various social problems.

H2: The presence of social workers in schools would contribute to a better communication between the school and the centers for social work.

H3: Social workers believe that the social work profession is necessary in educational institutions – secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

Sample

The study was conducted in 2018/2019 school year, and involved 12 public high schools in Novi Sad. Psychologists and pedagogues were interviewed from each school with a total of 23 pedagogues and psychologists (i.e., 10 psychologists and 11 pedagogues, while two did not comment). In addition, 15 social workers working at the Center for Social Work in Novi Sad participated in the research.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through an interview (structured questionnaire) that examined the perceptions of professional associates (pedagogues, psychologists, and social workers) about the need for social workers in secondary schools.

For the purpose of the research, the principals of all secondary schools on the territory of Novi Sad were contacted, and were visited by researchers personally. After interviewing the principals, psychologists and pedagogues were contacted, and the researchers interviewed the participants on the premises of the school. Also, the Director of the Center for Social Work on the territory of Novi Sad was contacted, and the re-

searchers personally interviewed all social workers who were present on the day of the interview.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

This research looks at the responses of professional associates in high schools in Novi Sad when it comes to the support of social workers in them. That is, as mentioned above, a total of 23 pedagogues and psychologists (i.e., 10 psychologists and 11 pedagogues, while two did not participate) from 12 high schools on the territory of Novi Sad, participated in the research. Moreover, the survey also included 15 social workers working at the Center for Social Work in Novi Sad. The results that will be presented were obtained through the statistical analysis of the answers given by pedagogues, psychologists and social workers during interview. The results of the descriptive statistics will be presented first, followed by the correlation and the results of the chi-square test.

The sample included all high schools on the territory of Novi Sad. The obtained results are grouped into two thematic sections:

1. Attitudes of pedagogues and psychologists about social work profession in schools,
2. Attitudes of social workers about the social work profession in schools.

School social work and attitudes of pedagogues and psychologists

In the section that follows, we will deal with the presentation and data analysis concerning the attitudes of pedagogues and psychologists when it comes to the inclusion of social workers in high schools. If we look at the age: 11 of them are between 50 and 59, slightly less, 9 of them are between 40 and 49, while there are only 3 respondents over 60. Also, the results indicate that the most significant number of respondents, or 14 of them, have over 20 years of school experience, 8 respondents have 15-20 years of school experience, while only 1 respondent between 1 and 5 years. The attitude that most respondents agreed with (16 respondents) was that the school would be a more favorable environment for the psychosocial development of students if it had a social worker position. On the other hand, only 5 respondents do not know or are not sure about this claim, while no respondents believe it to be false.

The following table shows the attitudes of pedagogues and psychologists and their views on differences in activities within the school when it comes to the social work profession and the profession of pedagogy and psychology. Specifically, the results obtained indicate that expert associates believe that social workers would be the most supportive of socially disadvantaged families, and this function cannot be compensated by a school psychologist and/or pedagogues.

Table 1. The difference in school activity between the social worker, psychologist, and pedagogues

Attitudes	N	%
Access to education	3	21.4
Support for disadvantaged families	8	57.1
Cooperation with social welfare institutions	2	14.3
There is no difference	1	7.1

In the following table, we will look at the responses of psychologists and pedagogues in the context of seeing the main role of social workers in schools. Namely, the results of the research show that as many as half of the respondents, or 50%, believe that the role of the school social worker is preventive work (cooperation with the Center for Social Work, MIA, etc.). Fewer respondents, or 33.3%, believe that the role of school social work is to connect school, students, family and the community. Accordingly, the respondents (N=14) strongly believe that teachers themselves would be more effective in teaching if they had the support of a social worker.

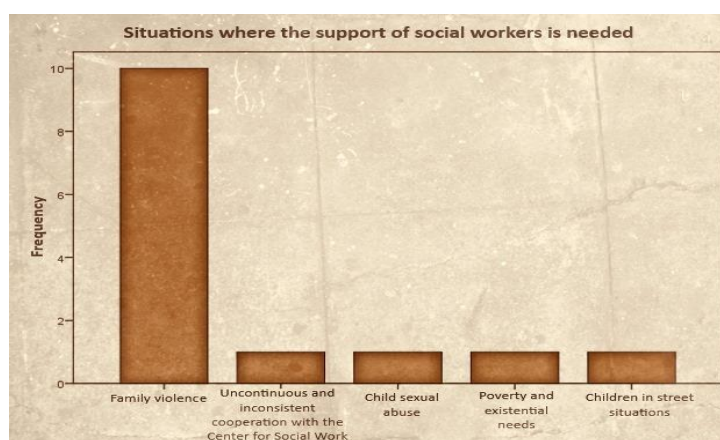
Table 2. What is the role of the school social worker?

Attitudes	N	%
Preventive work (cooperation with the Center for Social Work, MIA, etc.)	9	50.0
Connecting school, students, family and community	6	33.3
Support for disadvantaged families	3	16.7

After presenting the role of the social worker in the school, in *Table 3*, we will see how the introduction of the social worker in the schools would result. Specifically, 86.4% of respondents believe that introducing a social worker into schools would result in a higher degree of support for students and their families. On the other hand, only 1 respondent felt that there was no need to introduce social workers in schools. In contrast, the most significant number of respondents, 15 of them, thought that they had so far needed the support of social workers in many cases, but did not get adequate support. Accordingly, in the following graph, we will show what these situations were. As many as 71.4% of respondents believe that the biggest problem that requires the intervention of social workers at school is domestic violence. Given the above, it is not surprising that the respondents are dissatisfied with the cooperation with social workers from the Center for Social Work, because, as the respondents say, the cooperation is only sporadic, unsystematic and inconsistent.

Table 3. What would the introduction of a social worker in schools result in?

Attitudes	N	%
Introducing social workers into schools would result in a higher degree of support for students and their families	19	86.4
The introduction of social workers in schools would result in more effective cooperation between school, family, and the community	18	76.3
There is no need for social workers in schools, as an pedagogues and psychologist are enough	1	4.3
I do not know what would result in introducing social workers to schools	2	8.7



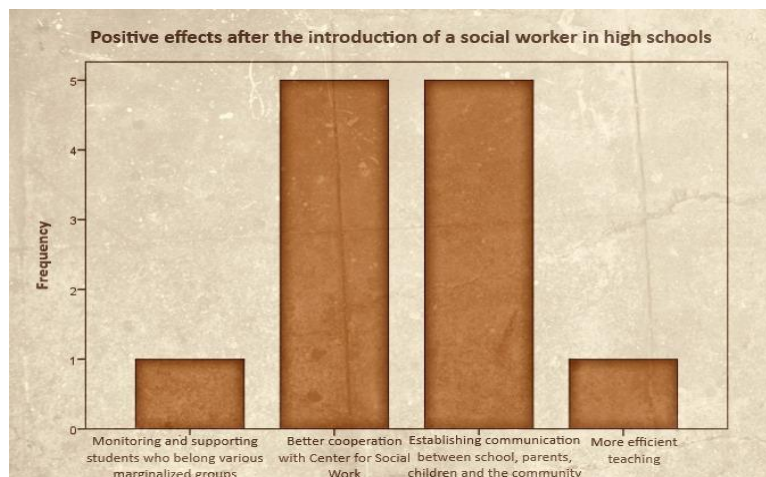
Graph 1. Situations where the support of social workers is needed

Attitudes of social workers when it comes to the social work profession in schools

A total of 15 social workers from the Center for Social Work from the City of Novi Sad participated in the survey. Out of the total, 12 were female, 2 were male, and one was undecided. When it comes to the age category, we have had diverse results: 1 respondent between 18 and 29, while there are 4 respondents in the 30 to 39 group. The age group 40-49 includes 4 respondents, while the same number of respondents belongs to the age group 50-59. There are only 2 respondents over 60. In addition, the results show years of work at the Center for Social Work. Only 1 respondent has been working at the Center for less than a year, while 4 respondents have been working there between 1 and 5 years, 5 respondents 15 to 20 years, and 1 respondent for more than 20 years.

Specifically, the results show that most of the surveyed social workers, or 80% of respondents, believe that social workers are needed in secondary schools. Accordingly, in the following chart, we will outline the

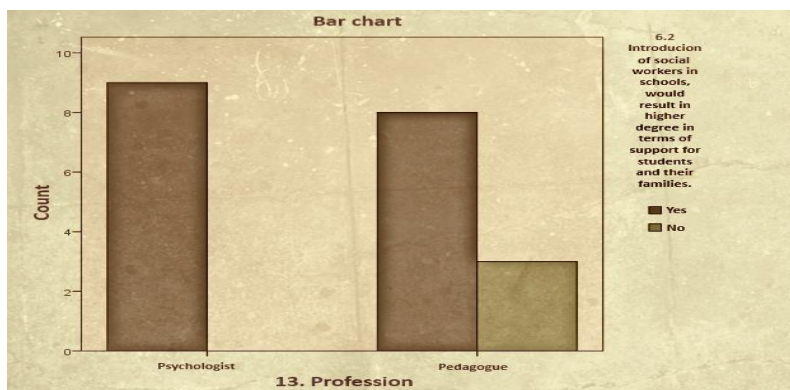
attitudes of social workers on the positive effects that would potentially be the result of the introduction of a social worker.



Graph 2. Positive effects after the introduction of a social worker in high schools

If we look at the results from the chart above, we can conclude that the majority of respondents believe that positive results would be reflected in better cooperation with the Center for Social Work, as well as in establishing communication between the school, parents, and children and the community. In addition, social workers feel that they have a broader field of activity (than pedagogues and/or psychologists) and that they can contribute to a better school climate, more efficient teaching, and better psychosocial development for the students themselves. Accordingly, they conclude that the system does not sufficiently recognize the role of social workers in schools. Further findings show the responses of social workers when it comes to the reason for not recognizing the role of the social worker in schools. The majority of social workers (87%) consider that the main reason for not recognizing the mentioned role is the lack of finances. Further, as many as 80% social workers agree that introducing social workers into school would contribute to effective cooperation between school, family and the community. On the other hand, no social worker believes that there is no need to introduce social workers into schools, that is, that having psychologists and pedagogues in schools is enough. Namely, 100% of respondents agree that the social worker at school would be a link connecting social work centres and schools, and would make their cooperation more constructive and useful. In addition, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the existence of social work in schools would also provide an integrative link between the school, fami-

lies and the whole community. Based on the interpretation of the statistical data, we can conclude that there are no significant differences regarding the surveyed attitudes with regard to the comparison of the age groups of the respondents and the length of their years of service. Also, there are no statistically significant differences among schools with regard to any of the attitudes in the questionnaire, which can be explained by the generally accepted attitude towards the need for the category of social workers in secondary schools in Novi Sad, which may of course be indicative for some future research on a similar topic with extended territorial sample. However, a statistically significant difference ($p=0.045$) was observed between the respondents' answers themselves, in this case the pedagogues and psychologists, whereby it was found that psychologists were the ones who believed that the introduction of school social workers would result in a greater degree of support for the students and their families which is demonstrated by *Graph 3*. This also raises the question of whether this claim can be linked to the extent to which the work of social workers coincides with the domain of work of these two categories of workers in schools, to whom and to what extent, the extension of this sphere of working with children, supporting families and working with competent institutions, such as the Center for Social Work goes in favour.



Graph 3. Introducing social workers into schools would result in a greater degree of support for students and their families

Several other relevant conclusions could be drawn from the comparison of results. Those pedagogues and psychologists who believe that the school would be a more favorable environment for the psychosocial development of students if it had a position of social worker, at the same time believe that the introduction of social workers would result in a greater degree of support for students and their families.

Such an attitude points to a clear correlation between understanding the importance and role of social workers in schools and their poten-

tial benefit for the general educational and learning environment in schools and the psychosocial development of students themselves. The same understanding is present in respondents who said that introducing social workers would result in more effective cooperation between school, family and the community. It is exactly this intermediary and cooperative role that the importance of this category of school workers is reflected in. Equally significant is the fact that those who believe that the school would be a more favorable environment for the psycho-social development of students also believe that there are not enough developmental programs designed to support students. In their opinion, this is a serious problem and a sphere that requires a lot of work and investment in order to improve and change things for the better. This means that social workers can help build a more efficient, fruitful and better collaboration and communication between the various actors involved in the life and work of an educational institution, such as secondary schools.

When it comes to the group of responses from the questionnaire concerning social workers, it should be noted that the age groups of the respondents do not differ significantly in terms of statistics when it comes to any attitudes in the research, nor on the basis of years of service. Those who believe that there is a need for social workers in schools also believe that introducing a social worker position would result in more effective cooperation between the school, family and community. The above points to the conclusion that respondents in this category among social workers believe that they can play a significant role when it comes to implementing and improving the quality of work in schools. This means that, based on their responses, introducing the position of social workers in schools would result in a greater degree of support for students and their families. However, it is noted that, as with the responses of psychologists and pedagogues, social workers do not recognize the system's sufficient interest in implementing such measures. In their opinion, our system does not sufficiently recognize the role and importance of social workers in schools. Which is in direct relation to the understanding that the introduction of social workers in schools would provide both a more integrative and stronger connection between school, family and the whole community.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Finally, we can summarize the following observations based on the research conducted according to the set hypotheses:

H1. *Pedagogues and psychologists believe that the existence of social workers in schools would contribute to a more effective solution to students' various social problems.* This hypothesis has been confirmed because both pedagogues and psychologists perceive that the introduction of social workers would result in a more efficient cooperation between

school, family and the community, but also in a greater degree of well-being of students and their families.

H2. *The existence of social workers in schools would contribute to a better communication between the school and the centers for social work.* This hypothesis has been confirmed because the results of the research indicate the need to introduce the position of social worker in schools and their importance and role when it comes to improving the quality of work and coordination of educational programs, and establishing a more integrative connection between school, family and the whole community.

H3. *Social workers believe that the social worker job positions are necessary in school institutions.* This hypothesis has been confirmed because the results of the research show that almost all social workers think that this job position is needed by the schools for better psychosocial development of students, better quality of teaching, but also for a greater degree of support for families.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research results have highlighted several important benefits that, from the perspective of the school and social workers, would condition the improvement of the quality of work in schools, regarding the introduction of the position of social work(er) in these institutions. Primarily, it is all about the attitude that introducing the profession of social workers would provide a higher level of quality and a range of possibilities in solving different social problems of students attending different profiles of schools, from grammar schools to those applied and vocational. Thus, social workers can be seen as important actors in dealing with many conflicts and crises, with a social background, playing an important role in mediating between the school and the social work centers, but also parents/caregiver/family and the students themselves. On the other hand, a social worker is able to advocate for social change that is geared towards social justice and equality. In addition, a greater degree of support, the possibility of more direct, professional and immediate contact, working in a different environment, continuous work on raising the well-being of students (but also their families and communities), on their fullest and most comprehensive psychosocial development, the ability to rely on institutions - are only some of the benefits that the introduction of the social worker job position into schools would bring. The role of the social worker in the school is, therefore, definitely of both systemic and individual importance, because in some ways it represents a bridge and a pillar of trust between different, interconnected links.

Phillippo and Blosser (2013) explain that social workers in schools provide different services to children that contribute to their psychosocial

development, as well as their motivation when it comes to school success. In other words, social workers are able to maximize school and social resources towards better academic achievement. Similarly, our findings indicate that positive results would be reflected in more consistent student support and (more) sustained collaboration with the Center for Social Work, as well as in establishing communication between the school, parents and children. Similarly, research (Bulanda & Jalloh, 2017) systematizes teachers' responses stating that the most common problems at schools that require the involvement of social workers are in fact related to poverty (lack of school supplies, school leaving due to child labor, etc.). On the other hand, our research findings have indicated that *domestic violence and collaboration with the Center for Social Work* are the main problem that requires the involvement of social workers. Namely, it is not disputed that the range of problems is wide and complex, and the role of social workers in schools is to promote (above all) equal educational opportunities, social justice and remove various barriers that hinder learning. Similarly, Allen-Meares (2008) states that school social workers provide key services in the areas of prevention, intervention, and positive change for children and their families. In addition, *timely interventions* aimed at supporting children through capacity building of family members are crucial.

The research results show that there is no consistent and systemic collaboration between the schools and the Center for Social Work, and the research (e.g. Gilbert et al., 2009) highlights the vital and necessary collaboration of the aforementioned for the benefit of the students and the entire community. Specifically, the findings indicate that schools and teachers are overburdened with various administrative tasks and do not have the time or expertise to cope with the challenges that students face on a daily basis. On the other hand, social workers can cope with these challenges and coordinate resources appropriately. The paper itself did not address the identification of all factors leading to questionable collaboration between the school and the Center for Social Work, and this paper opens another new topic that could be addressed in the future.

This research project has also helped us to better, more systematically and reliably look at the real state of affairs when it comes to the position and role of social workers in schools. The results we have obtained are a reflection of the attitudes of school psychologists, pedagogues, but also social workers themselves, which makes these results even more valuable. Moreover, this project is an important initial step in shedding light on the importance and potential role of social workers and overcoming institutional constraints which have been noted in their work so far. Although based on the territory of the city of Novi Sad, this research can serve as a starting point for studying this topic in any other territorial or social context, and especially in environments that share a similar posi-

tion, that is, the lack of the profession of social workers in schools. Therein lies the possible limitations of this research, with a clear and adequate room for expanding, concretizing and systematizing a scientifically based examination of this topic.

From the elaboration so far, we can conclude that various normative regulations on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the field of education recognize the social work profession. However, not as a mandatory and valuable resource of the educational system that has the power to help and support students and their families, but only in terms of opportunities. On the other hand, we can conclude that the quality of a student's education *should not be limited* to where the student lives, his/her family's income or any other external factors. For this reason, school social workers can be a starting point in the paradigm shift that will initiate positive changes in the educational system toward addressing the social, emotional, behavioral, mental and many other problems of students (their families and the entire community).

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ДА ЛИ СУ СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАДНИЦИ КАРИКА КОЈА НЕДОСТАЈЕ У НОВОСАДСКИМ РЕДОВНИМ СРЕДЊИМ ШКОЛАМА?

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Резиме

У овом раду аутори желе да скрену пажњу на потребу за социјалним радницима у редовним средњим школама на територији града Новог Сада. Односно, циљеви овог истраживања су: пружање потпуније слике о улогама социјалних радника у школама; анализа перцепције стручних сарадника (психолога, педагога и социјалних радника) о потреби за социјалним радницима у средњим школама и указивање на потребу за социјалним радницима у редовним новосадским средњим школама. Истраживање је обављено школске 2018/2019. године и у њему су учествовале све редовне државне школе (односно њих 12) на територији града Новог Сада. Рад ће покушати да одговори на два истраживачка питања: прво, да ли новосадске средње школе виде потребу за социјалним радницима, и друго, да ли социјални радници препознају потребу за својом професијом у школама.

Добијени резултати истраживања недвосмислено су указали на велику потребу за идентификовањем социјалних радника (у новосадским редовним средњим школама) као важног чиниоца у континуираном и здравом психосоцијалном развоју ученика, посредовању између родитеља, школе, Центра за социјални рад и заједнице, али и као целокупна подршка родитељима, односно породицама и читавој заједници.