



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

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Where social workers are needed in schools around the Pacific Rim

New Zealand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia

Stress, dropout rates, suicides, bullying and child abuse are motivating a demand for school social work in countries around the Pacific Rim. Publicity about shocking cases of child abuse, violence, suicides and bullying are driving the trend.

For example a child abuse case in **New Zealand** (in which a mother was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for starving and abusing her nine year old daughter) was quickly followed by calls for social workers to be made available in every New Zealand school (<http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/call-cross-party-response-horrific-abuse-4666801>).

In **Vietnam** experts find that increasing rates of school violence, dropping out and suicide have added urgency to the need for social workers to be a regular part of the educational system. The Ministry of Education and Training has proposed a major, well-funded plan for teaching life skills. Participants at a social work conference in Ho Chi Minh City believe that this is a task for social workers rather than teachers who are already overloaded with responsibilities. Le Chi An (head of HCM City Open University's Social Work faculty), speaking of current short-term school social work pilot projects, said that the work done by social workers should go beyond providing counseling to address other problems students face on a regular basis. Conference participants want social workers who are now being trained at about 34 universities to be part of a school's staff in order to be able to carry out this work professionally and effectively (<http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/social-issues/212239/violence-suicides-prompt-call-for-social-workers-in-schools.html>).

In 2011 the Government of **Hong Kong** increased funding for school social work services in secondary schools. A 20% increase in school social work staff is intended to provide more activities and guidance programs as well as more counseling for students with personal problems. Societal concerns about youth problems such as designer drugs, gangs and compensated dating prompted this expanded effort to help youth through both preventive and remedial school-based services by the NGO's that provide the school social work service (http://7thspace.com/headlines/395253/additional_funding_of_50_million_to_enhance_school_social_work_services.html).

In **Korea** the suicide of 2 teenagers who said they were victims of school bullies spurred national discussion about how to deal with bullying in the schools. The phenomenon of *wangtta* in which a class collectively ostracizes a student is a related issue. The Government's

response is to provide police protection of the victim and police supervision of the bully. This approach fails to deal with the underlying dynamics of scapegoating and prejudice, and has the potential to make it more difficult for timid and terrorized victims to ask for help. An approach that deals with the fundamental factors would be a school-wide effort that requires all students, faculty, families and staff to examine how the school culture promotes victimization. Stakeholders could then jointly design a plan to create a school culture that encourages acceptance while deterring bullying (<http://www.aljazeera.com/video/asia-pacific/2012/02/20122584444415454.html>).

School Social Work in Malaysia: Challenges and Prospects, an article by Zulkarnain A. Hatta of the Universiti Sains Malaysia calls for the introduction of school social work. Focusing on school violence and bullying, Hatta states that teachers, parents and counselors cannot handle the increasingly difficult problems faced by schools in **Malaysia**. These problems create an urgent need for professionally trained school social workers who understand the social ills of the community. He describes recent shocking incidents of violence in schools, as well as problems of youth gangs, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, absenteeism and dropouts, and points out that disciplinary measures are inadequate to solve the problems that appear to be related to rapid change in the traditional Malaysian lifestyle (http://eprints.usm.my/20675/1/SCHOOL_SOCIAL_WORK_IN_MALAYSIA_CHALLENGES_AND_PROSPECTS.pdf).

In **Laos** an experienced Vietnamese social worker, Xuyen Dangers, has created a unique social work program for school children in five villages through the Donkoi Children Development Center. Within a framework of traditional crafts and cultural activities such as music, she provides prevention programs, advocacy and social services using professional social work skills. She works with the schools, the village office, parents and community, focusing on the poorest, most disadvantaged children to protect their rights and develop their potential, interests and talents. Xuyen is also working towards developing professional social work training at the National University of Laos.

In 2006 the Cambodian Government estimated that 30,000 children were sexually exploited, often by tourists from the developed world. A model program such as Donkoi Children Development Center in Laos providing culturally sensitive social work services could provide the hope for children in neighboring **Cambodia** to escape poverty, trafficking and sexual slavery as described in a recent Vancouver Sun lead article. (<http://www.vancouversun.com/technology/gaming/tourists+invade+Cambodia/6354851/story.html>, <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Putting+price+childhood/6354173/story.html>).

School social work at its best uses a systems approach to develop a combination of prevention programs and early intervention to help the school community create a child-friendly environment that accepts all children. School systems everywhere embrace the goal of developing the child's full potential and protecting child rights. The school social worker's role is to work with all members of the school community to examine these lofty goals and ensure they are part of the school culture in practice. By turning the goals into measurable objectives and actions, teams of teachers, school staff, parents, school social workers, administrators and community leaders can develop a child-friendly school culture and activities that reduce all the problems mentioned here.