



**International Network for School Social Work**

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### **The development of school social work in Vietnam**

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Vietnam, a country of some 94 million citizens has grown markedly since winning the war at great cost in 1975 and then introducing market reform in 1986. The Vietnamese government has committed to sustaining equal opportunity and social justice for all citizens and recognizes education as the first national priority. Our education system has increasingly been providing pathways for advancing key components of the system including early childhood care and pre-school, primary, lower-secondary and non-formal education.

### **The history of social work and social work training in Vietnam**

During the period of French colonization, social work practice in Vietnam was inclined toward charity work and attached to activities of Christian Churches. During the American presence in South Vietnam (1954-1975), many social work schools were established and trained hundreds of social workers, such as the School of Military-based Social Work and the School of Youth Who Serves Community. After reunification in 1975 the Open University in Ho Chi Minh City was the first institution in Vietnam to start educating undergraduate students. This provided a key contribution to educating professional social workers as well as ensuring the continuity of social work education in Vietnam.

The **Đổi Mới** (Renovation) in 1986 brought social change through rapid industrialization, modernization and the creation of a market economy. Social problems associated with rapid social change indicated the need for social work to promote social protection. Social work was officially established in 2004 when the Ministry of Education and Training approved a national curriculum. Official government decisions for developing a National Plan and a National Strategy for Social Work Development followed.

### **The need for school social work in Vietnam**

Despite much progress in education since 1986, there are still some gaps in access to quality education, health services and other needs of children. Vietnamese schools also face problems with dropouts, ethnic gaps in achievement (between Kinh and non-Kinh youth), risk behavior (aggressive behavior, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse) and mental health issues. Several programs such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union have been implemented to respond to these issues giving additional support for students. Moral education and skills training are usually

provided through clubs, seminars, and self-help groups in schools. Although these activities help to meet students' needs, they are insufficient for meeting the complex needs of students today. Initially the responsibility of helping students in need belonged to the home-school teacher. However teachers lack the time and the training to provide what is needed. The traditional youth groups were also available, and later school psychologists and school counselors. They addressed teaching life skills, providing counseling for personal problems and career paths, and reducing violence.

### **Developing school social work in Vietnam**

Some of the circumstances of a student's life such as being from a low-income family, and lack of connection between student, teachers and family were not addressed and that limited the effectiveness of the interventions. The recognition of the role, value and function of school social worker has gradually emerged, especially in several schools in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. School social workers look at the student more comprehensively than do school psychologists or counselors. They work not only with students, but also engage teachers, family and community to meet children's needs. In 2011, some school social work activities were piloted in Ho Chi Minh City, along with the sponsorship of Save the Children Sweden.

At the same time, UNICEF supported some Vietnamese universities training social workers to organize a conference about school social work. Then in 2015, Hanoi National University of Education cooperated with South Carolina University to organize a Conference with the theme "School social work - world perspective and development strategy in Vietnam". In 2017, another international school social work conference was organized at the Vietnam National University of Education to discuss solutions for developing school social work in Vietnam. These conferences have helped to identify clearly the roles and tasks of school social workers for educational researchers and administrators.

Recognizing the importance of school social work and training for school social work, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) promulgated the national plan for developing social work in the field of education and training in the period from 2016 to 2020. This plan is designed to build and develop social work services at schools, and to raise awareness among leaders, administrators, teachers and staff in schools about the services. Now there is also legislation for instruction in school social work practice, and materials for instruction and field supervision are being built.

### **Hanoi National University of Education leading the way**

The Faculty of Social Work at HNUE is fostering school social work with various activities:

1. Conducting research and placing social work students in schools for field practice is raising awareness of school social work and demonstrating effectiveness.
2. Advocating with the national government to recognize and officially categorize professional school social workers in the school staff system with appropriate salary code.
3. Developing collaboration between universities and other organizations to tap expertise in training and in the practice of school social work, while developing the curriculum to meet professional standards, and to support publication of textbooks and materials.
4. Piloting a Vietnamese Model of school social work that is responsive to the Vietnamese context and culture and conducting research on this.

### **Conclusion**

Social workers have a key role as partners with teachers in guiding children and youth to reach their potential intellectually, emotionally and socially. Despite facing challenges, Vietnam has taken significant steps in the process of developing school social work.