Mental Health, Children and the Role Social Work
(In Reference to the School Going Children)

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Abstract: *The present paper is based upon the mental health of school-going children and the role that school social worker's can play in mitigating their mental health issues. The analysis of the school social workers suggests it can bring drastic change if given the chance to work with the school as the third pillar of the school.*

Keywords: Mental health, Social work, Children, School

Children, Mental Health and School:

After the pandemic of COVID-19, the mental health issues of school-going children have drastically increased. In fact, education itself is a contributor to the mental health issues of children. However, if the school increases the educational stress among the children, then, on the other hand, it will also promote positive mental health among their students. The importance of education cannot be overstated. Hetherington, (1993) and Jones, (1995) recognize the role of school in imparting education beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic, popularly known as the 3Rs. Therefore, it balances promoting the socio-emotional aspects of children on the one hand and their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects on the other. In the process of growing up, children learn coping strategies in school and, thus, become empowered with a positive sense while growing up. Thus, schools become a "site" for the overall development of children, including developing positive mental health.

Positive mental health is possible for students provided that their needs are met to their satisfaction. The process of socialization in school develops a sense of satisfaction among students. The Maslow hierarchy of needs sheds a lot of light on student needs satisfaction. Apart from this, Erikson and Piaget also provide ample understanding of the developmental stages of students and help a person understand the child's development. Cooper (1985) identified specific needs such as physical care, affection, security, guidance, control, and so on that aid in understanding appropriate social behavior among children. Development of discipline among the children, up to their own understanding and capacity, is hence developed to its maximum by the school. This ultimately helps the student to develop a sense of self-decision-making on their own. Thus, apart from the family, school plays a very positive and active role in satisfying the needs of students, which is seen by educationists as vital for the development of positive mental health among students.

However, school does not always play a role in providing a positive mental health environment for the entire population of students. It may be a source of stress and frustration as well. This is because

every child has a different capacity, potential, aptitude, and requirements which constantly work in the way of mental health. No doubt, in an ideal situation, schools need to work towards the individual needs of students. However, ideal situations do not remain conducive every time and hence; anxiety of different types emerges and causes hindrances in the case of the positive mental health of students and their way of upbringing. Many times, schools also become a place where students develop a sense of anonymity and isolation. Such anonymity and isolation are developed as a result of having no or limited opportunities for participation in any event sponsored by the school, in spite of the desire of the student. Apart from this, exclusionary practices, marginalization, and social isolation also contribute to such anonymity and isolation and provide fewer chances of interaction among students and teachers. This result in teachers or any other authority concerned with the student being unaware of the individual needs of the students. Students, in any case, respect the opinion of their teachers. Therefore, teachers are also considered to be major contributors to stress levels among students. Any irresponsible comment (verbal or nonverbal), negative attitude toward students demoralizes them, and they begin to perceive themselves as powerless and incompetent. Therefore, due attention must be given towards different types of behavioral problems so that positive mental health among students can be developed considerably.

Gender Bias and the Role of Social Work through NGOs:

Several studies (Hayat & Ahmad, 2013 & 2015; Hayat & Sharma, 2016 & 2018; Hayat, 2019) shows that gender bias become hindrance towards development of girl child. The multiplier effects of poverty, lack of access to schools, distance of schools, and parental negative attitude towards education of girl children and so on deprive the girl children in achieving the optimum level of learning and stunted their growth. Several initiatives of social work through different non-governmental organizations have sensitized the importance of girl's education and have successfully reduced the gender gaps. However, in Indian society these works are a minuscule and therefore, girls faces several hardship including girl infanticide, neglect at birth, non-preference of education as compared to boys and so on.

Thus, it is important that schools need to be structured to eradicate such prevalence of negativity towards girl children and cater to the individual needs of the students. The school further needs to help children live their life without bias and empower them through assistance in sorting out their problem themselves. However, the irony is that schools cater more to the cognitive aspects and develop academic pursuits of students. In fact, academic intelligence does not provide opportunities to address effectively the turmoil in life. Actually, the present day educational system focuses more on developing memory rather than intelligence. Thus, they are not able to provide wholesome education to students which also include empathy, co-operation, and tolerance towards others. These attributes help students grow holistically. Goleman (1995) therefore talks of developing emotional intelligence with a set of traits among students. This is because; the students with high emotional intelligence are more emotionally adept to situation and develop their competencies to manage feelings, dealing with feelings of others. Thus, such students are at advantage in any domain of their life.

Developing the above mentioned traits require special attention of schools in today's scenario where the society is witnessing rampant violence and conflict in different walks of life. This is why, it is said that sschool's can play vital role to direct the young mind with positivity. This cannot be done with loads of books. The curriculum needs to be restructured so that the above mentioned concerns can be addressed and accommodated. It is expected from schools that it will develop students in close proximity to the society and engagee them in activities which will helps them develop social relationship. This will have larger impact in the society. This will further help in sorting out the hurdles such as gender bias, consumerism and develop among student's respect for others, bond in

relationships, secular outlook, honesty, sense of pride for the country and its people. Most of such values have faded away due to socialization in the contest mobility which has largely affected the metal health of students.

Role of Social Worker at School

The modern day demand of personalities has put the individual in more complex situation. The complexities of life with technological intervention have further placed schools in more complex situation. Therefore, keeping the modern day demand, schools are preparing students who are more competent and highly productive. This has exerted more metal stress upon students. Such pressure upon students can be reduced with the involvement of school social workers.

School social workers are the one who provide services to students in schools. The history of the development of school social workers suggests that they have been working in schools for more than 100 years and are recognized as one of the pillars of school personnel in majority of U.S. states and other foreign countries. However, in India, though some of the schools have utilized their services, but they are not commonly recognized as pivot of school personnel by majority of schools.
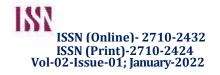
Since the stresses in life in the modern day are quantitatively increasing day by day therefore, the students of today are also getting greatly bewildered in their day to day belief. Majority of schools in India desire to develop variety of capabilities among students coming from different socio-economic background but they find it difficult to balance between and cater to individual and societal needs. Therefore, there are greater needs that some personnel having skills and competencies of supporting teachers and their efforts may be made a part and parcel of schools support system. Since school social workers owe such competencies therefore, they can help realize the vision of schools in modern day world. Since, the social work and education have same goal of development of a critical and rationale outlook among the students therefore, they can be an asset to schools for realizing their goals. They can be involved other than teaching in developing inter-personnel relationship, cooperate on, self-reliance, sorting out problems of mental health issues and so on as they are trained in such practices during their course discipline. They may also be involved in ccounseling the students since ccounseling is not considered now as an ancillary service rather it has become a central service for the students of today.

Looking at the goals of education and school social work we find that both have the same goals i.e maximum development of all students in particular who are deprived, disadvantaged or marginalized. As a matter of fact the school social worker's are trained in bridging the gap between the student and home; enrichment of sschool programmes such as Socially Useful and Productive Work (SUPW); ccommunity support; school and development programmes; dealing and supporting the disadvantaged; resource mobilization; staff development programmes and so on. Therefore, they will be assets to school if they are involved in nurturing the students along with the teachers.

Conclusion:

School, as an organization, undergoes significant complexity. The administrative and social relationships that the school maintains demonstrate several gaps that create a dichotomy between students, teachers, and the community. Due to the focus on memory and cognitive domains in the day-to-day working style of schools, lots of mental health problems are experienced by students. As a result of pressure from school and family, it devastates the students many a time, so much so that they lose interest in life. Such mental health issues can be addressed positively by the involvement of school social workers as a third pillar in school. This is because the school social worker is more likely to support not only the formal structure of schooling, but they will also help with the informal operating system of schooling as they are professionally trained for it.

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