

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AS AN INNOVATIVE PRACTICE FOR THE SRI LANKAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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This study explores the untapped potential of integrating the school social work practice as an innovative practice in education while school social work has been reputable effectively globally, still it remains underdeveloped in Sri Lanka. Even though there are support mechanisms including school counseling, resource distribution, and child protection procedures, fail to comprehensively address the needs of children with a lack of government involvement. The objective of this study to explore how school social work can be utilized as an innovative practice to address the well-being of school children and existing support mechanisms in the Sri Lankan education system. This qualitative study involved fourteen participants representing the different stakeholders including parents, teachers, counselors, education officers, and generic social workers in the Gampola education zone, selected through purposive sampling and thematic analysis used to analyze data. The study revealed several types of problems faced by school children including educational, social, economic, emotional, physical, and mental health problems which are interrelated but not addressed from a holistic view due to the limitations of innovations and training, lack of funding, lack of awareness among stakeholders of the highlights the significant gap between actual needs of the system and the service provision where the innovative practice of school social work can be applied using the direct and indirect methods of social work at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels using the promotive, preventive, rehabilitative, and curative initiatives using the multi-disciplinary approach with the skills of advocacy, policy analysis, cultural competency, reflective practice and collaborative skills by using ecological practice rather than the traditional interventions. This study recommends a contextualized school social work practice model for uplifting children's holistic well-being, emphasizing the significance of integrating school social work initiatives as an innovation to the education system in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Education System, Innovative Practice, Multi-disciplinary Approach, School Children, School Social Work

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